

Three Events Concerning the Bulgarian- Turkish Relations (1908-1909) and Their Reflections in Bulgarian Press

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Summary

At the beginning of the 20th century the political situation in both neighbouring countries Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire was unstable. In Bulgaria, the government of Stefan Stambolov was overthrown from the political scene. In his place on January 16, 1908 Prince Ferdinand designated the government of the opposition forces of the Democratic Party with Prime Minister Alexander Malinov.

During the last years of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II his regime raised discontent among the some section of in the Ottoman Empire. At the same time the Young Turks movement gained popularity and power, which forced the Sultan to take measures in order to maintain his authority.

Three events put a mark on the Bulgarian-Turkish relations during this period: July 3, 1908 marks the revolutionary movement against the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II; September 22, 1908 Prince Ferdinand declared the full independence of Bulgaria; April 27 1909, Abdulhamid II is deposed and exiled to Thessalonica.

The purpose of this article is to explore the repercussions of these three events in the Bulgarian press. Did the ruling of Abdulhamid receive support among the Bulgarians and how it was expressed? How the reactions of the Turkish government and the actions of the Sultan after the independence declared was evaluated? How the news of dethronement of the Sultan and his subsequent exile was received? Bulgarian periodicals tried closely to monitor and cover the developments in the Ottoman Empire. These publications are extremely revealing, because they covered the first reactions and evaluations of these events among Bulgarian society. Even a separate study of these issues, concerning the ruling of Abdulhamid II would be an original contribution to the Turkish and Bulgarian historiography.

Keywords: Abdulhamid II, Bulgarian press

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The Turkish-Bulgarian relations occupy an important place in the history in the first decade of the 20th century of the two Balkan neighbours. In the last years of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II for a very short period 1908-1909 passed through very difficult times. The events in the two countries were interconnected and appear to occur that they took place according to the physical law of "communicating vessels". It was like this for several reasons: Bulgaria was struggling to achieve its "national ideal" which was expressed in the liberation of the province of Macedonia and the Bulgarian population that lived there, at the same time the Ottoman Empire was struggling to maintain its integrity, which means preserving its European provinces. After the outbreak of the Ilinden Uprising in 1903 and the subsequent intervention of the Great Powers it became more difficult for Sultan Abdulhamid II to pacify the discontent of his subjects and to provide peace in the Empire. At this difficult internal situation, the Young Turkish Committee "Union and Progress", gained strength.

On July 11, 1908 in the territory of Macedonia, all of a sudden the Young Turk Revolution broke out. In the early days after the revolution almost all of the Balkan countries were surprised and unable to predict what could be the outcome of the serial crisis in the Empire. Young Turk revolution broke out soon after the meeting in Reval 9th and 10th June 1908 between Edward VII and Nicholas II, in which the two monarchs agreed for the further reforms in Macedonia. It is no coincidence that the Macedonia was the centre of the Young Turk movement in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the real purpose of the revolution awakened distrust and suspicions of all Balkan and European countries. This revolution also put the beginning of a stormy and dynamic period in the internal and external political relations of both countries, Principality of Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire.

This article is based on information from the Bulgarian press and in particular as sources selected from newspapers "Pryaporets"¹ and

¹ Newspaper "Pryaporets" was the official organ of the Democratic Party in Bulgaria. Issued in Sofia between 1908 and 1910, it was published three times a week. In 1908 Petko Penchev became director of the newspaper and Vasil Paskov the editor. It represented the official position of the ruling Democratic Party of Bulgarian principality. Dimitar Ivanchev, *Bulgarski periodichen pechat*

"Democrat"². This selection of the newspaper sources is an attempt to cover a wide public opinion of the political class and its reactions in the period of 1908-1909, when the Principality of Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire was facing serious internal and external shocks.

In the second part of the study, which examines the proclamation of Bulgarian independence are used pieces of information from published documents from Bulgarian State Archive-official documents of the Bulgarian government, telegrams and letters exchanged between Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire. So the research will try to show how the issue and reaction of the Ottoman government and the Sultan were assessed by the Bulgarian side.

July 3, 1908

The next day July 4, when the Bulgarian country awoke with the news for the outcome revolt and the new political crisis in the Ottoman Empire, the government of Alexandar Malinov³ and the Foreign Ministry of Bulgaria were reluctant to take an official position on the issue. In fact, the Bulgarian government was as surprised as all

1878-1944, 2 Sofia 1966, p. 198; Svetozar Eldarov, "Mekedono-Odrisnskoto dvijenie v Bulgaria": Nacionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvijenie na makedonskite i trakijskite balgari (1878-1908), Vol.3 Osvoboditelnoto dvijenie sled Ilindensko-Preobrajenskoto vastanie 1903-1919, Sofia 1997, p. 240.

² Newspaper "Democrat" was issued by the Bulgarian Radical Party, founded in 1905. It was published once time a week. The Radical Party actually was created in 1903 as part of the representatives of the Democratic Part. In the first years of its independent existence it stood in opposition and it was one of the most vocal critics of the policy pursued by the Government of the Democratic Party². Dimitar, *ibid*, 1, p. 234; *Enciclopedia "Pirinski kraj"* vol.II, *Blagoevrad* 1999, p. 110; Tsocho Bilyarski, *Dame Gruev, Jivot i delo. Sbornik, Sofia, Aniko* 2007, p. 526.

³ Alexandar Malinov (Pandakli, 1867 - Sofia, 1938), born in a family of Bessarabian Bulgarians, graduated law in 1891 in Kiew, worked as a lower, prosecutor and judge in Plovdiv. Leader of the Democratic Party after 1903, Prime minister of the (1908-1910) XXX, (1910-1911) XXI, (1918) XXXVI, (1918) XXXVII, (1938) XLVI Bulgarian government. Tasho Tashev, *Ministrite v Bulgaria 1879-1999. Sofia* 1999, p. 274-275.

other countries. In the first days after the events in the Ottoman Empire, newspaper "Pryaporets" also refrained to express personal opinion. In the column "external chronicle" asserted in detail the actions taken by the Young Turks, leading the rebellion⁴. Later in the issue of July 10 the Young Turk revolution was defined as "unexpected" from all subjects in the Empire. The revolutionary act was a surprise for both neighbouring Balkan countries and for the European powers too, according to the newspaper. Only one month earlier England and Russia were discussing the new project regarding the introduction of reforms in the European provinces of the Empire, and after the proclamation of equality and freedom in the Empire by the Young Turks, the need for such reforms fell away. Actions of the Sultan to suppress the rebellious provinces were interpreted as "giving great importance to this extraordinary event". Actually, the paper was trying to say that the Sultan had understood how serious these actions of the Young Turks were and so he took all the forces to put down the conflict. Against the rebel garrisons in Macedonia they sent not only forces from the capital but also transferred the military garrisons from Anatolia provinces⁵. After this issue of newspapers silence was kept and they did not published any more information about following revolutionary action in the Empire. This can be explained by the fact that the Bulgarian government also continued to refrain from any official statement as probably was waiting to see further developments of the crisis. Actually the Bulgarian government was very clearly aware that possible results of the Young Turk Revolution not only did not solve the Macedonian question, but it also faced a more difficult situation.

But despite this fact the opposition forces in the face of the Radical Party disagreed with opinion of the ruling party and were quick to speak about the revolution in the Ottoman Empire. On July 16, the newspaper "Demokrat" on the front page of its edition published an article titled "The introduction of the constitution"⁶. It expressed the great surprise of the success of the Young Turk Revolution. The issue

⁴ *Pryaporets*, 10 July, 1908, p. 3.

⁵ *Pryaporets*, 10 July, 1908, p. 4.

⁶ *Demokrat*, 16 July, 1908, p. 1.

gladly supported the new political situation and strongly condemned the current ruling of Abdulhamid II. After the changes it was believed that finally the new regime would bring to the Christians the opportunity to live free and as equal subjects of the Empire. But as a criticism of the Young Turks' policy the newspaper "Democrat" stated the preservation of Sultan Abdulhamid II on the throne. He had once already violated the constitution by suspending it in 1876 and so they could not be sure if not happening again. If the Young Turks wanted to be able to assert their authority and gained the support of all subjects of the Empire, they had to have the willingness to fight for an overhaul of the current system, even if it required the Sultan to be replaced. Christians had also to assume their obligations to support the Young Turk forces and immediately to enter into negotiations with them and put their demands for reforms. According to the newspaper Young Turks needed the support of Christians in the Empire to strengthen their power and they were ready to make a lot of concessions. This point was not to be missed by the Christian minorities. As a task of the Bulgarians in Macedonia and all Christian subjects in the Empire the newspaper put the need to gain the right of future constitutional arrangements to be laid on the federal basis.

On July 23, Sultan Abdulhamid proclaimed that he returned the Constitution of 1876 into power and would convene a national parliament to make changes in the governance of the Empire. When this news reached all European and Balkan capitals Bulgarian government realized that it could no longer watch passively, but could not act rashly, either. It was trying to win just a little more time to be able to take the right decisions on what to do next. Even though the issue of the possible introduction of a constitution in Ottoman Empire newspaper was laconic, on July 22 newspaper "Pryaporets" published an article devoted to the possible recovery of the Turkish Constitution⁷. There were 15 points which cited the fundamental rights and freedoms that were given to the people in the Empire of the Sultan, by the constitution, but it made no assessment of such a decision - either for or against. No even one opinion was expressed on

⁷ *Pryaporets*, 22 July, 1908, p. 3-4.

how the new constitutional regime would affect the future of Ottoman Empire.

The newspaper "Demokrat" showed more interest. In the editions published after the proclamation of the Constitution it dedicated an article in which it presented the main rights that were given by the constitution⁸. It expressed hope that things would become better for the Ottoman citizens from now on. It pointed out that the revolutionary feelings were stronger in Macedonia than the other provinces of the Empire but even though between the populations there were not any conflicts, the good feeling between the Young Turks and Bulgarians could be seen⁹.

However, the silence of the Bulgarian government caused significant controversy among the Bulgarian public and almost all opposition parties in parliament began to attack the government of Alexander Malinov. The work of the opposition in any government was to criticize and ask questions, but the attacks against the policy of the government crossed the line of good political tone. But why? One of the responses to this question was the obscurity in which the government hold the Bulgarian ruling classes and the inability of anyone to predict its actions.

In the issue on 29 July 1908 on the front page an article was published, in which finally the government, condemned by the opposition for refraining from official position on the events in Ottoman state, gave its answer¹⁰. Bulgarian government was accused of not taking the necessary care of the Bulgarians in Macedonia and showing indifference to their fate after the change of political power. In its defence, explained:

"the situation is not yet consolidated we cannot talk without knowing the facts, to approve or disapprove what is being done today and tomorrow will be amended or not. The events that take place in the Ottoman Empire today are internal affairs of Ottoman Empire, and although they do not determine

⁸ *Demokrat*, 19 July, 1908, p. 2.

⁹ *Demokrat*, 22 July, 1908, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Pryaporets*, 29 July, 1908, p. 1.

definitively the face of the future government, decency and common sense requires at least formal Bulgaria to refrain from applause or disapproval"¹¹.

In fact the question of approval or disapproval of the new Young Turks regime that was proclaimed by Sultan Abdulhamid constitution, the Bulgarian community was concerned in context of what this new government of Young Turks would contribute to the final solution of Macedonian question. Bulgaria was more interested in what it could gain from the ensuing crisis in the Ottoman Empire. The favourable political situation offered two possibilities to the Bulgarian state – the first was to support the Young Turks in exchange for their maintenance to require the implementation of reforms in Macedonia and even to be declared as a self-governing province. The second was that could take advantage of the vulnerability of the Empire and decline its dependency, but this was a very risky decision, because it meant the violation of the Berlin Treaty. The political groups in the country were unanimous that Bulgaria should use the opportunity occurred from the political crisis in the Empire, but they were divided by their opinion on how to act.

On July 26 on the front-page of the "Demokrat" an article under the title of "The new Turkish regime and Bulgaria's attitude towards it"¹² was published. The publication made an analyze of the foreign policy of the Bulgarian government towards the new regime in the Ottoman Empire and gave its opinion that the policy had to be dictated by

"the impact it may have on the situation in Ottoman Empire Bulgarians, on the progress of that new regime and the political concessions that can be gained".

Actually, the opposition believed that the new Ottoman government should be supported only because in this way the life of the Bulgarian population in the Empire would improve. According to them, the Democratic Party had made a mistake by failing to greet the Young Turks through diplomatic representative in Istanbul. Also the newspaper "Pryporets" gave the impression that Bulgarian

¹¹ *Pryaporets*, 10 July, 1908, p. 1.

¹² *Demokrat*, 26 July, 1908, p.1.

government fed hostile intentions. According to the newspaper "Democrat", the reason why there were no Bulgarians but only Armenians and Greeks in the new cabinet composed by Kamil Pasha was the silence kept on the issue and the lack of official position by the Bulgarian state. The Bulgarian cabinet was called useless and its attitude impeded the Bulgarian population in Macedonia from gaining extra privileges and even tried to negotiate a future autonomy of Macedonia. Bulgarian government was accused of lack of desire and political will definitively to resolve the Macedonian issue.

After the Young Turk Revolution, which broke out in European provinces of the Empire once again for the Bulgarian government came to the fore the question of the situation of the population in Macedonia. For the Bulgarian state this was the so called "National Question", the solution of which took a fundamental role in the foreign policy of all governments that ruled the country after the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria. But the Bulgarian community during these 30 years was divided on the means and the way how this "National Question" could be resolve. A part of Bulgarians believed that Macedonia should become an autonomous region and the other half thought that Macedonia should be annexed to Bulgaria and thus the so long dreamed unification of the Bulgarian population would be completed. After the outbreak of the Young Turk revolution and the proclaiming equality of all nationalities the status quo in the Empire changed. Bulgarian society and all political parties were aware of that Bulgaria should use this opportunity but were divided over how to use it. The government cautiously waited and observed if it could secure the regime of the Young Turks but the opposition insisted for an immediate action.

During the August, the newspaper "Pryaporets" continued to desist from taking personal assessment, but at the same time went on monitoring closely the events and providing with information on everything that was happening in the Ottoman Empire. It was published in each newspaper's edition information from the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency. The aim of the paper was to be as objective as possible and comprehensible in informing its readers. Together with the information gathered from their correspondents in Istanbul, the

newspaper observed also publications in the Turkish press. They cited information from the "Sabah", "Ikdam" "Gazeta", "Tannin" publications. The newspaper started to pay more attention to everything that happened in the Empire and gave more detailed information about the work of the new elected government, the ministers elected to hold new posts, on the changes intended to be made in the planned budget and changes thereto, the future foreign policy of the country¹³. Along with this they published information about the situation in the provinces of the Empire, and how the magnitude of the changes made by the new government was perceived¹⁴. The editors described in details every measure taken by the Grand Vizier and the Sultan Abdulhamid, they quoted their statements and provided information on each of their decisions¹⁵. Special attention was given to how the life in Macedonia changed, it provided information on how the demilitarization off the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian bands went on and what kind of freedoms the Bulgarians there began to enjoy¹⁶. It also enlightened and how the preparation of elections in August in the European provinces went¹⁷. The publication was closely monitoring the reactions and opinions of Great powers like England, Russia, Germany, France and Italy on events in the Ottoman Empire.

In August also the pressure of the opposition forces increased and they began furiously and openly to attack the policy of the Democratic Party on the pages of its official newspapers. However, the "Pryaporets" newspaper tried to keep a decent language and showed another perspective of the events in Macedonia. On August 2, was published an article titled "Letter from Thessaloniki"¹⁸. Its content is of particular interest because for the first time after the Young Turk revolution, doubts about the sincere intentions of this movement can be read. The author considers that behind the Ottoman Empire

¹³ *Pryaporets*, 2 August, 1908, p. 2-3; 5 August, 1908, p. 2-3.

¹⁴ *Pryaporets*, 7 August, 1908, p. 2-3; 16 August, 1908, p. 3-4.

¹⁵ *Pryaporets*, 9 August, 1908, p. 3-4.

¹⁶ *Pryaporets*, 28 August, 1908, p. 2-3; 30 August, 1908, p. 2-3.

¹⁷ *Pryaporets*, 19 August, 1908, p. 3; 26 August, 1908, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Pryaporets*, 5 August, 1908, p. 2.

attempt to liberalize, in fact, the previous governance at Constantinople and Sultan Abdul Hamid himself stood. He justified his claim by stating that the committees set up in Macedonia and Thrace after Ilinden Uprising that aimed to preserve peace in these areas now became the Young Turks committees and their representatives had not changed. Later in the same month in the articles from 21 August and August 23 they published two more editorials with titles "Letter from Macedonia"¹⁹ and "Correspondence from Macedonia"²⁰ that expressed the same suspicions. Both papers were printed as correspondence from the readers of Thessaloniki. They were trying to draw readers' attention to the fact that despite the proclaimed freedom of all nationalities to freely profess their religion and freedom of baking, the Turkish government and the administration continue to govern the country under the old methods. An interesting fact is that the ranks of the articles we find support for the position of the Bulgarian government,

"so far we do not know how Bulgarian government thinks for the things here, but we are fully aware of the absurdity of criticism in the opposition press regarding its behaviour"²¹.

While the political situation was not clarified in the Ottoman Empire and the rights of the Christian minorities were not fully protected in the future Parliament, the population of Macedonia was recognized as reasonable the reserved behaviour of the Bulgarian government. The author accused the opposition forces to try to use the situation of the Bulgarian population in the Ottoman provinces in order to attack the government.

The "Democrat" newspaper continued to support the Young Turks' regime and gave information about all actions taken by the Committee of Union and Progress and its leaders. In its pages the evaluation given of the Young Turk revolution by the authors could be clearly read. They called it a "great revolution"²², which had a full political nature

¹⁹ *Pryaporets*, 21 August 21, 1908, p. 2.

²⁰ *Pryaporets*, 23 August, 1908, p. 2.

²¹ *Pryaporets*, 21 August, 1908, p. 1.

²² *Demokrat*, 30 July, 1908, p. 3.

but in the future it would surely manifest itself and its social character. The success of the revolution was due to mistakes made by Sultan Abdulhamid during his ruling, with his reluctance to modernize and the governance mechanisms, and lack of economic progress that was the best guarantee for the integrity of the country. The author of the article published on August 6, 1908 thinks that the peaceful solution of the political crisis in the Ottoman Empire was a guarantee of the tranquility in the Balkans²³.

For the majority of the material posted by "Pryaporets" newspaper information from the Bulgarian News Agency and official government announcements of Sultan Abdulhamid and the Grand Vizier were used. The "Demokrat" published information collected from the representatives' statements of the Young Turks and its correspondents in the Macedonian province. The choice of the different type of sources that the two issues used was influenced by the position they occupy.

Even though both publications had differences in their assessment of the political changes in the Ottoman Empire there was one aspect in which they are unanimous – the proclaimed constitution from 1876 must be liberalized. What the Bulgarian public expected by the new regime was in fact this for what Principality of Bulgaria had struggled for all these years after the signing of the Treaty of Berlin – the right of Bulgarians in Macedonia to practice their faith in their churches, the right to have their schools and their children to receive education in their mother tongue.

The article published in the journal "Demokrat" on 9th August 1908 entitled "Young Turk program and Bulgarians in it"²⁴ paid attention to this particular topic. It forwards an opinion that in addition to equality and liberty, they had to be expressed through cultural freedom, and that required children to receive education in their own language, to have their own libraries, theatres and cultural entity. According to the Young Turk's program the education in the mother tongue was allowed only in basic education but in all subsequent stages teaching

²³ *Demokrat*, 6 August, 1908, p. 1.

²⁴ *Demokrat*, 9 August, 1908 p. 1.

would be conducted in Turkish. It was envisaged that all nationalities should study together, which the newspaper considered to be a prerequisite for future conflicts due to cultural differences of peoples living in the Empire.

So a month and a half after the outbreak of the Young Turk Revolution and a month after the restoration of the constitution of 1876, opinion about changes in the Ottoman Empire in the Bulgarian society and political community remain divided. One part totally did not believe in the sincere intentions of the change that the Committee of Union and Progress proclaims and even suspected that behind all these events stood the Sultan, who, after meeting in Reval where, Russia and England reached an agreement where reforms in European provinces of the Ottoman Empire were implemented and tried to discomfit them. Another part sympathized of the Young Turks in their attempt to modernize the Empire, and even believed that the Sultan should be dethroned.

22 September 1908

On August 29, 1908 in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul an official dinner was arranged. The birthday of the Sultan Abdulhamid II was celebrated at which representatives of all diplomatic missions in various countries were invited except the Bulgarian representative Ivan Evstratiev Geshov²⁵. The action was

²⁵ Ivan Evstratiev Geshov (1849, Plovdiv - 1924, Sofia) – public figure and politician, banker, economist, essayist, studied in Plovdiv class diocesan school "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" (1856-1864). Graduated finance and political science, "Owens College" in Manchester (1869), accompanied American journalist J. McGahan and American diplomat J. Schuyler during their inquiry tour in southern Bulgaria after the April Uprising (July August 1876). Member of the Provincial Assembly of Eastern Rumelia, and its first president (1879-1880), Chairman of the Standing Committee of Finance and Director of Eastern Rumelia (1882-1883). Leader of the People (Unification) Party in Plovdiv (1879-1885), the People's Party (1901-1920) and the United National Progressive Party (1920-1924), editor of the "Maritsa" in Plovdiv (1878-1885). Minister of Finance (1886, 1894-1897), Head of the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture (1894-1896), Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs

perceived by the Bulgarian government as an act where the Young Turks wanted to highlight the position of Bulgaria as a vassal²⁶. This unexpected event provoked the Bulgarian government to get out of the position of the observer of the events in the Ottoman Empire and led to another change in the status quo in the Balkans. The Bulgarian representative was immediately recalled from Istanbul, and the Turkish government did the same with its Commissioner in Sofia. The incident led a complexity of the situation in the Balkans and later on September 22nd became the occasion for the Bulgarian government to declare the independence of the Principality.

The official position on the incident of the Turkish government that the Principality of Bulgarian was vassal of the Ottoman Empire concluded that his diplomatic representative could not be equated with other diplomatic representatives of foreign countries. Because of this reason Geshov was not invited to the dinner for celebrating the birthday of Sultan Abdulhamid II²⁷. The "Pryaporets" newspaper in its issue of September 4 cited the "Tannin" newspaper:

*"the incident with the Bulgarian diplomatic agent is just one bad consequence of the policy of the past regime, which tried to avoid rising an incidents remained to trample the rights of the High Porte. The Bulgarian representative was treated as minister of a foreign country, but now everyone will take its place"*²⁸.

After that they quoted a newspaper, "Yeni Gazeta" which said that:

"the situation in Bulgaria is set according to the Berlin Treaty and they hope that the prince and the Bulgarian government will not want anything more and that will not give rise to tensions in relationships".

The attitude exhibited by the new Turkish government was considered offensive by the Bulgarian government.

and Religious Affairs and Head of the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Communications (1911 to 1913). Tashev, *ibid*, p. 118-120, compare with Elena Statelova, *Ivan Evstratiev Geshov ili tranlvia pat na saqidanieto. Sofia 1994*.

²⁶ CDA, f.3K, op.18, a.e. 23/7, p. 96-97.

²⁷ CDA f.176k, op.2, a.e. 20, l. p. 4-5.

²⁸ *Pryaporets*, 4 September, 1908, p. 3.

On 2 September on the first page of the "Pryaporets" people could read an article that spoke about the incident but discreetly was refrained from comment²⁹. On September 10, in the "Demokrat" came out an article that expressed its opinion on the matter³⁰. According to the authors during the previous regime of Sultan Abdulhamid, despite the clause in the Treaty of Berlin which defined the Principality of Bulgaria as a vassal of Ottoman Empire, relationships between Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire were developed in the direction in which the Principality was treated as an almost independent country. The Ottoman state had no objection to this and the Bulgarian diplomatic representative addressed directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bulgaria signed with Ottoman Empire the customs union and other conventions as with an equal state. At the receptions given by the Sultan to the diplomatic representatives of independent states, the Bulgarian diplomatic agent was also been invited. The mistake made by the Young Turk government which was an attempt to highlight the position of vassal of the Bulgarian country was evaluated as a "great insult". The edition also asked what actions should be taken and whether the Bulgarian government should make concessions in order to restore the diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. Then trying to give answers to these questions, it was for the first time when an edition issued out of the intention of the Democratic Party to use exclaimed conflict and to proclaim the independence of Bulgaria. This possible step of the government was evaluated negatively from the radical democrats, because the consequences of such action would only be detrimental for Bulgaria. The Young Turks had no power to oppose to this action; they could only vent their anger on the Bulgarian population in Macedonia, because after Bulgaria rejected the vassal status they would have no right to interfere any more in the internal affairs of the Empire, and to protect the Bulgarian population there. After the Bulgarian Declaration of Independence the Turkish government may also ask to move the seat of Bulgarian Exarchate of the Turkish capital, which was the singular authoritative defender of the Bulgarian educational work

²⁹ *Pryaporets*, 2 September, 1908, p. 1.

³⁰ *Demokrat*, 10 Septembet, 1908, p. 1.

within the Empire. The consequences could be also to the customs advantages for the trade that was given to Bulgaria. For these reasons, radical democrats had taken the position that instead of declaring the independence the government had to seek to restore the friendship with Ottoman Empire.

On September 5, the employees from the Eastern Railways went on strike that further pressurized situation between Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire. In Bulgaria, the company served lines Mustafapaşa - Belovo and Simeonovgrad - Nova Zagora - Yambol. A day later, the lines were undertaken by the Bulgarian staff, and on 9 September at the orders of the Bulgarian Prime Minister the lines were occupied by troops and declared for Bulgarian property³¹. On September 11, the home page of the newspaper "Pryaporets" a message appeared that says:

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the honour of the Imperial Ottoman Commissariat that assuming operation of railways of Eastern company of Bulgarian Railway Administration has happened as a result of the strike and an agreement with the representative of the Company."³²

But events were taking place very fast and the government of Alexander Malinov with the approval of Prince Ferdinand decided to announce the independency of the Principality of Bulgaria on September 22, 1908 at Tarnovo. On September 23, the front page of the "Pryaporets" newspaper published the official Manifesto signed by Prince Ferdinand³³. On September 24, the "Democrat" newspaper also published on the front-page a response to the event. They criticized sharply the decision of declaring independence³⁴. For Radical Democratic Party this decision could be explained by the long ambition of Prince Ferdinand to be "decorated with the honorary title of king". By this act perhaps the government did not realize that left an impression in the Bulgarians in Macedonia, that the Bulgarian

³¹ Statelova, *ibid*, p. 218.

³² *Pryaporets*, 11 September, 1908, p. 1.

³³ *Pryaporets*, 23 September, 1908, p. 1.

³⁴ *Demokrat*, 24 September, 1908, p. 1.

authorities sacrificed their cause. After Principality of Bulgaria became independent between the country and the Bulgarian population in Macedonia a huge barrier would raise. The "Democrat" paper suggested that the conflict arose between the Bulgarian and the Turkish government could be solved in a friendly way. After Bulgaria rejected vassalage towards the Ottoman Empire, the loss was bigger than winning a royal crown. Bulgaria lost the privileges it enjoyed in its trade with Ottoman Empire, the right of protection of the Bulgarian population in Macedonia and the rights of the Bulgarian Exarchate in organizing Bulgarian education in Macedonia. So between the government and the opposition a heated debate ignited.

The official authority "Pryaporets" explained in its pages that the decision to declare independence was a result of natural and rapid development of the Principality of Bulgaria. But this only penalized the actually adopted status of Bulgaria as an independent state by the Great Powers and Ottoman Empire³⁵. Bulgaria rejected a „purely fictitious law" and did not affect any interests of the Empire. The ruling powers immediately rushed to explain that did not feed any hostility to the new regime in the Ottoman state and did not want to complicate its situation but it was induced. Bulgarian government declared its desire for a peaceful solution of the conflict.

The "Pryaporets" did not miss the opportunity to publish the feedback and comments of the foreign press including the Turkish one. In accordance with the issue almost all of Turkish newspapers expressed an appreciation for the Sultan's request regarding an international conference to resolve the emerging crisis in the Balkans. According to Young Turk' publication "Shura Ameta" the guilt of rejecting suzerainty of Bulgaria entirely due to the previous misruling of the country and was a challenge to the Great Powers' signed the Treaty of Berlin³⁶. About the harassment of the opposition on 27 September in the newspaper a very interesting post could be read:

"The creators of the new regime retaliate against their fellow citizens for an act done in a foreign country for which these

³⁵ *Pryaporets*, 23 September, 1908, p. 2.

³⁶ *Pryaporets*, 25 September, 1908 p. 2-3.

fellow citizens have absolutely nothing in common with! So would this new regime differ from the old one, and how could one give more credit to it? "

What the newspaper was trying to say was that the manifested desire for equality and peace in the Empire by the Young Turk Revolution was violated and their real intentions were put under question. And if this really happened the paper concluded that:

"There are not Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire and that everything that is doing there after 11 July was a comedy!"³⁷.

The government of Aleksandar Malinov stood firm against opposition's attacks and stuck to a rigid course of upholding the independence, according to which Bulgaria had to redeem the exploitation and ownership of railways, and force Ottoman Empire to sign a direct agreement, but without paying any severance payment³⁸. This position required that Bulgarian diplomacy should be flexible and very precise in their actions. But this hard course again was condemned by opposition forces, who believed that the actions of the Bulgarian authorities put at risk the country and could involve it in a war with Ottoman Empire. The Great Powers also disliked this strong political position, because they are not ready for a war in the Balkans and they desired a peaceful resolution of the Balkan crisis.

Despite the willingness of the Turkish side to attend an international conference, the minister of foreign affairs General Stefan Paprikov³⁹ received information from the editor of the newspaper

³⁷ *Pryaporets*“, 27 September, 1908, p. 2.

³⁸ Statelova, *ibid*, p. 209-214.

³⁹ Stephan Paprikov (1858, Pirdop - 1920, Sofia) - Military and political figure, diplomat, graduated the Military School in Sofia (1879) and Nikolaevsk military academy in St. Petersburg (1884). Minister of the War in the government of Dimitar Grekov (1899) Ivancho (1899-1901) Racho Petrov (1901), Petko Karavelov (1901) and Dr. Stoyan Danev (1901 to 1903). Bulgarian diplomatic agent (1906-1908) and Minister of Plenipotentiary at St. Petersburg (1906-1908, 1910-1912), Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religious (1908-1910), Bulgarian representative at the headquarters of the Serbian army during the Balkan War (1912-1913), member of the Bulgarian

"Yeni Gazeta", which was on an informal visit to Bulgaria that the Ottoman Empire would not trust in a future conference⁴⁰. In confirmation Ziya Bey arrived in Bulgaria from the Ottoman capital. This was a sign for the Bulgarian government to start preparing direct negotiations with the Grand Vizier⁴¹. In early October the Bulgarian delegates Peter Dimitrov⁴² and Ivan Stojanovic⁴³ were sent to Istanbul. The representatives of France and Russia, Paleologos and Sementovski in a conversation with Foreign Minister S. Paprikov expressed their doubt about the eventual success of these negotiations⁴⁴. They were right, because on October 7, the Bulgarian delegates submitted reports that the Ottoman Empire was ready to recognize the independence of Bulgaria only, if "Rumelian status remains as before the Declaration of Independence"⁴⁵. After objection from the Bulgarian side, the Grand Vizier agreed to recognize the independence

delegation to the London Peace Conference (1913), member of the XVII Ordinary National Assembly (1914-1919). *Tashev, ibid*, p. 347-349.

⁴⁰ CDA, f.176K, op.2, a.e 5, p. 129.

⁴¹ Elena Statelova, Grancharov Stoycho, *Istoriya na Nova Bulgaria, 3, Sofia 2006*, p. 223.

⁴² Petar Dimitrov (1848 Zheravna -1899) - politician and diplomat, studied at the Franco-Ottoman Imperial Lyceum in Galatasaray, graduated from Robert College in Istanbul (1872). Fellow of the American Protestant newspaper "Zornista" (1876-1879), the journal "Pravo" (1870), newspaper "Makedonia" (1871), newspaper "Turcia" (1871-1872), translator of American journalist James McGahan and the American diplomat J. Skyler at their questionnaire tour in southern Bulgaria after the April Uprising (June - August 1876). Bulgarian diplomatic agent in Belgrade (1890-1892), Constantinople (1892-1896, 1899-1903), Athens (1896-1899), Bucharest (1903-1905), Cairo (1906), adviser and headed Secretary MFARD (1909 -1913), a member of a diplomatic mission in London (1895), Cairo (1905), Istanbul (1908), St. Petersburg (1909). CDA, f. 176k., op.18, a.e.58, p. 353.

⁴³ Ivan Stoyanov (1862, Eski Zaara - 1947, Sofia) - Bulgarian revolutionary, public and state figure. One of the leaders of the compound of Eastern Rumelina (1884-1885), Member of the IV Ordinary National Assembly (1886), head of Bulgarian communications (1894-1896), Senior Director of Posts and Telegraphs (1896-1917). "*Stoyanovich – anjeloto, Ivan*", *Minaloto. Sofiya 1992*, p. 17, 30.

⁴⁴ CDA, f. 176K, op.2, a.e. 5, l. 129.

⁴⁵ CDA, f. 176K, op.2, a.e. 5, l. 129.

of both Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, if the Ottoman Empire receives 100 thousand pounds as a tax for the capitalized debt of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. Thus, from the outset, it was clear that Bulgarian independence and its recognition "for the Ottoman Empire comes down to a question of money," and the Great Powers agreed with this settlement in order to resolve the crisis⁴⁶. As prescribed, after this meeting Dimitrov and Stoyanov left Istanbul.

For the failed attempt to negotiate the "Democrat" newspaper accused the Bulgarian government of making a mistake in choosing the delegates⁴⁷. It should have sent delegates who sympathized with the new Turkish regime. In this case they would have gained respect from the Young Turks. They chose delegates who had left the impression that they commiserate with the old government of Sultan Abdulhamid, instead.

Soon the entire Bulgarian nation began to discuss whether the independence should be paid in money or blood. In his statement, the Prime Minister said:

*"A state that is declared independent at the risk of war can not pay cash compensation"*⁴⁸.

Despite this statement very soon under the pressure of the Great Powers, who did not want a military conflict in the Balkans, Bulgarian government agreed to resume negotiations and to agree to pay the amount requested by Ottoman Empire.

As official delegate of the negotiations minister Andrei Lyapchev⁴⁹ was appointed and on October 18, departed for Istanbul. At the long

⁴⁶ CDA, f. 176K, op.2, a.e.5, l. 155, (CDA fond 176k, o.p.2 a.e.5, l. 203-205)

⁴⁷ *Demokrat*, 11 October, 1908, p. 1.

⁴⁸ CDA, f. KMF 03, inv. nomer 191/2.

⁴⁹ Andrei Lyapchev (1866 Resen - 1933, Sofia), studied in Bitola, Thessaloniki and Plovdiv, finance and economic sciences on Zurich, Berlin and Paris. Editor of the newspaper "Young Bulgaria" (1885-1896 years) "Reform" (1899-1905). Member of the XIV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XXI, XXII and XXIII Ordinary National Assembly. (1908 - 1910) Minister of Commerce and Agriculture (1910 - 1911), Minister of Finance (1918 -1918), Minister of Finance (1918 - 1918), Minister of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture manages and State Property (1918

meeting with the Grand Vizier, the Bulgarian delegate gave him a personal letter from King Ferdinand, with assurances of the sincere desire of the Bulgarian part of an agreement with Ottoman Empire. They arranged a second meeting to continue the negotiations. The mission of the Bulgarian diplomat was to defend Bulgarian willingness to buy right of used and ownership of Bulgarian Railways' occupied territory and to pay capitalized Eastern Rumelian tax in exchange of Ottoman Empire's recognition of Bulgarian independence⁵⁰. The start of negotiations put Lyapchev in difficulty; he began serious negotiations and bargains that continued more than a month.

Before leaving Istanbul on November 17, the Bulgarian diplomat awarded the Grand Vizier with the Bulgarian basis for agreements. They included "two necessary conditions" - the Turkish government to declare that it will settle all outstanding issues directly with Bulgaria and afterwards to immediately recognize the sovereignty of the country. Provided that the conditions were accepted, the Bulgarian government was ready to pay the tax amount of 40 000 000 lev for Rumelia and the 42 000 000 for the ownership and operation of railways. The other issues such as vakifs, headlight and sanitary services will easily be regulated by the relevant authorities. The proposed amount of 82 million lev was acceptable for the Russian and French Ambassador in Istanbul⁵¹.

The Turkish government did not back down and negotiations started to prolong. Several times they were interrupted, and the two countries even stood on the brink of war in early 1909. Russia took the initiative and came up with a proposal to Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire, a proposal agreed in advance with England and France. It offered a resolution of independence through a complex combination of financial base formula by Andrei Lyapchev. Russia would take upon

- 1919), Minister of war (1926 -1928), Chairman of the Council of Ministers (1926 -1928), Minister of the Interior and Public Health (1928 - 1930), Chairman of the Council of Ministers (1928 - 1930), Minister of Interior and Public Health (1930 - 1931), Chairman of the Council of Ministers (1930 - 1931), Minister of the Interior and Public Health. Tashev, *ibid*, p. 269-270.

⁵⁰ CDA, f. 176K, op.2, a.e. 5, l. 247.

⁵¹ CDA, f. 176K, op 2, a.e. 10, l. 39, 45.

itself the payment of the required 125 000 000lv, deducting that amount from the Turkish debt in contributions for the Ottoman-Turkish war 1877 - 1878. Bulgaria will not pay anything to Ottoman Empire and it will owe Russia only 82 000 000 lv., by entering into a formal loan with the Russian state-owned bank with a 4% interest for 40-50 years repayment term⁵². The difference between the two amounts will be deducted from the interest. Russian proposal should facilitate negotiations for satisfying the claims of both sides. It was greeted with relief in Sofia and was immediately accepted. After four months of negotiations they finally found an acceptable outcome. They resolved the crisis and agreed that the two countries will take another 3 months to conclude a final agreement.

Later in the afternoon on April 6, 1909, Lyapchev and Rifat Pasha signed the Bulgarian-Turkish protocol for the settlement of the independence⁵³. This happened in the presence of the Russian ambassador Ivan Zinoviev, the English and the French ambassadors G. Bones and Dzh.Louran who were the deliberately called by the Bulgarian delegate as guarantors for the implementation of the agreement. The Turkish attempt to postpone the recognition until the day of the ratification of the agreement was parried by the Bulgarian government with the threat of a general mobilization of the army. On the same day in St. Petersburg the Bulgarian-Russian financial transaction protocol was signed.

24 April 1909

So after 7-month diplomatic efforts another crisis in the Balkans ended. But another event will once again prove that peace and tranquillity of the Balkan Peninsula was one of the most elusive goals in the first decades of the 20th century. Because before signing the final agreement, the situation was again complicated in the Ottoman Empire. The relationship between the Young Turks Committee "Union and Progress" and Sultan Abdulhamid become strained and on March 31, 1909, a counter coup burst. Very quickly, the frustrated forces of

⁵² CDA, f. 176k, op.2, a.e. 10, l. 89-90.

⁵³ CDA, f. 176K, op.2 a.e. 11, l. 93-94.

the Young Turks concentrated in garrisons in Thrace and Macedonia attempted to reinstate his power. On April 16, Sultan Abdulhamid was dethroned and exiled in Thessaloniki.

The same day on the front page of the „Pryaporets“, an article about the success and the achievement of the ultimate goal of the Committee of "Union and Progress"⁵⁴, was published. The content of this article was a big surprise. The author said that the revolution on July 11 was met with sincere satisfaction by the new regime, although it did not justify all the hopes and

"did not turn out the way it was expected, it was infinitely more decent and better than the previous oppressive regime"

On the next page under column "foreign news" they wrote in detail how the process of voting in the senate the overthrowing the Sultan was made, how he was informed of the dethronement and how they agreed upon his exile to Thessaloniki. The paper so far had never expressed any support to Young Turks, but rather was their critic. Even if it was spoke about their good intentions, their will for a change in the Ottoman Empire, it always criticized their actions were considered insufficient. Sometimes the issues risen by the newspaper even question their intentions to reform radically the political and administrative system in the Empire and to give equal rights to all Christians. But what was happening now, and why the Democratic Party so suddenly had changed its mind? Bulgarian government had secured the independence of Bulgaria in an extraordinary difficult time when all the eyes of the Great Powers were headed towards the Balkans and each of them defend their interests. Now when all this was behind, Bulgaria was ready to open a new page in its relations with Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

So only within a year the events that happened in the two Balkan neighbours Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire on the one hand led to a change in political status and government of both countries. On the

⁵⁴ Pryaporets, 14 April, 1909, p. 2-3 .

other changed the status quo established by the Treaty of Berlin in the Balkans. The article tries to show the interdependence of these events. The outbreak of the Young Turk revolution as an act of dissatisfaction with the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid, gave an occasion to the Bulgarian state that had been waiting for long time wait for an opportunity to reject its dependence on the Ottoman Empire. The crisis in the Empire was evaluated by the Bulgarian government as the right time. The actions of the Bulgarian government additionally complicated the political situation in the Ottoman state, as they were seen as an attempt to bring a discredit on the new Young Turkish Government. This gave a reason to Abdulhamid to strengthen his positions in the Empire and to organize a counter-coup trying to regain his power. Excruciating negotiations for the recognition of the Bulgarian independence lasted about nine months, during this time the Ottoman Empire continued to be torn by internal strife. Shortly before signing the official memorandum on recognition of independence, Sultan Abdulhamid was finally deposed from the throne, and the Young Turks came to wield the helm of the Empire. The article also shows a different perspective of view on the events that opposition forces in Bulgaria had, they opposed the actions of the Bulgarian government and gave another evaluation for the unfolding crisis in the relations between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. Thus was put an ended on the one of the episodes in the Bulgarian-Turkish relationships in the first decade of the 20th century.

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