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## THE EMERGENCE OF BULGARIAN NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS 1800-1878

Katia Dineva Ivanova

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**THE EMERGENCE OF BULGARIAN NATIONAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS  
1800-1878**

An Undergraduate Thesis

by  
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Under the direction of

Dr. Karen Ruth Adams

Submitted to the Honors College of  
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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Upper Division Honors Distinction in  
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# Contents

List of Tables	i
Acknowledgements	ii
 Chapter I: <b>Introduction</b>	 1
Brief Summary of the History of Bulgaria in the 1800	1
Theories of Nationalism	5
My Argument	8
 Chapter II: <b>Toward Ecclesiastical Independence</b>	 9
Internal Causes	10
Economic Changes	10
Cultural Reforms	18
Reforms in Education	21
The Bulgarian Press	24
Political Aspirations That Gave Rise to the Movement for Ecclesiastical Independence	25
Phase I: 1853	27
Phase II to: 1853-1856	28
External Causes	31
The International Political Situation	31
The Porte's Position	32
The French Position	33
The British Position	34
The Russian Position	35
My Evaluation	37
 Chapter III: <b>Nova Bulgaria: Ideology and Action Toward Political Independence</b>	 39
Internal Causes	39
The Origins and Development of the Anti-Ottoman Liberation Movement	39
The Bulgarian Liberation Movement (1850-1868)	43
The Bulgarian Liberation Movement (1868-1876)	44
The April Uprising and Its Significance Abroad	48
The April Uprising: Preparation	49
The April Uprising: Realization	51

External Causes	53
The Significance of the April Uprising: the International	53
Reaction	53
The British Position	54
The Russian Position	56
The Decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century	57
The Russian-Turkish War of 1878	60
The Istanbul Conference	60
Beginning and Progress of the War	61
The Treaty of San Stefano	63
International Reaction and the Congress of Berlin	64
My Evaluation	67
Chapter IV: <b>Conclusion</b>	70
Bibliography	74

## **List of Tables**

Table 1.1 Trade of the Ottoman Empire with the Major Great Powers in 1845 and 1850.

Table 1.2 Ships of the Major Trade Partners of the Ottoman Empire that Imported and Exported Goods via Ports on the Danube River in 1845-1849.

Table 2.1 Imports and Exports of the Ottoman Empire in 1876.

Table 2.1 The Territories of the Balkan States after the Congress of Berlin.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In Bulgaria, the nineteenth century was a period of crucial and vast change. This change transformed the way of thinking of the Bulgarian people, led to ecclesiastical independence from 1840 to 1870, and resulted in the rebirth of the Bulgarian state in 1878. No single theory can completely explain why the changes happened at that particular time and in that particular sequence and manner. However, in this thesis I draw on theories of nationalism, secessionism, and decolonization to explain why these changes occurred.

#### Brief Summary of the History of Bulgaria in the 1800s

In order to obtain better knowledge about the period in which this significant change happened, the reader will need a brief immersion in the Bulgarian history from the early to the late nineteenth century. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, economic life along the Danube river, the Thracian valley, and the Balkan Mountains emerged from 300 years of stagnation. Urban development, formation of guild organizations and demand for more cotton products led to the appearance of a new social class, *esnafi*<sup>1</sup>, who became the major patrons of secular schools and small periodical presses imported from Istanbul. This merchant class started a capitalist economy that would eventually replace entirely the barter economy. However, the development of this middle class was impeded by the slow death of the feudal order in the Ottoman Empire, which prevented wealthy tradesmen from participating and influencing the political life in their towns. Being

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<sup>1</sup> In Bulgarian *esnaf* refers to the newly rich artisans and merchants who lived in the bigger towns and were well respected by the Ottoman authorities.



“infidel”<sup>2</sup> made it impossible for the wealthy Bulgarians to participate in the community’s decisions. Therefore, the more progressive *esnafi*, *chorbadjii*<sup>3</sup> and teachers focused their efforts in another direction: education and the Orthodox church.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of reforms in the spheres of education, economy and culture. The upper middle class of tradesmen was trying to gain more influence and to get more involved with the fate of the community. The struggle of these wealthy Bulgarians took the character of a nationalistic movement. Cell schools<sup>4</sup> became virtually extinct by the mid-1850s and were replaced by *esnafi*-sponsored secular schools, of which the first were the Helleno-Bulgarian schools<sup>5</sup> in which subjects were taught in Greek. Later, new schools arose, in which subjects were taught in vernacular Bulgarian. Studying abroad became a common practice among the upper middle class as well as the more talented low classes, who were supported by donations or scholarships. Most of the Bulgarians who pursued higher education studied in Istanbul (at the famous American Robert College), in Bucharest, Kiev or Odessa.

Bulgarian nationalism also extended to religion. Very soon after the Balkan Peninsula was overtaken by the Ottoman Empire in 1393, the national Bulgarian church founded in the 800s lost its independence and became subject to the Greek church known

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<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman Turks did not discriminate based on ethnicity or race but based on religion. If a man converted to Islam he was given the same rights as the Ottomans themselves.

<sup>3</sup> *Chorbadjii* were rich peasants who possessed land and were the most important people in the Bulgarian village.

<sup>4</sup> Cell schools existed until early 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were organized most often in monasteries and the teacher was usually a monk or a parish priest. The syllabus, as Mercia Macdermott points out in *A History of Bulgaria (1393-1885)*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger) p. 117, was a little better than medieval. It consisted of learning the Church Slavonic alphabet, the Prayer Book and the Psalter.

<sup>5</sup> The Helleno-Bulgarian schools were established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Greek-educated Bulgarians who believed that Greek culture was more advanced and Bulgarians would not develop if left alone. The practice of teaching Greek was seen as a menace by many Bulgarian nationalists.

as the Patriarchate. The Greek patriarch, who resided in Constantinople, cooperated with and paid taxes to the Ottoman authorities and thus was left to rule over all Christians in the Ottoman Empire. This led to Bulgarian resentment of the Greek clergy for, two reasons. First, church taxes rose every year, and if a village refused to pay “the churches might be closed by order of the Bishop and all sacraments discontinued.”<sup>6</sup> Second, the practice of Bulgarian dioceses having Bulgarian bishops was quickly altered. Greek clergy conducting worship services in a foreign language left the Bulgarians unable to understand and participate.

Around 1839 the Sultan issued the *Hat-I-Sherif* reforms, which contained the principle of equal rights of all people within the Ottoman Empire and gave great hope to the beginning nationalist, pro-independence, ecclesiastical movement. The center of lobbying for the Bulgarian demands shifted from the towns within the Bulgarian territory to Istanbul where many Bulgarian merchants had moved. In the spring of 1858 after the issuing of the *Hat-I-Humayun*, which promised equality between Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarians in Constantinople sent to the sultan a petition signed by 6,400,000 Bulgarians demanding the right to establish a Bulgarian church with its own leader separate from the Greek Patriarchate. In addition, they requested “a supreme civil leader who would assist the sultan to choose suitable Bulgarians to act as judges, officials, etc.”<sup>7</sup> The effort failed. Despite his edicts, the sultan was unwilling to grant ecclesiastical independence.

The church struggle intensified from 1866-1870, when Russian officials in Istanbul began supporting at different times either Bulgarian demands or Greek

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<sup>6</sup> Macdermott, *A History of Bulgaria*, p. 143-4.

<sup>7</sup> Macdermott, *A History of Bulgaria*, p. 151.

opposition to the requests. At first, Russia supported the Greek patriarch as the only leader of the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. But later, Count Ignatiev, the Russian Envoy in Constantinople, supported ecclesiastical independence for Bulgaria. Finally, in 1870, under pressure from the Count and protests in the Bulgarian dioceses, the Sublime Porte<sup>8</sup> issued a *firman*<sup>9</sup> that allowed the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate.<sup>10</sup> Thus ecclesiastical independence was achieved.

By this time, it was obvious that the Empire was experiencing a crisis and had difficulty maintaining order in its provinces. Encouraged and inspired by the recent political independence of Greece and Serbia, Bulgarian emigrants in Bucharest created the Bulgarian Secret Central Committee in 1866, whose aim was the political independence of Bulgaria. Most of the emigrants were men who studied abroad and who found returning home intolerable after having experienced the life in Western Europe or Russia. After several unsuccessful attempts to organize a revolution from the outside with the intention to spread it across Bulgaria, the revolutionaries changed their strategy. In April 1870 a new organization, the Internal Revolutionary Committee was created. It was headed by its founder Vassil Levski and consisted of revolutionary centers in smaller and larger towns within the Bulgarian territory with headquarters in Bucharest. The ultimate goal of the organization was to prepare the people for a national uprising and to provide weapons for the participants with the support of wealthy Bulgarians.

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<sup>8</sup> The Sublime Porte was the government of the Ottoman Empire whose head was the sultan.

<sup>9</sup> *Firman* is the Turkish word for a decree.

<sup>10</sup> Exarchate and Patriarchate are religious terms used interchangeably and mean the governing council of the Orthodox church.

These efforts culminated in the April Uprising of April 20, 1876, which was and remains the greatest military enterprise ever undertaken by Bulgarians against the Ottoman Empire. However, lacking its ideologist and coordinator Levski<sup>11</sup> the uprising was brutally put down. More than 15, 000 civilian Bulgarians died. The event evoked a strong response by outraged Europeans, particularly in France,<sup>12</sup> Russia,<sup>13</sup> and Great Britain.<sup>14</sup> When the sultan refused to comply with the rules and the reforms approved by the European Powers at a conference held soon after the rebellion, Russia declared war against the Ottoman Empire. In the early winter of 1878, Russian and Bulgarian soldiers fought together until they almost reached Istanbul. The war ended in the nearby village of San Stefano where a treaty was signed declaring Bulgaria an independent state.

### Theories of Nationalism

It is often thought that internal factors are the key to the emergence of nationalism and the drive for political independence on decolonization. For example, Karl Deutsch suggests that the rise of nationalism and nation-building is not a unique event that is characteristic to a certain geographic area. Instead, he believes that nationalistic movements must be studied in their “general and uniform aspects” across continents and

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<sup>11</sup> On Christmas Day of 1872, during one of his routine trips from Bucharest to Bulgaria, Levski was betrayed by a fellow Bulgarian in the village of Kukrina and captured by the Ottoman authorities. He was tried, sentenced to death and hanged on January 19, 1873 in Sofia.

<sup>12</sup> The strongest critique of the mass killings during the April Uprising came from Victor Hugo who wrote several articles condemning the atrocities on the Balkans. Konstantin Kossev, *The April Uprising: A Prelude of the Liberation* (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1996), p. 128-147.

<sup>13</sup> In Russia Mendeleev, Dostoyevski, Tolstoy and Turgenev spoke on behalf of the Bulgarian victims. Kossev, *The April Uprising*, p. 128-135.

<sup>14</sup> The government of Great Britain kept its policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire, but the British people started a campaign against the government’s policy on the Balkans. Kossev, *The April Uprising*, p. 144-145.

centuries.<sup>15</sup> In the book *Nation-Building*, Deutsch argues that the ancients were able to develop nation states over a long period of time by using internal resources to protect themselves from external influences. According to him, nations can be built using different plans, either rapidly or gradually, and always try to be independent from the international environment in which they exist.<sup>16</sup>

Deutsch claims that the concept of nation-building emphasizes the idea of the influence of the past and the expectations of millions of people. In his book *Nationalism and Social Communication*, Deutsch develops the theory of mobilization and assimilation through which national integration is achieved. More contemporary scholars such as Inkeles and Smith agree that industrialization and development of market relations contribute to the enrichment of the population, increased literacy rate and indirectly give rise to nationalistic movements.<sup>17</sup>

Like Deutsch, Benedict Anderson emphasizes internal cultural factors such as language and religion as the key to the process of shaping new states geographically and politically. Anderson points out that cultural artifacts in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century created various degrees of national consciousness and contributed to the formation of new political ideologies.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Ronald Sunny suggests that the vision of the national idea becomes more complete with the formation of the national identity of the people. National identity brings provisional stabilization in the search for solidarity and is formed

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<sup>15</sup> Karl Deutsch and William Foltz, *Nation-Building* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1963) p. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Deutsch and Foltz, *Nation-Building*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Countries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 137-143.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991) p. 4.

in “actual historical time and space, in evolving economies, politics and cultures.”<sup>19</sup>

Identity is often associated with unity and internal harmony across the forming nation. It provides the opportunity for a group of people to isolate themselves from other identities that threaten them. Yet, Sunny, like Crawford Young, argues that a nation is not a natural state of being and must be “worked for, taught, and instilled largely through the effort of intellectuals, politicians and activists”<sup>20</sup>; in other words, elites who often seek to improve their material well-being and social status.

Other scholars argue that external factors are the key to successful independence movements. For example, the theory of the international demonstration effect, which states that the standards of living in industrialized states have a profound appeal to other societies, is worth evaluating. There are many historical records from the nineteenth century, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two, which show how that the Bulgarian society tried to emulate Western nations by importing luxury goods and adopt Western practices of entertainment.

Similarly, there is broad agreement that the declining power of Britain and France were extremely important to the post World War II decolonization movements in Asia and Africa and that successful independence movements in one colony inspired the creation of such movements in others. Finally, structuralist realists such as Kenneth Waltz would argue that because the international system is anarchic, the policies of each state are guided by self interest and their main goal is to provide for their own security.

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<sup>19</sup> Ronald Sunny, “Provisional Stabilities: the Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia” *International Security* Vol. 24, No.3 (Winter 1999/2000), p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Sunny, “Provisional Stabilities: the Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia”, p. 144.

As a result, states try to balance the power of other states by alternatively pursuing and abandoning allies. In doing so, they may assist nationalist movements in other countries.

### My Argument

In this thesis, I consider the role of both internal and external factors in the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism, the achievement of ecclesiastical independence and the creation of an independent Bulgarian state in the 1800s.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the internal and external causes of ecclesiastical independence. Internal causes included the change in the Bulgarian economy, social reforms such as the emergence of a small press and secular schools, and political changes. I will argue that the external factors consisted mostly of the Russian support for the independence cause and were less significant than the internal causes.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the roots of political independence, explaining why and how it developed. I will separate the internal and the external factors in the same way as in Chapter Two and I will discuss an additional external factor: the gradual political and economic decline of the Ottoman Empire.

Finally in Chapter Four, I evaluate the relative importance of the external and internal factors, concluding that the internal ones were sufficient for Bulgarian nationalism but insufficient for political independence, which was determined by the combination of several external factors.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Toward Ecclesiastical Independence**

The struggle for ecclesiastical independence was controversial and divisive. It was controversial because not all Bulgarians were convinced of the need to have and to participate in the struggle for a Bulgarian autonomous church. The struggle was divisive because particular groups of wealthy Bulgarians who collaborated and bribed the Turkish authorities for more influence over the Bulgarian *raya*<sup>21</sup> were opposed to giving privileges to the Bulgarian population. They wanted to have more rights to compete against the power of the Phanariot Greeks.<sup>22</sup> However, it would be fair to say that with the exception of this interest group, the vast majority of Bulgarians either actively supported or simply approved the movement for church independence.

Bulgarian nationalism crystallized around the movement for ecclesiastical independence. The demand for an autocephalous church predated political independence and became the important first step to the formation of a national identity and common interests among Bulgarians. In this chapter, I discuss the economic, cultural, educational, social, and political changes in Bulgarian society that made ecclesiastical independence possible and led beyond it. I also evaluate the international environment and how it affected the outcome of this problem also known as the little Eastern Question.

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<sup>21</sup> This is a Turkish word used to describe the non-Moslem subject population.

<sup>22</sup> The Phanariot Greeks were a group of Greek nationals called after a district of Constantinople. They grew very rich and acquired enormous influence in both ecclesiastical and secular matters by purchasing offices from the Sultan.



## Economic Changes

In his book *Nationalism and Social Communication*, Karl Deutsch argues that in a state that has just begun to emerge national integration is achieved through mobilization and assimilation. His theory is that modernization leads to a greater political mobilization of the population, while increasing urbanization results in the assimilation of those who are politically mobilized.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Bulgaria, his argument seems accurate because the ecclesiastical independence movement started in the 1820s, a short time after trade and commerce began across the Bulgarian territory (in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century).

One of the most important changes that took place in Bulgaria during this period was the shift from barter to a money economy, which coincided with the slow liquidation of the Turkish feudal system. This allowed for the formation of a Bulgarian middle class, or *bourgeoisie*, that would play an important role in the struggle for church independence. The evidence that a substantial economic progress toward modernization was taking place can be seen in the division and specialization of labor. Records from that time show that various regions across Bulgaria began to specialize in the cultivation of crops: rice in Plovdiv region, hemp in Sofia region, rose oil in Kazanluk region, silk in Nova Zagora region, etc.<sup>24</sup>

These economic changes affected primarily the towns; villages did not benefit greatly from the new commerce and the development of crafts. The village *bourgeoisie* was represented by the *chorbadjii* who served as mediators between the rest of the

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<sup>23</sup> Rajat Ganguly and Raymond Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension* (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 2002) p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Mercia Macdermott, *History of Bulgaria*, p. 65-6.

villagers and the Turkish authorities and were responsible for collecting taxes and other favors to assure the colonial masters in their loyalty. They were considered the “traitors” of the nationalistic idea and a source of division within the Bulgarian community. This, as Crawford Young would expect, proves that fragmentation among the Bulgarians existed and that the self-interest outpaced public interest.

In the Bulgarian village the existing wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few *chorbadjii*. The presence of unequally distributed capital replaced the “revolution of rising expectations” of the population with the “revolution of rising frustrations”.<sup>25</sup> The majority of the rich peasants hired labor and, in addition to collecting taxes for the Ottoman administration, added personal taxes for themselves. It would be correct to claim that frequently the native oppressors were hated more than the colonial rulers. In the Balkan villages,<sup>26</sup> in which there was no permanent Turkish presence, the *chorbadjii* had full control over the public matters in the village as well as over the private lives of the inhabitants.

In order to find the true roots of progress and political activity in Bulgaria it is necessary to examine the life in the towns of that period. The towns were a mixture of Turkish, Greek and Bulgarian residents as the latter began to move into the towns and to open craft shops on their own. The development of a capitalistic market was difficult because in the towns the wealthy Bulgarians were exposed to seizure of property and

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<sup>25</sup> Ganguly and Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> The Balkan Mountain is the longest mountain in the peninsula. It separates Bulgaria in two parts and is difficult to pass through. This is why when the Ottoman invasion began many Bulgarians migrated from the valleys and the planes to seek refuge in the mountain. Thus new villages were formed.

even robbery by Turkish authorities. Being richer than a Turk was forbidden and put a Bulgarian at risk.

According to Deutsch the major point of modernization is the “mobilization” of populations<sup>27</sup> and this is related to the concurrent development of education, industrialization and market relations. However, for Inkeles and Smith the introduction of the factory is one of the most important indicators of modernity.<sup>28</sup> The first factory in Bulgaria was built in 1835 by the merchant Dobri Jeljazkov from Sliven. It worked with machinery imported from Russia and Germany.<sup>29</sup> This factory was the first Bulgarian attempt at manufacturing and industrialization. It had the special approval of the Porte, and its main goal was to produce textiles for the Ottoman army. Therefore, by the early 1840s the roots of industrialization started to appear but did not develop fast because the Bulgarian middle class did not have a lot of capital to invest in such huge enterprises that could prove to be risky.

Urbanization is another indicator of modernity. The process of urbanization was influenced by the single factor of geographical location. Cities and towns, in which the Bulgarian population significantly increased, were located on the southern slopes of the Balkan Mountains (where there were fewer Turkish authorities and less banditry) and along the main trade routes. The main roads around 1815 ran from Istanbul to Plovdiv, Sofia, Nis, Belgrade, and to the Habsburg lands and the port of Thessalonica.<sup>30</sup> Of

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<sup>27</sup> Deutsch and Foltz, *Nation-Building*, p. 6-13.

<sup>28</sup> Inkeles and Smith, *Becoming Modern*, p.154.

<sup>29</sup> Dimitar Kossev, Hristo Hristov and Nilolay Todorov, *History of Bulgaria* Vol. 5 (Sofia Bulgarian Academy of Science, 1985), p. 261

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans 18th-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* Vol.1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p.182.

course, to accommodate the travelers, their animals and goods, Bulgarian families built inns, also known as *hans*, along the roads.

Trade was free with Western Europe and especially with the Habsburg Empire because of the 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz. The Ottoman Empire lacked strict commerce regulations and allowed goods to flow in and out of the state without tariffs and taxes. Toward the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century the Habsburg Empire had a 5:1 ratio of imports and exports with the Ottoman provinces of the Balkan area.<sup>31</sup> For the Habsburgs, the Balkans remained a preferred market of raw materials like cotton, timber, wool and tobacco.

The freedom of international commerce was attractive mainly for the Orthodox subjects for both empires, especially for Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians. Old traditions and political conditions prevented the landed nobility and the enserfed peasantry under the Habsburg rule from actively engaging in the lucrative trade. The Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, preferred to invest in land because unlike the non-Muslim subjects, Muslims had the right to hold private property permanently and paid very low taxes on it. Only a small group of Muslim merchants traded within the empire's borders but "the Ottoman attitude toward foreigners and the limited knowledge of foreign languages"<sup>32</sup> deprived them of a more important role in the international business world.

Barbara Jelavich links the existence of Balkan Orthodox merchants to the cultural and political evolution on the Balkans. She states that the favorable factors for the

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<sup>31</sup> Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 182.

<sup>32</sup> Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 185.

development of commerce in the area were the lack of tariffs, the unregulated flow of goods and even the corruption within the local and central Ottoman governments, which were used by the newly rich merchants for achieving their own economic interests.<sup>33</sup>

However, the Turkish system of government had many disadvantages. Poor roads and waterways, insecure traveling conditions and the risk of robberies made business a dangerous profession. With the decline of the Ottoman power, the maintenance of a police force to ensure law and order was difficult. With the treaties of Karlowitz and Kuchuk Kainarji, Austria and Russia received the right to send their representatives to live in Istanbul and to protect the interests of their states. The Ottoman Empire did not have similar consuls in Western Europe and thus it did not provide to its merchants protection abroad. However, the merchants were the people who most clearly observed and compared the differences between the Western and the Ottoman systems of government. The contact with other Europeans familiarized the merchants with current political and economic doctrines. For most Bulgarian tradesmen the Ottoman government was perceived as backward and tyrannical.

In order to explain in detail the desire of the so-called progressive merchants for education of the Bulgarian masses and cultural reforms, I'd like to discuss the theory of International Demonstration Effect. The focus of this theory is the concept that the material standards, life-styles and expectations of advanced urban-industrial civilizations have a powerful psychological appeal to other societies. In this case, a core area (Western Europe) creates aspirations in the peripheral regions (the Balkans) as the population in the latter try to imitate the successful modernization of the first. In the

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<sup>33</sup> Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 171-189.

peripheral area, the Balkans, economic prosperity was stimulated due to one of the “basic rules of economic life.”<sup>34</sup>

Veblen explains this process as follows: first, new products are acquired by elites, or in the context of the Bulgarian community, by the Bulgarian merchants who were able to travel abroad. The “Veblen effect” similar to David Hume and Adam Smith’s theories that the “demonstration of new commodities would stimulate enterprise and economic productivity,”<sup>35</sup> supports the view that the urban Bulgarian community sought to adopt the Western lifestyle. In a short time the patterns of consumption spread with great facility through the body of population by the “force of emulative imitation.”<sup>36</sup> Luxury objects began to appear in the houses of the urban middle class. As an observer in Romania wrote in 1828, “perfumes, champagne, glass, silverware, mirrors, matches, furniture spread rapidly among the members of the upper and middle classes.”<sup>37</sup> Another observer from Hungary also noted that “People are developing new tastes all the time. Silverware...only seen in the houses of the rich now makes appearance in many households. The watch once rare...has now turned into an article of necessity.”<sup>38</sup> In the Balkans, spices such as tea, coffee and sugar that in the past had been an indication of a fine expensive taste now became commonly used. Imported furniture and household utensils began replacing the simple wooden locally made equivalents. One of the most

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Janos, *Politics and Paradigms: Changing Theories of Change in Social Science*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: the Politics of the Borderlands from Pre-To Postcommunism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Janos, *Politics and Paradigms*, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Janos, *Politics and Paradigms*, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Janos, *Politics and Paradigms*, p. 88.

praised novelties was the town made lamp, which made the homemade candle obsolete. But the accumulation of wealth and the overall prosperity were threatened by the shadow of the foreign government and the gangs of Ottoman bandits who plundered towns and villages against any state law.

Up until the Crimean War the conditions for accumulation of capital and rising standards of living in the Bulgarian lands were promising. Great Britain, motivated by the new markets of the Ottoman Empire and the strategic geographic location of the Bulgarian provinces, which could become an excellent route to the British colonies in Asia, began intensive trade. Large amounts of imported goods were sold at the annual fairs in the bigger cities of Northern Bulgaria. In Southern Bulgaria the British imports came through the autonomous provinces of Moldova and Wallachia.

At the same time, probably as a result of industrialization, Great Britain experienced shortages of grain. That is how Bulgarian wheat appeared on the British market for first time in 1842.<sup>39</sup> The rival of Britain in Bulgaria was Austria whose trade in the region increased mainly because of the cheap transportation along the Danube river. Here are some statistics that show the imports and the exports as well as the number of ships that docked in Bulgarian ports from 1845 to 1850.

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<sup>39</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 272.

**Table 1.1.** Trade of the Ottoman Empire with the Major Great Powers in 1845 and 1850.<sup>40</sup>

Countries	1845		1850	
	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports
Britain	3, 316, 000	358, 000	1, 541, 000	885, 000
Austria and the German states	1, 058, 000	502, 000	3, 181, 000	2, 000, 000
France	231, 000	3, 175, 000	274, 000	1, 093, 000

**Table 1.2.** Ships of the Major Trade Partners of the Ottoman Empire that Imported and Exported Goods via Ports on the Danube River in 1845-1849.<sup>41</sup>

Ships	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849
Austrian	0	6	54	42	81
British	0	0	9	3	8
French	0	0	0	2	0
Russian	34	28	15	12	52

The external constraints of Bulgarian development, however, remained. As I discussed previously the government did not stimulate the economic sector of trade and commerce and guaranteed no protection of the small businesses in the towns. Moreover, being a wealthy non-Muslim was perilous. Well-to-do Bulgarians soon tested the veracity of Thucydides' argument that the proclivity of the strong is to "take what they

<sup>40</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 275.

<sup>41</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 275.



can and the fate of the weaker [is] to surrender what they must.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the Bulgarians who suffered from blackmailing and robbery discerned that they had to fight against the foreign order of the Ottoman Empire as well as against other competitors, mainly the Greek merchants, educators and clergymen who wanted to dominate trade and culture on the southern Balkans. The drawback of the enterprise was that the fight against the Greeks became initially an “elite’s war” rather than a united nationalistic movement because the largest segment of the Bulgarian population, the peasantry, was still unaware and far away from the industrial changes and the new ideological currents that were taking over the towns.

### Cultural Reforms

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson suggests that the nation is an imagined political community, which is both inherently limited and sovereign.<sup>43</sup> He explains that the community is imagined because none of its members will ever get the chance to meet most of the other members. Therefore, the community will continue to exist only because “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>44</sup> As Anderson notes the nation is a limited imagined community because even the largest one has its boundaries, beyond which other nations exist. The nation is also defined as sovereign because of the idea born in the time, in which the “Enlightenment and

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<sup>42</sup> Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* p. 6.

Revolution were destroying the hierarchical old order.”<sup>45</sup> Anderson accepts the imagined community as a “deep horizontal comradeship.” It is a fraternity, which “makes it possible for ... [the] people willingly to [fight] and die for such limited imaginings.”

With the beginning of the European Renaissance the decline of the old sacred languages, especially Latin, and the flourishing of the vernacular speech began. This is how the vernacularly imagined communities were formed. Anderson writes that with the spread of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe in 19<sup>th</sup> century the urban and rural masses developed reading coalitions within the new vernacularly imagined communities.<sup>46</sup>

To examine in depth the formation of the Bulgarian vernacular community and the cultural reforms such as language development, emergence of a press and education, it is necessary to familiarize the reader with the forerunner of the 19<sup>th</sup> century changes. The 18<sup>th</sup> century was time of Enlightenment and new political ideas in Western Europe. For Bulgarian society, despite the Greek and Serbian revivals, it was still a time of stagnation and isolation from the rest of the world. The Bulgarian urban classes forming in the towns began to use Greek, which was the language of trade and commerce. Trade benefits and achieving a high status in the merchant community required acquaintance with the ancient classical culture [Greek] and the ability to speak Greek. This is how the terms Hellenization and Greekomania were coined. As I mentioned in Chapter One in the first secular schools called the Helleno-Bulgarian, the subjects were studied in Greek. It was not until later, when the Bulgarians established their own schools, that subjects were taught in vernacular Bulgarian.

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* p. 79.

As Martin Pundeff claims, the initial source of Bulgarian nationalism turned out to be not the prosperous cities but the “church intelligentsia and the monastic community.”<sup>47</sup> In 1762 the Bulgarian monk Father Paisii living in the Khilendar Monastery on Mt. Athos completed the *Slavic-Bulgarian History*. The manuscript was written as a mixture of Church Slavonic and spoken Bulgarian. The *History* started with the Biblical story of the Flood and ended with the fall of Bulgaria under Ottoman rule. From an historical point of view the *History* was neither complete nor very accurate. But comparing the history of the Jews in Exodus to the current “plight” of the Bulgarians, Paisii “reassured his readers... that God had committed them [the Jews] to captivity and desolation only to reassemble them again and to restore their kingdom”<sup>48</sup> thus making a comparison with the slavery of the Bulgarians and the hope that they must have for the future. Although, as I pointed out above, the *History* was not historically accurate and could not boast to be an exquisite piece of literature it became the stepping stone for the Bulgarian nationalism. Paisii’s book addressed the reader directly and taught that Bulgarians should learn their history first, in order to understand and be proud of who they were. In this highly patriotic manuscript the author wrote:

Read and know so that you will not be ridiculed and abused by other peoples and nationalities. I grew very fond of the Bulgarian nation and fatherland and applied much effort to collect from various books and histories until I assembled and put together the history of the Bulgarian nation. I have written it for your benefit and pride, for you who like to know about your nation and language...

There are those who do not care to know about their own Bulgarian nation and turn to foreign ways and foreign tongue; they do not care for their own Bulgarian language but try to read and speak Greek and are ashamed to call themselves Bulgarians. O, you senseless and stupid people! Why are you ashamed to call yourselves Bulgarians and do not read and speak your own language? Or had the Bulgarians no kingdom and state? They have ruled for many years and their glory and renown have been known in the whole world... In the entire Slavic

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<sup>47</sup> Marin Pundeff, “Bulgarian Nationalism”, in Peter Sugar and Ivo Lederer, *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1969), p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> Pundeff, “Bulgarian Nationalism”, p. 101.

race the Bulgarians have had the greatest glory, they first called their rulers tsars, they first had a patriarch, they first were converted, and they conquered the largest territory<sup>49</sup>.

The highly emotional tone appealed to the masses, and the manuscript began to spread across Bulgaria. This small book had a tremendous impact and gained a lot of popularity within the Bulgarian community. Regardless of whether the book is classified as counter Greek propaganda or simply a nationalistic narrative, it raised the issue concerning the usage of the Bulgarian language. Which language should be used during worship services became a particularly sensitive issue in the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Rarely was the language question in other parts of the world as acute and poignant as it was in the Balkans. Greeks and Bulgarians had their own written and spoken languages long before the Ottoman invasion. To try to impose one language over another became a source of bitter arguments and decades of fighting between the Greek and the Bulgarian clergymen and intelligentsia. The Bulgarian-Greek conflict was very intense because the violation of the right to worship in your own language did not come from the Ottoman “foreign usurper” but from an ethnic group religiously very similar to the Bulgarian. However, the Greek language was substantially different from Bulgarian in its phonetics and written characters.

### Reforms in Education

As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, some rudimentary form of education was preserved in Bulgarian churches and monastic communities. In the cell schools, boys preparing to become clergymen were taught how to read the Bible and

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<sup>49</sup> Pundeff, “Bulgarian Nationalism”, p. 101-2.

write in Church Slavonic. With the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the growth of the bourgeoisie, the need for proper up to date education became a priority. As Anderson writes “an illiterate bourgeoisie is scarcely imaginable.”<sup>50</sup> The aspiration of the Bulgarian elite to have a separate secular school system grew largely under the influence of Western political thought. The breakthrough of the Renaissance ideas made possible for various methods of education such as the Bell-Lancaster model to get introduced in Bulgaria.

However, the Greek community had secular schools in some Bulgarian cities as early as 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is almost contradictory to claim but, in fact, the initial contact with Greek culture and education had positive consequences for the Bulgarian educational development. The first cultural and political figures in Bulgarian society studied in Greek schools, which were an excellent source of revolutionary ideology in the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, around the 1840s and 50s with the support of wealthy Bulgarians, newly built secular schools opened their doors only for Bulgarian students. Although Greeks and Bulgarians were influenced by the Western ideas of the period and had similar views about educational reforms and school syllabi, they stopped seeing each other as an Orthodox Christian community and began to see one another as two different non-Muslim societies. The attempt for a separate identity led to the founding of the first high school in Gabrovo, in which all subjects were taught only in Bulgarian, in 1835. The spread of the Bell-Lancaster system, in which the more advanced students became teachers’ assistants, was applied in the majority of the Bulgarian schools to meet the need for more educators. One of the greatest innovations, which proves that Bulgaria was experiencing a fundamental educational reform, was the

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<sup>50</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 77.

formation of secular schools for women as well as Sunday schools, which were designated for older illiterate Bulgarians to learn to read and write.

Since in Bulgaria there were no institutions for higher education, after graduation from school many boys continued their studies abroad. It became a common practice for middle class Bulgarian families to send their sons to study abroad. Just in 1846, due to the efforts of the influential merchants V. Aprilov, N. Palauzov and D. Toshkocich, the Ottoman government sponsored 20 Bulgarians to study in universities in Moscow, Kiev and St. Petersburg.<sup>51</sup> This shows that the forming Bulgarian elites began playing an important role in gaining more rights and benefits for the Bulgarian population. In addition, it is necessary to add that the Bulgarian schools were accessible to all children who wished to study and were free of charge. The highly idealistic view of the Bulgarian intelligentsia in this period brought forth many “teachers of the people” who were ready to work in the Bulgarian schools for modest wages.

In brief, the Bulgarian secular education was the result of the self-organization of the Bulgarian elite (the merchant class) with the joint effort of the intelligentsia. The Bulgarian secular educational system rejected Greek as the language of the learned and prosperous man and focused on the Bulgarian language. Furthermore, a reform within the Bulgarian schools was made, concerning the kind of Bulgarian language to be used. The first school of Bulgarian linguists was dominated by the idea that old Bulgarian with its archaic words must be spoken in school because the finest literary texts up until then were written in old Bulgarian. The second school claimed that old Bulgarian, the “literary language,” should be integrated with vernacular Bulgarian. The third school believed that the vernacular “new” Bulgarian should be the only language used in the

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<sup>51</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 298-299.

schools. Because of the practical applications and the richness of the vernacular Bulgarian, the last view prevailed and from spoken language the vernacular soon became the new literary language, which writers, press and schools used.

### The Bulgarian Press

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson claims that when printed, new languages stabilized and unified societies that shared a common language. According to him without the printing press modern languages would not have been able to develop. It is a fact, however, that the Bulgarian language developed without being able to benefit immensely from Gutenberg's invention. By law non-Muslims did not have the right to have their own publishing houses. In 1835 the first Bulgarian printing press was imported from Serbia. This was done in secret and only after 13 years was its owner granted a permit to print books (but only with religious texts). Because of such legal obstacles it became common for the beginning Bulgarian press to be printed abroad, mainly in Bucharest, Belgrade, Odessa, Budapest, Moscow and Vienna. The printing of Bulgarian books was successful. Before 1840, 55 books were printed in Bulgarian altogether while from 1840-1950 their number increased to 2, 000.<sup>52</sup> The success of the periodical press, however, was limited because of the distance between the publishing press and the consumers. By the time the journal or the newspaper was printed and brought to Bulgaria, the news had already gone old. This is why the center of the periodical press became Istanbul because it was the closest big center to the Bulgarian lands.

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<sup>52</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 409.

## Political Aspirations

### That Gave Rise to the Movement for Ecclesiastical Independence

In this section I explain how the economic and cultural factors discussed above influenced the movement for ecclesiastical independence. I also discuss the chronology of the events that led to the establishment of an autonomous Bulgarian church. I do so by grouping these events in two major periods: phase one, which lasted a decade before the Crimean War and phase two, which lasted from 1853-1856.

It is not easy to analyze to what extent the struggle for church independence was ecclesiastical and to what extent it was a political phenomenon. However, one fact is indisputable: it was led by elites who claimed to be both spiritual and political leaders. The money was raised in the same fashion as it was raised for education: from the wealthy bourgeoisie and the influential Bulgarian clergymen. The right to have an autonomous Bulgarian church was a political issue oriented toward the building of a separate religious community. By breaking the existing religious community of “all subjected Christians” in the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarians began laying the foundations of an independent state. As Anderson explains, the replacement of the bigger religious community with the smaller communities of individual nations was a process that required sufficient time and efforts.<sup>53</sup>

It is unusual to think of the genesis of nationalism as having ecclesiastical roots but it is even more difficult to comprehend why two Christian nations would fight for decades against each other rather than unite their efforts against the “foreign usurper”, the Ottoman Empire. It is known, however, that the Balkans in its long history have seen very little cooperation among the individual nations settled in the region. Because of the

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 22.



mixture of so many different interests in such a small place, the Balkans remain until now one of the most conflictive points in the world. In the period from 1830-70, Bulgarian nationalism received its greatest impetus from the “extreme movement” that emphasize a rapid separation from the Greek church. That increased the importance of the Bulgarian role in the Eastern Question and made the great powers like Russia, England, France and Austria-Hungary re-evaluate their policies concerning the situation in European Turkey.

Soon after the conquest of the Balkans in 1396, the highest representatives of the Greek clergy settled in Istanbul, a strategic location, which gave them proximity to and quick information about the politics of the Porte. Gradually, with a multitude of decrees, the Greek clergy became the representative of the Christian population before the sultan, although the autonomy of the various patriarchates across the European provinces was preserved.

However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the main Patriarchate in Istanbul decided to “unite” the autonomous churches and instead of using local clergy send priests and bishops from Constantinople. In 1766 and 1767, the last autonomous churches in Serbia and Macedonia ceased to exist.<sup>54</sup> Having become the only official representative of the Christians on the Balkans before the Porte, the Greek Patriarchate controlled all the spheres of life of the non-Muslim community: spiritual, cultural and nuptial relationships and even disputes over property rights. Since the Greeks were a separate ethnic group with their own language and tradition, it was difficult to assimilate the Bulgarians into their community. The majority of the Bulgarians, like the peasantry, was indifferent to Greek services while the bourgeoisie was split in their opinions about what good worship meant. The wealthy class suffered from arguments and disagreements because some

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<sup>54</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 304.

leaders were inclined to become a part of the Greek community and to benefit from it. Others believed that the Bulgarian community would benefit more if it has its own independent church. The main object of the dispute was the language in which the church service must be conducted. Since the majority of the Bulgarians were uneducated, they did not understand Greek and called for Bulgarian priests.

The Greek priests were also hated because they served as tax collectors. In the report of the British consul in Solun from 1839 he writes: "The bishops annually make a tour around the villages in their dioceses and literally take from the homes everything they can."<sup>55</sup> If the population refused to pay or rebelled, church officials closed the churches and accused the Christian congregation before the Turkish governor, who often punished the instigators by sending them to prison in Istanbul.

#### Phase I: to 1853

For most of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, the rejection of Greek authority meant that the Bulgarian population would be acknowledged as a separate entity within the Christian community and the bourgeoisie itself would choose the clergy and ultimately represent the Bulgarians before the Ottoman government. In the 1840s, the Bulgarian clergyman Ilarion Makariopolski, funded by rich Bulgarian merchants from Istanbul, laid the foundation of the organized movement for ecclesiastical independence. The first significant demand put before the Porte in 1845 was the permission to build a Bulgarian church in Istanbul, in which the services would be held in Bulgarian. With excellent lobbying of the merchant class, the decree allowing the construction of the church was

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<sup>55</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 307.

issued in the summer of 1849. On October 9, 1849 the chapel St. Stephan opened its doors for the Bulgarian congregation.

With the building of St. Stephan the first phase of the struggle for church autonomy had begun and would end in 1853 with the outbreak of the Crimean War between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The first victory of the Bulgarian elites seemed to spur enthusiasm in many Bulgarian towns further from Istanbul. As the masses began supporting the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, the anti-Greek feeling began to be displayed more openly. The writings of Father Jovko show that in a short time the Bulgarians became bolder in their demands. For example, during a visit of sultan Abdul Medgid in the city of Veliko Tarnovo a huge protest was organized. "The people cried and shouted wanting to be given a Bulgarian bishop who would speak their language and insisted that the Greek priest Neofit Bizantios be sent away."<sup>56</sup> The sultan granted the request and this was considered the second victory of the Bulgarian people. This strengthened the ecclesiastical movement and increased the possibility of a schism between the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarians.

#### Phase II: 1853-1856

In the war years (1853-1856), the animosity between the Patriarchate and the secessionist Bulgarians subsided. However, after the Treaty of Paris, the Bulgarian leaders resumed the ecclesiastical question with renewed powers. The new decree, issued by the Porte and known as the *Hat-I-Humayun*, talked about the reforms within the Christian subjects of the empire. In paragraph 2 of the *Hat-I-Humayun* is written, 'Every Christian or other non-Muslim religious community will be able for a certain period of

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<sup>56</sup>Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 5, p. 324.

time and using the help of a committee of its own interpretations...to offer my Porte and me reform projects that this time of progress and enlightenment requires.”<sup>57</sup>

Soon after, the Bulgarian merchants in Istanbul sent a request to the Porte in the name of the Bulgarian people. In the request the merchants demanded both a Bulgarian patriarch and a “high political official to represent the Bulgarians spiritually and politically.” They requested a Bulgarian judge and in places with Bulgarian majority they demanded the right to choose a Bulgarian advisor instead a Turkish governor. All demands were denied.

The above information proves that the Bulgarian elites at the time had not only ecclesiastical but also political demands. They were ready to lobby, protest and to an extent manipulate Turkish officials to pay attention and satisfy the Bulgarian requests. Around 1860, however, the movement for church independence did not have the support of any of the Great Powers. Russia, France and England decided to stay aside from this delicate problem, which would soon take international dimensions. Deprived of any international support, the Bulgarians in Istanbul made an aggressive step toward the official break up with the Greek Patriarchate. On April 3, 1860 in the Bulgarian church St. Stephan the priest did not mention the name of the Greek patriarch (the required way church service always started) during the Easter worship. Instead, he mentioned the name of the political leader of the empire, the sultan, as the only one who has authority over the faith of the Orthodox Christians.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kosev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 124.

<sup>58</sup> This was the manner in which the independent churches of Moldova and Wallachia conducted their sermons.

Although the Bulgarian elites had made the masses believe that after April 3 the rejection of any Greek authority in Bulgarian churches was a fact, this was not true. Ten more years had to pass until the decree announcing the creation of an independent Bulgarian church was issued. After April 3 the independence movement split into two parts. The first group was moderate and its members believed that by using negotiation and compromise they would persuade the Greek Patriarchate to grant the Bulgarian church some degree of autonomy. The moderates at that point were mainly wealthy merchants in Istanbul who were afraid for their businesses, which often required partnership with Greeks.

The extremes were the intellectuals and the middle class merchants across Bulgaria who insisted on ultimate break up with the Greek church and on legalizing the existence of a Bulgarian autonomous Exarchate. The extremes soon gained popularity and little by little Bulgarians from different *sandjaks*<sup>59</sup> in the provinces of European Turkey began small local wars against Greek bishops and Turkish administrators. An example that illustrates the proportions of the conflict occurred in 1864 in Rousse, an important port on the Danube river. During that year the Bulgarian congregation of the city threw the Greek bishop Sinesios out of the church and demanded that he leave town. The bishop refused and sought the protection of the Turkish governor. The latter suspended all privileges that the Bulgarian merchants in town used to have. The Bulgarians immediately wrote a petition to the governor, but he refused to look at it and arrested the messengers. This led to the operation “dead city”, in which all Bulgarians closed their shops and stopped all activities. A crowd of people began protesting on the streets and made its way to the administrative building of the governor. The head of the

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<sup>59</sup> A *sandjak* is the Turkish word for parish or county.

artillery refused to obey the order to shoot at the masses, and the governor could only look at how the fence was being destroyed and the building taken over. At the same time another crowd attacked the Synod<sup>60</sup> and destroyed not only furniture like tables and chairs but also religious objects like the bishop's garment for liturgy, the tiara, etc. Even the bricks of the roof of the building were thrown on the streets. Men as well as women and high school students took part in this "organized effort". Sinesios ran away and a Bulgarian bishop was elected.

In a similar way the dioceses in Sofia, Plovdiv, Tarnovo and other cities were "freed from the Greek plight".<sup>61</sup> Finally, on February 28, 1870 the Ottoman government issued a new *firman*. The eleven paragraphs defined the separation of the Bulgarian church from the Greek Patriarchate and talked about the appointment of a Bulgarian sovereign patriarch who would report directly to the High Porte.

### The International Political Situation

After the Crimean War and the signing of the Treaty of Paris on March 30, 1856 Russia, which was defeated in the war, lost much of its influence in the Balkans. Russia was not allowed to keep its fleet on the Black Sea coast and had to give priority to Austria, Britain and France while using the Danube river for sailing. The *Hat-I-Humayun* was part of the Treaty of Paris and was written so that peace and stability in the Ottoman Empire would be maintained by giving more rights to the subject population. However, this idea turned out to be unsuccessful because the more rights non-Muslims,

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<sup>60</sup> A Synod is the administrative building, in which the Greek bishop and priests gathered for weekly meetings.

<sup>61</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 147.

received the more demands they had and the more they became thrilled with the idea of complete independence.

In the meantime it seemed that the interest of the Great Powers toward the Balkans increased considerably. After Prussia defeated Austria in 1866 and Denmark in 1864, it deprived the Habsburg Empire of a leading role in the Germanic world. The movement for unification of the Italian nation deprived Austria of its territory in Northern Italy. Therefore, Vienna decided that the Balkans would become the area of interest for more Austrian influence.

Defeated Russia had different intentions. The tsar's advisors decided that it was the Russian priority to solve the problems with economic backwardness and to protect the Asian territories. The Russian policy on the Balkans was to act more cautiously in order to avoid further conflicts with the West. The preservation of a single "universal Orthodox faith" among the Christians in the Ottoman Empire made Russia support the Greek Patriarchate and refuse to acknowledge the Bulgarian demands for autonomy.

### The Porte's Position

Many scholars believe that the policy of the Ottoman government played the most important role during the Greek-Bulgarian conflict. Since the struggle was taking place in the most important province of the empire, the Porte took the role of an arbitrator between the two sides because of its own self-interest. Usually scholars accept that the Ottoman Empire was led in its actions by the rule "divide and conquer" and this is why she kept favoring either one or the other side of the conflict.

This opinion may be partly true but the fact remains that the Greek-Bulgarian debate was initiated by the two Orthodox sides and in this aspect the Porte could do very little to stop the escalation of the tension. The Porte reasoned out that the Russian policy would eventually decrease the Russian popularity among the Bulgarians. Therefore, there was always the possibility that the Bulgarians would turn to western practices such as Catholicism or Protestantism. The Porte avoided for a long time interfering in the conflict perhaps because the government realized that once the problem was solved any of the sides would concentrate their efforts on achieving more political autonomy. The Porte was attentive enough to figure out that Bulgarians were getting more organized. After the petition for an independent church to the Porte from 1856 signed by 6,400,000 Bulgarians the Porte began cautiously delaying its decision about whether to satisfy the demands.<sup>62</sup> Finally, under pressure from Russian side (which in the last moment decided to shift from favoring the Greeks to working for the Bulgarian cause) and the more violent activities in some provinces, the Porte took the initiative and solved the 40-year old problem.

### The French Position

The East European policy of France was characterized by rivalry with Russia for influence on the Balkans. France favored the Ottoman Empire and wanted to keep it intact and whole because of its strategic location and the economic relations between the two countries. After the Russian defeat in the Crimean War, Napoleon tried to destroy completely Russia's influence in the empire and the best possible way to do that was to help the schism in the Orthodox church. The best way to succeed was to use Catholic

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<sup>62</sup> *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 133-134



propaganda and promise the Bulgarians that as long as they entered in holy union with the Catholic church they would be separated from the Greeks and would be given autonomy to worship in their own language. Catholic missionaries began settling in the southern part of Bulgaria. Rejected by the Russian diplomats in the empire and eagerly seeking support for their ecclesiastical efforts, some prominent Bulgarian leaders turned to Catholicism believing that this was the only way to achieve independence. A new church called the Union church was created a little after 1860.

However, the so-called Union movement was short-lived and its members were only about 14,000 people. Seeing a potential threat in the spread of Catholicism some extreme leaders of the movement for an independent Bulgarian church started a campaign using the small Bulgarian press and discussed the dangers that a possible union with the Catholic church could hide. The union movement lasted for several years. After its failure, Napoleon III turned to support the Greek Patriarchate against the Bulgarian demands.

### The British Position

In the early years of the church struggle, Britain usually took a neutral position on the Bulgarian demands. Of course, Russia was against creating two separate churches and it seemed that Britain would take the opposite stand to undermine the Russian influence and would support the Bulgarians. However, Britain was cautious and afraid of the French propaganda and did not want to support a cause France favored, either. But in the mid-1860s, British policy changed in favor of the Bulgarians. One of the reasons was the firm Russian position to keep the unity of the Orthodox church in the Ottoman world

and the other one was the failure of the French to join the Bulgarians to the Catholic church. The growing national movement and the worsening of the international situation for the Ottoman Empire between 1866-69 made British diplomats insist on an active Turkish stand on the issue.

### The Russian Position

In the beginning of the ecclesiastical independence movement Russia was against any form of autonomy of a possible Bulgarian church. The Russian government saw the creation of a separate Bulgarian church as a threat because it would weaken Orthodox unity in the Ottoman Empire. The Synod of the Russian church and the difficult international position of Russia in the years after the Crimean War made tsar Alexander II take the stand: "I need unity of the [Orthodox] church."<sup>63</sup> The conservative policy of the Russian diplomacy continued for years mainly because of the good relationship with the Greek Patriarchate in the empire and the Russian support in building the international image of independent Greece. The outbreak of the Greek uprising on Crete in 1866 made Russia again take the pro-Greek stand and use its diplomacy in favor of Greek annexation of the island. However, the international community did not agree and it was decided that Crete would remain a part of the Ottoman Empire. During that time the relationship between Greece and Russia underwent a rapid change. The breakdown between St. Petersburg and Athens occurred after the Russian subsequent withdrawal from the Greek cause to make Cyprus a part of Greece. In 1869, under international pressure, Russia "joined the Western capitals in forcing the Greek government to submit to an

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<sup>63</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 142.

international conference which subsequently humiliated it.”<sup>64</sup> The outcome of the Cretan crisis made Greece reorganize its foreign policy. Athens quickly re-allied with the West turning its attention exclusively to Great Britain and deliberately disregarding Russia for the most of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore, Russia, too, reversed its attitude toward Greece now an independent state. Through its tactful and diplomatic ambassador in Istanbul, Count Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatiev, Russia tried to revise its previous stand on the Greek-Bulgarian problem within the Ottoman Empire and gain the trust of the Bulgarian leaders for ecclesiastical independence. Although it was true that Russia supported the Bulgarian movement “in search of its own political ends,”<sup>65</sup> which aimed at shaking Greek dominance in the Church (since now the government of independent Greece had turned its back on its former supporter, Russia), it is equally true that the Bulgarian elites took full advantage the offered assistance and the political shift in the Greek-Russian relations.

Count Ignatiev took into account several factors that in the course of his personal diplomacy made him take a firmer stand on the Greek-Bulgarian conflict. The “Greek resentment over Russian...inaction in the Cretan affair” which led to the no longer necessary policy of unity in the Orthodox church, the Bulgarian nationalistic movement that became more massive with each day, and finally the menace of the Uniate movement promoted by French Catholic missionaries and diplomats made the count press the Grand Vezir Ali Pasha to settle the ecclesiastical independence issue in favor of the Bulgarians. Although in 1871-1872 the count made several more attempts to prevent the complete

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate 1864-1872* (Madison: The Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1970), p.118.

<sup>65</sup> Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate*, p. 21.

schism between the new Bulgarian Exarchate and the Greek Patriarchate, Ignatiev was a realist. As a *realpolitiker* he knew that the Balkan Slavs and the Greeks had particular historical, linguistic and even social differences that could not be resolved. In one of his dispatches Ignatiev wrote: "It is undeniable that once the fight with the Turks ends, the race rivalries will reappear, and that before many years pass nothing stable will be able to be established on the Balkan peninsula. But sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, as Meininger argues, Ignatiev not only referred to the ecclesiastical conflict but he also foresaw the Balkan Wars that came fifty years later.

### My Evaluation

In this chapter I discussed the importance of the internal and external causes that led to the rise and the ultimate victory in the Bulgarian movement for ecclesiastical independence. Both groups of factors played a significant part in the struggle for church autonomy. However, it is fair to argue that the internal factors economic changes, social and cultural reforms, the emergence of secular schools and a small press and the movement for church independence, which had nationalistic grassroots were considerably more important in establishing the foundations of the Bulgarian Exarchate than were the external factors. The constant petitions, the Bulgarian lobby in Istanbul and the violent confrontations with Greek officials prove the key role of the Bulgarian attempt to put pressure on the Porte to resolve the dispute in Bulgarian favor.

The international factors also had indirect influence on the conflict resolution. However, the Great Powers of Britain, France and Russia, in particular, showed interest in the Greek-Bulgarian dispute only when it entered its final phase.

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<sup>66</sup> Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate*, p. 67-8.

The Bulgarian ecclesiastical independence had larger implications than the Ottoman government initially thought it would have. Thomas Meininger writes:

From its insipient stages the Bulgarian crusade for a national church bore important political issues; the whole Ottoman concept of administration identified nationality with religious profession and a separate Bulgarian church would stand as the point of departure for considering the Bulgars as a distinct unit...For the first time since their conquest by the Turks, the Bulgarians had a sense of being one people, a sense of national direction and destiny. Ultimately, the movement for a free church furnished the core about which the new Bulgarian state arose in 1878.<sup>67</sup>

With the creation of a national nucleus the Bulgarians were ready to other more difficult and risky goals. The internal forces within the Bulgarian community were more helpful for the realization of the Bulgarian goal compared to any of the international efforts to support the ecclesiastical cause. However, there was one exception. The personal efforts of Count Ignatiev came at the right time and had a positive impact on the Porte's decision. Ignatiev did not spark the movement for Bulgarian autonomous church. He neither created it nor controlled it. Yet he manipulated the Ottoman authorities and contributed positively to the Bulgarian success.<sup>68</sup>

The granting of church autonomy had a tremendous psychological impact in the minds of Bulgarian leaders. For many of them the ecclesiastical victory became a stepping stone for political independence. In Luther's words "religious reforms could not be taken in utter disregard of political considerations."<sup>69</sup> According to Luther's doctrine of Christian liberty, men did not need to obey a ruler that commanded contrary to the teachings of the Bible.<sup>70</sup> Although most Bulgarians were unaware of Luther's

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<sup>67</sup> Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate*, p. 18-9.

<sup>68</sup> Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate*, p. 133.

<sup>69</sup> Sheldon V. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), p. 145.

<sup>70</sup> Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 160-1.

doctrine, they largely used it to claim civil disobedience on religious grounds. In the Bulgarian mind ecclesiastical independence was not achieved merely for its own sake. Instead, it had become the gateway to political independence.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Nova Bulgaria: Ideology and Action Toward Political Independence**

Struggle for ecclesiastical independence was an intense process that developed over a short period of time. It had a profound impact in Bulgarian intellectual circles within the Ottoman Empire and in emigrant communities. It also meant that the Bulgarian people were officially recognized as a separate minority group within the empire and even had a small lobby in Istanbul.

The success of the ecclesiastical independence movement renewed the political aspirations of the Bulgarian intellectuals abroad who became the founders of the anti-Ottoman movement for political independence. In this chapter, I examine the origins and development of the Bulgarian movement for political independence, the political ideologies of its leaders its culminating phase (the April Uprising), and its significance abroad. I also discuss two external causes of political independence: the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Russian-Turkish War of 1878.

#### The Origins and Development of the Anti-Ottoman Liberation Movement

In his book *Nationalism*, Anthony Smith defines what the national ideal is and how it is obtained. According to Smith the national ideal is best explained as “a belief that all those who shared a common history and culture should be autonomous, united and distinct in their recognized homelands.”<sup>71</sup> However, Smith believes that the national ideal includes two additional characteristics: a certain degree of solidarity among the leaders and a political programme. Therefore, Smith concludes that the national ideal

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<sup>71</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York University Press, 1979) p.2.

leads to nationalism, which is “a programme of action to achieve and sustain the national ideal.”<sup>72</sup>

Nationalism evolves around the idea of freedom of the homeland. Moderate nationalists do not demand complete sovereignty. For them autonomy within another state is seen as a well-balanced solution. Radical nationalists prefer a quick and complete cession from the colonizer so that they can build a state that is internationally recognized and would have its own military and political institutions.

In Bulgaria in the 1850s and 60s as the Bulgarian church crisis was coming to an end, most intellectuals and wealthy merchants who fought vigorously for ecclesiastical independence turned out to be moderate in their views when it came to political independence. For example, the intelligentsia in Istanbul and the upper *bourgeoisie* believed in the “evolutionary” rather than the revolutionary approach to Bulgarian sovereignty. It seemed possible that through negotiations with the Porte greater Bulgarian autonomy would be achieved. Political independence was not given priority because the efforts of the Bulgarians in Istanbul were focused on expanding educational reforms and finishing up the establishment of churches free from Greek clergy within Bulgaria.

Thus, although the center for ecclesiastical independence was in Istanbul, the birthplace of the political independence struggle was in the emigrant centers in Odessa, Belgrade, and Bucharest. In the 1860s, due to the educational reforms in Bulgaria, a significant number of Bulgarian students were sponsored and sent to study abroad. Most of them entered in contact with various revolutionary groups (ex. the anti-tsarists in

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<sup>72</sup> Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, p.3.



Russia and the Serbian and Greek revolutionaries who sought to liberate the lands populated with Serbians and Greeks still within the Ottoman Empire).

Smith places the radical nationalists into a sub-category of secessionist nationalists. For him “Serbs and Croats, Poles and Czechs, Hungarians, Rumanians, Bulgars...” tried to “define the content of the national ideal for ethnic minorities locked into vast empires.”<sup>73</sup>

The first Bulgarian ideologist who made a provisional plan for the liberation of Bulgaria was Georgi Rakovski. His plan was completed in 1858 and was influenced by the uprising in Montenegro that same year, in which the united forces of Montenegro and Herzegovina defeated the Ottoman army. The Great Powers, mainly Russia and France, supported the rebels’ actions and raised the hopes of many people on the peninsula for help and future liberation. Rakovski’s plan began with a manifesto for a rebellion. He wrote: “The Bulgarians lost their freedom with swords and with swords they will win it!”<sup>74</sup> This plan talked about a national uprising and letters asking for support from France and Russia.

The plan, although well known to most emigrants in Odessa where Rakovski wrote it and in other Bulgarian communities outside the Ottoman Empire, never reached the masses in the Bulgarian lands.

For most of its existence, the movement for Bulgarian independence remained isolated from the population that it was trying to liberate. Most of the young Bulgarian nationalists who had received some education abroad were fascinated by the French

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<sup>73</sup> Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 202.

revolution. They kept in touch with the Serbian government and the rebels in Bosnia, Montenegro and Herzegovina.

The attempts that the Bulgarian emigrants made toward a revolution within the Bulgarian territory were uncoordinated and sporadic. None of the emigrants seemed to realize that a successful rebellion occurs only with support from within. The idea to “import a revolution” from outside failed several times due to lack of proper communication among the leaders and no information and no preparation by the local people in the Ottoman provinces.

Barbara Jelavich describes the first Bulgarian revolutionaries as “educated youth, usually from prosperous families, who had traveled and who were influenced by the radical ideologies of the day.” Although these young men preferred direct and violent means to fight against the “forces of tyranny and oppression,” the idea of a great national uprising, in the 1860s was impractical and unrealistic.<sup>75</sup> As Jelavich writes “the relatively long period of tranquility in the Bulgarian lands, the generally good economic conditions, and the Ottoman reform attempts<sup>76</sup> had affected the population. Many were indeed extremely discontented, but there was... no large body of desperate men willing to risk their lives for national liberation.”<sup>77</sup>

From this description it can be concluded that the Bulgarian movement for political independence did not come from within the Bulgarian society in the Ottoman Empire. It initially lacked popularity, was decentralized, and consisted of people who

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<sup>75</sup> Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 342.

<sup>76</sup> The period between 1839-1876 is known in Turkish history as the *Tanzimat-i Hayriye*, which means “Auspicious Reorderings”. The period was characterized by several reforms to modernize the Ottoman state and society and attempts to centralize the Ottoman administration.

<sup>77</sup> Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 342-3.

were not familiar with the nationalistic tendencies in the Bulgarian territories, which were focused more on education and autonomy from the Greek church than on political independence. Moreover, even in the 1870s when the movement began to expand, it was full of internal conflicts, disagreements and betrayals.

### The Bulgarian Liberation Movement (1850-1868)

After the plan for the liberation of Bulgaria was written, Rakovski's goal changed. He abandoned the idea of a large national uprising and turned his attention to the international situation. In 1862, the tension between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire increased. The Serbian leader Mikhail Obrenovich estimated that uprisings in Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Herzegovina would facilitate Serbian military actions against the empire. This is why Obrenovich sought the help of the Bulgarian emigrants and promised them military equipment and patronage. In the same year the First Bulgarian Legion in Belgrade was formed. It consisted of nearly one thousand Bulgarian volunteers who fought on the Serbian side hoping that the conflict would expand and spread over the Bulgarian lands. However, at the conference in Kanlidji in the summer of 1862, which called for a peaceful resolution of the Serbo-Ottoman conflict over the Western territories of the Ottoman Empire, Austria and Great Britain pressed Obrenovich to dissolve the Serbian army and the volunteer legions. The Bulgarian legion ceased to exist in September and Rakovski's plan for liberation failed.

Another part of the liberation movement was the *chetas*, which in Bulgarian means a group of freedom fighters. The Bulgarian *chetas* consisted mainly of Bulgarian emigrants who gathered together, crossed the borders of the Ottoman Empire and tried to

organize rebellions among the Bulgarian population in various regions. Many of these rebel groups that entered the Ottoman Empire were chased, besieged and killed by the regular Ottoman army. The attempts of the *cheats* were largely unsuccessful and did not meet the support of the local Bulgarians.

In his book, *The Balkans*, Dennis Hupchick classifies these initial steps toward political independence among the Balkan nations as romantic nationalist attempts.<sup>78</sup> According to Hupchick, the origins of romantic nationalism sprang from the late eighteenth- and nineteenth Romantic Movement, which “emphasized identities based on irrational and emotional ethnic and religious factors.”<sup>79</sup>

The first Bulgarian revolutionaries correctly can be described as romantic nationalists. They were easily inspired by Western ideologies, saw the French revolution as a just revolt of the poor oppressed masses, and miscalculated the chance for success of a national Bulgarian uprising. They were not pragmatic, did not understand the need for a preparation within the Bulgarian lands and many of them died in vain while trying to fulfill the *chetas*’ plans, which were doomed to failure.

#### The Bulgarian Liberation Movement (1868-1876)

In “Nation-Building and Revolutionary War,” David Wilson claims that nationalism is the main cohesive force of nation building.<sup>80</sup> It implies a degree of national consciousness of being politically autonomous. Nationalism constitutes an

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<sup>78</sup> Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism* (Palgrave, 2002), p.189.

<sup>79</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*, p.189.

<sup>80</sup> David A. Wilson, “Nation-Building and Revolutionary War”, p. 84

assertion of a people's right to determine its political destiny independent of outside influence. Therefore, nationalism implies democratic principles because in the core of the nationalistic ideology lies the Kantian principle of self-determination.

Karl Deutsch pays special attention to the process of social mobilization. Social mobilization requires active participation of the masses in the building of a nation. As Wilson points out, it "demands resources of leadership with administrative ability."<sup>81</sup> The concept of charisma is also important because a charismatic leader persuades the masses more easily. Revolutionary war, if used as a method of political struggle, mobilizes "energies latent in a certain kind of society".<sup>82</sup> In order to be successful it must be carried out by educated people.

The new stage of the development of the Bulgarian liberation movement began with the policy that the young revolutionary Vassil Levski established. Levski's background allowed him to understand better the situation of the Bulgarians within the Ottoman Empire. Having been a deacon in a monastery, a participant in the First Bulgarian Legion in Belgrade, a schoolteacher in the Bulgarian territory, and a *chetnik*<sup>83</sup>, Levski had seen the many Bulgarian attempts at revolution. He understood that a successful revolution could come only after a well-organized social mobilization of the Bulgarians within the Ottoman Empire.

With that plan in mind, Levski set out for his first tour around the Bulgarian lands, which lasted from December 1868 to February 1869. During his second tour in the spring of 1869, Levski met with many local middle class merchants and intellectuals who

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<sup>81</sup> Wilson, "Nation-Building and Revolutionary War", p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, "Nation-Building and Revolutionary War", p. 86.

<sup>83</sup> A *chetnik* is someone who is a part of a *cheta*.

made him conclude that the success of a future revolution depended primarily on the solid foundation within the Ottoman Empire. Levki was the first nationalist to understand that the lonely efforts of the Bulgarian emigrant community would not lead to political independence. The weight of the preparation for an uprising had to be shifted to the Bulgarian lands. The only way to achieve that, Levski saw, was to create a new underground structure—"a network of secret committees whose task was to prepare the individual towns and villages for a rebellion."<sup>84</sup>

Levski was a realist who did not lack idealism. He knew that the masses had to be won to work for political independence. According to him, a revolution had to carry with itself a radical transformation and "not only shatter the Ottoman feudal order but also eradicate any new attempt for slavery or any form of social injustice."<sup>85</sup> During many of his speeches in front of the organized committees, Levski talked about political independence that would found the "pure and holy democratic republic of Bulgaria." This was a new concept because never before in its history was Bulgaria a republic in any form.

In a letter to another revolutionary, Levski wrote: "Time is in us and we are in time. It changes us and we change it."<sup>86</sup> Perhaps Levski did not change the time in which he lived but he definitely changed the attitude of influential Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire toward a possible revolution. A charismatic leader, a talented orator and a simple man with an amazing sense of humor, Levski skillfully expanded the

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<sup>84</sup> Kosev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 269.

<sup>85</sup> Kosev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 283.

<sup>86</sup> Kosev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 283.

network of committees forming the Internal Revolutionary Organization (IRO), which several years later conducted its major operation-the April Uprising.

Levski linked the IRO with the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC), which was the leading organ of the emigrant revolutionaries. The headquarters of the BRCC was in Bucharest. Levski was the main link between the activities to the north and south of the Danube river.

The social fabric of the IRO was made up of middle class artisans and merchants (1/3 of all members of the town committees), intellectuals (1/4 of the members of all committees) and peasants.<sup>87</sup> The intellectuals and merchant usually became the local leaders, a fact that reinstates Wilson's theory that educated people become the core of a revolutionary movement. This also resonates with Crawford Young and Ronald Sunny's theory about the importance of elites in shaping to an extent the political intentions of a nation.

It is not difficult to recognize why Levski became so popular among the Bulgarians in the empire and abroad. In the programme of the IRO, he wrote:

...with one comprehensive revolution to transform this country's despotic and tyrannical system and replace it with a democratic republic /people's government/ on this same land, which our ancestors defended with its blood...and in which now reigns the right of the stronger [we need] to erect a temple of the true and righteous Freedom and the Turkish despotism to give its place to peace, brotherhood and perfect equality among all nations.<sup>88</sup>

Despite his popularity and painstaking efforts to solidify the IRO and the BRCC Levski's actions were not entirely successful. The organizations lacked solidarity and unity in their decisions, their members were often divided on important issues, and some of the revolutionaries even acted without the approval of the majority despite the serious

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<sup>87</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 285.

<sup>88</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 291.

punishments such as execution that had to be performed by the members of the IRO in cases of disobedience.

In September 1873 one of Levski's assistants decided to attack the Ottoman mail believing that it contained important information for the revolutionaries. His attempt failed and many of the attackers were caught. Some of them revealed information about IRO and massive arrests of committee members began. Levski took a new tour to warn and save the committee members that were still intact but was betrayed by Father Krastjo-a member of a secret committee himself. On February 19, 1873 Levski was hanged in Sofia.

When a revolution is deprived of its leader in its embryonic stage, fear and disorder are the initial reactions of the remaining members. Distrust and anger, indecision and several unsuccessful attempts to find a replacement of Levski took place. In 1875 new leaders were elected in BRCC and the majority of the old members left.

### The April Uprising and Its Significance Abroad

In his book *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World*, Carl Leiden and Karl Schmitt divide the causes of revolution in two main groups: long-term factors that "contribute to discontent with the existing order of things and immediate sources of irritation."<sup>89</sup> Since revolutions are complex phenomena it is difficult to estimate which of these two types of factors plays a more important role in the occurrence of revolution.

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<sup>89</sup> Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World* (Prentice Hall Inc. 1968) p. 37.



In the case of the April Uprising of 1876, the long-term (primary) factors included almost five hundred years of foreign control, Bulgarians' deep desire to have their own religious and political structures, and their longing for a more secure and better protection of their property from the local Ottoman authorities. The immediate (secondary) factors include the dynamics of the nineteenth century (economic prosperity and revolutionary examples from Western Europe and other Balkan nations), the success of the movement for ecclesiastical independence, and the development of the movement for political independence. It is reasonable to argue that the immediate causes of the April Uprising played a more important role in the realization of the mass rebellion. Although the long-term factors had been present for a very long time in the Bulgarian society they alone were unable to stir the national discontent to a degree that would mobilize the population to oppose actively the colonizer. The immediate factors, however, for the relatively short time of 10-15 years were enough to raise the national awareness of the Bulgarians and to push them to demand political autonomy through violent means.

#### The April Uprising: Preparation

The April Uprising is claimed to be the largest and most massive Bulgarian revolutionary enterprise against the Ottoman Empire. However, it suffered from lack of organization and internal disagreements and betrayals. It was based on the revolutionary committees that Levski had created.

BRCC practically ceased to exist after the loss of Levski and the several later attempts for revolution in 1875. A new secret organ was formed by younger and even more radical men in Gurgevo, a small Romanian town on the Danube river. Gurgevo

was preferred rather than Bucharest because of its proximity to the Bulgarian lands. In addition the town had a large Bulgarian community, which consisted of several well-to-do merchants who were willing to finance a future revolution. The town also had a secret channel through which mail, weapons and people were transferred to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>90</sup>

The main goal of the new Committee of Gurgevo was to make up a plan for a uniform and timely uprising. According to the plan, five *okrazi*<sup>91</sup> in the Bulgarian lands had to be formed: Turnovo, Sliven, Vratza, Plovdiv and Sofia. The Sofia *okrag* never prepared for the rebellion because the man sent to organize and activate the local committee was caught by the authorities as soon as he arrived. The main coordinators of the uprising saw the spring of 1876 as the best time for a revolt because of the increasing tension between Serbia and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire and because Russia had become more active in its policies in the Balkans. International conditions seemed to be favorable as the attention of Europe was turning back to the Eastern crisis.

The strategy of the organizers was to have geographically important towns in the Balkan Mountains rise first. After gaining control of the main routes, the rebels would easily cut the flow of Ottoman army to northern Bulgaria and perhaps open the way to future negotiations. After the plan was composed, each leader crossed the Danube river and went to his chosen *okrag* to coordinate the pre-revolutionary activities.

It is fair to claim that although the plan was coined not by the angry masses but by Bulgarian intellectuals abroad, once the masses in the Bulgarian territory became familiar

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<sup>90</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 362.

<sup>91</sup> *Okrag* (pl. *okrazi*) is a Bulgarian word that defines an administrative area, which has its own local government that conducts the affairs in the region.

with it the majority of the people became fully supportive. As Dr. I. Mitev, writes in all four *okrazi* the financial support for the revolt came only from local benefactors. Some peasants “sacrificed the few pieces of their wives’ jewelry to buy guns.”<sup>92</sup> Wealthy conspirators gave as much as 12,000 *grosha*<sup>93</sup>. At intervals men would cross the Danube river, buy gunpowder, weapons and first aid materials from Romania and import them illegally in the Ottoman Empire.

Most of the radically oriented Bulgarian clergy also was on the rebels’ side. Many monasteries like the monasteries of Drianovo and Batoshevo were used as storage places for weapons and food supplies. The clergy help was important moral support for the masses, which believed that after the church independence God was willing to also grant a Bulgarian country.

Despite the efforts, the preparation did not go smoothly. Some of the illegal imports we confiscated by Ottoman authorities, some leaders were unable to tour all committees in their regions and some changes in the plan were made at the last minute. Some rebels decided that instead of burning whole towns and having mass riots they should organize *chetas* that would fight outside the populated areas.

### The April Uprising: Realization

As Leiden and Schmitt point out, not all revolutionary actions achieve the desired political change. Unsuccessful revolutionary attempts are called by some scholars

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<sup>92</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6 p. 369.

<sup>93</sup> *Grosh* is an old Turkish coin.

abortive revolutions<sup>94</sup> because they never are fully fulfilled and many end in the very beginning because of betrayals or government oppression.

The April Uprising was destined to fail. It started prematurely because of a betrayal within when a wealthy Bulgarian informed the Turkish authorities about the rebels' plans. On April 20, 1876 with the local Turkish forces on their way to the town of Panagurishte where the betrayal was committed, the rebels had no choice but to ring the church bells: the signal for the waited revolt. The leaders wrote a letter to the other *okrazi* to join the rebellion. In the end the letter was signed with a cross, drawn with blood instead of ink. The letter entered history as the "Bloody Letter."

Many other towns and villages rebelled. Others were not warned on time. In many places where the population was half Christian Bulgarian, and half Muslim Bulgarian<sup>95</sup> there was tension and disagreements concerning whom the people should obey: the rebels or the local authorities. In still other towns, some of the richer families objected the revolutionaries and called for respect of the Ottoman administration.

Several days after the initial euphoria in the risen towns the Ottoman army reserves along the borders were already besieging the rebellious places. Cities, villages and monasteries were burned and the whole population beheaded. Many women and children were taken captives while the houses of wealthy families were pillaged.

Batak, a small town of several thousand inhabitants, suffered tremendously. Having besieged the church "St. Nedelja," the Turkish army led all people one by one in

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<sup>94</sup> Leiden and Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence*, p. 60.

<sup>95</sup> The Muslim Bulgarians also called *pomaks* exist in Bulgaria until now. They are a minority group that accepted Islam either voluntarily or through coercion in the early stages of the Ottoman occupation on the Balkans.

the church courtyard and decapitated almost all men, women and children.<sup>96</sup> Fanatism and hopelessness caused many Bulgarian men and women to kill their children and themselves in order not to be caught alive by the Ottoman army.

The Ottomans suppressed the rebellion quickly and extremely brutally. Nearly 30,000 people were killed and hundreds of houses, churches, schools and monasteries were erased.<sup>97</sup> The large number of Turkish soldiers, their superior military skills and better equipment facilitated their job. Many of the leaders of the rebellion were either caught or killed. Therefore, the April Uprising did not succeed militarily. However, it achieved something: the crimes committed against civilians and the reports published internationally drew the attention of Western Europe and Russia. The April Uprising called in the newspapers the “Bulgarian Horrors,” evoked a huge public outcry by the outraged intellectuals and ordinary people in Great Britain, France, Italy and Russia. It seemed that the road to future negotiations and compensation for the mass killings was open.

#### The Significance of the April Uprising: the International Reaction

Soon after the suppression of the revolt, foreign reporters of major European newspapers arrived in the sub-mountain region where the uprising took place. After the first published descriptions in the press and the messages that came from foreign diplomatic representatives in the Ottoman Empire, the governments of Great Britain, France and Russia sent commissions to make full reports about the crimes committed against civilians and the seriousness of the Eastern crisis. The reports confirmed that not

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<sup>96</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 388.

<sup>97</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 413.

only did the Ottoman government send a large number of military forces, which outnumbered the rebels, but it also encouraged slaughters of civilians (mainly women and children) and pillages of their property.

### The British Position

The *Daily News* was the first source that stirred anti-Ottoman public sentiments in Britain. J. MacGahan, the *Daily News* correspondent to Bulgaria, wrote in August:

Three thousand people were killed at Otlukki. Children of both sexes were carried about the streets on bayonets. People were burnt alive...A bagful of human heads from Bazardjik was emptied in the streets at Jambuli before the house of the Italian Consul, and eaten by the dogs. Every Bulgarian house at Jambuli was pillaged by the regular troops and Turkish neighbours. Women are outraged every day.<sup>98</sup>

The entry on Batak was graphic and detailed:

We looked again at the heap of skulls and skeletons before us, and we observed that they were all small, and that the articles of clothing intermingled with them and lying about were all parts of women's apparel. These, then, were all women and girls. From my saddle I counted about a hundred skulls, not including those that were hidden beneath the others in the ghastly heap, nor those that were scattered far and wide through the fields. The skulls were nearly all separated from the rest of the bones, the skeletons were nearly all headless. These women were all beheaded.<sup>99</sup>

The reports influenced public opinion. Many British organized protests against their government, whose policy continued to support firmly the Ottoman Empire. More than 500 petitions toward the government were signed, voluntary donations were made, and peaceful protests were organized to show empathy toward the Bulgarians. Many intellectuals like Oscar Wilde, Charles Darwin, and Marx's daughter Eleonora joined the movement for Bulgarian support.

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<sup>98</sup> David Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876* (The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 204.

<sup>99</sup> Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*, p. 205.

The events in the Ottoman Empire were trying for Disraeli's government, which took the official stand that the media exaggerated the reports. The leader of the liberal party in opposition, William Gladstone, launched a campaign of attacks and criticism against Disraeli's policy. Gladstone drew the attention by writing small brochures with sensational titles such as "The Bulgarian Horrors and the Eastern Question" and "Lessons of Slaughter."<sup>100</sup> J. MacGahan became personally involved in the attacks against Disraeli through the daily publications in *Daily News*. An extract from an article says: "And yet Sir Henry Elliot and Mr. Disraeli will keep prating to us about exaggeration, forsooth! The crimes that were committed here are beyond the reach of exaggeration. There were stories related to us that are maddening in their atrocity that cause the heart to swell in a burst of impotent rage that can only find vent in pitying, useless tears..."<sup>101</sup>

Queen Victoria's ministers, however, did not change their position under the public pressure. In a speech in front of the House of Commons, Disraeli announced that the status quo in the Ottoman Empire "is a *status quo* ...not to be looked upon lightly or with disrespect; it is a *status quo* with which, in our opinion, it was not proper to interfere."<sup>102</sup> This was frustrating for all those who felt that the government must take active steps "toward aiding the rebellious Christians of Turkey."<sup>103</sup> Therefore, the position of Britain at the Istanbul conference in November of 1876 remained pro-Ottoman.

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<sup>100</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 414.

<sup>101</sup> Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*, p. 207.

<sup>102</sup> Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*, p. 134.

<sup>103</sup> Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*, p. 135.

## The Russian Position

The Russian intelligentsia became the strongest voice that criticized the Ottoman government. Scholars and scientists like Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevski, Dmitri Mendeleev, Ivan Turgenev and many other intellectuals called on the Russian government for more active involvement in the Bulgarian crisis. The press called for military actions. The popular Russian journal *Delo* wrote: "If we face the dilemma: war or ...another Bulgarian slaughter, we...without hesitation will say: "Yes, war is better."<sup>104</sup> A wave of protest in different parts of Russia like Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia became larger. The more progressive political circles began to lobby for a stronger Bulgarian support in front of the government. Count Ignatiev, still a consul in Istanbul, also pressed the government to develop a plan for solving the political crisis in the Balkans.

The April Uprising made the destiny of the Bulgarian people a priority in the foreign policies of many Great Powers. It achieved its goal of raising anti-Ottoman sentiments in foreign societies. As Benkovski, one of the leaders of the rebellion, later pointed out, the April Uprising "opened a deep wound in the heart of the tyrant, which would never heal."<sup>105</sup> The revolt opened the door for future negotiations and debates among the Great Powers, whose interests in the Balkans conflicted with one-another. Finally, the rebellion turned out to be one of the main pretexts for the Russian military enterprise against the Ottoman Empire, which grew in a new Russian-Turkish war.

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<sup>104</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 417.

<sup>105</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 384.



## The Decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Although empires usually last for a long time they do eventually decline and cease to exist. Some reasons for imperial decline are growth of bureaucracies, economic difficulties, successful rebellions, lost military battles, etc. As Alexander Motyl writes, imperial breakdown happens when “empires become insufficient and over time, cease to ‘work’.”<sup>106</sup>

The Ottoman Empire reached its zenith in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Since the late eighteenth century it steadily began to decline and the attempts for structural reforms within in the nineteenth century further contributed to its demise. One of the main faults in the economy of the empire was the practice of taxing only the native non-Muslim population in the provinces. Local elites contributed very little to the imperial budget and frequently took advantage of their status as tax collectors and local authorities. As state expenditures grew, insufficient tax revenues caused the accumulation of state debt. Moreover, at the conference of Paris in 1856 after the Crimean War, the Ottoman government took several foreign loans “at such steep rates of interest that, despite all the fiscal reforms that followed, it was pushed into insolvable debts and economic difficulties that continued for the rest of the century.”<sup>107</sup> The table below shows the imports and the exports of the Ottoman Empire in 1876.

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<sup>106</sup> Alexander Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (Columbia University Press, 2001), p.39.

<sup>107</sup> Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 141.

**Table 2.1** Imports and Exports of the Ottoman Empire in 1876.<sup>108</sup>

	Ottoman imports from (in kurush)	Ottoman exports to (in kurush)
Great Britain	971,067,060	352,177,010
France	325,292,158	256,560,576
Austria	288,515,715	81,075,996
Italy	53,993,450	14,236,884
Greece	31,901,739	32,163,140
Russia	142,390,942	34,375,036
United States	41,629,335	9,112,633
All counties	1,854,790,399	780,601,275
Total for all countries, including others not specified here	2,000,923,048	839,650,454

Additionally, Ottoman military expenditures amounted up to 40% of the entire empire's budget in the nineteenth century. Although the money spent on the military was considerable, the army still lagged behind the West Europeans' because its size was big but it lacked mobility and weaponry, very little innovation occurred, and the military sphere was metallurgically inferior in producing army equipment.<sup>109</sup>

During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire went through international wars and internal upheavals. The Lebanese crisis of 1840, the Holy

<sup>108</sup> Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, p. 122.

<sup>109</sup> Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires*, p. 59.

places dispute, and the Crimean War placed extra tension on the empire. The Ottoman Empire also lost Hungary and parts of Wallachia and Serbia, which fell under Habsburg rule. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Serbia rebelled, and Greece began a successful eight-year war for independence. The developing autonomy of Egypt in the 1860s and 70s, the revolts in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro and the uprising in Crete contributed to instability in the Ottoman Empire. The internal discontent continued with the April Uprising and the criticism of the European countries condemned the atrocities toward the Bulgarian population.

Count Ignatiev was said to exercise influence over the grand vezir Mahmut Nedim in those years. Until the end of his stay in Istanbul in 1877 he was promoting Pan-Slavic ideas that emphasized the unity of the Slavic nations with Russia as the great unifier. The grand vezir came to be known among the Turkish officials as “Mr. Nedimov” while the count was jokingly re-named “Sultan Ignatiev”.<sup>110</sup>

The spring and the summer of 1876 were a particularly turbulent period in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Not only were tensions in the provinces of Bulgaria reaching their peak; the sultanate also underwent several coups. On August 31, Sultan Murat was declared “insane” and deposed, and the Ottoman government swore loyalty to Abdulhamit II who would rule the empire for the next 33 years and lead it to its final breakdown.

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<sup>110</sup> Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, p. 156.

### The Russian-Turkish War of 1878

Rarely are wars carried out for the sole purpose of punishing violence against civilians. Interstate wars usually occur because of desire for hegemony in a region or due to opportunities to annex more territories. The deep causes of the Russian-Turkish War of 1878 were several: the Russian desire to establish its influence on the Balkans, to get control over the Straits of the Black Sea, to add more territory, and to weaken the already weak Ottoman Empire and thus to erase the shameful memory of the Treaty of Paris.

### The Istanbul Conference

On November 30, 1876 the Great Powers met in Istanbul to discuss the reforms that needed to be made in the Ottoman Empire and the situation of the Bulgarian population. The British and the Russians had prepared projects in which they proposed how to handle the Bulgarian crisis. According to the project introduced by count Ignatiev, Bulgaria would become an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire with a separate governmental structure and a ruler elected by the Bulgarians themselves.

The British project was designed in such a way as to prevent the spread of Russian influence in southeastern Europe. The two British delegates Elliot and Salisbury spoke about “peaceful reforms” within the Empire in order to improve the status of the Christian population.<sup>111</sup> After several days of negotiations Russia and Great Britain came to a compromise. The preliminary plan given to the Porte called for the creation of two autonomous Bulgarian provinces and in this way prevented the formation of a strong pro-Russian autonomous kingdom.

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<sup>111</sup> Kossev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 428.

However, two consecutive times the Porte rejected the proposal. In its defense the Ottoman representative Savfet Pasha pointed out that foreign propaganda instigated the rebellion and the Ottoman government was forced to fulfill its duties.

The Ottoman Empire was undergoing dramatic changes after the coup. After the more progressive party of the Young Turks came into power, it turned the empire into a constitutional monarchy. On December 23, the day of the official opening of the conference, the first constitution of Turkey was proclaimed. It made provisions for the personal liberty and equality of all subjects of the empire, equal taxation, right to property and freedom of speech. All these reforms aimed at preserving the integrity of the empire and presented a threat to the Bulgarian demands for an independent state.

The failure of the Istanbul conference came from the initial disagreements of the Great Powers, the silent support of Britain toward the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman promises for an immediate internal reform. However, soon after the conference the constitution was abolished and the temporary parliament stopped functioning. The absolute power of the sultan was restored and new repressions against the Christian population began. In 1877 the head of the Bulgarian church, Antim I, was sent to prison in Asia Minor. It seemed that the democratic reforms promised at the Istanbul conference were put on hold. The Russian government for the first time began considering a military offensive against the Ottoman Empire.

### Beginning and Progress of the War

Before the outbreak of the Russian-Turkish War, the Russian government tried to secure itself through diplomatic means so that no other great power would ally with the

Ottoman Empire and help her militarily. Ignatiev made a tour of Germany, Britain and the Habsburg Empire. Bismark promised neutrality and even encouraged Russia to go into war. He knew that a future war would deprive France of an ally in a possible Franco-German conflict. In Vienna in January 1877, Russia and the Habsburg Empire signed a secret treaty. In case of a Russian victory in the war Russia agreed to give Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Habsburgs. The Habsburg Empire agreed to the Russian control of Southern Bessarabia, which she lost with the Treaty of Paris. Bulgaria and Albania would become independent states but no big country would be allowed to form in the Balkans.

During the visit in London, the Russian diplomat demanded British cooperation in enforcing the promised reforms in the Ottoman Empire. To avoid military actions Britain agreed to sign the London Protocol, which obliged the Ottoman government to enforce the promised reforms. The Porte rejected the Protocol, relying still on the British support and hoping that Russia was still unprepared for a war.<sup>112</sup>

The defiant attitude of the Ottoman Empire and the rejection of the London Protocol gave Russia the pretext to declare war against the empire. The war was officially announced on April 24, 1877. The plan of the Russian army was to transport troops through Romania.<sup>113</sup> Then the troops would cross the Danube river, pass through the Balkan Mountains and reach Istanbul and the Straits.

Probably the most difficult battles that decided the outcome of the war were at the Shipka Pass and Plevna. Shipka was the major passage that the Russian army had to go

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<sup>112</sup> Kossév, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 434.

<sup>113</sup> Romania had already given permission for transit of Alexander's army. The Russian czar also received similar agreements for assistance in the war from Greece, Serbia and Montenegro.

through to enter the southern Bulgarian territories. The army also had to prevent legions of Ottoman soldiers from crossing the Balkans to unite with troops coming from Constantinople. The occupation of the pass by the Russian soldiers and Bulgarian volunteers continued three months and is known as “the Shipka stay”. The stay occurred during the winter and resulted in hundreds of deaths for the Russians.

The other strategic point of the war was in Plevna. This was one of the main fortresses in the Bulgarian territory. The Russians besieged the city and on December 10, 1877 the Turkish army, whose number was 43,338 soldiers, surrendered.<sup>114</sup>

#### The Treaty of San Stefano

The Ottoman Empire was defeated in the war. The hopes for military support from Britain and the Habsburgs never materialized. However, as Russia steadily advanced toward Istanbul Disraeli’s government began to come out of the position of neutrality. Disraeli sent an order to Admiral Hornby and his fleet to sail across the Aegean Sea and occupy the Dardanelles. That caused a temporary crisis in the Russian-British relations. To avoid a war with Britain, Russia promised to keep its army out of Istanbul, and the Russian headquarters was situated in the village of San Stefano, about 12 km from the Ottoman capital.

The peace negotiations started on February 24, 1878 but four days later they were discontinued. The Russian army, already exhausted and sick due to a growing typhus epidemic, was called to attack Istanbul risking a war with Great Britain. However, the action had its effect on the Ottoman Empire and the peace negotiations resumed. After

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<sup>114</sup> Kosev, *History of Bulgaria*, Vol. 6, p. 443.

17 days, Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of San Stefano. Chapter six of the treaty declared Bulgaria an autonomous kingdom that would still pay an annual tribute to the sultan. The Bulgarian borders encompassed all areas with Bulgarian population and spread from the Danube river to the Aegean Sea. The western part of Bulgaria included all of Macedonia and the eastern part ended at the Black Sea.

Chapter eight of the treaty provided for the governmental structure of the kingdom. The Bulgarian ruler would be elected by the people in the country and had to be approved by the Porte and the Great Powers. A constitution would be written by Bulgarian “notables,” and Russia would supervise the government for two years. No Ottoman army was allowed in Bulgaria. Instead Russia took the responsibility of protecting the kingdom until it was ready to have its own army.

Apart from the proclamation of Bulgaria as autonomous, the Ottoman Empire had to pay a “huge war indemnity” of 1.4 billion rubles, which was equal to four times its annual state revenue.<sup>115</sup> To pay off the indemnity the Ottoman Empire was forced to surrender parts of Dobrudja and some islands along the Danube river to Russia.

### The International Reaction and the Congress of Berlin

Ignatiev’s efforts to sign the Treaty of San Stefano were successful. In this way the Russian government made sure that the rest of the Great Powers would not have a say in the decisions made after the war. However, the signing of the treaty caused a wave of negative reactions throughout Western Europe. Britain and Austria opposed the San Stefano treaty because it interfered with their imperial ambitions. Assen Nikoloff writes,

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<sup>115</sup> Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* p. 189



“Austrian interest in Balkan affairs was now increasing.”<sup>116</sup> By this time the Habsburg dynasty had lost its control over Italy. Austria had also lost the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and was forced to acknowledge Prussian leadership in Germany. As a result, the Habsburgs focused their attention to the Balkans. Austria planned to annex Bosnia, Herzegovina and even Macedonia in order to gain passage to the Aegean Sea. The Treaty of San Stefano made this goal impossible.

Britain fiercely objected the treaty on slightly different grounds. According to the “most confidential memorandum”<sup>117</sup> that the British cabinet issued to Russia, the San Stefano Treaty violated past agreements of the Great Powers. Some of the explanations provided by Britain read that the treaty created a new naval power [Bulgaria] in the Aegean and Black seas. It also “threatened with extinction the non-Slav population of the Balkan peninsula” and placed the Porte “at the mercy of Russia.”<sup>118</sup>

The Great Powers, with Britain as leader, called for revisions of the San Stefano Treaty. Bismarck offered to hold a conference in Berlin, which was supposed to review some points of the Russian-Ottoman treaty. This conference was held from June 13 to July 13, 1878. The results of the Congress of Berlin became clear on the last day of the conference. San Stefano Bulgaria was divided into three parts. The autonomous kingdom of Bulgaria was limited to the Old Mountains. It still remained under “Ottoman suzerainty, with a Christian prince, an army, and Christian administrators, but paying an

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<sup>116</sup> Assen Nikoloff, *The Bulgarian Resurgence* (Cleveland, Ohio: published by the author, 1987), p. 192.

<sup>117</sup> Nikoloff, *The Bulgarian Resurgence*, p. 196.

<sup>118</sup> Nikoloff, *The Bulgarian Resurgence*, p. 196-7.

annual tribute to the sultan.”<sup>119</sup> The Bulgarian ruler had to be chosen from one of the noble houses in Europe rather than elected by the Bulgarians themselves.

The southern part of San Stefano Bulgaria became the province of East Rumelia. It was under direct Ottoman rule but was given a special statute and was ruled by a Christian governor. Macedonia was returned to the sultan upon the promise that necessary reforms would be made. The Russian army was allowed to stay in the areas with Bulgarian population but only for nine months rather than for two years as the Treaty of San Stefano stated.

Many small Balkan states were also affected by the decisions at the congress. Romania lost Bessarabia to Russia, while Austria annexed Bosnia, Herzegovina and the district of Novi Pazar. Cyprus was given to Great Britain. Here is a table that shows how the Treaty of Berlin redrew the map of the Balkan peninsula.

**Table 3.1.** The Territories of the Balkan States after the Congress of Berlin.<sup>120</sup>

1. Romania received Northern Dobrudja and lost Bessarabia	15,000 km <sup>2</sup>
2. Serbia (with newly added territory) reached	48,000 km <sup>2</sup>
3. Montenegro (with newly added territory) reached	9,000 km <sup>2</sup>
4. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Novi Pazar occupied by Austria	55,000 km <sup>2</sup>
5. Greece	65,000 km <sup>2</sup>
6. The Principality of Bulgaria	62,776 km <sup>2</sup>
7. Eastern Rumelia	33,308 km <sup>2</sup>
8. European Turkey	170,000 km <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, p. 190.

<sup>120</sup> Nikoloff, Adapted from *The Bulgarian Resurgence*, p. 203.

As it can be seen from the table, the Congress of Berlin did not allow for the creation of a big Balkan state. In fact, it divided the Balkan states with disregard of their natural boundaries. The Italian participant in the conference summed it up with the words “Everybody was telling everybody else to take something which belonged to somebody else.”<sup>121</sup>

The partitioning of the Balkans, which was done to satisfy the immediate interests of the Great Powers, proved to have catastrophic consequences for the new Balkan states. The Berlin Treaty did not allow the new nation-states to protect their interests and build up a system of self-government. The newly independent states were highly nationalistic but had to put up with the presence of the Great Powers in the cases of Bulgaria, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia and others. These circumstances became the Balkan unrest that emerged several years after the Berlin Conference.

### My Evaluation

In this chapter, I discussed the internal and external factors that led to Bulgarian political autonomy. The internal factors such as the formation and the development of the anti-Ottoman liberation movement and the April Uprising were necessary although not entirely sufficient causes for the Bulgarian independence. The external factors such as the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Russian-Turkish War increased the speed and the intensity of the secessionist process but these causes in themselves were also necessary but not sufficient for the emergence of a Bulgarian state.

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<sup>121</sup> Nikoloff, *The Bulgarian Resurgence*, p. 202.

The creation of network of secret rebel committees in Bulgaria made the April Uprising possible. The April uprising became the key point, which started the chain of political events that led to the Treaty of San Stefano. In his book, *The Balkans*, Dennis Hupchik writes that “had the Ottomans merely quashed the affair, the Bulgarians’ 1876 “April” uprising would have passed virtually unnoticed by a Europe preoccupied with the looming international crisis sparked by the revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the subsequent Serbo-Ottoman War.”<sup>122</sup>

It is true that had the Ottoman forces not committed the mass killings of Bulgarian civilians the rebellion would have attracted far less attention from the Great European Powers. In addition, the uncompromising policy of the Ottoman Empire and its general unwillingness to enforce the internal reforms it promised made it almost impossible for Russia to stay impartial when it came to protecting Slavic interests.

The role of the Great Powers came to be of great importance during the final phase of the Bulgarian walk toward independence. However, the interference of the European Powers, with the exception of Russia, had a negative impact because Great Britain and Austria sought to prevent or put off the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Thus at the Congress of Berlin, Bulgaria was partitioned. Since all of Bulgarian lands were not independent, the political goals of independence remained for the most part unaccomplished.

Many scholars until now hold the view that the freedom of Bulgaria was “in the main won by others, not by herself.”<sup>123</sup> I disagree with this opinion and argue that the

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<sup>122</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*, p. 263.

<sup>123</sup> R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Rise of Nationality in the Balkans* (E. P. Dutton and Company: 1918), p. 69.

political freedom of Bulgaria was mainly won by herself and helped by others. Despite the internal disagreements, betrayals and confrontations among the pro-independence Bulgarian leaders, national consciousness came from the Bulgarians themselves rather than from external propaganda and manipulations. Many Bulgarians did seek external help when it came to military confrontation with the Ottoman authorities. However, the desire to have a country of their own and the major steps that showed the commitment and conviction in the right to have independent Bulgaria were undertaken without outside help or approval.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

In this thesis, I discussed the role and the significance of internal and external factors that led to the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism and the formation of a free state. In my analysis of the period from 1800 to 1878, I tried to explain the connection between the changes that happened in that crucial period of the Bulgarian history. My conclusion is that, although both internal and external causes were important in the realization of ecclesiastical independence and the creation of an independent Bulgaria, the internal causes had a greater impact and activated the external forces to engage in the Balkan crisis.

I argued the achievement of ecclesiastical independence stimulated the development of the political liberation movement. Some scholars like Dennis Hupchick disagree with this view. In Hupchik's words "Once the evolutionaries' struggle for an independent Bulgarian church was won, nationalist momentum swung to the revolutionaries' approach. This was not a natural development of victory in the Bulgarian Church Question but a shift forced by the radicals themselves."<sup>124</sup> I acknowledge the fact that the leaders of the ecclesiastical independence movement held different views from the younger and more radical intelligentsia that formed the core of the political independence movement. However, I claim that the shift from ecclesiastical to political independence occurred naturally. The ecclesiastical leaders did not influence the revolutionaries directly, but they did blaze a trail in the consciousness of the Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire. As a result, when Levski founded the Internal

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<sup>124</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*, p. 263.

Revolutionary Organization it grew and developed in an intricate network because the Bulgarians were already better educated and had higher self-esteem and the experience of winning a victory on a national level.

In Bulgarian history it is debatable whether the struggle for independence was led by elites or constituted a rise of the masses. I argue that, in both the ecclesiastical and political movements, the masses were led by elites. This, however, does not mean that the elites took advantage and manipulated the masses for personal gains. It simply shows that leaders were necessary for the orderly, successful, and efficient execution of strategies that produced the desired outcomes. Although solidarity was not a consistent virtue among the rebellious masses, it did exist and helped the development and growth of the underground resistance in the Bulgarian lands.

The internal forces of nationalism made the external factors secondary. The emergence of the nationalistic idea crystallized within the circles of the Bulgarian intelligentsia. None of the Great Powers helped the Bulgarians develop of a national consciousness. The two most influential powers Russia and Great Britain, which to a great extent steered the politics of the Ottoman Empire, did not show a particular interest in the Bulgarian Question until the struggles of the Bulgarian population entered its decisive phases. Similarly, Russia's favoritism did not spring from the altruistic desire to protect the "suffering Christian Slavic brethren." Instead its actions were well measured and in accord with the hegemonic appetites of Alexander II. Self-interest and confrontational ambitions made Great Britain and Russia the most important rivals in the Balkan region. Their competition and fears produced the Treaty of San Stefano and the revisionist Congress of Berlin.

Therefore, the external factors were secondary when it came to the creation of an autonomous Bulgaria because after the April Uprising the formation of a Bulgarian state was not a question of whether there should be a Bulgaria but when that would happen. The Great Powers played the most important role when it came to shaping the timing and the character of the political future of Bulgaria and all Balkan states.

As Hupchick points out, the Congress of Berlin recognized the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Romania. Russia gained the territories of Anatolia and Bessarabia. Cyprus was handed over Britain's protection. Only the Bulgarian provisions underwent a drastic modification.<sup>125</sup> As I mentioned Bulgaria remained autonomous but its territory was greatly reduced. Hupchick makes a precise analysis of the "accomplishments" of the Congress of Berlin. He writes:

While the Berlin settlement may have headed off the immediate war crisis by satisfying the imperialistic concerns of the Western European Great Powers, it created deep-seated dissatisfaction among all the small Balkan states. The dismemberment of San Stefano Bulgaria struck the Bulgarians' short-lived national Bjubilation like a hammer blow...Their faith in brother Orthodox Russia was shaken...<sup>126</sup>

Lost territories and deep discontent in the Balkan states shaped the turbulent, post 1878 future of the Balkans. The terms imposed by the Congress of Berlin became the underlying cause of the later Balkan wars and divisive events that have become known as the "Balkan Syndrome". Radicalized Balkan nationalism became the reason for the 1885 unification of the Kingdom of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia. Only seven years after the division of the Bulgarian state, the Rumelian militia overthrew the province's governor and announced the Unification with Bulgaria on September 6, 1885. This was a decision made and implemented by the desire of Bulgarians in both parts of divided San

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<sup>125</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*, p. 266.

<sup>126</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*, p. 267.



Stefano Bulgaria. It was against the provisions of the Berlin Congress, which violated the international agreement. However, this act showed again the Bulgarian determination for a separate state that included the lands with Bulgarian inhabitants.

The Bulgarian path to religious and political independence was unique, yet it was also similar to and bound up with the other nationalistic movements in the Balkans. Among the theories discussed in this thesis, no single one explains the complex and rich panorama of events that created an independent Bulgaria. But when several theories are simultaneously taken in account, it is easier to understand why internal factors were more important than the external factors until 1876, when the importance shifted to the external factors. Furthermore, by uniting the theories of Crawford Young and Karl Deutsch, it becomes clear that both elites and masses were responsible for the processes that led to the April Uprising.

In conclusion, it is hard to estimate whether Bulgaria was in the short run better off before or after independence. Soon after independence, the unification of the kingdom of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia and the Balkan Wars broke out, and later the region was engulfed in the terrors of World Wars I and II. But in the long run, the Bulgarian independence had a positive effect on the population. The Bulgarian government gradually learned how lobby for its interests on international level and how to build a nation-state that protected the liberties of its citizens.

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