

Lecture on Factors Leading up to Macedonia's Partition And the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest 1878 to 1913

May 18, 2008

Introduction

Great Power Economic and Political influence in the Balkans

Macedonia was liberated in the spring of 1878 and was given back to the Ottomans in the summer of the same year.

After waiting for a long period of time for something to happen Russia took its chance and attacked the Ottoman Empire in 1877. The official cause of the attack was in response to complaints from the peasants in the Balkans who were claiming to be exploited to starvation.

The Turkish armies were decimated and on March 3rd, 1878, Turkey was forced to sign a peace treaty with Russia. This treaty became known as the San Stefano Treaty.

One of the requirements of the treaty was that a large Bulgarian state be formed that included most of present day southern Bulgaria, all of Macedonia and other parts of the Balkans.

The peace treaty was unfortunately signed without the consent of the Western Power who convened in Berlin in June 1878 to decide what to do.

Russia's real motive for the attack it would seem had to do more with self interests and less with the interest of the people it was trying to protect, so Russia took the opportunity to realize a long held ambition in the Balkans, access to the Mediterranean Sea.

The western powers of the time which included Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, unfortunately did not agree with what Russia was doing for two main reasons;

1. Britain and France, particularly Britain, did not want Russia to gain access to Mediterranean waters.
2. Both Britain and France had made many investments and had companies operating in the Ottoman Empire and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would have meant the loss of their investments.

The western powers including Russia, convened in Berlin on June 13th, 1878 and by July 13 they had concluded among other things to allow Bulgaria to become an autonomous state and to give Macedonia back to the Turks.

So, Macedonia was free for 132 days from March 3rd, 1878 when the San Stefano Treaty was signed, to July 13th, 1878 when Congress of Berlin decided to give it back to the Ottomans.

The Macedonian people's high hopes were dashed when they were handed back to the Ottomans to be further abused and exploited. This not only fostered hatred and mistrust for the great powers but also made the people realize that they would have to depend on themselves to gain their freedom.

Outside of dashing the Macedonian people's hopes, the actions of the Berlin Congress placed doubts on Macedonia's future which opened the question "what will happen to Macedonia when the Ottoman Empire collapses completely?"

Actions and influence of the Orthodox Churches in Macedonia

One of the most frequently asked question is "What were foreign Christian Churches doing in a predominantly Muslim State?"

On the surface it seemed that everyone was interested in the wellbeing of the Macedonian people, especially Macedonia's neighbours Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria and they wanted to make sure the Christian Macedonian people's rights were observed.

The reason however for allowing only churches to exist in Macedonia as opposed to clubs, political and other organizations is because of Muslim law.

Being Muslims, the Ottoman would only recognize religion as the sole entity allowed to operate in Muslim lands.

On the insistence of the great powers, especially Russia, to give the Ottoman non Muslim citizens more rights, the Phanariot Patriarch church under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople was re-established in Macedonia in 1850, 73 years after it was abolished by the Sultan Mustafa III in 1767.

Unfortunately, the language of the Patriarch church was Koine, which was foreign to the vast majority of people in the Balkans who spoke dialects of the Slav language and after much complaining, Russia who saw itself as the protector of the Christian Orthodox believers, squeezed the Sultan to establish the Exarchate Church in 1872 which catered to the Slav speakers of the region.

But, after the formation of Bulgaria in 1878, the Bulgarian State adopted the Exarchate Church as the church of the Bulgarian people.

Faced with the prospect of having no church of their own, the Macedonian people also made an attempt to establish a Macedonian church in 1891 but without success. On the recommendation of the Patriarch, the Sultan would not grant the Macedonians their wish.

So, having no church of their own, the Macedonian believers in Christ had no choice but to attend the foreign churches for their prayer.

So: “What were foreign Christian Churches doing in a predominantly Muslim State?” The real reasons for establishing the foreign Patriarchate and Exarchate Churches in Macedonia, as it turned out, were to promote foreign nationalist propaganda.

Involvement of the European Royals in Macedonia’s destiny

Up until a few years ago, most of us were not aware of what was going on behind the diplomatic curtain in Europe especially when it involved royal families.

But thanks to Hans Lothar Schteppan the former German ambassador to Macedonia we get to peek behind the curtain.

Using information from the Ottoman period he discovered in the Austrian and German archives, Hans Lothar Schteppan wrote a book called “The Macedonian Knot” which is based on new facts that have emerged connecting the European Royals to Macedonia’s annexation by its neighbours.

Before I give you any details, allow me to tell you a bit about the relationship of the royals of that time:

The King of England, Edward 7 was married to Princess Alexandra of Denmark. Princess Alexandra of Denmark was King George I’s sister and King George was the King of Greece.

Princess Dagmar of Denmark, who was also the sister of King George of Greece, was married to the son of the Russian Tsar.

King George’s wife Queen Olga Konstantinovna was a cousin of the Russian Tsar Nicholas’s father and sister in law to King Edward 7 from England.

So you can see that the royals who ruled the most powerful states were related to each other and also looked after each others interests.

Sometime after Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans, it had been decided at high diplomatic levels that Macedonia was to be partitioned and awarded to Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria under the condition that Macedonia be divided under ethnic lines. How and when Macedonia was to be divided was at the time not determined.

Here is what Greek King George I said: “I do not know exactly what the conclusion was (in Reval on June 9, 1908) but a decision on Macedonia was reached.” This statement was made after King George met with King Edward of England, Tsar Nicholas of Russia and his own wife regarding “the future of Macedonia”.

So from what Hans Lothar Schteppan tells us, every time the royals had a meeting, King George of Greece would be asking “when can I get more land for my people?”

Here is a quote from Hans Lothar Schteppan: “Greek King George, it would appear, was strengthening his Dynastic relations for the purpose of territorial expansion into Macedonia. This became evident when, during every meeting with the Great Powers, King George lost no opportunity to beg for more territory for his Greek Kingdom demonstrated through 250 Acts of the German Kingdom.”

Here is a quote from Hans Lothar Schteppan: “Back in the 18th century when the Russian–Ottoman wars were shaking up the Ottoman Empire, England had interests in securing a passage through the Mediterranean Sea to gain access to its Indian colony. On the other hand, Russia needed uninterrupted access from the Black to the Mediterranean Sea. To prevent Russia from gaining access to the Mediterranean Sea, England established the new Greek State on the land historically known as Achaea. A new King from the European Dynasties was installed and the young State became a Kingdom, established for the first time in 1832. The first King to be installed was Otto of Bavaria (1833-62). The next King to sit on the Greek Throne was Prince Wilhelm from Denmark known as George I, 1863-1913. He is responsible for all the Imperialistic gains Greece made during the Balkan Wars.

To justify why he wanted Macedonian lands for his Greek kingdom, King George I kept referring to the 2.5 million Greeks living in Macedonia who over the centuries referred to themselves as “Makedones”. These so called Greeks who referred to themselves as Makedones, according to King George, in fact were a majority in Macedonia and he could not allow a small minority, referring to the Exarchates, to “usurp the name, national and cultural identity of some 2.5 million Greeks”.

When Kalnoki, the foreign minister of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, having listened to his incessant complaints about the Greek Church in Macedonia, challenged the Greek King George I about where he got the figure of 2.5 million Greeks in Macedonia, King George had to admit that the number of Greeks in Macedonia was very small. (Austro–Hungarian records of 1886)

So, having only a small number of Greeks in Macedonia, King George I would have found it difficult to free Macedonia. To increase his chances he would have to “make” Greeks out of the Macedonians but the only access he had to do that was to “Hellenize” them through the Patriarch Church.

Another less known fact presented by Hans Lothar Schteppan in his Book “Macedonian Knot” is that during the 1903 Macedonian Uprising, Macedonian Revolutionary Dimitar Berovski, one of the organizers of the Razlog Uprising of 1876, was not granted audience with the Russian Tsar. This sounds suspicious because it was well known that Russia was helping all Uprisings in Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and even Greece. Russia prided itself on being the self appointed protector of the Orthodox Christian, regardless of ethnicity.

Could Russia have been planning a different future for Macedonia? If Dimitar Berovski for example was a Bulgarian, as Bulgarian Propaganda likes to present him, why then was he not granted audience with the Russian Tsar? Bulgarian Revolutionaries were certainly always supported! One reason might be that supporting Macedonia would have interfered with Russian support for Bulgarian interests in Macedonia, and this would certainly have had future consequences for Russian Free Passage into the Black Sea.

There are also other aspects to this. The Imperialistic Dynastic Network of Greek King George I, also had interests in enlarging Greece’s territory. Thus Macedonia was left to fight on its own, not only against the Turks but also against the royal resistance. (Hans Lothar Schteppan)

Since most historians in this time period were overwhelmingly dependent on their monarchs for their subsistence, it becomes very questionable that they would ever question their benefactors. It is however, most logical to assume that they as subordinates, accepted such and co-operated in initiating the creation of a fictitious state with a fictitious history. Historians such as Droysan, promoted such, and are being accepted today as being factual when they are not. This quote was made by our own Pete Kondoff and confirmed by Hans Lothar Schteppan during an interview conducted by the MPO’s Macedonian Tribune on October 17, 2005.

Among other things here is what Hans Lothar Schteppan had to say: Yugoslav history is like Bulgarian history, Soviet history, East German history and Polish history. History based only on ideological specters. There is no truth, no facts, just intentions, wishful thinking, ideas and ideology. If you prefer ideology, please do so and please don’t listen to me or read my book. What you have been taught in school, I am very sorry to say that I

would personally not believe. So, please, you may believe whatever you like, just let me quote my documents. These documents are actual reports from the German ambassadors from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century from Constantinople, Sofia, Belgrade, Vienna, London, St. Petersburg, etc., and I believe them to be factual more than I can say about Yugoslav and Bulgarian interpretations of history. I am sorry to say that. Hans Lothar Schteppan

The Macedonian people's rise to power and their failure to achieve independence and create a Macedonian State

When the Macedonian people along with their lands were handed back to the Ottomans in 1878 to be further abused and exploited, the Macedonian leadership came to the realization that no one was going to help the Macedonians so they had to organize and carry out a national struggle on their own.

The 1878 Congress of Berlin also awakened the Muslim Rulers in the Balkans to the reality that their Empire came very close to being destroyed.

So now we have the dynamics of the Macedonian people gearing up to free themselves and the Turks trying harder to stop them.

To maintain their state's integrity the Turks had to raise taxes in order to pay the interest on the money they borrowed from the westerners and they also had to keep a close eye on potential insurrections and further loss of lands.

To prevent further uprisings and rebellions, the Turks stepped up espionage activities and searches for weapons in the villages. If by any chance weapons were found, the entire village was burned to the ground, even if the weapons belonged to thugs.

By the time taxes were paid a Macedonian family would be left with 25 to 40 percent of their meager annual earnings to live on.

To make ends meet Macedonian men were accustomed to taking on additional jobs within the Ottoman Empire or abroad to make enough to survive the winter. It has been said that after twenty-five years of achieving autonomy, Bulgaria was thriving economically thanks to the cheap labour provided by the Macedonian pechelbari or migrant workers.

The West, including the USA and Canada were to some extent, also beneficiaries of the cheap Macedonian labour. Unable to pay their bills, Macedonian men ventured further and further away from Macedonia looking for work. The further they ventured the longer they took to return home sometimes spending more than a couple years before returning.

It was never their intent to abandon their homeland, but as Macedonians found it more and more difficult to cope at home they began to settle in foreign lands like Bulgaria, Russia, Serbia and even the USA and Canada.

Be they in Bulgaria, Russia, the USA, Canada or Macedonia, the Macedonia people's preoccupation after 1878 was how to become free from the oppressive Ottomans.

The answer came to them on October 23rd, 1893 when a number of Macedonian intellectuals met in Solun and decided to form a Macedonian Revolutionary Organization

with aims of destroying the Ottoman social system and seeking autonomy for Macedonia. Gotse Delchev was chosen to lead the revolution.

By 1896 the revolutionary movement was able to exert influence to a point where it acted like a state within a state, taking over administrative positions from the Ottomans, leading boycotts against Ottoman institutions and offering isolated villages protection from Greek and Bulgarian sponsored brigands.

Besides preparing for an imminent uprising, the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was able to organize cheti to defend the villages from marauding bands, Turkish soldiers and from Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian hired armed bands and thugs.

However, before the failed Ilinden uprising, the Macedonian leadership hardly concerned itself with the armed foreign bands or with the Greek, Bulgarian or Serbian nationalistic propaganda.

Unfortunately, as the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization became more and more successful at its job, the Turkish authorities began to clamp down on it.

On January 31st, 1903 the Turks declared the organization illegal and sought ways to destroy it. One of the ways was to step up weapons searches in the villages, another was to capture and imprison its leadership.

With villages being destroyed at a rapid rate and leaders being lost to the prisons, the Macedonians had to accelerate their plans to carry out this massive national insurrection they were planning.

Unfortunately the Macedonians were finding it difficult to acquire the weapons, ammunition and supplies they needed for an all out strike and for a prolonged struggle. Some, including Gotse Delchev believed more time was needed.

Unfortunately with Dechev's death on May 4, 1903 and with most of the leadership still divided, a rash decision was made to carry out the uprising on August 2, 1903 during the Ilinden celebration.

According to newspaper reports from 1903, during the heat of the Illinden Uprising, Russia and Austria-Hungary urgently warned Macedonia's neighbours, for the sake of peace, not to interfere in Macedonia. In other words, not to help the Macedonian people free themselves. (Hans Lothar Schteppan).

As we all know, the uprising did not go well and ended in tragedy. All the villages suspected of helping the rebels were destroyed and many people were killed and displaced.

At the aftermath people lost confidence in their ability to free themselves and for the first time began to look to their neighbours to save them.

Actions of Macedonia's neighbours in Macedonia's invasion, occupation and partition

While the Macedonian people were preparing for an uprising, their neighbours had different plans.

The Macedonia people's loss of confidence in themselves coupled with the weakened defense at the villages, was a victory for Macedonia's neighbours who wasted no time in stepping up their nationalistic propaganda campaigns.

Another little known fact is that after the failed rebellion, the Greek factions in Macedonia allied themselves with the Turks and became their eyes and ears in the villages.

As long as they kept the rebels down, people like Karavangelis, the Greek Bishop of Kostur were given authority to carry out armed attacks on the Macedonian people, such as the one in Zagorichani.

Villages that refused to bend to the will of Karavangelis were viciously attacked and destroyed sometimes with the help of the Turkish army.

Unable to convince the Macedonian people to peacefully change their allegiance by declaring themselves to be Greeks, Serbians or Bulgarians, their neighbours use armed bands and terror tactics to force them.

It was well known that there were no Greek, Bulgarian, or Serbian ethnicities living in Macedonia but that didn't stop the new Balkan States from inventing them. The wheels of the protagonists were turning when they attempted to kill two birds with one stone by cleverly substituting "ethnicity" for "religious affiliation". By the end of the 19th century the Christian Millet of Ottoman Macedonia was already divided into two millets (the Greek Patriarchist Millet and the Bulgarian Exarchist Millet).

First, since there was no Macedonian Millet there was no "governing body" to represent a Macedonian religious denomination. Second, since all Christians in Macedonia already belonged to one millet or another, it was easy to make "ethnic" claims on behalf of "religious affiliation".

In modern terms, all Macedonians belonging to the Patriarchist fold were considered to be Greek. Similarly, all those Macedonians belonging to the Exarchist fold were considered to be Bulgarian.

By introducing Serbian churches and schools, Serbia later used similar tactics to claim the existence of a Serbian ethnic identity inside Macedonia.

All Macedonians belonging to the Patriarchist church were given Greek or "Hellenized" names. Similarly, all Macedonians belonging to the Exarchist church were given Bulgarian names. That is why to this day people who fled Macedonia at that time have names ending in "s", "ff" or "ch"

In many instances brothers, born of the same parents, were given different last names because they happened to go to different churches. Their choice of church had nothing to do with loyalty to one faction or the other, but rather with the church's location relative to home.

Each brother attended the church nearest to his house as he had always done. The sad part was that now with every spoonful of religion came a dose of venomous propaganda. Brother was pitted against brother, one fighting for "Hellenism" and the other for "Bulgarism".

At the beginning of the Ilinden rebellion most Macedonian villages belonged to the Exarchate Church. With increased Greek activities through Karavangelis and others like him, the tide was turning. The Greek success was mainly due to the Turkish-Greek alliance and the Turkish militia's assistance.

Russia made it clear to all parties that they couldn't invade Macedonia without Russian permission and only if Turkey became a threat to the Christian population.

So, plans to invade Macedonia were under way, now it was only a matter of time.

Macedonia's three neighbours after forming a series of alliances, on June 1912 with Russian help, formed the "Balkan League of Nations" in preparation of an invasion. The League of Nations in fact was simply a device for synchronizing a military effort against the Turks.

When Russia proposed the idea of a "Balkan League of Nations" it was welcome news for Britain, France and Italy. The League was viewed as an anti-German front, a way of ejecting the Ottoman regime from Europe and at the same time, safeguarding (British, French and Italian) interests and expansionary ambitions.

The not so obvious Russian motive for sponsoring the League was to guarantee its own influence in the Balkans perhaps through Serbia or Bulgaria or both.

On October 18th, 1912 Montenegro declared war on Turkey with the League following suit. The battles that ensued were fought almost entirely on Macedonian soil.

The League's plan was to surround the Turkish army in Macedonia and force it out to Constantinople. To everyone's surprise, however, the League won a crushing and unexpected victory in just six weeks.

With the exception of Sandanski and a force of 400 Macedonians who fought back and liberated Melnik and Nevrokop, the League received no opposition from the Macedonians.

In fact, the enthusiasm created by the "liberators" not only helped the League fight harder but also encouraged thousands of Macedonians to enlist in the League's armies.

However, no sooner than the league armies evicted the Turks, the Macedonian people found themselves not liberated but occupied.

“A great terror reigns in Macedonia now. The ‘freedom’ of the allies has no frontiers, no-one from Macedonia has the right to travel outside, to protest or complain before the European states. Whoever disturbs this order is either killed or imprisoned. The allies surround Macedonia with a Chinese Wall...” (Page 145, Michael Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question)

Conditions under which the treaty of Bucharest was drafted

As mentioned earlier, there were no definite plans on how to divided Macedonia since Macedonia never belonged to any of its neighbours. There were no national dividing lines to speak of other than the Patriarchist or Exarchist affiliated villages which existed all over Macedonia. So after the first Balkan war ended, arbitrary borders were set up more or less where the armies stopped their advance.

Serbia was looking to gain access to the Adriatic Sea but Austria-Hungary and Italy saw to it that it doesn't by proposing the creation of Albania.

This loss of territory on the Serbian side lead to a renewed conflict in the region termed the second Balkan war involving Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Rumania.

As a result of this conflict, the original borders proposed after the first Balkan war were shifted and Macedonia was once again arbitrarily partitioned.

According to military historian Dr. Vanche Stojchev, author of the book “Military History of Macedonia” while the Treaty of Bucharest was being drafted in 1913, the occupying armies were still fighting in Macedonia. Every time one side took a hill or a ridge from the others, its military commander telegraphed his counter part in Bucharest who in turn asked the commission to modify the maps to include the new gains.

I have uncovered various inconsistencies and anomalies in this treaty which would be of interest and importance to the Macedonian people. For example not many people know that the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest was not ratified by Austro-Hungary. Austro-Hungary was the first Great Power in the Balkans. After the signing of the treaty both Russia and Austro-Hungary called for further revisions which were basically ignored. Russia only accepted the treaty because it was pressured by the other Great Powers which in reality means the treaty may not be valid. Says Professor Dr. Vanche Stojchev

The reason why Macedonian institutions are not yet affirming the idea that Macedonian roots extend from the ancient times to today is because everything that was taught in Macedonia up to now had to be politically correct. We were taught a politicized history

which catered less to reality and more to political aspects on how history should be viewed. Says Professor Dr. Vanche Stojchev

Summary

1878 was the year that the Great Powers told Bulgarians that Macedonia was not going to be theirs. It was also the year that the Macedonians were given the message that they were not going to be freed.

Worst of all about what happened in 1878 is it gave Macedonia's neighbours that idea that the Great Powers were not going to support a free and independent Macedonian state and that the Macedonian territories were now free for grabs.

I suppose that the Turks too would have known that their days were numbered so they too tried to bring change with the Young Turk revolution but that too did not pan out and eventually they collapsed and led the way to Macedonia's partition.

So, how and why did we end up here in countries like Canada, the USA and Australia?

As I mentioned earlier, Macedonians were faced with many problems including the need to survive and pay their taxes. That led many to venture further and further outwards from their villages into neighbouring villages and with time to the outer reaches of the Ottoman empire wherever work was available.

As the frontiers became open and the new lands such as the USA and Canada, began to welcome migrant workers, Macedonians ventured further and further, always aiming to return home.

These first men set a pattern for the many more who dared to venture out and earn some money in the shortest possible time so they could return to their families in their old homeland, Macedonia. A few worked one year, others two years at most. All returned to their homes with their savings to remodel and improve their homes and to aid their families in their daily work. But the few dollars earned were spent all too quickly, and within a year or less they returned a second time, a third time and sometimes more times.

No one at that time entertained the slightest notion of settling permanently in Canada or the USA. How could they abandon their place of birth, families and homes full of memories?

But, as the situation worsened at home over the years the unthinkable too began to happen. Women left their villages to join their men abroad and as the saying goes "where the women go so goes the family and home".