

## THE BALKAN WARS THEIR MEANING IN THE HISTORY OF GREECE

Your Majesty,

Ever since the beginning of the 19th century omens portended that the Ottoman Empire was about to collapse, and in the middle of the same century its withdrawal from Europe could be foreseen with certainty.

The Christian nations of the Balkan peninsula anxiously watched the development of events while endeavouring to accelerate the fall of the Empire. At the same time they were concerned about the great problem of how the territories would be distributed which the Turks would sooner or later have to abandon. This problem of territorial distribution was of primary concern to the Bulgarians.

The Greeks had unfailingly preserved a live sense of nationality during their times of servitude. The national consciousness of the Bulgarians was, on the contrary, in a state of hybernation during that same period and it started awakening only in the first decades of last century.<sup>1</sup> The Bulgarians may have been long waking up, but they were fast to put forward great demands from the very first. Thus, they had no sooner assumed their national wakefulness than they laid claim to the entire Macedonia besides requiring Bulgaria proper, which was the area situated between Aimos and the river Danube.

I. To have the vision of a Great Bulgaria realized, the Bulgarians first aspired at establishing an independent Bulgarian Church.

It is a basic principle of Orthodoxy to renounce what is called "*Ethno-phyletismos*", that is the coexistence of several independent Orthodox Churches within the same territory, each one of which has a separate nation as its congregation. According to the conception the Orthodox Church

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1. St. Kyriakides, *A Brief Survey of the History of the Macedonian Struggle*, 1962, p. 6. (in Greek). M. Laskaris, *The Oriental Question* A, b, p. 246 ff. (in Greek). N. Kokkonis, *History of the Bulgarians*, 1877, p. 232 (in Greek); cf. also Georgi Schishknoff, *Zur Pshychologie der bulgarischen Wiedergeburt im 19. Jahrhundert*, in *«Völker und Kulturen Südeuropas»* (Schriften der Südeuropa-Gesellschaft), I, 1959.

has, all Orthodox Christians who inhabit the same country must belong to one and the same Church irrespective of nationality.

After long effort and with the help of General Ignatief, Russian Ambassador in Constantinople at the time, the Bulgarians contrived to set up an autocephalous Bulgarian Church by Sultan Decree (27 February 1870).

The establishment of an autocephalous Bulgarian Church within the territorial suzerainty of the Oecumenical Patriarchate was certainly irregular. For this reason a Great Synod met in Constantinople in 1872 and proclaimed the newly established Bulgarian Church schismatic.<sup>2</sup>

The Bulgarian Exarchate, which made Constantinople its seat, claimed all the slavophones of Macedonia and Thrace as Bulgarians. Moreover, it tried through various means, especially by setting up schools, to cultivate a Bulgarian national consciousness and even to expand it beyond the slavophones. In its work the Bulgarian Exarchate had Holy and Great Russia as a stand by, who was naive enough to believe that the Bulgarian State to be would vow devotion and serve as a stepping-stone for her own descent to the Mediterranean Sea.

II. Indeed it looked for a minute as if by the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) Russia had managed to create a great Bulgarian State that stretched as far as the river Aliakmon. The Treaty of San Stefano was like a death-warrant to Greece, however. Because if Greece was squeezed into this side of Aliakmon and pushed by the volume of a great Bulgaria, it would be too small, poor and emaciated to be viable. It would be condemned to fall into Bulgarian hands sooner or later.

The rest of the big European powers interpreted the Treaty of San Stefano as Russia's descent to the Aegean Sea. But they were not going to allow such a descent. An urgent conference was then called in Berlin which, mainly on the insistence of Britain, reversed the Treaty of San Stefano.

Greece was saved. The Berlin Conference created on the one hand, instead of a great Bulgaria, a Bulgarian autonomous principality, tributary to the Sultan which comprised Bulgaria proper; and on the other hand it proclaimed Northern Thrace an autonomous province under a Christian Gov-

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2. On the establishment of the Bulgarian Church and the schism it caused, see M. Laskaris, *op. cit.* p. 257 ff. (in Greek). B. Stefanidis, *Church History*, 1948, § 54 p. 663, ff. (in Greek). F. Vafidis, *Church History*, C b, 1928, § 263 p. 154 ff. (in Greek). E. Reinhardt, *Die Entstehung des bulgarischen Exarchates*, 1912. Cf. also G. Konidaris, *Abrogation of the Bulgarian Schism*, 1950 (Reprint from the Bulletin of the Faculty of Theology, University of Thessaloniki, Vol. 1) (in Greek).

ernor and under the name of Anatoliki Romylia (i.e. Eastern Rumelia). A few years later Bulgaria arbitrarily annexed Anatoliki Romylia (1885).

III. Bulgarian ambition could not possibly be satisfied with the Bulgarian State which originated from the Berlin Conference, even after Anatoliki Romylia had been annexed to it. The Bulgarians kept claiming the whole of Macedonia and the whole of Thrace as their own. The newly sprouted Bulgarian State joined efforts with the Bulgarian Exarchate in order to cultivate and propound Bulgarian national-mindedness in both these areas.

Their efforts did not have the expected results. A large number of those inhabiting these provinces remained faithful to the Oecumenical Patriarchate. Bulgarian propaganda had not succeeded in presenting all of the Macedonian and Thracian slavophones as Bulgarians. The slavophone element of these provinces divided into two large parts: slavophones who went over to the Exarchate and were henceforth called exarchic, and slavophones who remained faithful to the Oecumenical Patriarchate and were given the name "Graecoman" by the Bulgarians.

IV. The Bulgarians, confronted with such a situation, had recourse to a different means in the hope both that all slavophones would be attracted toward Bulgarian nationality and that all other subjugated Christian nations, especially the Greeks, would be abased.

Terrorism was the means they had recourse to. Armed troupes of guerrillas saw to the country and the villages, and secret agents saw to the towns. Since 1893 and particularly since 1903 systematic terrorism was exerted against every Christian in Macedonia and Thrace who was not prepared to go over to Bulgarian ideology. Acts of terrorism were mainly directed against every representative of Greek nationality, especially against Greek priests and teachers. The acts of terrorism consisted in plundering, setting fire and mostly killing.

The reaction of the Greek people to such Bulgarian activity was slow but effective. From this reaction issued the Macedonian Struggle.<sup>3</sup>

The entire strength of the nation participated in that struggle. Partisan troupes were formed with locals but also with volunteers who came from liberated and enslaved Greece. Special mention must be made of Cretan participation in these partisan groups. Outstanding Greek officers or

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3. St. Kyriakides, *op. cit.* G. Modis, *Our Macedonia and the "Macedonian" Minority*, 1962 (in Greek).

brave Macedonian chieftains were put at the head of the partisan corps. The struggle was supported by the Church and led by excellent Greek diplomats.

V. The Macedonian Struggle proved the Greek people vigorous and neutralized Bulgarian planning. The Macedonian Struggle stressed and corroborated the titles of Hellenism to Macedonia and Thrace. The Macedonian Struggle proved that the largest part of Wallach - speaking and a large part of Slavic - speaking people had a live Greek consciousness. The weight of this Greek struggle was carried to a great extent by the Macedonian slavophones and many of the chieftains could not even speak Greek.<sup>4</sup>

The importance of the Macedonian Struggle was great in that it prepared the Nation, both materially and mentally, for the wars to come. The Macedonian Struggle raised the morale of the Nation and inspired self-confidence. The Macedonian Struggle made it clear to the Nation that, if Macedonia was to be liberated from and protected against Bulgarian voracity, hard wars would be necessary; and also that these wars were imminent. As it was appropriately said, the Macedonian Struggle «was the starting point of the glorious liberation wars that took place between 1912 and 1913».<sup>5</sup>

The Macedonian Struggle lasted until 1908. During that year the Young Turks came to power and put an end to the martial conflicts among the Christian nations.

Young Turkey had abandoned the «divide and rule» policy, an old dogma with the Ottoman Empire.

VI. After the Young Turks had risen to power, the Christian peoples who had been freed from the Turkish yoke realized that they would not be able to turn the Turks out of Europe unless they resorted to war. On the other hand, it was clear to everybody that no successful war against Turkey was possible without the Christian states of the Balkans cooperating closely together.

The formation of alliances between Balkan states had been attempted before. Already in 1861 Serbia took the initiative of carrying out negotiations toward a Balkan alliance. In the year 1867 the Greek Government, with Charilaos Trikoupis as its Minister of Foreign Affairs, resumed negotiations with Serbia which resulted in the Greek - Serbian treaty of al-

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4. See Modis, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

5. See Kyriakides, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

liance signed on the 14/26 August 1867.<sup>6</sup> Later, in the year 1891, Charilaos Trikoupis went to Sofia and suggested to Staboulof, the Prime-Minister at the time, that there should be cooperation among the Balkan States. Staboulof not only refused to follow up Trikoupis' suggestion, but he also hastened to report about it to Abdul Hamit.<sup>7</sup> When the Young Turks rose to power, however, and when the Bulgarians apprehended that their terroristic activity in Macedonia and Thrace had virtually been a failure, they were finally convinced that unless there was agreement among the rest of the Christian States it would be impossible to turn the Turks out of Europe. So they contracted two treaties, one with Serbia, another with Greece. These treaties constitute the diplomatic foundation of the first Balkan War.

To start with, the Bulgaro-Serbian alliance treaty of 13 March 1912 was contracted, which provided for war against Turkey and the sharing of Macedonia between Serbs and Bulgarians. This was followed by negotiations between Greece and Bulgaria, which naturally presented many difficulties, as these nations had been in acute conflict with one another over the Macedonian Struggle. The attempt to conclude a Greek-Bulgarian agreement was started in 1910, during the government of Stefanos Dragoumis.

The above efforts did not come to a conclusion of alliance, yet relations between Greece and Bulgaria began to improve. Konstantine, a Crownprince then, visited Sofia in February 1912 and attended the festivities organized to celebrate the Bulgarian Crownprince Boris coming of age. Eleftherios Venizelos, Prime-Minister then, tried very hard and finally contrived to have a three year defence treaty signed between Greece and Bulgaria on the 17th May 1912. There was no provision in that treaty for the manner in which territories to be freed by war would be shared among the allies. The omission was due to the Bulgarians underestimating the potentialities of the Greek army; they did not expect the Greeks to make much progress during the time of hostile action and hence wished to wait until a more realistic situation was shaped through the war, before the sharing of the booty could be effected.

VII. When these two treaties, the Serbo-Bulgarian and the Greek-Bulgarian, were signed, the war was not long to break out.

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6. On the efforts towards cooperation among the Balkan States between 1861 and 1867, see M. Laskaris, *op. cit.* pp. 215-226 (in Greek).

7. Cf. Al. Kyrrou, *Our Balkan Neighbors* p. 94 ff. (in Greek).

The declaration of war against Turkey called all the Greeks to the arms. The whole nation threw itself into the fight as one body; they were materially prepared and morally united, they had great eagerness and unshakable faith in their eventual victory. In the war took part also Greeks from non-liberated parts and Greeks from abroad.

The Greek army crossed the border in the morning of 5 October 1912 and contrived to reach Thessaloniki within twenty days, continually fighting under unfavourable weather conditions and using primitive means of transport on the then miserable roads.

The Greek army displayed great energy during the first days of the war. Its successes exceeded the most optimistic expectations. The battles of Sarandaporon and Yiannitsa will always do honour to the Greek army.

Saint Demetrius, on his name-day, led the Greek army into his town. Thessaloniki was established as a large Greek city and had existed for many centuries as the second city of our medieval empire, as a 'first town after the first' — said the Byzantines. Such a town was now liberated after 482 years of servitude. The magnificent Byzantine churches were now returned to Christendom. On the Eptapyrgion and on the White Tower there fluttered Greek flags.

When Thessaloniki was liberated, the Greek army turned westward. Western Macedonia was set free without too much sacrifice, and the legendary town of Yiannena was seized after many months of hard struggle.

Special mention must be made of the Greek navy, which ever since the beginning of the war had confined the Turkish armada within the Straits of Hellespont. And this was of the greatest importance, as the Turks were thus prevented from sending reinforcements to their army by sea. The naval battle of Helli in the first days of December gave glory to the Greek navy, just as the naval battle of Salamis had in ancient times and just as the deeds of the Greek navy had during the War of Independence in 1821.

So that the trophies of 1821 might be fully repeated torpedo-boat 11 sank the Turkish battleship 'Fetich Bouled' in the bay of Thessaloniki, in the first days of war.

After the fall of Yiannena, the Turks had almost withdrawn completely from Europe. The problem of how the booty was to be shared emerged and it was acute. The Bulgarians required a lion's portion. Serious disagreement arose as much between Greece and Bulgaria as between Serbia and Bulgaria.

The conflict between Greeks and Bulgarians derived mainly from their disagreement over Thessaloniki, as the Bulgarians laid a persistent

claim on it while they had imported a considerable army force into the town by fraud. But the Greeks were absolutely determined on this point. Thessaloniki and the area necessary for its security constituted a minimum demand on the part of the Greeks. Conflict was inevitable. Thessaloniki then was the Apple of Discord which caused the Greek-Bulgarian war.

VIII. It was now clear that peaceful sharing of the booty was impossible. War was behind the door. The Bulgarians prepared for the rupture. Indeed, on the 8th of May they made an unexpected attack against the Greek army in Nigrita and Pangaion. In order to meet the situation Greece and Serbia signed a defence treaty in Thessaloniki on the 1st of June 1913.

On the 16th of June, at midnight, the Bulgarians launched a general attack against the Greek and Serbian armies, without ever declaring war. The second Balkan War had begun.

The successes of the Greek army in this war were amazing, what it accomplished being undoubtedly greater than what it had done during the Greek-Turkish war. The Greek army surpassed itself. Words will not suffice to praise its wonderful deeds, that brought forth international admiration. In a few weeks the Bulgarians were turned away from the areas they had occupied. The battles of Kilkis, Lachana, Doirani and Kresna will be remembered as great glories for the Greek army through the centuries. The war ended with the treaty of Bucarest which extended the Greek frontier as far as the river Nestos.

IX. When celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of those great events today, it is our duty as a nation to express our gratitude to the Greek army, the officers, petty officers and privates. During the Balkan Wars of the years 1912-1913 the Greek army and the Greek Navy wrote excellent epic pages, some of the most beautiful pages in the history of the Greek Nation.

It is our special duty as a nation to express our gratitude to the two great foremen of the Balkan-war wonder, to King Konstantine and to the Prime-Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos.

At the beginning of the war the Crownprince, who later became King Konstantine, led the army from victory to victory, with his ability as a leader, his military education, his valliancy, his manliness, and with his concern for the soldiers.

Eleftherios Venizelos, with his enlightened mind, his peerless courage and his indomitable energy, handled political matters with admirable dexterity which was best displayed when he dealt with the most difficult

diplomatic issues involved in this war and was able to turn the military triumphs of the nation completely to account.

When we celebrate today the fifty years since the Balkan Wars we bend our knee in reverence before the many thousands of its victims, among which King George I holds the first position, as a national martyr who sanctified by his own blood the undestructable ties between Greece and Thessaloniki.

X. Great events are certainly numerous in the three thousand year history of our Nation. The Balkan Wars are an event of the greatest magnitude. The Balkan Wars constitute a landmark in the history of the Greek Nation. They are most important for the fate of the Nation from many points of view.

XI. The Balkan Wars were very significant as a chance for the Nation to try out its worth in warfare.

The unfortunate War of 1897 had created doubts as to the value of the Greek soldier as a fighter. The Balkan Wars restored his reputation. Since then, the Greek army has been considered an important military power. Since the Balkan Wars Greece has counted as military factor that cannot be ignored. Its alliance is sought after.

The reputation of the Greek army was later corroborated through its grand success in the Macedonian battlefields during the first World War, and through the glorious honour it reaped in the mountains of Albania during the second World War.

Greece is proud of the martial value of its army. It is not enough for a nation to be a guardian or even the creative source of cultural values; it must at the same time have the power to defend its national independence and to protect the cultural values it believes in. A civilization that is powerless is doomed to perish of emaciation and decay.

XII. The Balkan Wars are very significant because it was through them that almost one million and a half enslaved brothers were liberated from Turkish yoke after many centuries of servitude.

The Balkan Wars contributed a great deal toward the realization of the "High Ideal", a concept serving as an ideal for the Greek nation as it was resurrected from ashes. The "High Ideal" had no imperialistic or conquering elements in it; the "High Ideal" had the liberation of enslaved brothers as its aim.



The "High Ideal" did not wish the Greeks to rule over other nations, it simply aspired at freeing the enslaved brothers and rehabilitating the Greek Nation in its home.

XIII. The Balkan Wars have been very significant as the extent of the Greek Kingdom was doubled through them and the necessary geographic space was hence created to harbour almost the whole of the Greek nation in a united territory. Greece enlarged was able to give shelter to and to rehabilitate about one million and five hundred thousand Greeks when they had to abandon century old homes and seek refuge in their motherland.

But also after this terrible uprooting of Hellenism from its century old hearths Greece has repeatedly found itself in a position of having to give shelter to Greek brothers, who had been obliged to leave their homes fleeing before the intolerance of non-free countries.

XIV. The Balkan Wars are very important because through them Greece was made a viable economic unity by liberating new areas of rich soil. In order to turn these new areas to account, Greece has not spared its efforts. The capital spent by the State to finance technical works in Macedonia during the last fifty years exceeds the amount of money made available for similar works in "Older Greece" during the 130 years of its free existence.

XV. The enlargement of Greece, which was effected through the Balkan Wars, also brought about a propagation of the democratic ideal over the Balkan peninsula and the islands.

Already since 1821, when our War of Independence began, our Nation had proclaimed its belief in democratic and liberal ideas.<sup>8</sup> These ideas were materialized during the reign of King George I. His era was a period of government where the King rules over a Republic; and since Charilaos Trikoupis initiated the Parliamentary System (ἀρχὴ τῆς δεδηλωμένης), the Government took the form of the King ruling over a parliamentary Republic. The realm of King George I was a time of liberal democracy, when the rights of the individual were respected and the palladium of personal independence, namely the "judicial independence", was secured in an exemplary way. The realm of George I also opened the

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8. Cf. Ch. Fragistas, *The Democratic and Liberal Spirit of the Constitutions during the War of Independence*, 1953 (in Greek).

way to social democracy that provides for the many, especially for the poor and feeble.<sup>9</sup> This was begun through a constitutional reformation which facilitated the expropriation of farming land.

The expansion of the Greek Kingdom to include new lands also meant that democratic and liberal ideals expanded into these new areas. If we overlook certain periods of political irregularity, mainly due to warfare, the new lands attached to the Kingdom of Greece after their liberation from the Turkish yoke have lived under Greek rule in a regime of political and liberal democracy.

The respect which the Greek State showed towards inhabitants of the newly annexed lands who had different religions, i.e. towards the Hebrew and Moslem minorities, should be especially stressed. In its attitude toward the Moslem minority Greece did not confine itself to observing the international treaties faithfully, but it made concessions beyond their set terms.<sup>10</sup>

Especial mention must also be made of the State expropriating farming land. A few years after the liberation from the Turkish yoke, the land was distributed to cultivators, so that the farmer of Macedonia was set free not only from national but also from economic servitude.

XVI. Through the Balkan Wars causing the Kingdom of Greece to expand territorially, almost all Greek Nationals were now allowed to gather in one place, where they could live under conditions financially viable, and with institutions democratic and liberal.

The Nation is now united, has a high morale, rests upon a firm economic basis as well as upon liberal and democratic foundations. Hence, it grows on in strength, and it is capable both to protect its own national existence and independence, and to go on creating and applying the high values of life.

9. On the Three Forms of Democracy, i.e. on Political, Liberal and Social Democracy, see Ch. Fragistas, *The Christian Bases of Democracy*, "Proceedings of the First Congress on Greek-Christian Civilization" 1956 (in Greek).

10. Cf. Ch. Fragistas, *Le droit musulman en Grèce*, in *Annales de la Faculté de Droit d'Istanbul*, 1955, No. 4 - 5 p. 129 ff.