„PRZEGLĄD HUMANISTYCZNY", 4/2022
ISSN: 0033-2194, e-ISSN 2657-599X

https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2022-4.6

The Great Eastern Crisis (1875−1885) as a Balkan Historical Milestone (A Case Study of Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty)

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Abstract

The historical issue of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875−1885) is examined as a significant phase in the social and political development of parts of Southeastern Europe connected with the territorial withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire. Through a brief presentation of the crisis' main events, a more extended periodization of its stages is offered when analyzing this complex historical process. Based on the analysis of Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty (1878) and its (non)implementation, the consequences for the further historical development of Ottoman Macedonia are discussed.

Keywords

Ottoman Empire, Great European Powers, Ottoman Balkan, Great Eastern Crisis, Treaty of Berlin, Article XXIII, Ottoman Macedonia

Introduction

In the history of the European 19th century, the period of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875−1885) included many events that marked another stage in the resolution of the so-called "Eastern Question" – the question of the survival of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. The diplomatic activity, wars, uprisings, and insurrections that took place in Southeastern Europe in a short time, one after the other, competing and intertwining, eventually resulted in major territorial changes in the political geography of the Balkan

region. The Ottoman Empire, being on the defensive both on the battlefield and in the diplomatic arena, slowly but surely withdrew from most of its European dominions. The Sublime Porte's attempts to consolidate the internal situation through reforms did not achieve the desired effect. The large Ottoman territory faced economic and political collapse. On top of that, the central authority was unable to guarantee the security of life and property of the Christians living in its European provinces. On the one hand, the Empire was constrained by the semi-colonial status of its European creditors and the lack of economic potential. On the other hand, the outdated semi-feudal social system, which was characterized by the lack of any democratic freedoms and burdened with religious dichotomy, was in irreconcilable conflict with the aspirations for equality of most of its subjects.[1] The millet system, which had provided some balance to this duality within the Empire (division into the Muslim millet and other millets),[2] began to withdraw under the impetus of the new social phenomena of the nation and nationalisms. The Crimean War had divided the Concert of Europe into opposing blocks, after an extended period of peace. Even so, the European Great Powers, signatory states of the Treaty of Paris, still agreed only on one issue – that collective approval was necessary for changing borders and creating new independent states. In the age of imperialism, there were increasingly egoistic and aggressive power politics.[3]

This strong position seemed attractive to the European Powers in terms of conquering new colonies and also regarding the territories of the "Sick Man of the Bosphorus." However, these very empires (including the Ottoman Empire), being large multi-cultural realms, could no longer satisfy the needs of a part of their populations, and before the onset of national strategies and actions of the 19th and 20th centuries, the domino effect of their destruction was initiated.

The first diplomatic survey after the start of the Great Eastern Crisis showed Imperial Russia that, unlike at the time of the Crimean War (1855−1856), the contradictions between its Western rivals were glaring, making it impossible for them to form a unified anti-Russian coalition. Russia sought to take advantage of the crisis to expand and increase its influence over the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. It wanted to spread its hegemony in the Balkan region not through the territorial expansion of its borders but primarily through the formation (or expansion) of Slavic Balkan states which would act as its satellites. The Austro-Hungarian Empire played a significant part in this European crisis. It could achieve its aspiration to expand toward the Gulf

[1] Manol Pandevski, "Položbata na Makedonija vo osmanskata imperija kon krajot na XIX i početokot na XX vek," in *Makedonskoto osloboditelno delo vo XIX i XX vek*, Vol. 5: *Projavi, relacii, likovi*, Skopje: Misla, 1986, 7–29; Ilber Ortajli, *Najdolgiot vek na Imperijata*, Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, Sojuz na turskite nevladini organizacii vo Republika Makedonija, 2009.

[2] Kemal H. Karpat, "*Millets* and Nationality. The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude, Bernard Lewis, Vol. 1, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982, 141–70.

[3] Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Jugoistočna Evropa. Globalna istorija*, trans. Ranka Gašić, Sarajevo: UMHIS, 2020, 286.

of Thessaloniki only by conquering the Ottoman Balkan heritage. However, it tried to fulfill these territorial aspirations gradually – by taking the Balkan territories away from the Sultan step by step. Guided by these strategic plans, the Dual Monarchy was unwilling to allow the formation of new Balkan states or the strengthening of existing ones. The British pro-Ottoman policy played a very important role in these diplomatic games at someone else's expense. By pushing the Ottoman Empire toward war with Imperial Russia, the British Cabinet wanted to take advantage of the future military weakening of both empires for its political and territorial expansion. Germany also made its mark in the conflict by supporting the stances and aspirations of Austria-Hungary and Great Britain. The other European powers, France[4] and Italy, remained on the sidelines of the key political currents at that time regarding these international matters. The small Balkan states (Romania, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro) were treated more as objects than subjects in the Powers' resolution of the existing crisis.

The Periodization of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875−1885)

In a comprehensive study of the complex historiographical issue known as the Great Eastern Crisis (1875−1885),[5] the internal rhythm of specific historical events can be perceived, among other things, in terms of their categorization into four interrelated and conditioned stages of development. The uprising in Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1875 marks the starting point of the **first stage** of this great European crisis: the stage of uprisings and insurrections of Christians in the Ottoman Empire (August 1875 – May 1876). The inability of the Ottoman army to suppress the rebellion at the outset led to a tense political atmosphere in the Balkan provinces of the Empire. Seeking to prevent the spread of the rebellious spirit, the Sublime Porte implemented the practice of mass arming of the Muslim population. In this way, it ensured, following its internal logic, that the legal defenselessness of all Christians in the troubling times reached its peak. The Ottoman authorities believed that the fanaticism and mass arming of the Muslims would be a serious factor and force that would help them to overcome the crisis before it reached larger proportions and could not be easily managed. However, this led to an escalation of the crisis,[6] as confirmed by the bloody event in

[4] Ibidem, 316.

[5] The historiography which deals with the issue of the so-called "Eastern Question" accepts the date of the Berlin Congress (1878) as the end of the Great Eastern Crisis. All activities and historical events that are directly related to the (non)implementation of the Treaty of Berlin are therefore disregarded. Also ignored are the historical events in the Balkan territories affected by its provisions. The proposed periodization is an attempt to overcome this historiographical problem and complements the Macedonian historiography as well. Krste Bitovski, *Makedonija vo vremeto na Golemata istočna kriza (1875–1881)*, Skopje: INI, 1982; *War and Diplomacy. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Peter Sluglett, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011.

[6] Bitovski, *Makedonija*, 28–37.

Ottoman Macedonia in May 1876: the assassination of the German and French consuls in Thessaloniki by an inflamed and fanatical Muslim mob. This incident was seen as an unprecedented attack on the diplomatic immunity of the European representatives in the Empire and attracted the attention of the European public. Further events began to occur one after another at breakneck speed. In April 1876, the Christian population in Ottoman Bulgaria raised an uprising. And while the European powers twice failed to resolve the conflict between the Bosnian-Herzegovinian rebels and the Sublime Porte at the other end of the Ottoman Balkan region, the latter brutally quelled the Bulgarian uprising.

These attempts at repression and the actions of the Ottomans against the rebels and uprisings were the direct cause of the emergence of the **second stage** of the Crisis, characterized by the increased diplomatic activity of all interested European Powers (May 1876 – April 1877). Under the guise of "concern" for the lives and rights of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, the Powers were preparing to divide their spheres of influence as well as the Sultan's territories. In this way, under the pressure of the circumstances, the so-called Berlin Memorandum was adopted at the meeting of the ministers of Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary (Berlin, May 1876). The agreement sought to implement reforms in the Ottoman Empire that would improve the position of its Christian population. The difficult political situation of the Ottoman Empire after the uprisings and the incident in Thessaloniki actually led to the legalization of the right of foreign interference in its internal affairs. All this was undoubtedly reinforced by its semi-colonial status and the bankruptcy of the state in the autumn of 1875. The outbreak of the crisis led to the dethronement of Sultan Abdülaziz and the establishment of a new pro-British government. Nonetheless, the crisis provided the opportunity for all involved parties (the European Powers as well as the small Balkan states) to pursue their mutually conflicting territorial aspirations. Therefore, under the pressure of public opinion, which insisted on their so-called historical right over the territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire, Serbia and Montenegro embarked in the summer of 1876 on a poorly prepared military adventure against the Ottomans. Austria-Hungary and Russia realized that they had to overcome their differences and demarcate their spheres of influence and territorial claims to the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire. This resulted in a meeting in Reichstadt (1876) between Emperor Franz Joseph and Tsar Alexander II. The fact that no formal agreement was signed and that there exist two slightly different versions of the records from this meeting shows the deep disagreement between both parties about the ways of dealing with the crisis.[7] The last more serious diplomatic attempt to resolve it peacefully was the proposal for an international conference that was to

[7] One of the points on which Austria-Hungary and Russia agreed was that which foresaw the possibility of an eventual Ottoman victory in the ongoing war. Both sides agreed that in such a case, they would demand that the Sublime Porte restore the status quo on the borders from before the war. Therefore, in the autumn of 1876, at a time when the Serbian military forces were in a critical position, Russia issued an ultimatum to the Ottoman Empire and brokered a truce with Serbia and Montenegro. Manol Pandevski, "Makedonija vo megunarodnite spogodbi i dogovori od vremeto na istočnata kriza," in *Makedonskoto osloboditelno delo vo XIX i XX vek*, Vol. 5: *Projavi, relacii, likovi*, Skopje: Misla, 1986, 155–85.

come up with possible solutions to neutralize all the Balkan problems. This proposal resulted in the so-called Constantinople Ambassadors' Conference (December 1876 – January 1877). It was then that the projects for peace between the Empire and Serbia and Montenegro were designed, as well as the projects for reforms in Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. However, the Sublime Porte, secretly incited by the promise of the British Cabinet, refused the proposals and pompously announced the introduction of the first civil constitution in the Ottoman Empire. The reforms were unnecessary because, ostensibly, a parliamentary system of government was being implemented in the Empire. This behavior of the Ottomans burned down all the bridges to resolving the crisis in a diplomatic way. Nevertheless, even before the beginning of its military campaign, Russia wanted diplomatic security and therefore concluded the secret Budapest Convention with Austria-Hungary (1877). In this way, the former country secured the neutrality of the latter. Even though Russia had been preparing to start a war with the Ottoman Empire, it had never stopped looking for ways to avoid it, as evidenced by the signing of the so-called London Protocol. However, this document, which was quite moderate in its demands, was rejected by the Sultan in April 1877. It became clear that war was inevitable.

The **third stage** of the Great Eastern Crisis – the military resolution of the crisis (April 1877 – July 1878) – began with the Russian military campaign in the Balkans. Serbia and Montenegro again joined this latest Russo-Ottoman war.[8] In June 1877, the Russian army entered the territory of Ottoman Bulgaria. The Sultan's army, unable to defend its positions, had to withdraw. The principal Russian operational plan envisaged crossing the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina) and advancing toward Edirne and Istanbul. After months of bloody battles on almost the entire Russo-Ottoman battlefield, especially at the Shipka Pass (Shipchenski Prohod), in the first days of 1878, the Russian troops together with the voluntary and Opalchenie units entered Sofia.[9] After that, one part of the Russian army continued to pursue the demoralized Ottoman troops in the direction of Tatar-Pazardzhik and Plovdiv. But with the exception of a last more organized resistance by the Ottoman army to defend Plovdiv, the city was surrendered in mid-January 1878. After this defeat, Edirne surrendered virtually without a fight, and the Russian army

[8] Russia was prepared to start the war. Nonetheless, on the one hand, the clauses of the Budapest Convention (in the event of Russian victory) limited in advance the territorial expansion of its influence over the central and western Balkan regions. On the other hand, the possibility of the formation of one large compact Slavic or other state was excluded. With the Convention, Austria-Hungary pledged its neutrality in return for not only Russia's consent to its occupation of the Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina but also guarantees for the expansion of its influence in the Balkan Peninsula. I. V. Koz′menko, *Sbornik dogovorov Rossii s drugimi gosudarstvami 1856–1817*, Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel′stvo političeskoj literatury, 1952, 144–55.

[9] This war is usually known as the "Russo-Turkish war." This term stems from the historical sources and documents from that period. At present, however, it is necessary to distinguish between the terms "Ottoman Empire" and "Turkey," i.e., the modern Turkish state. Since Imperial Russia started the war, it is most adequate to use the term "Russo-Ottoman" war.

reached the Istanbul suburb and summer resort of San Stefano on the Sea of Marmara. On January 31, 1878, an armistice was concluded in Edirne after the capitulation of the Ottoman army. At the same time, in those January days, the remaining units of the Russian army, after entering Sofia, headed for Kyustendil. The Russian troops had entered the city twice and controlled it for just one day before the signing of the truce in Edirne. On this western front, a demarcation line would initially be formed and then a state border between the Ottoman Empire and the Principality of Bulgaria. In this way, by reaching Kyustendil, the Russian army actually reached the eastern borders of Ottoman Macedonia.[10]

When the Principality of Serbia re-entered the war on December 1, 1877, it acted within the framework of the global Russian operational plan in its initial phase that was to play out in Ottoman Bulgaria. However, the plan of the Russian command to advance in the direction of Istanbul incited the Serbian army, after the fall of Slivnica, to act independently on the territory of Ottoman South Serbia. The Serbian regular units, supported by the strongly developed insurgent movement of the Serbian Slavic population, succeeded in entering Niš, Leskovac, Vranje, and the surrounding towns in a short time. Before the truce in Edirne, the Serbian army also reached the northern borders of Ottoman Macedonia. On the other hand, the Montenegrins fought fiercely along the borders of Ottoman Herzegovina and Albania. Between September 1877 and January 1878, they managed to enter the towns of Nikšić, Bar, Ulcinj, Grmožur, Vranjina, and Lesendro.

The Russo-Ottoman war created a completely new political situation on the Balkan Peninsula. This led to a tightening of Russia's relations with the Western powers. The victories of the Slavic armies and rebels increased the danger of a British-Russian military conflict. In such a tense political situation, the preliminary San Stefano Agreement between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was signed on March 31, 1878.[11] Russian military actions on the territory of Ottoman Bulgaria terminated the Ottoman administration there. However, Russia's Western European rivals insisted on the restoration of Ottoman domination even in South Bulgaria, which had already been taken over by Russian troops. Due to all these reasons, we can agree with the

[10] *Osvoboždenie Bolgarii ot tureckogo iga*, Vol. 3, Moskva: Izdatel′stvo AN SSSR, 1967.

[11] Even though the role of this agreement is considered significant in Bulgarian historiography, education, and journalism, as well as in state politics where it is treated as a source of national pride and is celebrated as a state holiday (which to this very day in European Bulgaria actually carries irredentist segments toward four contemporary Balkan states), the following crucial fact should be taken into account: the construction of a San Stefano entity in the Balkans could only be realized with a full Russian military presence throughout its territory (excluding all of Ottoman Bulgaria up to parts of the western Ottoman provinces of Macedonia and parts of Albania, as well as parts of the Serbian territory). That never happened. On the contrary, at the Congress of Berlin, Ottoman domination was restored in parts of Ottoman Bulgaria where Russian troops had achieved significant military success and brought down the Ottoman regime (for example, South Thrace). Manol Pandevski, *Macedonia and Macedonians in the Eastern Crisis*, Skopje: Macedonian Review Edition, 1978, 130–4.

conclusion that the plan of the Russian Machiavelli – Count Nikolay Ignatyev,[12] known as San Stefano Bulgaria, was just that: a planned preparation for better positions at the congress, which would clearly happen. The San Stefano provisions contradicted the existing agreements and obligations that Russia had made with Austria-Hungary and Great Britain. Their reassessment was only a matter of time.

The published Russian documents from the time of the crisis suggest that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to the treaty out of a need to establish a favorable position for itself in order to be able to negotiate the future of the Ottoman provinces in the Balkans, rather than to show a firm determination to create the projected Bulgarian state for which it lacked power.[13]

Therefore, there were, on the one hand, Count Ignatyev's *Realpolitik*, including his shattered Pan-Slavic dreams, Russia's western rivals, and the Ottoman Empire, and on the other hand, the Bulgarians – on the "green table" divided by an artificial line.

The military action was basically over, and all activities focused on the upcoming international congress. The outcome of the Berlin Congress (June 13 to July 13, 1878) was a compromise that satisfied all parties involved in this phase of the conflict. Of course, the aspirations of the Powers had to be satisfied first at the expense of the aspirations and fate of the small Balkan states and their populations.[14] Thus ended the third stage of the Great Eastern Crisis, and the Great European Powers believed the trouble to be over. However, the **fourth stage** (July 1878 – November 1885) of the crisis in the Balkans manifested itself in the resistance of the small nations against the decisions made in Berlin. The major territorial changes of the state borders in the Balkan Peninsula did not mark the end of the complex and charged political situation in the region. The riots, uprisings, and ultimately another brief Serbo-Bulgarian war (1885) that took place in these territories in the following years can only be analyzed in terms of their interconnection and continuity with the previous European political, military, and diplomatic events. Therefore, the period from the conclusion of the Berlin Congress to the mid-1880s is considered an integral part of the Great Eastern Crisis, i.e., the stage of the resistance of the Balkan nations against the decisions of the Berlin Congress. These patchy decisions again incited waves of discontent, and the people

[12] Ayten Kiliç, "A Russian Machiavelli in the Ottoman Empire. Count Ignatiev Conquers Istanbul," in *The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–78*, ed. Ömer Turan, Ankara: METU, 2007, 1–24.

[13] Koz′menko, *Sbornik*, 144–55.

[14] As for the Balkans, the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania was proclaimed at the Congress, while Greece gained territory (although it did not participate in the wars against the Ottomans, it was an important location for British maritime traffic across the Mediterranean). Furthermore, the Treaty not only contributed to the sufferings of the population in Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina (both the Muslim and Christian) but also envisaged that this territory would be occupied by Austria-Hungary. Ottoman Bulgaria was artificially divided into two parts – the northern one, which became the tributary Principality of Bulgaria, and the southern one, called Eastern Rumelia, which was to return under Ottoman suzerainty. Although Ottoman Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo were not mentioned by name, it was clear that Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty referred to them. Ernest L. Woodward, *The Congress of Berlin 1878*, London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920.

in the Balkans continued to resist: in Bulgaria, in the Rhodope Mountains, there were two simultaneous but opposing armed uprisings (of the local Christian and Muslim populations); the Albanian and Bosniak followers of the League of Prizren were active in the Ottoman regions of Western Albania, Western Macedonia, and Kosovo; the Christian inhabitants of the parts that had remained within the Ottoman Empire after the Serbo-Ottoman war rioted and organized rebel groups that filled the forests; the Kresna (Macedonian) Uprising broke out in Ottoman Macedonia,[15] and rebels were also active in the western part of Ottoman Macedonian and the Provisional Government of Macedonia;[16] during the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Austro-Hungarian troops only succeeded in breaking the resistance of the Muslim population and gaining a foothold in both regions by military force.[17] The reasons for this were not only the inadequate decisions and provisions agreed upon in Berlin but also the obstruction of their implementation by the signatories, which created long-term problems in the Balkans. For example, on the one hand, the Powers ignored the fact that the Ottoman Empire did not actually implement Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty, which applied to the rest of the so-called European Turkey. On the other hand, the same was done in 1885 when the Principality of Bulgaria was united with the so-called Eastern Rumelia. The dissatisfaction of the Balkan peoples with the "Solomonic" decisions in Berlin was, among other things, reflected by the explosion of migration in the Balkan lands.[18] The literature reveals that during this period, about two million refugees from various ethnic groups and religions moved across the Balkans.[19] The new political map of this part of Europe, sanctioned by the treaties following the Berlin Congress, was the main reason for this huge demographic movement of the population in the Balkans, which in some regions caused new ethnic regroupings and long-term refugee frustrations. And – yes! Perhaps the Balkans *produce more history than they can consume*, but the question that is not being addressed is: "Who has been causing, directly and continuously, this historical reality?" As Nobel Prize laureate Milton Friedman wrote: "It's always so attractive to be able to do good at somebody else's expense."

Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty: Intentions vs. Implementation

The diplomatic language is specific in that it is concise, with words that are wisely chosen and applied to describe deeper states, correlations, and influences, as opposed

[15] *Makedonija vo istočnata kriza 1875–1881*, ed. Mihajlo Apostolski, Skopje: MANU, 1978; *Kresnenskoto vostanie vo Makedonija 1878–1879*, ed. Mihajlo Apostolski, Skopje: MANU, 1982.

[16] Vančo Gorgiev, *Sloboda ili Smrt. Makedonskoto nacionalnooslobodi telno delo vo Solunskiot vilaet 1893–1903 godina*, Skopje: Tabernakul, 2003, 10–5.

[17] *War and Diplomacy*, 125–253.

[18] Maria Pandevska, *Prisilni migracii vo Makedonija vo godinite na Golemata istočna kriza (1875–1881)*, Skopje: Misla, 1993.

[19] *Istorija srpskog naroda*, Vol. V.1, Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1981, 525–6.

to what one might read at first glance. That is why the short Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty should be analyzed here briefly:

> The Sublime Porte undertakes scrupulously to apply in the Island of Crete the Organic Law of 1868, with such modifications as may be considered equitable.
>
> Similar laws adapted to local requirements, excepting as regards the exemption from taxation granted to Crete, shall also be introduced into the other parts of Turkey in Europe for which no special organization has been provided by the present Treaty.
>
> The Sublime Porte shall depute special commissions, in which the native element shall be largely represented, to settle the details of the new laws in each province.
>
> The schemes of organization resulting from this labors shall be submitted for examination to the Sublime Porte, which before promulgating the Acts for them into force, shall consult the European Commission instituted for Eastern Roumelia.[20]

A careful analysis of this Article may lead to the following conclusions:

1) The use of the term "scrupulously," which means "in a very careful and thorough way," contains the essence of the real situation on the battlefield after the wars. The truce signed in Edirne stopped the Slavic armies in certain positions, thus the Ottoman domination in the areas of Ottoman Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo was not in question. The Ottoman army was not defeated here, nor did these Balkan regions directly enter into some previous agreements and settlements, unlike Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, all these regions did not have the geopolitical significance of the Greek state, protected by the interests of its patron – the powerful British Empire. For these reasons, at the Congress, the Great Powers could have only "asked" (but not forced) the Ottoman Empire to carry out reforms in these regions. The great military defeat of the Ottoman army in the context of the loss of both Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of Greece – without war – was sufficient for the interested parties. In this case, it was important to prevent further major destabilization of the territorial balance of the states that were to rule sections of the Morava-Vardar Valley leading to the important port of Thessaloniki. The Serbian penetration in this direction was considerably worrying for Austria-Hungary, which had financed the building of this part of the railway. It was preferable that the southern section remained under Ottoman rule rather than that of another Slavic state.
2) The reforms proposed in the text regarding "the other parts of Turkey in Europe" contain restrictions such as "with such modifications as may be considered equitable," thus distinguishing between the position of Crete and the Ottoman provinces in these regions. This is logical since Crete indeed differed greatly from Ottoman Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo. One very important distinc-

[20] "Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878," *American Journal of International Law* 2 (1908), 412.

tion was the fact that a number of millets had already been functioning in these regions, not only among the Macedonian but also among the Albanian population. Of course, one must not forget about the schism between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Bulgarian Exarchate.

3) In its essence, Article XXIII of the Treaty of Berlin was mainly based on a more comprehensive document, i.e., the Sultan's Decree of August 23, 1868, called *Firman. Organic Regulations for Crete*. In trying to understand the essence of the reforms envisaged at the Congress of Berlin, it is in fact necessary to briefly analyze this decree. Its Article 4 stated:

> The island shall be divided into as many Sandjaks or districts as may be found necessary. These districts shall be administrated by Mutessarifs (Governors) chosen from among the functionaries of the Imperial Government; the Governors shall be half Mussulman and half Christian. The Mussulman Governors shall be assisted by Christian Mouavins (Deputies), and the Christian Governors by Mussulman Mouavins, both appointed by the Imperial Government.[21]

Article 5 also provided for broad Christian participation in the governing process in smaller administrative units – the Kazas.[22] These amendments, unlike the existing Vilayet Law (1867), allowed almost twice as much participation of non-Muslims in administrative power. A similar trend was observed in the case of the General Council (Article 12):

> A Council-General shall be established at the seat of the Government, elected by the population, in which each Kaza shall be represented by two Delegates; every exclusively Mussulman Kaza will send Mussulman Delegates to the Council-General; the same shall be observed towards the exclusively Christian Kazas; and every Mixed Kaza shall be represented by a Mussulman Delegate.[23]

This initial inclusion of Muslims and Christians in governing bodies was particularly emphasized in Article 9:

> Civil and military tribunals shall be appointed at the seat of the Government and in the Sandjaks and Kazas. The tribunals at the seat of the Government and in the Mixed Sandjaks and Kazas shall be composed of Mussulman and Christian members chosen by the people. In Sandjaks and Kazas exclusively Christian, those tribunals shall be composed of Christians only.[24]

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[21] *Greece with the Cyclades & Northern Sporades. Appendix*, London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920, 160.

[22] "The Sandjaks shall be divided into Kazas (Cantons), and the Kazas shall be governed by Caimacams (Sub-Governors) chosen and appointed by the Sublime Porte, and taken as occasion requires from among the Mussulman or Christian functionaries of the Imperial Government. These Caimacams shall be assisted by Mouavins in accordance with the abovementioned rules." Ibidem.

[23] Ibidem, 161.

[24] Ibidem.

The establishment of a governing body called the Council of Elders for each Kaza and Démogérontie for each Sandjak was introduced in Article 10: "[…] Each commune shall have a Council of Elders and each Sandjak a Démogérontie or Council of Elders for each of the Mussulman and Christian Communities," with emphasis on the method of their election: "The members of those Councils will be elected by their constituents." As was pointed out in Article 12, the duties of these administrative bodies were essential for ensuring the stable everyday life and prosperity of the population and consisted of:

> […] works of public utility, such as the development of the means of communication, the formation of banks, and everything tending to improve agriculture, commerce, and industry, and measures for spreading public instruction in all matters of general usefulness.[25]

This brief presentation of the main points of the document shows clearly the principal idea of the reforms. The establishment of some kind of semi-autonomy was meant primarily to address the most pressing problem the central Ottoman government was facing with regard to the large multi-cultural provinces under its rule. This meant a lack of full control over the corrupt, often criminalized, inefficient, lazy, and at times fanatical local administration. The farther the provinces were from the center, the greater the incrimination of the independent administrative bodies. This situation was the most frequent cause of dissatisfaction (rebellions, uprisings, and insurrections) on the part of the members of the non-Muslim millets. All of this had a direct impact on the economic development of the Empire, which was already clearly falling behind the western part of Europe.

4) The question of exactly which territories were covered by the generalized term "the other parts of Turkey in Europe" in Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty should also be "decoded." The understanding and interpretation of this very general geographic term varied depending on which of the opposing sides dominated at the diplomatic meetings and gatherings of the Great European Powers. What must also be emphasized is the fact that these terms, imposed by those in power, were neither naïve nor accidental. They depicted the concrete power balance on the battlefield as well as on the diplomatic front during the crisis, and as it was becoming unpredictable, the meaning of these terms changed considerably. When researching how peoples and regions have been labeled within the diplomatic correspondence, it is important to consider who had the power to give those names. For example, in the case of Ottoman Macedonia, the power of giving names rested with the established state institutions of the Ottoman Empire, the European powers and their representatives, and the institutions and intellectual elites of the neighboring Balkan states.[26] This *labeling* depended in many ways on the knowledge of nation-building processes, which at that time was general and rather limited (as can

[25] Ibidem.

[26] Filip Putinja, Žoslin Stref-Fener, *Teorije o etnicitetu*, Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1997 (original title: *Théories de l'ethnicité*), 160–70.

be seen on the example of the interpretation of the term "millet"),[27] but even more on the day-to-day political interests of the involved parties. Therefore, in the diplomatic conversation, and especially in the international agreements and settlements, the general terms "European Turkey," "Rumelia," and "Bulgaria" were used to describe Ottoman Macedonia. Very rarely in diplomatic correspondence it was referred to as "Western Rumelia" or "Macedonia."[28] In many cases, its territory – partly or entirely – was designated with such Ottoman administrative terms as Bitola Vilayet, Thessaloniki Vilayet, Kosovo/Skopje Vilayet, etc. In some very specific situations, a part of Macedonia was called the Vardar Valley.[29] The reasons for this mélange of words were primarily the deeper and far-reaching political goals pursued by the actors in the crisis.

Given all this, just two years after the signing of the Berlin Treaty, the merging of the term "scrupulously" with the need to implement the proposed reforms "overseen" by the European Commission of Eastern Rumelia proved to be a very crucial designation. The Sublime Porte gave serious thought to this term and hastened to take the "reforming" into its own hands and decide on it by itself.[30] It simply appointed its own Commission, one without European representatives. Nor was the local Christian population included in it. In April 1880, the Porte informed the European Commission of Eastern Rumelia (which had finished *The Organic Regulation for Eastern Rumelia*) that all the formalities stipulated in Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty had been fulfilled on their part and the only thing that remained was to consult the European Commission before enforcing the "new" vilayet statutes. However, the latter were merely a copy of the 1867 Vilayet Law. The European Commission found that the Ottoman side had violated two crucial points of the Berlin agreement: the project of the "reforms" had been drafted by Ottoman officials alone, without the participation of European representatives and the local population, and it did not have any common ground with the statute of administrative autonomy of Crete or Eastern Rumelia. The European Commission thus rejected this Ottoman proposal. Afterward, the Commission prepared its own draft of "The Law on Vilayets in European Turkey" with amendments that were closer to the principles of the *Organic Regulations for Crete*. Also, this European project envisaged reforming the police in terms of the participation of the local population. The long discussions during which the European project was thoroughly reviewed and analyzed did not produce any results. After a long diplomatic correspondence, the Porte succeeded in quietly putting this project to death. However, soon after 1878, it introduced the

[27] Maria Pandevska, Makedonka Mitrova, "The Concept of the Millet in Turkish Dictionaries. Its Alteration and the Impact on Ottoman Macedonia," *Balcanica Posnaniensia* 26 (2019), 171–92.

[28] *Report Presented to the International Commission at Constantinople as to State of Macedonia since the Treaty of Berlin*, London: Gilbert and Rivingston, 1880.

[29] Pandevski, *Macedonia*, 139–44.

[30] The Sublime Porte already had the necessary experience (not only with Crete) on how to obstruct this kind of reforms since the Lebanese Crisis in 1860. Dragi Gorgiev, "Administrativnata struktura na Solunskiot, Bitolskiot i Kosovskiot vilaet vo vtorata polovina na XIX vek," *Prilozi. Oddelenie za opštestveni nauki* 40 (1–2) (2010), 163–84.

administrative reorganization of its Vilayets and Sandjaks, which eventually led to the ethnic-territorial fragmentation of the Slavic part of the Christian population.[31] It cannot be ignored that having in mind the *Organic Regulations for Crete*, the Sublime Porte tried to restructure its administrative units from Vilayets and Sandjaks down to Kazas (where necessary and possible) so that they would become mixed rather than entirely Christian. The Berlin duties of the Porte were also suddenly "forgotten" by the major European Powers. And in 1885 came the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with the so-called Eastern Rumelia as the end of all these diplomatic games and outsmarting. This crisis was terminated, but bitter frozen conflicts remained well into the 19th and 20th centuries (unfortunately even into the 21st century), such as the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina or the so-called "Macedonian Question." The Great Eastern Crisis and its outcomes were the basis of all future Balkan wars, including the Great War that started with the first bullet fired in Sarajevo.

Instead of Conclusion: Ottoman Macedonia on the European Seesaw

The Berlin Treaty, unlike the previous five agreements reached during the crisis, established for a very long time the de jure and de facto permanently unchanged status of Ottoman Macedonia. Nevertheless, the clauses of that Treaty, if implemented, would have eased the difficult socio-economic situation of the Macedonian people.[32] This agreement also had extremely negative consequences for the internal development of Ottoman Macedonia since, in a legal sense, only the 1880 Vilayet Law remained. Two points of this law are especially interesting in terms of the participation of non-Muslims in the local administration. Firstly, none of the non-Muslims who were part of the administration held any position of executive authority in the bodies in which they were included. They were just ordinary members of councils or municipal commissions. All the presidents, officeholders, secretaries, commissioners, and inspectors in the local administration were Muslims. And secondly, very often one or two Christians, being

[31] Ibidem, 169.

[32] Historical sources provide evidence of Macedonian involvement in all phases of the crisis – except, of course, the diplomatic one. For example, due to organizing the Razlovtsi insurrection (in May 1876 in the regions of Piyanets and Malesh), Ottoman Macedonia was included in the map of uprisings and rebellions of the Christian people in the first stage of the crisis. We also come across Macedonians fighting in the Slavic armies in the third (the military) stage. The Kumanovo-Kriva Palanka Uprising was also indirectly linked to the approach of Serbian troops toward the borders of Ottoman Macedonia in the same stage. During the fourth stage of the crisis, the Macedonians organized the Kresna (Macedonian) Uprising (1878). As a result of the usurpation of the rebellion's leadership by the Sofia Committee "Unity," the fighting soon moved to the Razlog region. This stage also included the events related to the Conspiracy in Western Macedonia and the formation of the Provisional Government of Macedonia. Pandevski, *Macedonia*, 37–83; N. Levintov, "Kresnenskoe vostanie," *Vopros istorii* 4 (1951), 76.

wealthy and influential persons, were members of more than one municipal commission and almost the only representatives of their community.

Local corruption continued to flourish. In addition, there emerged among the Muslim part of the population the inevitable feeling that the situation was changing and that the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from these territories in the near future was possible. The influx of Muhajir refugees and their dismal fates were visible proof of the likelihood of this scenario.

Due to its geopolitical position, Ottoman Macedonia could have remained neither on the margins nor completely on the outside of the migratory movements in the Balkans that had been prompted by all four stages of the crisis. Indeed, waves of Muslims (from the lost Ottoman territories) were heading toward it. Although a common term is used in historical literature and other sources for all these refugees, they did not constitute a homogenous group. The term "Muhajir" encompasses all peoples of the Muslim faith – Turks, Albanians, Pomaks, Bosniaks, the Cherkess, Tatars, etc. – whose traditions, ethnicity, and language were, however, distinct from each other. They lived in these regions, and their faith took on a political character during the Ottoman territorial retreat from Europe. On the other hand, parts of the Macedonian population that participated in the anti-Ottoman insurrections and uprisings during the crisis left Ottoman Macedonia (moving from the border regions to Serbia and Bulgaria). These two-way migratory movements led to a greater mélange of ethnic groups in the Macedonian territories. It is necessary to point out here that the pejorative term "Macedonian salad" does not only refer to the division of Macedonians within the affiliation to different Christian millets (those under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and its Serbian branch, the Bulgarian Exarchate, the Protestant Church, or the Uniate Church). This pejorative term also refers to all the Jews and Vlachs (who lived in enclaves throughout the Ottoman Balkans) and to all the diverse Muslim ethnic groups.[33] The newly created or expanded Balkan Christian states succeeded in ethnically cleansing parts of their newly acquired territories, in addition to diplomatic attempts to repatriate the Muslim population. In contrast, no ethnic cleansing was carried out in Ottoman Macedonia until the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) when both the Christian and Muslim Macedonian populations came under attack of the armies.

The essential geopolitical features of Ottoman Macedonia were related to the fact that, unlike the surrounding Ottoman Balkan provinces (Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece), it went from being a central Ottoman province to a peripheral one only after the events of the Great Eastern Crisis, i.e., in the last decades of the 19th century. This change had a significant impact and importance on its future historical development. It was the beginning of its strategic significance in a broader sense, expressed clearly in the statement, "Whoever rules Macedonia rules the Balkans!". Along the Balkan borders of the Empire (and consequently around Macedonia), new Christian states

[33] Maria Pandevska, "The Term 'Macedonian(s)' in Ottoman Macedonia. On the Map and in the Mind," *Nationalities Papers. The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 40 (5) (2012), 747–66.

were created. Subsequently, these states continued the process of nation-building by fostering a common national identity through all available means – state money, civil and military services, development of culture, press and education system, etc.[34] These objective geopolitical factors induced the new states, aware that the Empire would sooner or later withdraw from the Balkans, to start, using all available means, creating the preconditions for the division of the remaining Ottoman heritage. Ottoman Macedonia played a central role in their relations. By opening churches and schools, sending their priests, teachers, and paramilitaries, these states launched a fierce propaganda war in and for Macedonia. The well-known military tactic, found in the old Roman proverb, "Divide et impera!", was fully put into practice. This very systematic policy, practiced for decades within the Macedonian ethnicity, managed to penetrate parts of its substance, slowing down its constitutional processes. It is an indisputable historical fact that no other anti-Ottoman Balkan liberation movement had faced such limiting conditions.

As for the unfulfilled Article XXIII of the Berlin Treaty, its "resurrection" occurred in the 1890s when it became one of the pillars for the formation and functioning of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) founded in 1893 (from 1896 SMARO, from 1905 IMARO).[35] The aspirations for autonomy were partly founded on international legal grounds, i.e., the provisions of the 1878 Berlin Treaty.[36] The

[34] Katrin Bozeva Abazi, *The Shaping of Bulgarian and Serbian National Identities 1800–1900*, Skopje: INI, 2007; Holm Zundhausen, *Istorija Srbije od 19. do 20. veka*, Beograd: Clio, 2009 (original title: *Geschichte Serbiens. 19.–21. Jahrhundert*).

[35] In the Balkan historiography, the question about the first name and the first constitution of this Macedonian underground organization has not yet been settled. The proposed versions are in fact only hypotheses based on confusing and contradictory historical data. Resolving this matter requires further research and new genuine original sources. Some new documents indicate that it was initially called the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO). See Mihajlo Minoski, "Prilog kon prašaneto na imeto na Makedonskata revolucionerna organizacija vo početniot period na nejzinoto (1893–1896)," *Prilozi* 26 (2) (1995), 62–71. Its official name SMARO (Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization) dates back to the Thessaloniki Congress in 1896 (this issue is still debated in historiography due to the fact that the document "The Constitution of SMARO" itself bears no date). See Maria Pandevska, "Na patot kon Ilinden. Ustavot na TMORO i negovoto datirańe," in *100 godini Ilinden 1903–2003*, Vol. 2, Skopje: MANU, 2005, 141–54. It is, however, not disputed that the organization was renamed at the Rila Congress in 1905 to IMARO (Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization). Throughout its existence, it was unofficially referred to by the abbreviated name "Internal Organization," as opposed to "the Other," external one – the Vrhovist (Supreme) Committee with headquarters in Sofia. The term MRO can be used generally to refer to the Organization during its entire functioning (1893–1908). It self-dissolved after 1908 and, therefore, all the future organizations that emerged from its various factions were in fact other types of organizations with different activities and goals.

[36] Contrary to the Macedonian historiography (Bitovski, *Makedonija*), there is a tendency in some publications to minimize the significance and importance of the opportunities for Ottoman Macedonia's development that were envisaged in Article XXIII of the Treaty of Berlin, had it not become a dead letter (Duncan M. Perry, *The Politics of Terror. The Macedonian Liberation Movements 1893–1903*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988). More on the meaning of Article XXIII can be found in the sources, i.e., in the published positions of Western democratic public figures of the time: *Pour l'Arménie et Macé-*

historical sources credited to this Macedonian underground organization attest to this because its initiators believed that it was an unfulfilled duty of Europe.[37] The Macedonian revolutionaries were in a visionary way aware that the fate of their homeland Macedonia was in the hands of the Great European Powers and dependent on their opposing interests. The liberation axiom proclaimed by William Gladstone, "Macedonia for Macedonians," was added to this call to international standards:

> The hopelessness of the Turkish government would make me witness with delight its being swept out the countries which it tortures […] Next to the Ottoman Government nothing can be more deplorable and blameworthy than jealousies between Greek and Slav, and plans by the States already existing for appropriating other territory. Why not Macedonia for Macedonians, as well as Bulgaria for Bulgarians and Servia for Servians?[38]

The axiom "Macedonia for Macedonians" was a direct negation of the efforts of the neighboring Balkan countries which strove to divide it. However, the European Powers, committed only to their own interests, did not intend to abide by their undertaken (but unfulfilled) obligations, while the frozen conflicts remained neuralgic for the Balkan region. Historical scholarship analyzes and interprets all these situations as long-lasting historical processes, which (unfortunately) continue to this day.

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[37] *VMRO prez pogleda na nejnite osnovateli*, Sofiâ: Voenno Izdatelstvo, 2002, 18–9.

[38] Gladstone's letter was addressed to the President of the Byron Society and bears the date of January 19, 1897. Quoted after: "Times," February 6, 1897, 12.

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