

# **THE BULGARIAN POLICY ON THE BALKAN COUNTRIES AND NATIONAL MINORITIES, 1878-1912**

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## **1. IN THE NAME OF THE NATIONAL IDEAL**

The period in the history of the Balkan nations known as the “Eastern Crisis of 1875-1879” determined the international political development in the region during the period between the end of 19th century and the end of World War I (1918). That period was both a time of the consolidation of and opposition to Balkan nationalism with the aim of realizing, to a greater or lesser degree, separate national doctrines and ideals. Forced to maneuver in the labyrinth of contradictory interests of the Great Powers on the Balkan Peninsula, the battles among the Balkan countries for superiority of one over the others, led them either to Pyrrhic victories or defeats. This was particularly evident during the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars (The Balkan War and The Interallied War) and World War I, which was ignited by a spark from the Balkans.

The San Stefano Peace Treaty of 3 March, 1878 put an end to the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). According to the treaty, an independent Bulgarian state was to be founded within the ethnographic borders defined during the Istanbul Conference of December 1876; that is, within the framework of the Bulgarian Exarchate. According to the treaty the only loss for Bulgaria was the ceding of North Dobroujda to Romania as compensation for the return of Bessarabia to Russia.

The Congress of Berlin (June 1878), however, re-considered the Peace Treaty and replaced it with a new one in which San Stefano Bulgaria was parceled out; its greater part was put under Ottoman control again while Serbia was given the regions around Pirot and Vrania as a compensation for the occupation of Novi Pazar sancak (administrative district) by Austro-Hun-

gary. The Congress did not consider the territorial interests of the Balkan countries according to national principles and did not settle the contradictory claims of the Great Powers. Thus, new conflicts were soon to arise that would turn the Balkans into the “powder-keg of Europe.” After the Congress, Bulgarian foreign and, to a considerable degree, internal policy was entirely and immediately orientated towards the destruction of the Berlin status quo in the name of the liberation of the Bulgarian population that remained under foreign rule.<sup>1</sup>

So, like the other Balkan countries established on the national principle, children of the 19th century such as Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, Bulgaria faced the problem of forming a state united in its ethnic and territorial entirety. After the Congress of Berlin, sizable territories with a predominant Bulgarian population remained outside Bulgaria, often in Balkan countries with different political and national statutes. Bulgarian policy on the resolution of the national problem had to confront not only the hegemonic interests of the Great Powers in South-Eastern Europe but also the ambitions of its young neighbours. The ruling circles of the Balkan countries often took an ideological stand of the political programs such as “Nacertanije” [Mapping Out] written by Iliya Garashanin in Serbia or the so-called “Megali Idea” [The Great Idea] in Greece. The governments of Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania pursued the policy of territorial compensation in the name of “balance in the Balkans.” However, this policy did not take into consideration the importance of nationality for the majority of the population in the lands that were planned for return. At the same time, it was necessary to take into consideration the national movements in each of the Balkan countries, which had territories with ethnic majorities still under foreign oppression in many regions.

<sup>1</sup> G.P. Genov, *Iztochnijat vapros (politicheska i diplomaticheska istorija)* (Sofia, 1926), II, pp. 348-359, 394-405; I.P. Ormandzhiev, *Bulgarija ot San-Stefano do Njoi (1878-1919). Ustremi za obedinenie* (Sofia, 1938); K.D. Kozuharov, *Iztochnijat vapros i Bulgarija 1875-1890. Diplomaticheski studii* (Sofia, 1929).

The main aim of the foreign policy of the Bulgarian Principality was the union of all Bulgarians into one country by means of supporting the national-liberation movement of compatriots then living under foreign rule. The significance of this policy was expressed by the slogan “A Whole Bulgaria,” while the program for resolving the Bulgarian national problem within its ethnic borders could be called “San Stefano Bulgaria.” Although this meant that Bulgaria would become the biggest country in the Balkans, that program, at least during the period under consideration here, could not be characterized as one proposing a Pan-Bulgarian state or be identified with the Serbian foreign policy of “Mapping Out” or the Greek “Megali Idea.” It did not have pretensions to other territories or aspirations to the assimilation of the non-Bulgarian population. Still, before political liberation in 1878, the national idea of the Bulgarians had found its realization through the Bulgarian Exarchate established in the Ottoman Empire in 1870. This institution was a result of the struggle for an independent Bulgarian church and against the assimilation and oppression of the Greek priesthood and the Patriarchate. The 1870s, along with the building and consolidation of the Exarchate and the struggle against the supporters of the Patriarchate, saw the idea of Bulgarian State Union within its own ethnic borders become crystallized. These borders were internationally confirmed during the Istanbul Conference, held from 11 December, 1876 to 20 January, 1877, and to some degree in the London Record of Proceedings of 31 March, 1877, signed between England and Russia and handed in at the Sublime Porte, and later at the San Stefano Peace Treaty of 1878.<sup>2</sup>

Bulgarians, by means of mass protests, immediately started to struggle against the resolutions of the Berlin Congress, with the brightest expression of the resistance being the Kresna-Razlog rebellion. After the Congress of Berlin, the Bulgarian Principality began to secretly support the movement towards unity in Eastern Rumelia and the struggle for the consolidation of the

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2 L.S. Meush, *Natsionalno-teritorialni problemi na Balkanite ot Berlinskija kongres do 1918 godina* (Sofia, 2000), pp. 34-39, 50.

Bulgarian character of the autonomous region.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the 1880s, Bulgarian-Serbian relationships became tense, especially after the Timok rebellion (October 1883), when members of the opposition radical party fleeing from Serbia with its leader N. Pashich sought refuge in the country. In 1885, the Bulgarians achieved a great success with the Union of the Bulgarian Principality with Eastern Rumelia, which was defended through political means as well as on the battlefield with the stunning victories of the young Bulgarian army over Serbia near Slivnitsa, Dragoman and Pirot in 1885. The ruling elite in Serbia, who could not resist Austro-Hungary, then occupying Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Novi Pazar sancak in the western and southeastern parts of the Balkans, directed their attention to the territories of Bulgaria and especially to the regions of Vidin, Breznik, Samokov, Ihtiman, Belovo, Chepino, Dospat, and so on. Serbia started the war, representing itself as a defender of the Balkan status quo, threatened by the shift in the balance of powers. The Bucharest Peace Treaty of 19 February, 1886 restored the pre-war borders between the two countries. The resolutions of the Tophane Conference (1885-1886) untied the hands of the Bulgarian rulers to eliminate the Constitutional Statute and to spread the Tarnovo Constitution and the laws of Bulgarian Principality in the united territory, led by the Bulgarian king. Thus, the first step towards a revision of the Berlin Treaty was taken.<sup>4</sup>

3 *Bulgarski patriarh Kiril. Saprotivata sreshtu Berlinskija dogovor - Kresnenskoto vastanie* (Sofia, 1955), pp. 13-28, 35-62, 74-113; K. Pandev, *Natsionalnoosvoboditelnoto dvizhenie v Makedonija i Odrinsko 1878-1903* (Sofia, 1979), pp. 36-65; D. Doinov, *Komitetite "Edinstvo." Roljata i prinosat im za Saedinenieto 1885* (Sofia, 1985); D. Doinov, *Kresnensko-Razlozhkoto vastanie* (Sofia, 1979).

4 *Bulgarskata darzhavnost v aktove i dokumenti. Sastavitel Vasil Giuzelev* (Sofia, 1981), pp. 268-270 [records No. 154, 155]; I. Dimitrov, *Predi 100 godini: Saedinenieto. Istoricheski ocherk* (Sofia, 1985), pp. 224-264; E. Statelova, *Diplomatsijata na Knjazhestvo Bulgarija 1879-1886* (Sofia, 1979), pp. 91-179; Meush, *Natsionalno-teritorialni problemi...*, pp. 56-60; I. Salabashev, *Srabsko-bulgarskata voina* (Sofia, 1971); I. Mitev, *Saedinenieto 1885* (Sofia, 1980); G. Stefanov, *Mezhdunarodni odnoshenija i vanshna politika na Bulgarija (1789-1970 g.)* (Sofia, 1977), pp. 59-68.

According to Article 23 of the Berlin Treaty, the Ottoman Empire accepted the responsibility for founding special committees in each province of its European lands with wide representation from the local population for preparing statutes, similar to the Constitutional Statute of the Island of Crete from 1868. This formulation was used by the Bulgarian government to pressure the Ottoman Empire for reforms through which to relieve the situation of the Bulgarian population in Thrace and Macedonia. After the status quo was established in Berlin, Bulgaria, like a typical young and not yet militarily capable country, was unable to achieve its purposes independently by military operations and, thus, it directed its efforts towards supporting the national spirit in the regions under Ottoman domination by the means of education, culture, customs and the clerical influence of the Exarchate. Still, initially, there was the idea that the country could be turned into a prosperous modern European bourgeois-democratic state that would provide an economic and cultural center for the fragmented parts of the former motherland. By rendering an account of its experience of the Union of Eastern Rumelia with the Bulgarian Principality in 1885, and the claims and policies of Serbia, Greece, Romania, the Ottoman Empire and even the Albanian national-liberation movement for Macedonia, the idea of achieving autonomy for these regions was accepted as a step in the process of their joining Bulgaria. This was why, especially during the government of Stephan Stribanov, policy played at a fictitious rapprochement with Ottoman Turkey with the aim of gaining advantages for the Bulgarian religious and educational institutions in Thrace and Macedonia, such as the appointment of Bulgarian bishops in Scopje and Ohrid in 1890. In that way, it was opposed to the idea of Greece and Serbia, that Macedonia be divided into spheres of influence and, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, joined respectively to the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek states.

In the 1890s, Greece and Serbia entered into serious negotiations over a zone of influence, although they did not initially achieve agreement. The slaughtering of the Armenians in 1894, and again in 1895-1896, which caused indignation among the European public, provided an excuse for a more active Bulgar-

ian policy after 1895. At that time, the Internal Macedonia-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (VMORO), which became the organizer and leader of the Bulgarian national-liberation movement in Macedonia and Thrace, was established. The organization adopted a program of absolute autonomy, agitating and uniting the different nations in a common struggle against Ottoman despotism in the name of democratic and social transformation. In the Statute, it was recorded that the organization opposed the division or invasion of regions of any country. Parallel with the establishment of the VMORO and influenced both by the Palace and the Government of K. Stoilov, was the founding of the Supreme Macedonian (Macedonia-Adrianople) Committee in Sofia, which also officially aimed at autonomy but considered it a transitional stage to annexation. Led by professional soldiers, the committee aimed at subordinating the independent revolutionary organization and leading the liberation movement in Macedonia and Thrace. Through rebel actions, provocative and badly organized rebellions, propaganda and other activities, the members of the Supreme Macedonian Committee caused tension in the relationship between Bulgaria and Turkey with the hope of prompting intervention by the Great Powers in support of the Bulgarian aspirations towards Macedonia.

The visits of the Prime Minister K. Stoilov and the Bulgarian King Ferdinand to Istanbul in 1896 were an expression of improved relations between Bulgaria and Turkey. However, the pressure for reforms in the subordinate regions continued, as did the demands for the appointment of bishops in Macedonia, for the establishment of a Synod and a mixed committee in the Exarchate as well as trade representations in the bigger cities of European Turkey, and for the connection of the Bulgarian and Macedonian railways. Negotiations were also begun in 1897 for a union between Bulgaria and Turkey. During the Crete rebellion of 1896-1897, Greco-Turkish relations were strained when the Bulgarian Government rejected an offer by the Serbian King Alexander for compensation in the case of Crete being annexed to Greece. Signed on 19 February, 1897, the Bulgarian-Serbian agreement, to which Montenegro later joined, fore-

saw the preservation of the Balkan status quo and the signing of additional agreements by both sides concerning Bulgarian and Serbian populations in European Turkey. Both countries desisted from unilateral actions aimed at changing the status quo and they agreed not to interfere in any eventual Greco-Turkish War or political complications on the Island of Crete and the Southern regions of European Turkey. Intervention was foreseen only in case of problems in Northern and Middle Macedonia.<sup>5</sup>

In the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, Bulgarian neutrality was greatly appreciated by Turkey, which gave bishops *berats* (appointments confirmed by the authorities) for the Monastir, Debar and Strumitsa Exarchates, amnesty for the exiles on the Island of Rhodes and an agreement on the establishment of trade agencies in Thessaloniki, Monastir, Scopje, Adrianople, Seres and Dedeagach.

In 1891, the Greek politician and statesman Trikoupis visited Belgrade and Sofia to discuss the matter of eventual union among the three countries on the grounds of an agreement on the division of Macedonia into spheres of influence. The Bulgarian government declined the offer, maintaining its position on the autonomy of Macedonia. For the very same reasons, another political mission from Montenegro to Belgrade, Athens and Sofia for a Balkan rapprochement ended in failure in 1896. Thus, Prime Minister K. Stoilov was in the unenviable position at the end of December 1896 and the beginning of January 1897 of trying to organize a collective attempt by Sofia, Belgrade and Athens to seek support from the Great Powers in Istanbul and the Sublime Porte for reforms in the European Vilayets of Ottoman Turkey and for the transformation of Macedonia into a privileged province.<sup>6</sup>

5 R. Popov, "Bulgaro-srabskata spogodba ot 19 fevruari 1897 g. i otnoshenijata mezhdu dvete strani," in *Studii po nova bulgarska istorija (1878-1944)* (Sofia, 1985), pp. 119-157.

6 Meush, *Natsionalno-teritorialni problemi...*, pp. 76-103; Pandev, *Natsionalnoosvoboditelno dvizhenie...*, pp. 66-186; D.G. Gotsev, *Idejata za avtonomija kato taktika v programite na natsionalnoosvoboditelno dvizhenie v Makedonija i Odrinsko (1893-1941)* (Sofia, 1983), pp. 4-19; R. Bozhilova, "Sarbija i bulgarskoto natsionalnoosvoboditelno dvizhe-

In 1902, the supporters of the Supreme Macedonian Committee, with the knowledge of the Bulgarian government and Palace, began, by the means of armed groups, the so-called Gornodjumaya and Razlog rebellions in separate border regions of Macedonia. That situation led to merciless new retributions on the population by the Ottoman authorities. After preparing and arming the population through a network of revolutionary committees similar to the ones established by Vassil Levski and the organizers of April Rebellion (1876), the Ilindensko-Preobrazhensko Rebellion broke out in 1903 only to be drowned in blood.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the rebel movement continued its activities, not only in opposing the Ottoman oppressor but also Greek and Serbian propaganda through military operations.

The revolutionary actions of the Bulgarians in Macedonia in 1903-1904 led to a crisis in Turko-Bulgarian relations. An attempt at surmounting this problem was sought in the agreement of 26 March 1904, which granted an amnesty for and repatriation of refugees. In return, Bulgaria was obliged to block the entry of rebel groups and arms into the territory of the Ottoman Empire. Under pressure from Austro-Hungary and Russia, an era of reforms was begun in Macedonia with the so-called Murzsteg reforms of 1904-1908. That process, however, did not provide the necessary democratic results and instead of improving the situation, the Bulgarian population fared even worse. Macedonia was turned into an arena for fratricidal rebel collisions and large-scale acts of terror were often carried out on the Bulgarian population on behalf of the Ottoman authorities, and at the instigation of Greek and Serbian propaganda.<sup>8</sup>

nie v Makedonija v kraja na XIX vek (1893-1900),” *Izvestija na Instituta za istorija* 25 (1981), pp. 40-73.

<sup>7</sup> L. Panaiotov, *Ilindensko-Preobrazhensko vastanie 1903* (Sofia, 1983), pp. 60-115.

<sup>8</sup> T. Vlahov, *Kriza v bulgaro-turskite otnoshenija 1895-1908* (Sofia, 1977), pp. 102-115; Panaiotov, *Ilindensko-Preobrazhensko vastanie 1903*, pp. 141-146; A.I. Krainikowsky, *La question de Macedoine et la diplomatie europeenne* (Paris, 1938), pp. 153-154; A. Pantev, “Anglija i reformenata aktsija v Evropeiska Turtsija (1895-1903),” *Istoricheski pregled* 6 (1971), pp. 23-24; R. Bozhilova, “Sarbija i bulgarskoto natsionalnoos-



Despite the entry of armed rebel groups into Macedonia in the winter of 1903-1904 and disputes with Bulgaria over the matter of autonomy or partition and the definition of spheres of influence, the reform process at least led both countries to the negotiation table.

After continuous negotiations in 1904-1905 the following contracts were signed: the secret "Contract of Union" supporting reforms in Macedonia by peaceful means, the "Amicable Contract" toward identical customs and policies, and a trade contract toward the establishment of an incomplete union of customs, to which Austro-Hungary was utterly opposed. The dual monarchy achieved not only its economic but also political aims through its active support of the cooling of Serbo-Bulgarian relations.<sup>9</sup>

Emigration of the Young Turks led to the establishment, in Paris in 1901, of an organization called the "Ottoman Society of Union and Progress," which later opened branches in a number of European cities as well as in the bigger Bulgarian towns such as Sofia, Plovdiv and Rousse. In 1905, a circle of intellectuals established in Thessaloniki the "Ottoman Society of Liberty," which entered into direct contact with the Young Turks in Paris.<sup>10</sup> Collaboration between the Bulgarian national-liberation movement in Macedonia and Thrace and the Young Turks began on the basis of anti-absolutism. Diametrically opposed to

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voboditelno dvizhenie v Makedonija v nachaloto na XX v.," in *Bulgar-skiyat natsionalen vapros sled Berlinskija kongres (do Sotsialisticheskata revoljutsija)* (Sofia, 1986), pp. 7-70; V. Georgiev and S. Trifonov, *Istori-ja na bulgarite 1878-1944 v dokumenti 1:2 [1878-1912]* (Sofia, 1996), pp. 259-330; V. Georgiev and S. Trifonov, *Gratskata i srabskata propa-gandi v Makedonija (Kraijat na XIX - nachaloto na XX vek). Novi doku-menti* (Sofia, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> S. Dimitrov and K. Manchev, *Istoriya na balkanskite narodi 1879-1918* (Sofia, 1975), pp. 289-300; R. Popov, "Kam vaprosa za politicheskite otnoshenija mezhdur Bulgarija i Sarbija prez 1904 g.," *Studia balkanika 4 [Balkanski prouchvanija - XX vek]* (Sofia, 1972), pp. 221-225; H. Ki-osev, "Srabsko-bulgarskiyat mitnicheski sajuz ot 1905 godina," *Izvestija na Bulgarskoto istorichesko druzhestvo* 24 (1968), pp. 40-43.

<sup>10</sup> D. Hakov, *Istoriya na Turtsija prez XX vek* (Ankara, Sofia, 2000), pp. 24-25.

the public opinion in Bulgaria supporting the Young Turk revolution, the Government and Palace treated the change with resentment and suspicion. They considered it to be a new Turkish manoeuvre for concluding the reform work and escaping from foreign diplomatic and military interference. In order to tarnish the prestige of the Young Turks, Royal Prince Ferdinand and the Government of Malinov rejected the formal vassalage and, on 22 September, 1908 in Tarnovo, pronounced the country an independent kingdom.<sup>11</sup> After the disappointment of the Young Turk revolution, the right-wing circles in association with the Bulgarian national-liberation movement in Macedonia and Thrace took advantage of new constitutional freedoms to establish, in 1908, the Party of the “Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs” in support of an autonomous Macedonia and its union with Bulgaria. The leftist forces established the “National-Federal Party” with the similar aim of achieving autonomy. Thus the rebel struggle was renewed.<sup>12</sup>

Bulgaria took part in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 in the name of the liberation of Bulgarians in Macedonia and the Adrianople region, and thousands of them applied to the Military Ministry in order to gain their freedom in a battle against the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and the agreements that followed marked a change in the “status quo” or “balance” in the region, as proclaimed through the organization of South Eastern Europe by the Great Powers, and imposed by the dictates of the Berlin Treaty.

The ruling elite in Bulgaria looked toward war as a means of resolving the national problem. However, by stubbornly following that course of action they led the country to two national

11 *Bulgarskata darzhavnost v aktove i dokumenti*, pp. 271-272, 276-278 [records No. 157, 159]; Vlahov, *Kriza v bulgaro-turskite otnoshenija 1895-1908*, pp. 21-102, 155-180; Ts. Todorova, *Objavjavane na nezavisimostta na Bulgarija 1908 g. i politikata na imperialisticheskite sili* (Sofia, 1960).

12 Georgiev and Trifonov, *Istorija na bulgarite 1878-1944 v dokumenti* 1:2 [1878-1912], pp. 515-542; Meush, *Natsionalno-teritorialni problemi...*, p. 59; M. Pandevski, *Politicheskite partii i organizatsii vo Makedonija (1908-1912)* (Skopje, 1965).

catastrophes – the Balkan Wars and World War I. As a result, new territories were taken away from Bulgaria.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. BETWEEN THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF THE MINORITIES AND NATIONAL CONSOLIDATION

After the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman domination, the legal status of the individual representatives of national minorities as citizens of the country and a part of her society was determined by two main factors; international contracts, approved or signed by Bulgaria either of her own free will or by force, and the country's domestic legislation. Shortly after 1878, the Principality of Bulgaria (in geographic terms – northern Bulgaria) and the autonomous region of Eastern Rumelia (in geographic terms – southern Bulgaria) were founded in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin (July 1-13, 1878). In 1885, they united to form a state under the name of the Principality of Bulgaria, which became legally independent after 1908. The system of government as well as the citizens' participation in exercising and controlling power were regulated by the two fundamental laws of these state structures. These were the Constitution of the Principality of Bulgaria, the so-called Tarnovo Constitution because it was adopted in the old capital city of Tarnovo on 16 April, 1879, and the Constitutional Statute of Eastern Rumelia passed on 14 April, 1879 in the city of Plovdiv. These acts determined the basis of the internal legal status of the national minorities in Bulgaria. They did not, for example, discriminate between the Jewish population and other citizens as

13 A. Ganchev, *Balkanskata voina 1912-1913* (Sofia, 1939); A. Ganchev, *Mezhdusajuznicheskata voina 1913* (Sofia, 1940); A.S. Toshev, *Balkanskite voini 1-2* (Sofia, 1929-1931); A.A. Girginov, *Narodnata katastrofa. Voinite 1912/ 1913 g.* (Sofia, 1926); A.A. Girginov, *Ot voina kam mir* (Sofia, 1937); *Balkanskata voina 1912-1913 g.* (Sofia, 1961); K. Kosev, "Prichini, tsel i sashtnost na Balkanskata voina 1912-1913 g. i prichini da ne se postigne obedinenieto na bulgarskija narod," *Izvestija* (Institut za voenna istorija - Generalen shtab) 37 (1984), pp. 3-30; Ch. Spelanzon, *Iztochnijat vapros. Pobedeni i pobediteli na Balkanite 1-2* (Sofia, 1930).

in some neighboring Balkan countries as well as in some countries belonging to the Great Powers. The main principle underlying the said basic acts was the legal equality of all citizens regardless of their religion and nationality. There were two prerequisites for adopting this principle. On the one hand, it coincided with the democratic views of the figures of the Bulgarian national revival – both the enlighteners and revolutionaries. In the “Regulations of the Workers for the Bulgarian People’s Liberation,” the draft statute of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee in Bucharest drawn up by the national hero Vasil Levski, it was claimed that “through a general revolution to make a radical reorganization of the present despotic state system and replace it with a democratic republic (people’s ruling)... the Turkish status of a master should give place to the consent, brotherhood and absolute equality among the all nationalities. Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, etc., will be equal in every respect, be it religion, nationality, civil respect – everything. All will fall under one general law voted in by the common consent of all nationalities.”<sup>14</sup>

These views, accepted as a sacred tradition in building the newly liberated country, became the guiding principles for the Bulgarian Constituent Assembly, which passed the Tarnovo Constitution. This basic law of state was officially in force from 16 April, 1879 till 4 December, 1947. It proclaimed the following: freedom of worship in Bulgaria for all citizens and foreigners living permanently or temporarily there (Article 40); autonomy in ruling ecclesiastical matters (Article 42); equality in the eye of the law and political rights for all Bulgarian citizens (Articles 57 and 60); the right to hold a post in the state, or public or military service for all Bulgarian citizens (Article 65); property rights for all citizens (Article 67); guarantees of the inviolability of person, property and correspondence for all citizens (Articles from 73 to 77 inclusive); and the freedom of meetings, associations and the lodging of personal and collective petitions,

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14 D.V. Strashimirov, *Levski. Zhivot, dela i izvori* (Sofia, 1929), pp. 218-226; I. Undzhiev, *Vasil Levski* (Sofia, 1945), pp. 364-365.

claims and applications for all citizens regardless of their religion and nationality (Articles from 82 to 84 inclusive).<sup>15</sup>

According to the Tarnovo Constitution, the Bulgarian state was at first defined as politically autonomous, but national, monolingual and with a dominant Eastern-Orthodox religion. Not only the principle of citizens' equality but also that of the equality of nationalities was expressed more firmly in the Constitutional Statute of Eastern Rumelia than in the Constitution. The Constitutional Statute was drawn up by the European Commission, which was then in session in the city of Plovdiv. Eastern Rumelia was an autonomous region under the direct political and military power of the Ottoman Empire (Article 1). The state was characterized as being multinational and trilingual. Turkish, Bulgarian and Greek were proclaimed as the official languages. They were used by the central and the local administrative authorities, the judiciary and by the private individuals according to specified rules (Article 22). The state posts were distributed among the nations proportionally, on the basis of elections (Article 21). The spiritual heads of the ethno-religious communities, including "the chief rabbi who judges in the chief town of the region," participated in the Regional Assembly, the principal councils and the commissions in making the district electoral lists by their right as members (Articles 69 1-o, 125, 165). The following civil obligations, rights and freedoms were proclaimed in the Constitutional Statute: conscription for all in the Regional Militia (Article 6), income and property taxation for all (Article 25), equal rights for all citizens irrespective of nationality and religion, their access to the public services, honours and posts (Article 24); the right of free movement and place of habitation (Article 27); freedom of worship and protection in the performance of divine service (Article 28); the ban

15 A. Kalev, "Pravnoto polozhenie na evreite v Bulgarija. Evreite - slobodni i ravnopravni grazhdani v Narodna Republika Bulgarija," *Godishnik na Obshtestvena kulturno-prosvetna organizatsija na evreite v NRB* 1-1 (1966), p. 50; *Konstitutsija na Bulgarskoto knjazhestvo i Zakon za izbirane predstaviteli na Obiknovenoto i Velikoto narodno sabranie* (Sofia, 1880).

on interference by religious communities in the religious matters of another religion, to impose its own rituals and to require other communities to observe its own holidays (Article 29); the inviolability of the person (Articles 30 and 32), home (Article 33), possessions and property (Articles 36 and 37); the right to work (Article 34), education (Article 38), to legal defense (Article 31), to freedom of opinion and speech (Article 39), to a free press (Article 40), to call meetings (Article 41), to found societies (Article 42), and to lodge personal and collective claims with the authorities (Article 43). There were some very conservative terms regarding the rights of citizens to vote and to be elected. Electoral qualification was connected with property and education, but there were no restrictions in relation to nationality or religion (Chapter V, Sections 1 and 2).<sup>16</sup>

International treaties were the other prerequisite for proclaiming legal equality for all citizens irrespective of religion, mother tongue, ethnic origin and nationality. These were embodied in the Treaty of Berlin (1878) and the protection of minority rules in Articles 49 to 57 (inclusive) of Section IV of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly (1919) with which the international legal matter of minority protection by the League of Nations was regulated. The Tarnovo Constitution had to conform to Article 5 of the Treaty of Berlin, which did not provide grounds in Bulgarian law for the restriction of civil and political rights, employment in public and state services, the conferring of titles and honours or the exercising of certain professions and industry in any part of the Principality because of differences in religion.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Article 8 of the Treaty of Berlin obliged the Principality of Bulgaria to observe not only the commercial and maritime conventions, agreements and contracts concluded between the Great Powers and the Porte that were relevant to the Ottoman Empire but also the rights and privileges of the foreign citizens including their right to the consul's protection and jurisdiction, as specified by capitulations and common practice. This article guaranteed complete equality of the different na-

<sup>16</sup> *Organicheski ustav na Istochna Rumelija* (Plovdiv, 1879).

<sup>17</sup> *Bulgarskata darzhavnost v aktove i dokumenti*, p. 209.

tions and the trade of all powers.<sup>18</sup> Among these foreign citizens from western European nations and the Ottoman Empire were also a large number of Jews who lived in the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. The Tarnovo Constitution guaranteed that all people living in the Principality had “civil rights” according to the laws (Article 60). The Bulgarian laws were valid for the estates of the foreigners (Article 63) and in all other cases the situation of foreign citizens was regulated by laws made especially for them (Article 64). The Constitutional Statute followed almost word for word Article 8 of the Treaty of Berlin by regulating that the international contracts and agreements of any character between the Great Powers and the Porte, either concluded in the past or which might be concluded in future, were also to be enforced in Eastern Rumelia. The freedoms and privileges acquired by the foreigners were valid also for the autonomous region despite the conditions of their acquisition (Article 20).<sup>19</sup>

Based on these specified prerequisites, equality for all Bulgarian citizens was the underlying principle of all official internal legal acts. Of course, this does not mean that there was no anti-Semitism in Bulgaria, just that the degree to which it did exist could not be compared to that in most other countries. In the interest of historical truth we should mention that there were some restrictions on the Bulgarian Jews regarding access to high military ranks and many posts in the state administration; i.e., there were restrictions regarding the access of the Jews to the Military School, the School of the Officers of the Reserve, and the Bulgarian National Bank.<sup>20</sup> These restrictions, however, were regulated by internal rules and confidential circular letters and their application or non-execution depended on various subjective factors. The confidential character of these acts, however,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Konstitutsija na Bulgarskoto knjazhestvo...*; *Organicheski ustav na Istochna Rumelija*.

<sup>20</sup> V. Paounovski and Y. Ilie, *The Jews in Bulgaria between the Holocaust and the Rescue* (Sofia, 2000), pp. 67-71; Kalev, “Pravnoto polozhenie na evreite ...,” pp. 50-51.

indicated the fact that they were a way to get round the Bulgarian legislation and, in principle, they were in violation of it.

The struggle against the results of the Berlin Treaty and the development of the national idea were reflected to a considerable degree in the state policy towards the minorities. In character the state policy did not differ from the policy implemented by the other Balkan countries, except the fact that the Bulgarian policy was much milder. The reason for this was the necessity of taking into consideration the international factors and the national psychology of the Bulgarians, which was influenced by some objective circumstances. It should be added that a considerable Bulgarian population remained as a minority in neighbouring Balkan countries, and the Bulgarian politicians had to take this fact into consideration.

Among the main questions for the government of Eastern Rumelia during its existence from 1879 to 1885 was the cohabitation of the many different ethnic minorities and religious groups. In principle, the Ottoman government's traditional methods of suppressing ethnic-religious conflicts were followed. But in fact, the predominating Bulgarian presence in the government, legislative authorities, court system, police force and army made it impossible to exert influence in favour of the Bulgarian national cause. The Rumelian government implemented a balanced policy, based on legal principles, towards the minorities and religious societies. According to the statute, the region was multinational with three official languages (Turkish, Bulgarian and Greek), which were used by the central and local authorities according to the two dominating nationalities in the districts and while promulgating documents of special social importance (Article 22). While constituting this main law, the principles of ethnic and, therefore, of religious balance were as well grounded in the principles of equality as those between the ethnic majority and minorities.

The predominating problems connected with the life of the ethnic religious communities in the autonomic region had to be resolved by the administrations of two executive authorities – those of national education and internal affairs. The Rumelian government managed to organize the educational activities in



terms of ethnic religious tolerance. Religious minority groups profited from their legal rights concerning self-government and self-support of the primary education and equality in the distribution of budget funds. Each ethnic religious community chose and studied its own particular school subjects in their native language, had its own internal self-governing board for organizing and operating the schools, and freely sought trained teachers and negotiated with them with regard to salaries.

Referring to the attitude towards the distribution of funds, it happened that Bulgarian Catholics (Pavlikyani), Bulgarian Protestants and Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomatsi) were tolerated despite usually experiencing losses. The department of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was responsible for the religious sects in the Principality. The fundamental laws of both the Bulgarian Principality and Eastern Rumelia were grounded on the principle of separating the church from the state, as it was logically formulated in Article 62 of the Berlin Treaty for the free contact of religious communities on the borders of the Ottoman Empire and its autonomous parts with the supreme clerical preceptor. Thus, outside factors might influence the country since the nationalities as minorities were identical with some religious communities. The Greeks obeyed the Patriarch in Istanbul, Bulgarians the Exarch, Armenians the Gregorian Bishop in Adrianople, formally the subordinate to the Istanbul Patriarch, Turks the Caliph and Sheikh-yul-Islam, the Jews the Main Rabbi in Istanbul, and the Catholics of different nationalities together with foreign citizens the Pope and so on. The Constitutional Statute guaranteed the freedom of worship – the right of divine service, the structure of the communities, and the connection of the parishioners with their spiritual heads. The state interfered in the deeds of the church on matters connected with immovable church property, the extent of taxes and duties, and licenses for realizing local activities by the clerical heads.

The main nationalities in the new state structure, according to a Russian census from immediately after the Russo-Turkish War, were: 70.3% Bulgarians (72.3% in 1885; 64% in towns) professing Christianity and Islam and comprising a majority of orthodox Christians (mainly Exarchate supporters with some Pa-

triarchate supporters), Catholics (among them Bulgarian Catholics – Pavlikyans – and a few Uniates), Protestants – and 2% Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomatsi); 21.4% Turks (21.3% in 1885; 26% in towns) professing Islam; 5.2% Greeks (5.6% in 1885; 26% in towns) professing mainly orthodox Christianity (Patriarchate supporters) with a few Catholics (Uniates); 2.4% Gypsies (2.9% in 1885; 7% in towns) professing orthodox Christianity (Patriarchate supporters) and Islam; 0.5% Jews (0.7% in 1885; 6% in towns) professing Judaism; and 0.2% Armenians (0.2% in 1885; 4% in towns) professing orthodox Christianity (mainly Gregorians and a few Patriarchate supporters) and Catholicism. A number of foreign citizens also lived in Eastern Rumelia, mainly professing Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) and Judaism. The slight variations in the statistics between years was due to demographic changes, such as migrations (escapes and returns) during and immediately after the war, especially of the Muslim and, to a lesser extent, Jewish populations, as well as problems connected with self-determination during the counting of the Slav-speaking Bulgarian Mohammedans and the Romany Muslims, such as the Turks, and Bulgarian Patriarchate supporters and Wallacians, such as the Greeks.

There were conflicts on a national level between Greek Patriarchate supporters and Bulgarian Exarchate supporters, called schismatics, in the Plovdiv (1879 and 1885) and Kavakly areas (July 1884). These conflicts were caused by religious arguments or arguments over church and monastery property as well as rivalry over bishoprics. The Patriarchate supporters considered the authorities pro-exarchate and treated them with distrust or complained outspokenly that they infringed upon their ethnic and religious rights. This was particularly noticeable during elections. The matter of sending Bulgarian bishops to Macedonia, also led to a rise in anti-exarchate feelings among the Greeks in Plovdiv in 1885. As well as the other religious communities, the Patriarchate supporters were represented by their bishop as a deputy by right in the Regional Assembly.

Religious tension also existed between Bulgarian Exarchate supporters and Bulgarian Protestants in Sopot, Panagyurishte and Merychlery, who were regarded as heretics. In the Bulgar-

ian Principality, the Protestant missionaries complained of their living conditions, the lack of collaboration and protection by the authorities in obviating the inconveniences and pressure from the Exarchate aimed at stopping their publishing activities. In Eastern Rumelia, the protestant clerical preceptors were included in the membership of the Regional Assembly by right, as was one of the two representatives of the Catholics. The other Catholic representative was appointed by the governor. However, there were complaints by the Protestants to the authorities here, too, despite the fact that a number of representatives of the administration were alumni of Robert College in Istanbul.<sup>21</sup>

The main guarantee of civil rights and freedoms was the Department of Internal Affairs, led by the Bulgarians Gavril Krastevich and Nacho Nachov. Turks participated, according to their abilities, mostly in the lower executive (with positions in district administration, prefectural and town councils, and as assistants to town and village mayors, according to the proportional principle as contained in the Constitutional Statute) and in the legislation authorities (through their eligible and appointed representatives and the deputies by right in the Regional Assembly). They were also present in the gendarmerie and in the military as commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The Muslim religious communities were subordinate to the Main Mufti in Plovdiv, who was, by right, a member of the Regional Assembly. In contrast to the difficulties in the Principality, in Rumelia the problems with vakif property and the incomes derived thereof were settled quickly, as in 1883 when a law introduced by the regional governor concerning vakifs was approved. In 1879, the Muslim clerical preceptors complained of and protested, on behalf of their communities, the demolition of Turkish houses by Bulgarians and other violations by armed rebel groups.<sup>22</sup>

21 A. Zheljazkova, B. Aleksiev, and Zh. Nazarska, *Mjuszulmanskite obshnosti na Balkanite i v Bulgarija. Istoricheski eskizi* (Sofia, 1997), pp. 152-190.

22 Ibid., pp. 155-158.

There were anti-Semitic persecutions in Karlovo and Stara Zagora during the Russo-Turkish War, and refugees were later repatriated with the help of the administrative authorities, which prevented the resentment demonstrated by local Bulgarians from turning into outrage. Exarch Yossif I, himself, supported G. Krastevich in accepting the Jewish refugees back to Karlovo. Some of the unwanted Jews were accommodated in deserted or newly established villages. The authorities in Eastern Rumelia paid considerable attention to case, not only because they followed a policy of prevention and settlement of conflicts among ethnic religious communities, but also because the matter was presented at the Berlin Congress as a part of the Jewish affairs examined there. Acceptance of the Jewish refugees was trouble-free in the towns of Kazanlak, Haskovo, Yambol and Sliven, as their properties had been saved and were given back. The Jews were represented in the Regional Assembly by the Main Rabbi (haham-bashi) of the Israelite clerical community with a Head Office in Plovdiv. He was a deputy by right. The Main Rabbi received a permit from the regional governor and confirmed the appointment of the Rabbis in the various religious communities.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the Turks and Bulgarians, the Greeks had a higher percentage of representatives with high educational qualifications, but their small population prevented them from having more than two district heads. This caused discontent, although they had taken posts on behalf of the Turks and Bulgarians. However, despite the assistance of international representatives, they did not manage to achieve more than was their due at the time. They participated in the local authorities as mayors, assistant mayors and municipal councilors. They often competed in elections with the Bulgarians, with who they often were in conflict. They were not enthusiastic about participating in military and police bodies, but they had their representatives there, too. The Gypsies were also poorly represented in the army because of their nomadic way of life and their reluctance to serve. The Jews served in the army, while the Armenians tended to prefer

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-150.

the police force. In most elections, the Jews supported Bulgarian candidates, and so did the Armenians. The Jews did, however, have their representative in the municipal council in the regional capital Plovdiv for several years. This was possible because of the resolution of the governor to unite, like the Catholics, their few scattered offices into a detached constituency. Armenians became municipal councilors in Burgas in 1879 and in Plovdiv in 1883. The Gregorian clerical head participated in the sessions of the Regional Assembly as a deputy by right.<sup>24</sup>

During the Temporary Russian Government, the Bulgarians were tolerated as part of the policy of persecuting the Turkish element that was considered to be a promoter of Ottoman interests in the Principality and Eastern Rumelia. Some clashes between exiled Bulgarians and Turks were permitted along with a series of minor injustices including predetermined legal proceedings, the appropriation of farm lands and movable properties, threats, obstruction of returning refugees (including official decrees, court prolongation of the return of property, a lack of or only symbolic compensation), orders for Muslim property to be destroyed to make way for new towns and buildings, arbitrariness with Turks and Greeks (whose complaints and petitions were not granted), isolation of the Muslims in the municipality councils, anti-Semitic actions and so on. At the same time there were attacks and revolts, like the one in the Rodopi Mountains, where the Bulgarian population was the victim. The solution of the refugee problem in the Principality and Rumelia caused by the return of many Muslims in 1879-1882 also created a number of difficulties involving ethnic conflicts between Bulgarians and Greeks, on the one hand, and Turks on the other. The authorities in the Principality uncompromisingly continued to implement the Russian policy, refusing to accept large groups of tens of thousands of refugees or leaving their complaints unanswered. The Government in Eastern Rumelia pursued a more flexible policy due to the menace of Turkish military interference and because of the supervision of the foreign commissars and diplomats. In 1879, the Porte, without taking into consider-

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-152.

ation the agreements and according to a British suggestion, flooded the Burgas coast with tens of thousands of refugees unloaded from British ships, provoking an ethnic conflict as, according to the British Vice-Council, Bulgarian-Greek rebel groups attacked Turkish villages in the Messemvria region, and police officers were involved in murders, rapes and thefts in the Burgas region. Again, according to much diplomatic information, Turks were tormented in the Stara Zagora region and systematically threatened by Bulgarian gymnastic associations. The Government of Rumelia, which was continuously criticized for its failures in connection with the refugee problem, replied to the Ottoman comments and explained the situation before the European Commission by means of refutations and the findings of mixed survey commissions and so on. With this, financial aid began to be granted, state lands given for establishing new villages, charities were supported and encouraged, and the Bulgarian gymnastic associations were dismissed. The period from 1882 to 1885 saw the start of mass emigration of the Turkish population from Eastern Rumelia (Pazardjik, Srara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Yambol, Chirpan and other regions) and from the Principality (more than 70 thousand people from the Shoumen region). There were ethnic conflicts in the border regions as well, where, because of robberies and separatism, the police and army interfered. A particular point of discussion involved cases in the Kardjali and Aitos regions, where Turkish villages were struck.<sup>25</sup>

According to the census of 1881, the ethnic make up of the Bulgarian Principality was as follows: Bulgarians 67%, Turks 26%, Romanians (Wallachians) 2%, Gypsies 1.9%, Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomaks) 0.9%, Jews 0.7%, Tatars 0.6%, Greeks 0.6%, and Armenians 0.2%.

Islam was professed by the Turks (Sunnites and Shi'ites), Tatars, Circassians, Yuruks, Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomaks), Allians (Kazalbashes) and some Gypsies. It is worth mentioning the Gagauses, an ethnic group of uncertain origin, who were Turkish in language and Orthodox in religion, and who num-

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-140.

bered 12,000 people in 1880 and 9,329 people in 1910. The community was under the clerical supervision of the Istanbul Patriarchate. Besides Islam, the following religions were also professed: Orthodox Christianity (Exarchate supporters, Patriarchate supporters and Gregorians), Catholicism (Bulgarian Catholics and Uniates) and Protestantism (American Board, Methodists, Baptists, and Lutherans).

As in the Principality, intolerance, to some degree, on religious or ethnic grounds existed between Bulgarian Mohammedans and Bulgarians, the Orthodox and Muslim communities, Catholics and Protestants, Shi'ites and Sunnites among the Muslims, and the Ashkenazim and Sephardim among the Jewry.

The founders of the Tarnovo Constitution did not take into consideration some of the articles of Berlin Treaty, such as Articles 5, 8 and 12, which dealt with matters associated with the rights of minorities and religious communities. According to these articles, it was guaranteed that religion, as professed by the citizens, could not be used as grounds for restricting their personal and political rights or as a impediment to their appointment to jobs or professions. The state could not interfere in the hierarchical structure or in the relations between clerical heads and their communities. Emigrant Muslims were able to maintain rights over their properties and could sell or lease them. The Principality was obliged to establish a mixed commission for solving the problem of the vakif properties. The lack of these decrees in the fundamental laws of the country gave the authorities the latitude to avoid dealing with the problems faced by the minorities. Besides the abovementioned restrictions, there were a number of cases in which Jewish doctors were deprived of their rights to practice their profession because of their religious affiliations or because of problems of their faith. It was possible for the country to interfere in the cadre deeds of religious communities by dismissing Muftis, appointing clergymen who were not approved by the religious authorities and did not acknowledge the clerical heads of the Patriarchate supporters and Gregorians, implementing police supervision of bishops in bishoprics and so on. Basic legislation regarding the educational system created serious obstructions for the schools supported

by the religious communities of the Israelites, Gregorians, Patriarchate supporters, Muslims and others, as the right of their alumni to continue their education in the state schools was restricted. The distribution of funds was either absent or restricted for separate ethnic religious communities. The state stimulated education in the newly established municipality and state schools, as their teachers were granted a number of privileges. These schools were financed normally, while the others were largely self-supporting despite being controlled by the state. With regard to financing, preference was given to ethnic or confessional groups, which had the potential to “Bulgarize” themselves, such as the Bulgarian Mohammedans, Gagauses, Wallachians and Bulgarian Catholics (Pavlikyans), as well as those who taught school subjects in the Bulgarian language, such as the Jews and Armenians. In the Principality, the so-called “regime of capitulations,” inherited by the Ottoman Empire and grounded in the Berlin Treaty, was not accepted. As a part of radical agrarian reform, the forced confiscation of Muslim property was implemented by the Bulgarians. Under the patronage of the authorities, a policy that delayed the return of the property to refugees was introduced. In this sense, laws for expropriation, even for the breaking the Constitution, were introduced. Even the Ottoman vakif commissar was not acknowledged and, subsequently, his work was obstructed. Thus, the problem with the vakifs was not solved, and reflected the financial situation of the Muslim institutions, which began to decay. Vakifs were either not or only partially returned. A part of them were expropriated in favour of the state or municipalities, and the buildings were demolished or left until they fell down. Many Turkish schools were closed because of a lack of funds. The laws of “seigniorial and farm lands” and the acts of sub-law contradicted the texts of the Constitution on the equitable and normatively based compensation for property.

The imperfection of the Tarnovo Constitution and the consolidation of the state with the dominant religion and language also provided possibilities for infringement upon the rights of the religious communities as well as for the state to interfere through the power of the Minister of Foreign Affairs by inspec-



tion of the management of their deeds. The fundamental law foresaw equality before the law for citizens with Bulgarian citizenship. The foreign citizens among Catholics, Protestants, Israelites, Patriarchate supporters and Muslims immediately fell into an unequal position, as the state was able to refuse them estates and licenses to practice their professions, and to expel them as school trustees and to close their schools.<sup>26</sup>

The representatives of the minorities were elected for the National Assembly and Council of State according to their party appurtenance or their political affiliations.

The policy of the Bulgarian Principality towards the minorities was influenced by the interference of Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which acted against the interests of the Catholics, Protestants and the Patriarchate in Istanbul. The state policy towards the minorities was also influenced by its foreign policy, which was subject to the idea of national unity of the Bulgarian lands parceled out by the Berlin Treaty. Thus, the attitude towards the Muslims and Patriarchate supporters depended on Ottoman and foreign pressure for their abiding sovereignty towards the Sultan and the implementation of article 23 of the Berlin Treaty, connected with the necessity of reforms in Macedonia and Thrace. The steps against Romanian schools were a

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26 Zh. Nazurska, *Bulgarskata darzhava i neinite maltsinstva 1879-1885* (Sofia, 1999), pp. 7-64, 81-115; G. Todorov, *Vremennoto rusko upravlenie v Bulgarija (1877-1879)* (Sofia, 1958), pp. 125-185; G. Todorov, "Urezhdaneto na agrarnija i bezhanskija vapros v Knjazhestvo Bulgarija v parvite godini sled Osvobozhdenieto (1879-1881)," *Istoricheski pregled* 1 (1961), pp. 25-52; G. Todorov, "Politikata na bulgarskite burzhoazni pravitelstva po agrarnija i bezhanskija vapros sled darzhavnija prevrat ot 1881 g. (1881-1886)," *Istoricheski pregled* 2 (1961), pp. 3-32; Statelova, *Diplomatsijata na Knjazhestvo Bulgarija 1879-1886*, pp. 97-102; T. Dobriianov, T. Bakalov, K. Georgiev, Ts. Doinova, M. Kovacheva, R. Popov, and E. Statelova, eds., *Vanshnata politika na Bulgarija. Dokumenti i materialy* 1 [1879-1886] (Sofia, 1978), pp. 52-53, 60-62, 64-65, 67-68, 70-74, 92-119, 151-152, 205-206, 393-394, 428-430, 483, 707-708 [records No. 19, 25, 29, 31, 33, 44, 46, 47, 63, 95, 184, 206, 229, 388]; V. Georgiev and S. Trifonov, *Istorija na bulgarite 1878-1944 v dokumenti* 1:1 [1878-1912] (Sofia, 1994), pp. 555-557, 558-562, 573-581, 587-588, 593-596.

means of implementing pressure for the solution of the border question and the rights of the Bulgarians in Northern Dobroudja. The policy towards the minorities was influenced by outside interference from Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary and others through diplomatic missions in defense of the rights of the Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews. Contrary pressure was provided by Russia through its traditions of state building from the time of the Temporary Russian Government and the activity of Russian colonels, clerks and alumni in the government of the country. The first measures against the Muslims, Greeks and Jews dated from that time. During the regime of the attorneys, some steps were taken against the Jews to obstruct their economic enterprises in the Danube and Black Sea towns. Bulgaria pursued a policy of Bulgarization of the national self-consciousness of Bulgarian Mohammedans, Gagauses, Bulgarian Catholics and Wallachians as a counterstep to the actions of the Balkan countries in relation to the Bulgarian population there. With regard to taxes, the Bulgarian Mohammedans were in a privileged position compared with the Turks. In that way, the Bulgarian policy stimulated the emigration of the Turks and the incorporation of the Bulgarian Mohammedans, especially those with a Turkish consciousness.<sup>27</sup> It was this external factor that helped determine the Bulgarian policy towards the minorities till the end of World War I.

### 3. NATIONAL INCORPORATION AND THE RETURN TO THE WITHDRAWN FAITH

As a result of the centuries-old policy of the Ottoman Empire aimed at the Islamization on the Balkans, some of the Christian nations, such as the Serbians, Greeks, Bulgarians and others, were forced to adopt Muslim religion by the means of various voluntary and forceful methods. Bulgarian Muslims numbered about 400 thousand people and populated more than 500 villages in the Rodopi Mountains, Western Thrace and Mace-

<sup>27</sup> Nazarska, *Bulgarskata darzhava...*, pp. 205-229, 232-236; Statelova, *Diplomatsijata na Knjazhestvo Bulgarija 1879-1886*, pp. 102-105.

donia on the eve of the Balkan War.<sup>28</sup> According to the San Stefano Treaty, a part of these regions was included in the lands of Bulgarian Principality. But on the strength of the Berlin Treaty, almost all the regions populated by Bulgarian Muslims were given back to the Ottoman Empire. After the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), due to religious and political reasons and at the instigation of Turkish agitators, Bulgarian Muslims from several villages in the Dyovlen region opposed the authorities in Eastern Rumelia and established their own autonomous government. After the union of Eastern Rumelia with the Bulgarian Principality, the Dyovlen region and the Kardjaly district were joined to the Ottoman Empire according to the Tophane Act of 5 April, 1886 in return for the Turkish refusal to keep garrisons in Eastern Rumelia. Only a small territory, populated by Bulgarian Muslims, was included in Eastern Rumelia – the autonomous administrative region, which was under the direct political and military power of the Sultan. On 6 September, 1885, this very small territory was integrated with the new united state after Union. This Muslim population was considered by the authorities to be Bulgarian. It differed only in its religion from the majority of orthodox Bulgarian Christians, the few Bulgarian Catholics, Bulgarian Protestants and others. They all had their rights of citizenship, which were guaranteed by the Tarnovo Constitution, and the Muslims could profess Islam freely and follow their customs without problem. On the other hand, the Bulgarian Muslims in Thrace, the Rodopi Mountains and Macedonia, who remained in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, were considered by the official authorities to be Turkish. They were persuaded to accept this in spite of language differences.

After the Berlin Congress (1878), people of several different nations continued to live in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire according to their ethnic origin and religious affiliations, such as Bulgarians, Serbians, Wallachians and Albanians, and who were not forgotten by the respective Balkan

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28 S.N. Shishkov, *Bulgaro-mohamedanite (pomatsi). Istoriko zemepisen i narodonauchen pregled s obraztsi* (Plovdiv, 1936), p. 34.

countries. The common interest in opposing the Ottoman Empire prevailed over any discrepancies among the young Balkan countries for a short time. In 1912, the Balkan Union was established among Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, by the means of synallagmatic agreements, directed at a decisive retribution against the Ottoman Empire and liberation of compatriots living on its borders. The Peace Treaty of 17 May, 1914 in London put an end to the Balkan War. The Ottoman Empire lost its European possessions in the North and East from the Midia-Enos line. The Bulgarian military-administrative authorities established the Lozengrad Military Province in the newly liberated lands in eastern and western Thrace and the Rodopi Mountains, and the Seres Military Province in Eastern Macedonia, where compact masses of Bulgarians of Christian and Muslim faith lived. From the very first months of the Balkan War, according to the initiative of King Ferdinand, the government of Ivan Evstatiev Geshov, the Holy Synod of Bulgarian Orthodox Church and leaders of Macedonia-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization, and the Bulgarian civil, military and church authorities realized a policy for receiving the mass of Bulgarians who had previously adopted the Muslim faith to the bosom of the Eastern Orthodox Church. It was considered that, with the liberation of Thrace and Macedonia from Ottoman domination and the geo-political union of the Bulgarian nation, the process of conversion would help in the consolidation of the nation and in the consolidation of Bulgarian State power in the newly liberated lands. Thus, the traditional attempts of the Ottoman Empire at political influence by the means of confusing the national consciousness of the population with its devotion to the Islam and the customs established during the ages had to be prevented. Thousands of Bulgarian Muslims were mobilized in the army of Ottoman Turkey during that war. In the Kardjali region, they were included in the military corps, which first retreated under pressure from the Macedonia-Adrianople army of volunteers and was later captured. A considerable number of the captured Bulgarian Muslims, after they had been sent to the interior of Bulgaria, were converted and later set free in order to go back to their homes.

During the conversion of the Bulgarian Muslims, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church had the full support of the state authorities, leading public and political circles and even of the influential Slavophile societies in Russia. The Holy Synod sent ecclesiastical missions of priests and teachers to regions with such populations for the realization of the conversion, religious education and instruction in everyday customs, and agitation for the establishment of churches and chapels. The authority of the Plovdiv bishopric held sway over the regions of the Rodopi Mountains and the newly liberated lands in western Thrace and eastern Macedonia. To aid in the mass conversion, the authorities made use of the hard conditions caused by the severe winter as well as the intensive military actions that had resulted in the destruction of a number of villages. The population was overtaken by hunger and epidemics of cholera, typhus and other diseases. Bulgarian authorities rendered assistance to the Bulgarian Muslims, giving them money and delivering food, clothes and other essentials. A part of the population thus adopted the Christianity hoping to escape the hard conditions as soon as possible. To encourage reception into the bosom of the church, the authorities used social psychology to make the most of the mass euphoria caused by the military victories from the end of 1912 to the summer of 1913 and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. The ritual of the conversion included a religious ceremony, the adoption of Bulgarian names, replacing the fez and yashmak of the Muslims with the hat and kerchief of the Christians, and the choosing of a godfather by the newly converted person. Thus, according to Christian tradition, a deep relationship was established between the two persons. In the villages that were converted en masse, mosques were reconstructed into churches and the old Turkish schools were transformed into Bulgarian ones for the education of children and adults. The conversion of the Bulgarian Muslims was done both voluntarily and forcefully, but with an almost complete lack of knowledge by the general public. The authorities did not want to acknowledge the process and it was a matter of obvious concern for military censors. Separate articles on the past, the way of life and the customs of that population as well as the necessity of its conver-

sion were published in the semi-official newspaper “Mir” [Peace] and the printed organ of the Holy Synod “Tsarkoven Vestnik” [Church Newspaper], which also gave information about the disastrous situation of the Bulgarian Muslims as well as about the aid being given them. The independent newspaper “Dnevnik” [Journal] briefly reported the conversion of some villages in the Rodopi Mountains. It was assumed that the total number of Bulgarian Muslims converted in the Rodopi Mountains, western Thrace and Macedonia was around 200 thousand.

After the catastrophe that met Bulgaria in the Interallied War, which started on 16 June, 1913 and finished with the Bucharest Treaty of 10 August, 1913, King Ferdinand and the government of V. Radoslavov were forced to radically change their attitude towards the Muslims in western Thrace. The Turkish re-occupation of eastern Thrace and the establishment of the Gjumurdjina Autonomic Republic, saw a cruel retribution against the Bulgarian Christian population and the newly converted people, who did not revert to their former religion. Massive reversions to Islam began again. According to the Istanbul Peace Treaty of 29 September, 1913, the eastern and central Rodopi Mountains and the White Sea coasts remained within the borders of Bulgaria, but the Muslims in these regions had the right to keep their Turkish citizenship for four years. All people liable to military service were excused. The people who wanted to emigrate during that period could keep their estates and movable property could be moved duty free. The new attitude towards recognizing the religion of the Muslims in the country and, especially, towards Bulgarian Muslims had a direct connection with the political orientation of the King and the Government towards the Central Forces and Turkey. During the elections in 1914, the Liberal coalition of V. Radoslavov relied on the strong support of the Muslims. Turkish emissaries were let into the newly liberated lands and, thus, even more favourable conditions were created for the process of returning the newly converted Bulgarians to Islam and emigration of a part of them to Turkish lands. Not many of them remained true to their new Christian faith.<sup>29</sup>

By signing the Treaty of Neuilly, Bulgaria assumed an unqualified obligation to protect the minorities. The clauses in Section IV, however, did not make for a considerable change in the legal status of the national minorities in Bulgaria. Guarantees of the rights and freedoms of the Jewish population to be considered as individual citizens and as organized groups existed in the Tarnovo Constitution and in the state legal system as a whole. Bulgaria, being a defeated country, deprived of territories with large Bulgarian populations, was interested in adopting the specified articles of Section IV as well as the convention for the freedom of minority emigration. Thus, according to Article 49 of the Treaty of Neuilly, Bulgaria was obliged to recognize the protection of minority decrees as basic laws. There were no laws, rules and official orders that could contradict these orders or make them invalid.<sup>30</sup> The adoption of the Nation Defense Act by the majority of the 25th Ordinary National Assembly in the years during the Second World War was an absolute revision of this section of the Treaty of Neuilly and violation of domestic laws.<sup>31</sup>

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29 V. Georgiev and S. Trifonov, *Pokrastvaneto na bulgarite mohamedani 1912-1913 – dokumenti* (Sofia, 1995), pp. 1-11.

30 B. Kesjakov and D. Nikolov, eds., *Nioiski dogovor* (Sofia, 1994), pp. 18-19.

31 Paounovski and Ilel, *The Jews in Bulgaria...*, p. 71.