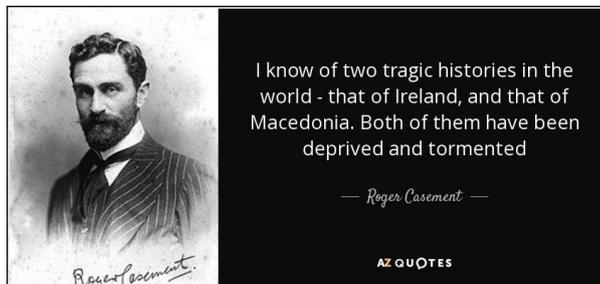


# Roger Casement's Paradox

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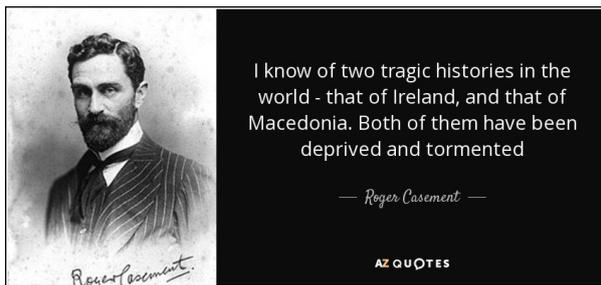


## Roger Casement's Paradox

"I know of two tragic stories in the world, the Irish and the Macedonian. Both deprived and tortured."

Roger Casement

Irish Revolutionary



### Introduction

October 2015, San Sebastian or Donostia as my Basque friends call it. Situated on the Atlantic in a great location, it is filled with the smell of the sea, freshness and irresistible Mediterranean vividness. Even though it is late autumn tourists are everywhere and I am very impressed by the numerous surfers who ride the waves at a beach near the city. At the meeting of several partner organizations from Europe dedicated to small and minority languages and literatures, it is most surprising to me that someone knows (besides me, of course) that the Macedonian language, besides Basque and Irish, is among the ten oldest languages spoken in the world nowadays. A little later I realized that the Basque language is barely used in San Sebastian and there are only a few media that cherish it. Two years later I discovered during my stay in Dublin that the same applies to the Irish language, although not quite as much. It is broadcast on television and there are special programs for its preservation. We don't have problem of that nature in Macedonia. When you seem to have something, you do not appreciate it enough, and its own language is invaluable and essential to a nation. The impressions showed me differences and the very few similarities between us today. Obviously, time has taken its toll.

## **Differences and similarities**

### **Dublin, Ireland, October 2017**

One of the most famous statements of a man who was certainly one of the most important and the most remarkable figures in the struggle of the Irish people for freedom and independence, Roger Casement, became my main inspiration for this research. I made the decision without any doubt, mostly because of my interest in history and politics, as well as in the struggles of all enslaved and oppressed peoples in the world, especially in Europe. Apart from the research in the Other Words project, I knew that the historical similarities of the revolutionary struggle from the past probably still exist nowadays. On the other hand, I may be wrong. Perhaps I am.

Who was Roger Casement and how is he credited with ensuring the freedom of Ireland? I was able to get more information in detail from the actor and screenwriter Diarmuid, who stayed for two months in Bitola and gladly shared all his knowledge about the person and the work of one of the icons of the Irish struggle for independence. Roger was born in Dublin, to a Protestant father and a Catholic mother; he received a solid education that enabled him to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and be appointed British consul. Before that, in the Congo, he investigated the way the colonial powers abused the native population in Africa. Probably, seeing all the injustices and misdeeds meted out on the indigenous population was an initial inspiration to stop serving the crown and join the IRA by helping the insurgents by collecting funds and weapons. The indictment charged Casement with "high treason against the crown", which cost him his life. Soldiers of the United Kingdom captured him, and he was sentenced to death and hanged.

A tall, handsome man with aristocratic bearing, a poet and diplomat, bold and uncompromising and his appearance reminded me of Todor Alexandrov, the legendary and also the most successful leader in the history of VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization). Both were similar in that they were shrouded in the controversy of their time and stir interest even today. Roger was homosexual and at that time, of course, this was not a desirable trait, at least not for a revolutionary in the early 20th century.

His sexuality was criticized after his execution and of his *Black Diaries* were published that show him as a promiscuous homosexual predator. Of course, the purpose was to cast a dark shadow over his revolutionary activities and the merit in the struggle for creation of the Irish Republic. However, Roger today is a national hero in the Irish Republic, and not only there, but in the part that of Ireland which remained under British administration, Northern Ireland. What is interesting is that until yesterday the divided city of Belfast has countless graffiti and murals (especially in the Western part) dedicated to Roger Casement. A park bears his name. Huge murals show the devotion of the Irish to Palestine and their struggle for independence. There are also beautifully painted messages to support for the independence of Catalonia, and we also must mention the leader of Kurdish rebels Abdullah Ocalan, convicted of terrorism.

Is the EU so tolerant to the public support of those convicted of terrorism or is Belfast just one exception? Is it an oasis for radical politics from extreme leftists to supporters of Zionism? Yes, long ago on the other side of the wall that divides the two conflicting communities proudly they are flying the Israeli flag alongside the Union Jack of the United Kingdom. Dual standards or freedom of speech in the same Union that is constantly trumpeting about hate speech and respect for human rights and freedoms. Especially the countries of the third world of the tortured Balkans, popularly known as Southwestern Europe I was unable to find out whether Protestants or loyalists (who are a slim majority) in Northern Ireland mind about it. However I know that the Irish built Titanic which sailed from Belfast and today is one of the main attractions that should be visited. The museum is shaped like the ship that had an ill-fated voyage, which hit an iceberg and sank with casualties and material damage that was unprecedented until then. Can this happen to EU too? Especially post-Brexit. Judging by the double standards applied to and in the individual members of the Union, if it does not come to its end, the transformation is inevitable. But the voters in all Member States will decide democratically in the next elections for the EU parliament.

Besides the positive comments about the character and above all the work of Roger Casement, in Dublin I undoubtedly had the opportunity to meet people with the opposite opinion.

The main criticism came mainly from leftists and communists who could not forgive him for believing in the wrong people who, after liberation, abused their power in the newly formed republic by giving too much power to the Catholic Church in the whole society and neglecting the social elements of the revolution and the struggle of working class for dignified living conditions.

For me it was more than shocking! With the same opinion are the fans of Ernesto Che Guevara (as anywhere in the world) . In vain did I explain that Che was responsible for the shooting of hundreds of captives and also some of his comrades which was something Casement never did. However, I could not refrain, and my love of justice did not allow me to keep silent and allow someone to be blamed who sacrificed his career and a comfortable diplomatic life for the freedom of an oppressed people. I tried to explain by mentioning Josip Broz Tito, who was the legendary leader and lifelong president of Yugoslavia as an example of person who could ensure prosperity, but with limited freedom and without democracy, how could I explain that nothing in the world is black and white but at the same time I realized that subtle nuances are unfortunately invisible to fanatics.

All this reminded me of the dispute and controversy over the leaders and heroes who struggled for independence in Macedonia and is still going on, about the revolutionary organization that has changed its name many times over the years and is best known as VMRO. It undoubtedly gained its highest point after the Great War under the leadership of Todor Alexandrov, concerning whom there are different opinions nowadays regarding his actions, ideology and of course his mysterious assassination carried out by a person whose identity remains unknown, although it can be assumed that it was done because he was a thorn in flesh of many.

Many people wanted to be rid of him starting with the Royal Court in Sofia, Bulgarian political opponents and all the way to the Comintern in Moscow and of course those who wanted leadership of the organization. Fortunately, today there is a monument in Macedonia and a boulevard that bear the name of the legendary leader of VMRO and neighboring Bulgaria, from which the organization actually operated, has long enjoyed all the honors that follow. Casement before his arrest arrived from Germany which happened during the First World War.

Coincidentally VMRO was also an ally of Germany during the Great War from which they received a promise that they would unite all enslaved parts of Macedonia.

Every person in the 21st century who is partly open-minded would understand why he (Casement) co-operated with the enemies of the United Kingdom which he had recently served. All the rest would say that it was an act of high treason. Unfortunately, there is no middle ground or absolute common truth to be found today especially in Europe which is divided today between Neo-Liberals and Ultra Nationalists. Certainly there has never been such division and disagreement in the views of politicians and the ordinary people since the creation of the EU.

The greatest merit of Roger Casement until 1916 was to supply IRA volunteers with weapons for the Easter Rebellion as well as his agitation through the US to collect money for the same liberation movement. If I was about to write movie script, I would invent a scene somewhere in the USA where Roger Casement, meets with the representatives of the Macedonian Diaspora, then the already formed Macedonian Patriotic Organization, MPO, from where he would get information about the similar tragic fate of the both nations. Perhaps he met them in Marseille as one amateur historian asserted and he asked me not to omit this information. Yes, it was in Marseille, France, that the VMRO assassin Velichko Georgiev–Kerin, better known as Vlado Chernozemski (a nickname that he chose himself in his fight for independence, a sovereign independent and united Macedonian state) committed, in 1934, one of the most famous assassinations of the 20th century.

The victims were Serbian King Aleksandar Karajordjevic and the French Foreign Minister Louis Barth. Today Vlado Chernozemski is a hero to some and for others a cold-blooded killer. R. Casement allegedly gave part of the proceeds to the VMRO for Macedonian liberation, although I have not found any evidence for that yet.

## **Macedonian paradox**

The paradox of Macedonia is that a country which was perceived to be an oasis of peace in the beginning of the wars in the former Yugoslavia in 1991 and an example of a free-use of independence has now been torn apart by internal turmoil and interethnic confrontations.

Many agree that the main obstacle Macedonia is facing is that Greece is blocking it from declaring its independence, which has slowed its integration into Euro-Atlantic alliances. The main dispute is over the name Macedonia. Greece managed to convince its allies that the name is irredentist and implies a claim to its territories, i.e. the area which was under its rule after the Balkan Wars and the Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1913 which was signed by all the warring parties, except the Macedonians.

Furthermore, the Greeks are of the opinion that the Macedonian nation was invented by Tito in 1944 so that Yugoslavia as it was then could claim its territories, especially Thessaloniki and the outlet to the sea.

For Macedonians, the name is a matter of national identity, and that should not be taken away by anyone. When the problems with other neighbors are added to the mix they create further difficulties. Bulgaria denies the Macedonian language as well as the existence of the Macedonian nation. Serbia does not recognize the rightful independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, claiming that ecclesiastical canons were breached when it was formed in 1967 even though it has been in existence for more than half a century. We witnessed the Albanians and their irredentist aspirations for the creation of a greater Albania during military conflict of 2001.

## **The NATO cooperation during the bombing of Serbia**

Of course, the EU and the US are directly responsible for the difficult situation of Macedonia. In spite of all the mechanisms at their disposal they didn't influence Greece to stop blocking its neighbor's efforts to join Euro-Atlantic integration.

During the debt crisis in Greece when it was possible to bring pressure to bear on the government in Athens to abandon the irrational problem which they invented themselves. By this refusal to help, Macedonia was literally punished, although it had co-operated with NATO during the 1999 bombing of Serbia, and at the same time accepted hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees from Kosovo, and in reward received only beautiful words, shoulder patting and false hopes for fast EU membership.

The ultimate high point of hypocrisy and, above all, EU double standards was reached during a military conflict when the UK Foreign Minister Lord George Robertson decided overnight that the paramilitary Albanian UCK formations (UCK - the Kosovo Liberation Army) instead of being terrorists were defenders of human rights even though they had published five communiqués in which they said that were fighting to capture Macedonian territories or fighting to create a Greater Albania. Certainly, the main advocates and supporters of this hypocritical policy were to be found in the State Department or in the Pentagon in Washington, but we should not omit the EU bureaucrats from Brussels.

## **Today's situation in Macedonia**

### **Bitola 2018**

The Prespa agreement was signed between Macedonia and Greece by the foreign ministers of Greece and Macedonia rather than by the presidents of the two states as required by the constitution. The first precedent in modern world history was set under auspices of the EU at the border village of Nivitsaon Prespa Lake. The event only confirmed the awareness (I m not sure who is more aware?) and confirmed the previous indications of identical opinion, shared by the most mainstream politicians, intellectuals and human rights activists at home and in Europe. Almost no one reacts to the basic human right to one's own identity and self-determination, or to denying them by force and blackmail. Although, it is not just about the renaming of the state with the addition of the word North, as well as all institutions that carry the same name as a whole nation. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this is another genocide against the Macedonians. The previous one occurred after the end of the Second World War during the civil war in Greece from 1945 to 1949, when after the defeat of the partisans around half a million people who had joined the losing side were expelled from the state. The majority of them were Macedonians and the victorious side was massively supported by British and American bombers who literally burned the mountains in the Aegean part of Macedonia. Indeed, for the first time, they used the inhumane napalm bombs, long before Vietnam, but for this part of the history few know or recall in today's democratic Europe. When we consider the Greek agreement and that of Bulgaria, the second is more harmful for the Macedonian national identity than the first one. With our first neighbor (Greece), we renounced our identity, and with the second one (Bulgaria) we accepted the revision of our history and above all the occupation by Bulgaria. We will discover that during the Second World War, there was no occupation, or fascists, and perhaps the entire struggle of the NOB (Macedonian Partisans of the People's Liberation Army of Macedonia) will disappear from the new history books of Northern Macedonia.

## **The referendum as the highest act of democracy**

In every normal state, the will of the people any crucial decision is determined by referendum. This was pointed out in a positive way by the poetess of Basque, Ainara Maia;

– You are lucky to hold a referendum on the agreement on the new name of the state; we in the Basque Country have no right to declare on that issue,

– We are with more advanced Democracy, I replied with a dose of irony and in the same context I added an argument about the tolerance of Macedonian police to Protesters, compared with that of the Spanish in Catalonia during their equally contentious referendum on independence. In the conversation I could not refrain from referring to the Frisian writer, Jan. While many are convinced that the referendum is positive and there will surely be many more who will vote against. I had to point out that anyone who stands by his honor and conscience will not bargain over their identity and to give legitimacy to an agreement that is beyond every precedent in human history. I also added that the referendum contains various omissions and is consultative so the results will not be valid. Upset over attempt to convince me of the opposite, of course, unsuccessfully. That confirmation came a little later when about 30 percent voted for the agreement and our cunning and pro-European prime minister just confirmed my contention that he just wanted to hear the opinion of the people and the final decision will be made by the parliament. Most likely, according to him, the people are lower beings who do not know what is good for them and decisions must be made by the elected rulers. Jan later in casual conversation mentioned that his name is Jan Matt, I had mistakenly thought it was fine if I called him Jan. However, identity was significant and it hurt regardless of whether it was individual or national. I hope he understands the point as well as all the others who will read these lines before they start to judge someone or something they do not know well enough.

## Epilogue

The implementation of the contract was by launching the constitutional changes procedure, with the most brutal violation of laws, civilized norms, and democratic benefits. By buying MPs, many of them blackmailed, some even kidnapped and previously detained in jail, they managed to collect fatal 2/3 or 80 MPs to change the constitution. And all that of course is for our good and well-being for which we yearned for 28 years. As for future NATO membership that will bring long-term peace? Yes, that is one of the main arguments just like the war for peace in Iraq or Afghanistan where Macedonian soldiers were part of the US-led coalition unlike sovereign states such as Greece or Bulgaria, who although they are part of the NATO alliance refused to be part of the occupying mission, even if it was for peace. One might wonder about double standards, but in order to avoid confusion with these precedents, it is at least triple or multiple standards or criteria not only for the term democracy, but for all basic human benefits/needs, regardless of what system or society we live in.

How would Casement and Alexandrov be classified today according to current European standards of political correctness? Would they be seen as defenders for freedom, democracy and justice or as terrorists? Roger would probably have strong mitigating circumstance as a homosexual, and frankly, I do not think Todor would suit the bureaucrats of Brussels. The "progressive" ones, i.e. those who decide on behalf of everyone, would not like his traits. Apartheid by definition is the term used for discrimination against the majority by the minority. Surely this (agreement) will be one of the few documents that were started in one country and completed in another country, and although Macedonia is known as a land of the sun, warm weather and hot summers it will never be North, at least not for the Macedonians or for fair minded people from all over the world.

Alexander Mishevski