

Skopje, 4 May 2010

***Subject: The disturbing state of the Bulgarian cultural and historical monuments in the Republic of Macedonia***

Dear Sir/Madame,

Understanding the important role of civil society organizations in promoting democratic principles, cultural diversity and stable inter-ethnic relations, the Bulgarian Cultural Club – Skopje is striving to build and establish a society that will be part of a united Europe without borders.

Since its foundation in May 2008, our organization has been collecting data on Bulgarian monuments, cemeteries and tombstones in the Republic of Macedonia. We have witnessed many disturbing cases of deliberately destroyed monuments. These are not isolated cases and show the authorities' tendency of ruthless treatment of the Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage in the Republic of Macedonia. We protest against this uncivilized practice and the indifference of the relevant institutions. Because of this our organization questions their honesty regarding the effective implementation of European values and standards.

We provide you with detailed documentation on some of the destroyed Bulgarian monuments. The most outrageous examples are briefly explained as follows.

Appendix A shows photographs of the grave of priest Iliya Gabrovaliev in the church yard of the village of Robovo, municipality of Strumica. The gravestone reads: "one of the first champions of the Bulgarian national spirit in the region of Strumica". The part of the notice on the gravestone that reads "Bulgarian national spirit" has been erased.

Photographs B.1 and B.2 of the Appendix B show the church of St. Nedelya in Bitolya and the inscription above its entrance. The inscription reads: "This holy church of St. Martyr Nedelya was erected with the contribution of the Bulgarians under the diocese of His Holy Grace Benedict of Byzantium who sanctified it in Bitolya on 13 October 1863". The part of the inscription that reads "Bulgarians" has been erased.

In the yard of the church of St. Nedelya, one may find the Ilinden Cemetery of the freedom fighters, who fought in the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising of 1903. The cemetery is in terrible condition and is almost abandoned. As photographs B.3 and B.4 show, the original gravestone of the voivode Dimko Nikolov is destroyed and it is replaced by a new gravestone written with the post-1945 alphabet. The original inscription, written in Bulgarian, reads "Rest in peace, dear Bulgarian son". The part of the inscription that reads "dear Bulgarian son" has been erased.

