

THE BALKAN WARS AND THE PARTITION OF MACEDONIA

Following their own interests and aims to conquer and partition the European part of Ottoman Turkey, the neighbouring Balkan states Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro decided to start a war. The Treaty between Serbia and Bulgaria signed on March 12th 1912 (with a secret annexe) included a possibility for the transformation of Macedonia into an autonomous region and anticipated the arbitration of the Russian Tsar. In such form, this agreement was a compromise to avoid the territorial separation and partition of Macedonia. After Greece and Montenegro joined the agreement, a Balkan Alliance was formed and it immediately began preparations for a war against the Ottoman Empire. In autumn 1912 the Balkan allies declared war on Turkey. The offensive actions of the Balkan allies against the Turkish army were carried out mainly on Macedonian territory and on the Thracian front. Believing that this war would bring the long-expected freedom, the Macedonian people took active part in the First Balkan War with their own regiments (chetas) and voluntary units. Forty-four such units were operating in Macedonia at the time impeding the mobilization and the movement of the Turkish army with their diversions. About 14,000 Macedonians fought together with the Bulgarian army within the so-called "Macedonian Regiment". At the same time there were Macedonian soldiers distributed in thirty units within the "National Defense" and the "Voluntary Regiments" of the Serbian army. A similar formation, called the "Holy Regiment", was operating within the Greek army. The victories of the Balkan allies over the Turkish army conditioned Turkey to sign a cease-fire and a short-term truce, but the battles went on until May 30th, 1913. However, new bloodshed started soon among the Balkan allies who could not reach an agreement as how to partition the territories taken over from Turkey. The partition was carried out by force of arms and sanctioned by the Bucharest Peace Treaty signed on August 10th, 1913 according to which all the Balkan states expanded their territories. Macedonia was not only denied its autonomy which had originally been one of the causes of the war against Turkey, but it was forcefully divided and partitioned by the neighbouring

Balkan states. Greece seized the biggest, southern part of Macedonia, Serbia won the central Vardar region and the Pirin part with the Strumica vicinity was given to Bulgaria. Drawing new borders under the excuse of establishing a "balance" and peace on the Balkans was a violent denial of the rights of the Macedonian people to live and develop as a free, unified and independent nation. The aspirations towards the creation of a state of their own as a necessity, a guarantee of the national sovereignty and -territorial integrity of Macedonia, were evident in the ideas and actions of the Macedonian patriots. Despite the conquering and partitioning of their homeland they fought for independence and the establishment of a Macedonian government and national assembly which would decide on the form of government and,, the internal structure of the Macedonian state". However, the attempts to prevent the compulsory partition of Macedonia were in vain because the Balkan and the European states remained deaf to the demands of the Macedonian people for preserving the integrity of their land and its constitution as a state. The new masters of the conquered Macedonian regions introduced a violent military and police regime, denied the national individuality of the Macedonian people, deprived them of their rights . and tortured and denationalized the Macedonian people. A regime of "special decrees" from the mid-nineteenth century was imposed in the territory under Serbian rule. In the part of Macedonia under Bulgarian rule, military commanders helped by comitadji voivodes ruled over the civil authorities and "dispensed justice" to the people. In the Macedonian districts under Greek rule the notorious Cretan gendarmerie, which acted in support of the conservative Greek governors, kept law and order. The territorial, ethnic and economic disintegration of Macedonia caused severe damage to the economy, to the Macedonian movement for national liberation and to its socio-political development. After the Balkan Wars, Macedonia was completely devastated. Besides the tens of thousands killed in the war, there were several hundreds of thousands of refugees (more than 135,000 Macedonians and a small number of Bulgarians from Thrace escaped from the Aegean part of Macedonia occupied by the Greek army alone). There were numerous cases of genocide towards the Macedonian population in the territories occupied by the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies and, according to the Carnegie Commission, several towns like Voden, Negush, Ber, Enidze Vardar, Dojran, etc., more than 200 villages (out of which around 170 villages with 17,000 homesteads in the Aegean part of Macedonia) were completely destroyed. In June 1913 the Greek army burnt to ashes the Macedonian town of Kukush with its 1,846 houses, 612 shops, 6 factories, etc. At the same time 4,000 houses were burned to the ground in the Seres vicinity. The tragic outcome of the Balkan Wars was a real national catastrophe for Macedonia. The unresolved Macedonian question continued to be "an apple of discord" for

the Balkan states. It remained in the whirlpool of events which were of fatal importance both for Macedonia and the future of the Balkans.