

## THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION IN FOREIGN RELATIONS

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The Macedonian question appeared in foreign relations in the 1870's during the great Eastern Crisis when armed uprisings for liberation of the subdued peoples started in the Balkans. The uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875, in Bulgaria in April 1876 and in Macedonia in 1876 raised the question of the further existence of the Ottoman Turkish Empire in Europe. Following its current policy for the Balkans, Russia opposed the policies of the great Western European powers to retain the integrity of the Ottoman state, guaranteed by the Treaty of Paris concluded on April 15th 1856, and supported the fight of the conquered nations for liberation and independence. The Russian political programme devised several years before by counsellor Gorchakov was announced at the end of 186 and included a solution to the Macedonian question. The Russian plans for the Balkans anticipated a direct involvement of Russia in the liberation of the Orthodox Christian peoples and creation of national states: independence and territorial expansion for Serbia and Montenegro (in their ethnic borders), establishment of two Bulgarian principalities (north and south of the Stara mountain as counter-balance to the two Serbian principalities), and a separate, independent Macedonian principality. The Macedonian question divided the interests of Austria-Hungary and Russia. The Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Count Abrashi, requested establishment of an autonomous Macedonian state in customs union with Austria-Hungary-91 Gorchakov in principle agreed to it, but it soon turned out that Russia could not accept it. In 1876-77 an Ambassadors' Conference of the great European states was held in Constantinople. It was expected to reach a diplomatic solution to the problems of the conquered nations within the Ottoman state and thus prevent further escalation of the crisis. The USA, which did not have any special interests in Macedonia, initiated an appropriate inquiry and solution to the Macedonian question. The American diplomacy in association with the American professors from the Robert College in Constantinople who were well-acquainted with the real situation, submitted to the Conference a proposition for the autonomy of

Macedonia. However, the Conference failed due to the opposing interests of the great powers. Russia changed its policy on Macedonia and abandoned the plans for creation of a Macedonian state and started working in favour of a greater Bulgarian state instead. This happened after the secret negotiations on the Balkans among Austria-Hungary, Russia and Germany in April 1878 when Austro-Hungarian diplomacy renewed the question of the creation of an autonomous Macedonian state, i.e. Macedonian principality (with General Radich as its governor). On that occasion the Russian representative, General Ignatiev, did not oppose that solution, but in May 1878 Russian diplomacy refused to clarify its view on the question or support the Macedonian demands for an independent state submitted in Constantinople to General Ignatiev by Dimitar Robev, a Macedonian representative in the Ottoman Parliament. On July 13th, the International Treaty of Berlin (Art.23), gave Macedonia a special autonomous status. The government of the Ottoman state was assigned to regulate the status of Macedonia and the other provinces with a separate Statute. However, as there was no international control to observe the implementation of these resolutions or authorize sanctions for their non-implementation, the government in Constantinople did not fulfil its duties. The Macedonian uprising from 1878-79 and the actions of "Edinstvo" ("Unity"), the Transitional Government of Macedonia (formed secretly at the meeting of the National Assembly held from May 21st to June 2nd 1880) renewed interest in the Macedonian question in the diplomatic circles of the Great European Powers. The Transitional Government sent an Appeal to the great powers accompanied by a Protocol of the National Assembly for liberation of Macedonia and its constitution as an independent state. Furthermore, on March 23rd 1881, it issued a Manifesto which was distributed among the diplomatic representatives in the Ottoman Turkish state. Macedonia became an object of special interest in the relations between Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany. The agreement on a secret alliance of the emperors of these three states signed in 1881 included a separate stipulation for the protection of Macedonia from a possible attack by Bulgaria. The beginning of the Ilinden uprising for national liberation of Macedonia in 1903, which the European diplomats called "The Macedonian revolution", marked the Macedonian question as an acute one for European diplomacy. The uprising and the creation of the so-called Krushevo Republic proved that the Macedonian people were ready to fight for their national freedom and the formation of their national state. At that time, the European powers were against the creation of a new state in the Balkans. European diplomacy had to intervene in order to calm the situation by proposing several projects for reforms among which were the Austro-Hungarian - Russian project known as the Murzsteg Reforms Programme and the British initiative that gave Macedonia a special status in its natural and

ethnic borders. US diplomacy also became involved. The secretary of state and the USA president T.Roosevelt himself wrote to the British government acclaiming the British initiative for the autonomy of Macedonia. As regards the reforms in Macedonia, American diplomats in 1907 suggested strict control of their implementation by the mandatory powers. In the beginning of March 1908 the government of Great Britain launched an initiative for the introduction of more radical reforms in Macedonia. This initiative was readily accepted by Russia. The two state sovereigns (British and Russian) met in June 1908 in Reval (Tallinn) and adopted a new proposal for reforms as a preliminary phase towards full autonomy for Macedonia." Nevertheless, this initiative did not take place due to the revolution of the Young Turks which declared and introduced a constitutional order and democratization of the Ottoman Turkish state. However, the rule of the Young Turks with its Greater Ottoman politics stopped the process of further democratization and of a peaceful democratic solution to the Macedonian question within the Turkish state for which there existed the necessary conditions. It only led towards further deterioration of the situation which was used by the neighbouring Balkan states to interfere in the internal affairs of the Turkish state and to manifest openly their expansionist intentions. Due to the worsening relations on the Balkans, in 1911 US diplomats undertook steps to influence the governments of the Balkan states to ease the tension and avoid the war they were preparing for, which could have led towards further involvement of the great powers in the solution of the eastern crisis. However, European diplomats showed no interest in preventing the military conflict on the Balkans. Moreover, they took part in its preparation governed by their original interests. At the time of the Balkan Wars when Macedonia was occupied and partitioned by the neighbouring Balkan states which was confirmed by the Treaty of Bucharest of August 10th 1913, European diplomacy had its own interest in accepting the partitioning as such. This could well have been predicted as the European powers, divided into two opposite blocks, started hasty preparations for the forthcoming Great War. Thus, the Macedonian question entered a new and extremely dangerous phase, not only for the future of the Macedonian nation, but for the peace on the Balkans and in Europe too. These fears soon came true with the beginning of the First World War. At the end of the war the Macedonian question became a crucial problem in the negotiations and the plans for the post-war organization of Balkan relations. The high military and political circles of the Entente powers and the US diplomats considered the creation of an independent Macedonian state, under the protectorate of one of the great non-involved powers (having primarily in mind the USA) as an unbiased, just and permanent solution to the problem. The final aim of this idea was the establishment of radically new relations on the Balkans which would ensure permanent stability

in that neuralgic region. Such a solution was also presented at the secret negotiations for separate peace between the powers of the Entente on the one side and Bulgaria on the other under the observance of the USA. The interest in the Macedonian question was renewed yet again in the official diplomacy of the USA, with President W. Wilson's peace programme. In the official American interpretation of the "14 items", the USA declared that they would support an objective and unbiased investigation of the problem. An American expert group studied the Treaty of Bucharest of 1913 and concluded that it could not serve as a basis for a solution to the Balkan problems because that agreement was "an act of the corrupted Balkan bourgeoisies". At the beginning of the Paris Peace Conference, twenty-five renowned intellectuals from different European countries, Great Britain and the USA signed a Memorandum on the Macedonian question and sent it to the President of the USA. They demanded the formation of an autonomous Macedonian state in its natural and ethnic borders, which in the south would stretch from the Lake of Kostur to the Vardar estuary, thus leaving the towns of Ber and Negrita and the Halkidiki Peninsula to Greece. Furthermore, it was suggested that in the beginning the autonomous Macedonian state be under the protectorate of one of the great powers (the USA presumably). An unsigned Memorandum with identical contents was sent to Great Britain, too. The issue of the formation of a Macedonian state was the subject of an intense exchange of opinions and viewpoints among the members of the USA Peace Delegation, the American diplomatic representatives in the European states and the members of the American teams of experts. This was especially evident after the request of the Macedonians to be allowed a presence at the Paris Conference in order to present their demands. The member of the team of experts for Balkan questions C. Day informed A. Dulles in a letter about his numerous consultations with impartial experts on the Macedonian question who admitted the existence of problems arising from the issue, but were unanimously for the formation of an autonomous Macedonian state. The envoy of the American President, his personal friend and an expert on European relations, Professor George Herron urged President W. Wilson and the American Peace Delegation to put the Macedonian question on the agenda of the Peace Conference, supporting the integrity and independence of Macedonia. In a letter of May 26th to Colonel Haus, the leader of the American delegation and the most influential political figure after the President, Professor Herron wrote that the Macedonians were a separate nation, unified in their demands and wishes to form an independent state under the protectorate of the USA. Col. Haus himself supported "the cause of Macedonian freedom". Despite the favourable attitude of most of the USA representatives, the Macedonian question remained outside the agenda of the Peace Conference due to the categorical opposition of France and Great Britain

who supported the aspirations of the Balkan Allies, Greece and Serbia (i.e. the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians) to keep the occupied parts of Macedonia. At the Paris Peace Conference, when the peace terms were negotiated with the Balkan states, the Macedonian question was treated as a minority problem and discussed at the Committee for New States and the Protection of the Minorities. At its meeting on July 15th, 1919 the Italian delegation submitted a proposal for the autonomous status of Macedonia "within borders fixed by the Great Powers and their allies" with the highest possible degree of self-government, but within the borders of the the new Kingdom of SCS. The meeting of July 18th discussed the stipulations which were to be introduced at the peace negotiations with the Balkan states concerning the protection of minorities. These stipulations also included the Macedonian minorities in the Balkan states, referred to as "Macedonians". At the meeting of July 30th the Committee discussed the Italian proposal for the autonomy of Macedonia and the British proposal for the establishment of League of Nations control over Macedonia. As regards this, it was suggested that the League of Nations be authorized to send its representatives to Macedonia. The following meetings discussed the same proposals in a somewhat modified form. Due to the opposing views on the question, it remained open till the beginning of November 1919. The text of the Peace Agreement on minorities and the obligations of the government of the Kingdom of SCS for the protection of the rights of minorities were then finally formulated. On November, 11th the Supreme Council accepted the proposed text of the document and obliged the government of the Kingdom of SCS to sign the agreement. The Committee for New States also prepared stipulations for protection of minorities in Greece where the Macedonian people were given minority status.' The Committee informed the Greek delegation about the draft-agreement for the protection of minorities and the stipulations included in it. The president of the Greek government and a leader of the peace delegation responded to this document issued by the Committee with a false statement that Greece had provided protection for the Albanian, Moslem and Slav minorities (the latter referred to as "the Slav communities in Macedonia") and claimed that Greece was ready to accept the agreement. According to this, the president of Greece recognized the existence of a Macedonian minority. The stipulations for the protection of minorities put Greece under an obligation to introduce minority languages in the state schools, but Venizelos resisted this and demanded reformulation of the decrees for the protection of minorities. At the meeting on September 18th the Supreme Council rejected all the Greek comments and on November 3rd ratified its agreement with Greece. Having imposed his plans for a reciprocal exchange of population between Greece and Bulgaria, the aim of which was only to conduct an ethnic cleansing of the

occupied Aegean part of Macedonia with international approval, Venizelos presented himself as especially co-operative as regards the Agreement. Accepting his demands, the Committee for New States formed a separate Sub-Committee which prepared "special stipulations" for "voluntary emigration" of the citizens of these states during a period of four years after the effectuation of the Agreement. The Committee for New States only redefined this decree as an individual right for voluntary emigration, thus changing nothing essential in it. The suggestion of expanding these stipulations to refer to the Kingdom of SCS and Turkey was not accepted. The Committee prepared a separate convention for an exchange of citizens between Greece and Bulgaria on a voluntary basis. The Supreme Council approved of its text and obliged the Bulgarian delegation to sign it within 48 hours. The Bulgarian delegation signed the convention within the given period of notice. The stipulations for the protection of minorities which also referred to parts of the Macedonian people were not respected by the Balkan states. The Macedonian people was subjected to very severe de-nationalization and assimilation. Greece applied such means of violent pressure that it forced a great part of the Macedonian population to accept "voluntary" emigration.