

XVI. Macedonia and the Great Powers

by Vlasias Vlasidis

*Lecturer for Political Communication and Mass Media,
Department for Balkan Studies, University of Western
Macedonia, Greece*

1. From the beginning of the 19th century to the Congress of Berlin

The creation of an independent Greek state and an autonomous Serbian one changed to a great extent the scene in the Balkans, in as much as these states replace Austria and Russia in the struggle against the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the policy of the major powers, Great Britain, France and Austria, which tended to support the preservation of the hypostasis and integrity of the Ottoman Empire, delayed its dissolution for another century. It is a fact, however, that the revolutions among the Balkan peoples, the Serbs, Greeks, Montenegrins and Bulgarians rocked the equilibrium of the structure but did not demolish it.

1.1. Great Britain

The main aim of British policy in the Near East in the 19th century was to intercept Russian expansion in the direction of the Straits and the Mediterranean Sea. The purpose behind the successful implementation of this policy was to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and good relations with the Sublime Porte so as to create an obstacle to the expansive intentions of the Russians.

The foundations of this policy were laid by the Prime Minister Palmerston in the decade from 1830 to 1840, and, with minor changes, was followed strictly until the end of the 19th century, bypassing the national enlightenment of Christians and other peoples who resided within the Ottoman Empire and their demands for national liberation and the creation of nation states.

However, the continual divergence of the Ottoman Empire from the political, social and economic development of Europe threatened the whole venture undertaking. That is why, with the British Ambassador to Constantinople, Stratford Canning as spokesman, the British firmly sought the introduction of reforms in the structure and operation of the Ottoman state, so as to ensure its continued existence and enable it to respond to changing times.¹

The outcome of this policy was the peace treaty with which they ended the Crimean War. The Sultan was forced to grant isonomy and respect all his subjects, both Muslim and Christian alike, under the Imperial decree known as “Hatt-I Humayun”. The reforms had begun but would take time and prove ineffectual.

The most significant deviation from this doctrine was the positive stand which was adopted by Great Britain after 1824 in connection with the Greek Question, which led to the proclamation of a Greek state. In fact, the transformation of the regime from an autonomous state to an independent one is the result of the initiative of the British, who used the independence to outflank the Russians, who under the treaty of Adri-

anopole in 1929 had the initiative during the negotiations over the Greek Question. At any rate, at no stage of the negotiations did Great Britain forward for discussion the question of the integration of Macedonia within the Greek state.

1.2. France

France, for its part, hoped to establish an Arab-Egyptian Empire, in which it would control the finances, as in the case of the Ottoman Empire. As France held large economic interests in the Ottoman Empire, the last thing it would want was its collapse, dissolution or impoverishment. Consequently, France was against every attempt by Russia to replace the regime in the region. Furthermore, it was cautious towards the reforms which had been proposed by the British.²

However, in the case of the Greek Revolution, France, after the first years, contributed jointly with Russia and Great Britain to solving the problem to the advantage of the Greeks. In the diplomatic field, France supported, in the main, the moves of the British, but sent troops to the Peloponnese in order to oust Ibrahim and implement the resolutions of the treaty of 1827. In any event, at no stage during the diplomatic discussions and meetings did France raise the subject of the annexation of Macedonia to the nascent Greek state.

For the duration of the Crimean War, France and Great Britain allied themselves with the Ottoman Empire against the Russians, in order to prevent the latter from ending Ottoman rule in Europe. Napoleon III placed himself in favour of the integrity of Turkey and, in fact, it was he who began hostilities against Russia in the Black Sea.³ Naturally, it was the French who not only refused to help the rebels headed by Karatasos, but who dispatched a warship to Chalkidike to bombard and sink Karatasos' flotilla thereby cutting off his supply route from the sea.⁴ However, the French and British consuls mediated in 1854 to secure the safe withdrawal of the Greek rebels from western Macedonia and Chalkidike.⁵

After its defeat in the Franco-German War of 1870, France interested itself more in the activities of the Germans than in the Eastern Crisis. However, before the conference of ambassadors in Constantinople, France proposed the allocation of the Ottoman Empire to Britain and indeed, the occupation of Macedonia by the British in order to check the moves being made by the Slavs against the Greek state.⁶

1.3. Austria and Germany

The policy of the two German states, Austria and Prussia, was the same. Faithful in their support of the doctrine of absolute monarchy, the maintenance of social classes and the legitimacy of "The Divine Right of Kings" which inspired Metternich, Austria and Prussia were against every revolutionary movement, whether social or national-liberation in character, and advocates of intervention in neighbouring states in order to suppress such revolutions at the time of their inception before they become a danger to autarchy. On the basis of the above, their stand towards Turkey was stable and similar to that of France.⁷

Both powers remained hostile on the question of the Greek revolution from beginning to end. During the crisis brought by the Crimean War, Austria and Prussia sided with the French and English, but initially remained neutral during hostilities. Finally, Austria turned against Russia.

The policy of Austro-Hungary, just like that of Great Britain, was aimed at keeping the Ottoman state alive. It wished for good relations with the Ottoman Empire, but it was prepared to profit and gain territorial benefits in the event of a new crisis. The opportunism of Vienna led on many occasions to changes in or amendments to its policy on the question of the hypostasis and limits of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ Germany paid more attention to the activities of the French and, on the Eastern Question, usually supported Austro-Hungary.

1.4. Russia

On the contrary, Russia's firm intention was the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the occupation of Constantinople and the securing of an outlet to the Mediterranean. However, as long as France and Great Britain supported the existing regime in the Near East, the attempt was doomed to fail.

The Greek Revolution gave Russia an opportunity to cause tremors in the alliance between the British, French and Ottomans. Initially the tsar condemned the Greek Revolution, but later in 1825, Russia engaged in intense activity in order to settle the question of the Serb and Greek revolutions. Eventually, Russia acted both on the diplomatic level, jointly with the British and the French and also on the military level separately, declaring war on the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of the 1830s, both questions had been resolved in favour of the two Christian nations, with the creation – beginning from 1826 – of an autonomous Serbia and in 1830 with the creation of an independent Greek state.

The question of Macedonia, which was to be widely discussed fifty years later at the diplomatic level, did not concern Russian diplomacy at all. In any case, until 1870 it had not concerned the Greek nation either, since it regarded Macedonia as another Greek province, which would be annexed after Crete, Thessaly and Epirus, without any special effort and without competition from any other nation.⁹

However, despite the victory of the Russian army in the Russo-Turkish War and the concessions made by the Ottoman Empire, the proper conditions for its collapse were not created. That is the reason why Russia attempted to become reconciled with the British so as to succeed in establishing a common front against the Ottomans.¹⁰ In fact, at the beginning of 1853, Tsar Nicholas had presented the British with a plan for the partitioning the Ottoman Empire, with Constantinople as a free city under a Russian garrison, the Straits with an Austrian garrison, and the Balkans reverting to the possession of the Balkan peoples. Greece would annex only the islands of the Aegean and would not expand northwards.¹¹

Russian policy began to change and the end of the 1850s. Finally, it crystallized in a triptych: averting diplomatic isolation, controlling the Straits and supporting the national aspirations of the Bulgarians,¹² in other words, avoiding the reverses of the Crimean War. The last component was the result of the activities of pan-Slavic circles. Around that time, there was created the "Slavic Benevolent Committee", whose main work was aimed at getting Russia to turn its attention exclusively to the Slavic populations of the Balkans. This movement was strengthened significantly by the appointment in 1864 of the Pan Slavist, Graf Ignatiev, as Russian Ambassador to Constantinople. This move was to have serious consequences on the direction taken by Russian policy towards Greece in general and on the question of Macedonia's fortune in particular.

More specifically, Russian policy began to support Bulgarian claims in Macedonia, claims which, on a religious level, constituted 30 out of the 49 provinces of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in European Turkey, and, on a political level, involved the integration of almost the whole of Macedonia within the future Bulgarian state.¹³ Russia's support of the Bulgarian requests was expressed either directly to the Sublime Porte, by Ignatiev, or to the local Ottoman authorities in Macedonia, by Russian diplomatic staff, who were serving in the Russian Consulate in Thessaloniki and the Russian Consulate in Bitola, which was established in 1861.

The Russian policy of Panslavism in Macedonia was also expressed in the attempts to Russianize Mount Athos. From the 1850s, hundreds of Russian monks began to swarm to Mount Athos to live in the depths the monasteries, sketes (dwelling places of communities of monks living in partial or complete seclusion) and cells. The correlation between the Russians and the other monks in the decade between 1860 and 1870 changed to such an extent that in 1867 a Russian was elected abbot at the monastery of Saint Panteleimon. The Russian government helped both morally and physically in the whole attempt, as it provided the necessary sums, the materials and the means of transport, for the purchase of cells, the building extension of monasteries, and the erection of the new sketes of Saint Andreas and the Prophet Ilias.

The radical change in Russia's foreign policy with regard to the Balkans is not wholly explained as being the result of the influence exercised on the Russian leadership by Panslavists. The Russians had realized, after the Crimean War, that the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was impractical as long as the remaining European powers continued to support it and that the alliance between them and the Ottoman Empire could mean the return of the British and the French to the area of the Black Sea without there being another power capable of obstructing them. For this reason it had to create a powerful nation in the Balkans, with outlets to the Black Sea and the Aegean, which would be under its protection.¹⁴

During the crisis of 1870, which led to the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, Russian adopted an equivocal stand towards the entire issue,¹⁵ but during the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878, with Ignatiev playing the leading role, it implemented the plan of the Panslavists for the creation of the "Greater Bulgaria" established under the Treaty of San Stefano, a Bulgaria which would have encompassed all of Macedonia, apart from Thessaloniki and its environs, including Chalkidike. Greece's refusal to enter the war on the side of the Russians, despite the relevant invitation of Tsar Alexander II, and in view of the pressure put on it by Great Britain to remain neutral, might have played a part in Russia's decision to favour the Bulgarians exclusively at the expense of the Greeks.¹⁶

More specifically, in December 1876, a meeting of representatives of the Great Powers was held in Constantinople in order to resolve the problems which had been created by the Bulgarian rebellion. The representatives of Great Britain and France sought in the main to act in a deterrent way, so as to avert a Russo-Turkish war, which could have reduced the Ottoman Empire to a worse state or even led to its dissolution. Consequently, they demanded from the Sublime Porte administrative and economic reforms for the areas which had rebelled. Ignatiev opted to ally himself with the representatives of the other powers, but in a masterly way included in the areas where the Bulgarians had started rebellions – therefore areas which were included in the transformation – many provinces of Macedonia. The areas of western Macedonia, which included the provinces of Kastoria, Florina and Edessa, were included in a new self-governing villayet. The connection between these areas and the Bulgarian national issue became self-evident from that point on.¹⁷ In the end, the plan was not implemented, as

Sultan Abdul Hamid proceeded with the granting of a constitution for the sole purpose of escaping from the difficult position in which he had become entangled.

However, the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War in April of 1877 and the advance of Russian troops, who reached as far as the suburbs of Constantinople, radically changed the correlation by dramatically reducing the resistance of the Ottomans. On the 19th of February 1878, a peace treaty was signed between the Ottomans and Russians at San Stefano, a suburb of Constantinople. During the negotiations, Ignatiev attempted to resolve the Macedonian Question once and for all, proposing the creation of a Bulgarian state which would comprise all of Macedonia as far as Kastoria, including Thessaloniki itself. In order to temper the opposition of the Greeks and the other powers, he proposed returning Thessaly, Epirus and Crete to the Greeks. The Ottoman Empire had become so weak that it was unable to bring any opposition. However, the tsar feared the reaction of the other powers and did not approve the integration of Thessaloniki within the Bulgarian state that was being planned. Finally, the Sublime Porte agreed to the establishment of a Bulgarian hegemony, which would incorporate all the lands of Macedonia within its territory, with the exception of the provinces of Kozani, Servia, Chalkidike and Thessaloniki.¹⁸

The Treaty of San Stefano was a diplomatic triumph for Ignatiev, a vindication of the Pan Slavists as well as an indication of Russia's intention to expand within the area under the Ottoman Empire in order to secure an outlet to the warm seas, a show of power and a disposition to follow – in its own way eventually – the other European powers in the competition to colonize.¹⁹

The other powers were not willing to ratify the Russian triumph and bury their dreams along with their aspirations. At the same time, there began in Great Britain, France and Italy a revival of a wave of Philhellenism, which turned against Pan Slavism and favoured Greek rule in Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia.²⁰

The coinciding of the views of Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary and Germany led to the convening of a peace conference, which would re-examine the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano. At the Congress of Berlin, Macedonia's future changed. The "Greater Bulgaria" would remain a dream, the "Great Idea" for the Bulgarians. In its place there was created a tribute to the sultan of the Bulgarian hegemony north of Rhodope and a second, Eastern Rumelia, with the same regime, which stretched from Haimos until Rhodope. Macedonia was returned to the Ottomans, who promised to proceed with reforms.

The parties responsible for these changes were Austro-Hungary, Great Britain and France, each one for their own reasons. The first of these, Austro-Hungary, had not been involved in any struggle for colonies beyond Europe and attempted to expand towards the south and the east. It sought an outlet to the Adriatic and the Aegean. Its first aim was realized when it was given the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The second aim was expressed in its insistence on being given the sanjak of Novi Pazar, something which finally proved unfeasible. A large Bulgarian state in Macedonia would have frustrated Austrian plans for an outlet to the Aegean through the Axios River basin. That is why Austro-Hungary remained firm in wanting a revision of the Bulgaria which was anticipated by the Treaty of San Stefano. In order to avert the revival of the idea of an expanded Bulgarian state in the future as well as to reduce Serbia's objections to Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it preferred to encourage the spread of Serbian influence in Macedonia.²¹ In fact, Austro-Hungary signed an official agreement with Serbia on the 16th of June 1881, under which it was obliged to support Serbian claims in Macedonia, when future developments called for such a course of action.²²

2. From the Congress of Berlin to the First World War

From the time of the Congress of Berlin until the First World War, the Great Powers attempted to follow a steady policy towards the Ottoman Empire and a policy which brought equilibrium to the relations among themselves. Great Britain continued to follow her policy of backing and reforming the Ottoman state as a means of intercepting the Russians, but it had begun to perceive that its dissolution was not far away. The policies of Austria, Russia and Italy were similar. Only Germany considered that its interests would be successfully protected in the Near and Middle East by its support, even to extremes, of the hypostasis and integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Russia, on its part, considered that it had been humiliated at the Congress of Berlin and worked vigorously for its annulment.

The question of ownership of Macedonia and its Christian populations remained in the news regularly. This was helped by the conflicting propagandas of the Balkan states. Finding a solution for the Macedonia Question which would have satisfied all parties – the Great Powers and the Balkan states – and which would not adversely affect the hypostasis of the Ottoman Empire, proved to be a crossword puzzle for strong solvers

2.1. Austro-Hungary

More specifically, Austro-Hungary stepped up its influence in the Balkans since, with the renewal of the alliance of the Three Empires on 18th June 1881, it had gained the right to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina but also the obligation not to oppose the unification of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria.²³ The ulterior motive behind its policy was to gain an outlet to the Aegean in the vicinity of Thessaloniki, via the Axios River valley. With this aim in mind, Austro-Hungary sought the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in combination with the strengthening of Bulgaria. This policy worked against the integration of Macedonia within the Bulgarian state, as a powerful Slavic hegemony would have thwarted Austrian plans.²⁴ During the crisis of 1897, the Austrians collaborated with the Russians in order to avoid any change in the territorial status quo of the Ottoman Empire and especially Macedonia.²⁵

The scheme of reforms which was jointly presented by the Austrians and Russians to the Sublime Porte in 1903, in order to appease the spirits in Macedonia after the Ilinden Uprising, was in essence designed to weaken the Ottoman Empire and create the most suitable conditions for securing an outlet for Austro-Hungary to the Aegean through the Axios River valley. More specifically, they had proposed the establishing of the office of Governor General for the vilayets of Skopje, Bitola and Thessaloniki and the appointment of two advisors, one Russian and one Austrian, as well as the reorganization of the gendarmerie by European officers.²⁶ There was a clear intention to reduce the influence of the Sultan in Macedonia and bring about Macedonia's internationalization by having two foreign advisors assist in its administration.

The Young Turk Revolt of 1908 and the laying of a constitution was apparently an undesirable development for the Austrian aims since it invalidated the programme of reforms under Mürzteg and showed that the new leaders had changed their stance towards Vienna. At any rate, Austro-Hungary exploited the incident by annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina and expelling a large number of Muslims, who sought refuge in Macedonia. Furthermore, it found an opportunity to disengage itself from accountability for the successful course of the program of reform in Macedonia, for which both the Sublime Porte and the general consensus of opinion considered it the inspirer and,

consequently, the one responsible for the course the program would take, be it successful or otherwise.²⁷

Austrian annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 after the Young Turk Revolt. It sided with Italy against the advance of the Serbian army towards the Adriatic and Albania and forced the Serbs to move southwards, for the duration of the First Balkan War, in violation of the Serbo-Bulgarian agreements concluded on the eve of the war.²⁸

In the interim between the two Balkan wars, Austro-Hungary developed intense diplomatic activity. Encouraged by the ease with which it annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, it attempted on the eve of the London Peace Conference, to obtain the largest benefit for itself by asking for the establishment of an independent Albania, the prohibition of an outlet to the Adriatic for the Serbs, the transformation of Thessaloniki into a free port and the right to enjoy free trade in all the former Ottoman provinces.²⁹ Nevertheless, these demands, and its general stance at the London Peace Conference, brought objections even from Germany, which realized that the Austrian intransigence was capable of precipitating a war among the Great Powers under adverse conditions for the Central Empires, since, in such an event, the Balkan states as a whole would side with the powers of the Entente.³⁰

2.2. Great Britain

Great Britain, for its part, considered that Russia's triumph in the Treaty of San Stefano constituted a serious threat to its own policy in the region, since the establishment of a powerful Bulgarian state under the protection of Russia would virtually encircle Constantinople and, in effect, hold the Sultan hostage.³¹ That is why it made vigorous efforts to have the Treaty of San Stefano annulled and the power of the future Bulgarian state reduced.

Following the Congress of Berlin, the policy of Great Britain continued to be one of maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire as the only way to prevent the occupation of the Straits and Constantinople by some other power, a development which would have brought an obstacle to Great Britain's control of the sea and land routes between East and West.³²

It held a cautious stand towards Bulgaria. In 1880, Gladstone's Liberal Party, which inherited George Canning's policy towards the Bulgarian people, came to power. In addition, the occupation of Cyprus in 1878, followed by that of Egypt in 1882, and the control of the Suez Canal reduced for the British the importance of protecting the Ottoman Empire. A fairly strong Bulgarian state, which would not be under Russian protection, was considered by the British a satisfactory development.³³ Consequently, without any particular reservations, the British chose to support the Bulgarian demands in an attempt to wrest Bulgaria from Russian protection or create unfavourable feelings towards the Russians on the part of Bulgaria. This policy was manifested in the crisis of 1885.

Furthermore, there were many trade unions and personalities in Great Britain who, in a totally romantic way, viewed the atrocities committed by bands of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), as heroic acts of the oppressed Christians against their oppressors. Public opinion in England reacted with great displeasure to the severity which the Ottomans showed in repressing the Ilinden Uprising, with the result that a wave of support for the Bulgarians was created. In fact, a revolutionary committee, the Balkan Committee was created with the purpose of helping the refugees and demanding the establishment of a Macedonia which would be autonomous.³⁴

However, the rapprochement between the Bulgarians and the Russians and the strengthening of Bulgaria at the expense of the neighbouring peoples changed the priorities of British policy. Great Britain did not wish for a powerful Bulgaria that would include Macedonia and be created under Russian protection. Additionally, Britain began to be troubled towards the end of the 19th century by the violence with which the Ottomans usually dealt with insurrections begun by the Christian peoples within the lands of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, it began to be oriented towards a policy that was more critical of the Sultan, which did not exclude a change even in the regime in Macedonia, where there was continued peremptoriness on the part of the state authorities and Muslim insurgents at the expense of Christians.³⁵ A solution in this direction was the position taken by Gladstone in 1897, for the right to self-determination of the peoples who resided in Macedonia.³⁶

Britain continued to regard the creation of an autonomous hegemony in Macedonia with a Christian governor as a possible solution, and at the beginning of the 20th century, as a reaction to the reforms proposed by Vienna and Mürzteg, but eventually gave way, in order not to create problems in the implementation of the reforms.³⁷ Having seen, however, that the planned reforms were limited to certain areas of Macedonia and were not effective, it asked, at the beginning of 1905, for the extension of the reforms to cover particular kazades in the villayet of Adrianople, for the assigning of further duties to the Governor General (Vali) of Macedonia and the appointment of a commission, consisting of representatives from the six European powers, in order to work out a plan for control of finances and the conferring of justice in the three villayets of Macedonia.³⁸ In the summer of 1907, it brought up once again the request for self-government for Macedonia with a Christian governor. However, the other powers, and especially Austria, refused to back the British proposals, since they regarded the work on reforms which had been done until then as having been satisfactory.³⁹

Even more important was the rapprochement between Great Britain and Russia in the summer of 1907. London, which watched with uneasiness as Germany's influence upon the Ottoman Empire grew worryingly stronger at a time when its own had begun to wane, preferred to work together with Russia in order to protect its interests in the Far East from Russian competition in exchange for an agreement to change the regime in the Balkans.⁴⁰

In March of 1908, Britain once again presented its proposal for self-rule for Macedonia under the aegis of the Great Powers; however, the plan was not acceptable either to Austria or Russia.⁴¹ In any case, Britain continued negotiations with Russia that would end in an attempt at reform. This, however, did not succeed since, in the summer of 1908, the Young Turk Revolt which erupted in Macedonia resulted in the granting of a constitution.

The new situation which was created changed things for the time being. The course being taken by reforms in Macedonia was halted, since, with the constitution, much greater freedom was given to the peoples and promises were made for extensive changes in the organization and functioning of the Ottoman state.

The British government was from the start in favour of the Young Turk Revolt. Moreover, it had more reason than the other powers to desire such a development. The complete overturn of the political balance in Constantinople created more possibilities for a rapprochement between the Turks and the British and indeed the Young Turks initially moved in this direction. Besides, the British programme of reforms for Macedonia, which was clearly more advanced compared with that of Mürzteg, had more chances of progressing under the announced constitution of the New Turks.⁴² The various liberal circles in Britain, such as the Balkan Committee, were, albeit with reser-

vations, in favour of the new situation, since they did not trust the Ottomans; however, they could not deny that the developments following the Rebellion of 1908 were moving in the right direction. At any rate, both the British government and British public opinion were at that time ready to change their stand towards the New Turks in the event of their being made aware of any violations of the commitments and renewed oppression of Christian populations.⁴³ When after 1910 the Young Turks proceeded to revoke the rights of the Christians and began to exercise a harsh nationalistic policy, the British government, the press and the various liberal organizations completely changed their policy towards Ottoman rule.⁴⁴

The creation of an alliance of Balkan states was not unheard of in Great Britain, but the secret protocols which defined the claims and provisions of Russia's mediation were revealed after the outbreak of the First Balkan War. Britain did not attempt to avert the outbreak of the Balkan Wars since it judged that they were unavoidable. It hosted the London Peace Conference in the hope of playing a role similar to that of Germany in ending the crisis of 1875-1877, but was finally unwilling or unable to play a leading role. At any rate, while there was a lot of diplomatic activity in connection with all the other issues (Albania, the islands of the Aegean, an outlet for Serbia to the Adriatic), the question of Macedonia was not widely discussed. Neither Great Britain nor the other powers – with the exception of Austria, which attempted to internationalize Thessaloniki – submitted an integrated plan for Macedonia.

2.3. Russia

In the period which followed the Congress of Berlin until the end of the 19th century, Russia continued to support the claims of Bulgaria in Macedonia and Thrace even when power in Bulgaria was held by parties which were more sympathetic towards the Austrians and the Germans instead of the Russians. In the period from 1878-1885, Russia had made an attempt to reconcile the Greeks and Bulgarians in connection with the future of Macedonia, but both the former and the latter remained adamant in the stands they took and the Russian initiative was left without support.

The arbitrary action of Bulgaria in annexing Eastern Rumelia in September of 1885 met with opposition from the Russians, who were afraid that such a move would provoke a reaction from the Austrians and claims from the Serbs and Greeks in return. In fact Russia together with Austro-Hungary and Germany refused to accept the accomplished fact and demanded the reinstatement of the previous regime. The Ottoman Empire, encouraged by the stand taken by the three empires, threatened to intervene militarily but met with opposition from Great Britain, which posed the possibility of a military imbroglio involving the Serbs and Greeks against the Ottomans without the British being able to support them.⁴⁵

The support of the Bulgarian claims became even more obvious after the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885-1886 and the victory of the Bulgarians. Russian diplomatic staff in Macedonia advanced or supported all the requests of the Bulgarians for the erecting of new churches and schools. Indeed at this time the prestige of Bulgaria was so great that its requests won the support even of Great Britain, which believed that with such a policy it would be able to wrest Bulgaria from Russian influence.⁴⁶

The opposition of the other powers to the change in Balkan borders and the actions of the Bulgarian-Macedonian Revolutionary Committee, which was demanding the creation of a united and autonomous Macedonia, began to be accepted, with the passage of time, as a possible solution to counter the ploys of Russian diplomacy. Consequently, when in December of 1902, the Foreign Ministers of Russia and Austro-

Hungary, Lambsdorff and Goluchevski respectively, met in Vienna, the former proposed as a solution, self-rule for Macedonia with a Christian governor.⁴⁷ After opposition from Austro-Hungary, Russia eventually agreed to accept the reforms of Mürzteg.

The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 limited Russia's interest in Balkan matters for a time. The unfavourable outcome of the war, however, turned Russia's attention once again towards the Near East and the search for an ally, which, in the summer of 1907, it found in Great Britain, with the intention of bringing about a complete change of the regime in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. The Young Turk Revolt did not bring changes in the Russian stand towards the Sublime Porte, since the Russians judged that the movement was doomed to fail.⁴⁸ After 1909, the change in the policy of the Young Turks towards the Christian peoples who lived within the Ottoman Empire, vindicated the opinion of the Russians. Furthermore, the Austrian move in annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina, led them to encourage the idea of an independent Bulgaria and adopt a more aggressive policy towards the Ottoman Empire, one which, however, was not adopted by the British and French.

This policy manifested itself in the encouragement given to Serbia and Bulgaria to collaborate militarily against Ottoman rule in the Balkans. The foundations of this collaboration were put forward by Hartwig, the Russian Ambassador in Belgrade from 1909 and ardent supporter of the Pan Slavists. The approach became feasible only in 1911, as a result of the reservations which were held by King Ferdinand of Bulgaria.⁴⁹ The final agreement anticipated that if both sides did not agree to have the land between the River Strymon and the Shar mountain range, that is to say Macedonia, become a united self-ruling province, then it would be divided into two zones, from Golem Korab until Lake Ochrid. The southern zone would revert to Bulgaria and the northern to Serbia. More important for Russia was the fact that if differences arose between the two states, then they would turn to Russia for arbitration.⁵⁰

However, Russia finally found itself unable to control the situation since it might have agreed to the concluding of an agreement between Bulgaria and Greece, but its opposition to the participation of Montenegro was ignored. What were also ignored were Russia's exhortations for a postponement of military operations, seeing that in mid-September 1912 Bulgaria informed Russia that the Balkan states had decided to declare war against the Ottoman Empire.⁵¹

2.4. Germany

The unification of German states in the mid 19th century and Germany's supremacy in the Franco-German War of 1870 made Germany into yet another European power. In turn, it also followed a policy of supporting the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, perhaps more dutifully than France and Great Britain.

The reason behind this policy was mainly the search for markets for German industrial products and raw materials for German factories.⁵² In practice, this policy was seen in Austrian support of the Ottoman Empire, to the disadvantage of Russian aspirations. This support did not stem from a common descent but was based on purely economic criteria. Germany viewed the region from the River Elba in Central Europe to the Euphrates in Mesopotamia as a unified economic zone, in which it would enjoy a preferential position together with its ally Austro-Hungary. The building by Germany of a railway line from Konya as far as Baghdad and the permission which Austria was granted for the linking of the Austrian and Ottoman railway lines at Mitrovitsa, put the German plan into operation and simultaneously alarmed Great Britain and Russia, both

of whom began to move towards an overall solution to the Eastern Question which had as its basis the disruption of the Ottoman Empire.⁵³

The Germans did not possess any particular policy in connection with Macedonia. In the context of maintaining the existing regime, they supported the efforts of Austro-Hungary and Russia to reach a settlement of the problems which resulted from poor administration and nationalistic antagonisms. Naturally, every move against the Sultan or the local authorities brought anger and opposition from German policy.⁵⁴

The Young Turk Revolt of 1908 brought about a temporary cooling in the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Germany, since Germany was the supporter of the corrupt regime of Abdul Hamid. It was logical, therefore, for the Young Turks to treat the Germans with coldness and turn initially towards the British and French. This coldness had unfortunate consequences for the Ottomans, as the Germans supported, albeit with reservations, the arbitrary annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary and did not oppose the expansionist policy of Italy in the direction of the African provinces of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵ However, from 1911 onwards, the Young Turks began once again to show a preference for the Germans. This was helped by the appointment of the pro-German Sefket Pasha to the position of War Minister, the refusal of Great Britain to supply the Sublime Porte directly with warships and the policy adopted by Great Britain on the Cretan Question.⁵⁶

2.5. France

The French presence in Macedonia and the rest of the Balkans continued to identify the region with the French capital which controlled important sectors of the economy such as banks, industries, transportation and other services. France desired a regime of peace, order and security, in other words, the conditions which were essential for the growth of the economy. However, its policy differed from that of Germany since it had not reached the point of turning a blind eye to the important changes which were taking place in the region or the weaknesses and atrocities of the Ottomans.

However, it agreed with Great Britain that the Ottoman Empire needed extensive changes if it were to survive, and supported every related attempt at reform, displaying particular sensitivity on the question of protecting Christian populations from the peremptoriness of local authorities and the violence perpetrated by the Muslim rabble, the army and irregulars.⁵⁷ It is characteristic that after the quelling of the Ilinden Uprising, the greater part of humanitarian aid that was distributed to victims of the uprising was of French origin, and French authorities collaborated with Catholic organizations in its distribution.⁵⁸

In the period from 1902 to 1908, the French consuls in Macedonia held a cautious stance towards all the efforts to bring reforms to the region. They were of the opinion that the situation could change for the better with an improvement in public administration and that the entire system that had been implemented under the Mürzteg programme was ineffective and bureaucratic. At any rate, it supported the policy for reform because it had as a priority the maintenance of the existing regime.⁵⁹

2.6. Italy

Italy was included among the new European powers since came into existence from the unification of the Italian states in the mid-19th century. The main aim of its foreign policy immediately after its unification was the establishment of *mare nostrum*, in

other words, expansion throughout the entire Mediterranean basin. The annexation of the eastern coast of the Adriatic was put forward as a first step in the accomplishment of this aim, something that brought it into open confrontation with Austro-Hungary. At the Congress of Berlin, the Italians did not make any particular claims for territorial concessions; however, in the years that followed they made vigorous moves in this direction.⁶⁰

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Italy appeared as a guarantor of the continued territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, having signed the treaty of 1887, but its policy arose out of the fact that it felt incapable of matching Austria and Germany in a crisis which would lead to a change in the regime. The diplomatic activity which was observed at the beginning of the 20th century, as a result of the situation in Macedonia, gave Italy the pretext to revise her policy. Consequently, at the beginning of 1903, it supported, as did Great Britain, the creation of a unified, self-governing Macedonia with a Christian governor. This was not a strategic option but was more of an expression of discontent at having been excluded from the Mürzteg Conference. At any rate, as soon as it was determined that the head of the International gendarmerie would be an Italian, it withdrew its reservations.⁶¹

The opportunism of Italy was revealed after 1908, when it exploited the change in diplomatic equilibrium, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary and the favourable stance of Russia, in combination with the intransigence of the new Ottoman rule, and declared war against the Ottoman Empire, with the intention of obtaining land in the eastern Mediterranean.

3. The First World War

The Treaty of Bucharest might have made radical changes to the regime in Macedonia, which, with minor modifications, is what exists until today, but at that time few considered it as a final text which was to endure. First among them were the Ottoman Turks, who, as losers under the terms of the treaty, had lost in the space of two years all their possessions in Europe, and the Bulgarians, who had been defeated in the Second Balkan War. The First World War was for the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria an opportunity to reverse in their favour the regime in Macedonia which had been implemented by the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913.

The same were the intentions of all the other Great Powers. Both the Central Empires and the Entente Cordiale (Entente) attempted to win over Bulgaria, by offering it a part of the territory in Macedonia which had become entangled between the Serbs and Greeks in the Balkan Wars.

3.1. Germany and Austro-Hungary

The Central Empires promised Bulgaria a complete change in the status quo in Macedonia and virtually allowed it to annex all of Macedonia and not only that.⁶²

At the beginning of 1915, when it appeared that Greece would enter the war against Turkey, Germany, in an attempt to strengthen its position with King Constantine, offered guarantees for the security of the region around Thessaloniki and small concessions on the Serbo-Bulgarian border at Gevgelija –Doiran as well as territorial concessions in Albania. However, when in August of the same year, critical talks began between Germany and Bulgaria, the only thing the Germans had to offer Greece was south Albania and the islands of the Aegean.⁶³ Finally, Bulgaria signed a military pact with Germany in exchange for all the areas east of the River Morava and all of Serbian

Macedonia. It also acquired the right to annex all the areas which Greece had been gained under the Treaty of Bucharest.⁶⁴

Germany fully supported Bulgarian ambitions for the duration of the military campaigns and used the Bulgarian forces to impose its influence on the defeated Serbia. The Germans also displayed a special interest in IMRO, to the point where in middle of 1915 it became a channel for information and communication which existed between the German services and the central committee of IMRO. A year later, during the meeting between Emperor William II and the Bulgarian King Ferdinand on the 18th of January 1916, the two leaders of IMRO, Todor Alexandrov and Alexander Protogerov, were present.⁶⁵

3.2. Great Britain

The powers of the Entente on their part, considered that Bulgaria was extremely important on the chessboard of the war in the Balkans. Bulgaria had either to remain neutral or enter the war on the side of the Entente. In either case, the powers of the Entente attempted to obtain from Serbia and Greece territorial concessions for Bulgaria within Macedonia.

Great Britain often offered the area of Kavala to Bulgaria and on a few occasions the areas around Drama and Serres and also agreed to changes in Serbian Macedonia.⁶⁶ This policy did not change even after Great Britain declared war against Bulgaria. In the summer of 1916, the British were certain that the Bulgarian army would advance towards Thessaloniki and in order to avert such a development, they proposed the surrender of eastern Macedonia to Bulgaria.⁶⁷ In fact, at the end of 1917, they sought to secure the neutrality of Bulgaria by signing a separate peace treaty and that is why they were willing to make territorial concessions in the region of Macedonia, but were not prepared to accept Bulgarian demands for the reinstatement of the Bulgaria foreseen under the Treaty of San Stefano. A few months later, at the beginning of 1918, encouraged by members of the Balkan Committee, Buxton and Boucher, work was carried out together with the Americans on a plan for self-rule in Macedonia.⁶⁸

3.3. Russia

Russia was excessive in concessions offered to the Bulgarians, seeing that in turn it proposed giving Bulgaria a zone from Doiran until Kastoria or Florina and a corresponding zone towards the north from the new Serbian areas.⁶⁹ At any rate, Russia's ulterior motive was to turn the Serbs towards the Adriatic, the Greeks towards Epirus, the islands of the Aegean and Asia Minor, and to give the Bulgarians Bitola or changes in the borders in the region of Edessa.⁷⁰

After the defeats in Galicia in 1915, Russia forced the British and French to offer large territorial concessions to Bulgaria from parts of Serbian and Greek Macedonia in order to have it enter the war on the side of the Entente and participate in a flank attack against the Ottoman forces in Thrace. In any case, the Russians did not wish for Greek involvement in the campaign in Gallipoli, as they saw Greece as a powerful contender for Constantinople and the Straits.⁷¹

3.4. France

France, which maintained an extensive economic influence and substantial capital in the Near East, desired to retain this influence in the Balkans and simultaneously to prevent an increase in Russian presence in the same region. That is why, at the end of 1914, it put forward the idea of creating an additional front in the southern Balkans.⁷² One year later, the French government, and in particular Briand, envisioned Thessaloniki as a base for the spread of French influence in the Balkans after the end of the war.

For the implementation of this plan, France opted to use Serbia. In 1915, Serbia had been defeated and the Serb army, led by the King of Serbia, withdrew via Albania and took refuge in Corfu. The French thought of establishing a base in Macedonia which would be controlled either by them or by the exiled Serb forces. This plan was implemented with the return of the Serb forces to Macedonian soil. In this way, the French and Serb armies jointly advanced in western Macedonia. By 1916 a large part of western Macedonia, from Korytsa in the west to Bitola and Kaimakchalan in the north and Giannitsa in the east was in French hands. Serb authorities were appointed to settle in the lands under occupation by the French and Serbs. In fact, in the summer of 1916, and more specifically on the 18th of August, they took advantage of the unstable political situation and succeeded in forcing the evacuation of all Greek troops from Thessaloniki, with the intention of using the city as the headquarters of the King of Serbia.⁷³

The Greek authorities frequently protested about the actions of the French and the peremptoriness of the Serbs. However, the French not only rejected the Greek protests but also offered their support of any peremptory behaviour displayed by the Serb authorities or army in western Macedonia. The main reason for this stance was the pro-German neutrality which had been adopted by King Constantine.⁷⁴

The strong military presence and the occupation of a large part of western Macedonia as well as the heated opposition to the policy of King Constantine were leading for a time towards the establishment of a scenario which even included the creation of an autonomous Macedonia under French occupation or influence. In fact, in a report to the French Foreign Ministry, Jules Lecoq, the leader of the French political delegation to Thessaloniki, proposed the creation of a self-ruling Macedonia, which would be made up of six cantons: the cantons of Skopje, Veles, Bitola, which would be under the control of the Serbs, the cantons of Serres and Chalkidike under the control of the Greeks and the canton of Drama under Turkish control. Thessaloniki and its environs would constitute a free federal city. The autonomous Macedonia would be under the influence of France, which would of course represent it in its international relations.⁷⁵ This plan was not put into effect since Greece entered the war on the side of the Entente and a powerful Serbia was created after the end of the war.

3.5. Italy

Italy did not show any particular interest in Macedonia during the First World War. Its prime aims were to secure strong footholds in Albania, and after 1917 to place under its control as much Albanian soil as possible so as to be able to create a Greater Albania, which would prevent the Serbs from gaining an outlet to the Adriatic.⁷⁶ Italy's interest in the developments in Macedonia was limited. Of greater interest to them was the ambition of Venizelos to expand Greece in the region of Asia Minor, a move which would create difficulties for their own expansionist policy in the same region. The same

opposition forced them to cultivate good relations with the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. The Jews saw the Italians as a strong voice of protest and an obstacle to the various actions of the caretaker government of Venizelos.⁷⁷

3.6. The USA

Finally, the USA's interest in Macedonia was exceptionally small and late in being expressed. Colonel House was sent at the beginning of 1918 for the purpose of forming an opinion in connection with the events in the region. The American officer toured the region and had many meetings with representatives of the other allied forces as well as with American missionaries who had been active in the region from the 19th century, exclusively with the Slavic element of Macedonia. In his findings, House proposed a solution to the Macedonian Question which took a different approach from that suggested by the other powers of the Entente. More specifically, it pre-determined self-rule for Macedonia and an outlet to the Aegean for Serbia in the region of Thessaloniki.⁷⁸

4. The Interwar Years

The victory of the powers of the Entente in the First World War led to the ratification of the Treaty of Bucharest. Simply, the area of Stromnitsa passed into the control of the Serbs and western Thrace was given to Greece. During the interwar years, the Macedonian Question lost the importance which it had acquired in previous years as it was disconnected from concerns connected with the maintenance or dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and control of the Straits. The policy of the major European powers was determined by their general stance towards the existing regime in Europe. Great Britain and France were in favour of having it maintained, whereas Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union made efforts to have it revised. In this way, European diplomacy around the Macedonia Question was directly connected with the maintenance of or change in the wider regime in the Balkans.

4.1. Great Britain

The basic concept of the policy of Great Britain was the maintenance of the regime which had been created under the peace treaty that ended the First World War. Occupied with matters in the Middle East, the British were not interested in playing a leading role in the region. They preferred to assume the role of observer and equilibrist in the oppositions of the French and Italians. In order to achieve their goal, it was necessary to reduce the rivalry among the Balkan states. In the case of Macedonia, the tension was created by the activities of IMRO in Yugoslavian and Bulgarian Macedonia. In fact, the British believed that collaboration between IMRO and fascist Italy was capable of bringing changes to the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, and that in turn could lead to more extensive changes to the regime which had been implemented under the peace treaties which ended the First World War. In the period from 1927 to 1930, the British exercised strong pressure on the Bulgarian government to take stringent measures against IMRO.⁷⁹

Of course, in Britain, influence continued to be exercised by traditional pro-Bulgarians such as the Balkan Committee and Noel Buxton, an influential member of the Labour Party, and whoever was attempting to make British policy on the Macedonian Question more pro-Bulgarian and pro-IMRO. However, when the Labour Party was in

power, between the 23rd of January and the 4th of November 1924, and two pro-Bulgarian politicians, Buxton and Thomson were part of the government, the internal conflicts within IMRO and the question of its participation in a movement together with the Bulgarian Communist Party did not allow them to formulate a policy which differed from that which Britain had followed until then and would be exercised from that point on by the British Foreign Ministry. The greatest gain for Bulgaria, albeit a short-lived one, proved to be the signing of the Politis-Kalfov Agreement.⁸⁰

4.2. France

France was mainly interested in the maintenance of the postwar regime of territorial domination and stability in Europe, in the configuration which it had suggested and guaranteed. For the implementation of this plan, France sought the creation and maintenance of an alliance of states, which would have been negative if not even hostile towards the Soviet Union and Germany. In northeast Europe this particular policy was manifested in the support of Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia. In fact the aggressiveness of Italy towards Yugoslavia increased French interest in Yugoslavia. The French arrived at the conclusion, as did the British, that Italian influence and aggressiveness could be reduced if Bulgaria and Yugoslavia arrived at some level of agreement. A thorn in the relations between them was the regime in Macedonia and mainly the activities of IMRO. That is why during the period from 1927 to 1934, in collaboration with Britain, as well as on its own, it repeatedly put pressure on the Bulgarian government to take such steps so as to prevent IMRO from operating in the southern part of Yugoslavia.⁸¹

4.3. Italy

The keystone of the policy of fascist Italy in the Mediterranean was the expansion of the country, an expansionist policy which was economic and demographic, in the Adriatic, in North Africa and in the Eastern Mediterranean. A strong Yugoslavia, a state created by the peace treaties which ended the First World War, hindered to a great extent the fulfillment of this policy. At first, Mussolini tried to reach a reconciliation with Belgrade by concluding the Treaty of Rome on the 27th of January 1924, according to which he supported the Serbian desire for an outlet to the Aegean Sea and especially Thessaloniki, in return for the expansion of Italian influence in Rijeka.⁸²

The Yugoslavian-French alliance of 1926 displeased Mussolini very much since he saw it as limiting his power not only in the Adriatic but more generally in Europe. That is why he initially proposed the creation of a quadripartite alliance with the participation of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Realizing that his plans for achieving supremacy in the Adriatic and for expansion within the Balkans could not be implemented without the weakening of Yugoslavia, he followed the policy of *accercchiamento* (encirclement) of Yugoslavia. In order to succeed in this policy, Mussolini sought parallel action from Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria as well as IMRO, the Kosovar Albanians and the Croatian secessionists.⁸³

Within the above framework, Bulgaria and IMRO had to assume very serious roles. The former had to repulse every "approach of friendship" from Belgrade, all pressure from the other powers which aimed at getting it to collaborate with Yugoslavia and to allow IMRO to operate unobstructed on Bulgarian soil. This policy was accepted by Bulgaria until 1934 and its main advocate was General Volkov, a member of all the Bulgarian governments over that period. The latter was to play an equally important

role in seeing that it was the only organization which had at its disposal forces powerful enough to destabilize Yugoslavia. Consequently, Italy supplied IMRO with guns and money, offering it diplomatic support and bases within Albania to operate from.

Italy did not show any particular interest in relation to the future of Macedonia. In meetings with members of IMRO, Italy proposed an independent Macedonia under Italian protection, something which would not be easily accepted by IMRO or Bulgaria. Other proposals for the creation of a federation which would include Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro or Macedonia, Kosovo and Croatia, did not proceed further seeing that their implementation proved to be clearly unattainable. In reality, Mussolini was not really interested in Macedonia; accordingly, he did not have any reason to discuss the eventual regime that would exist. On the contrary, he was mainly interested in weakening Yugoslavia using every possible means.⁸⁴

4.4. Germany

Germany, the big defeated power of the First World War, was not able to continue exercising a policy of intervention in the Balkans as it had been doing at the beginning of the 19th century. Its weakness was reflected even in the policy it adopted in the Macedonian Question. In the interwar years, the picture that the Germans had of Bulgaro-Macedonians was one of the supercilious popular rebels, whereas IMRO appeared as a national liberation organization and its leader, Ivan Mihailov, as a hero. All of the parties, from the Communists – with reservations – to the extreme right, cultivated relations with and supported IMRO's struggle, but Germany as a state could not exercise an active policy or affect conditions.⁸⁵ Until 1929, it tried to cultivate friendly relations and collaboration at an economic level with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia simultaneously, despite being aware that the Macedonian Question could spark off war between the two countries.⁸⁶ After 1929, its policy towards the Balkans became clearly more active and aimed primarily at annulling the small Entente which France had promoted.⁸⁷

4.5. The Soviet Union

The policy which the Soviet Union adopted on the Macedonian Question had its roots in the ideas of Lenin on peoples' right to self-determination and their incorporation within Socialist Federations as well as in the connection between the Labour movement and the national liberation movements of colonies.⁸⁸ Thus, the Communist International, an organization under the complete control of the Soviet Union and which all communist parties belonged to, estimated that the existing situation in the Balkans in 1922 could lead to the dominance of Communism in Bulgaria. However, the defeat of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1923 showed that it could not fulfill its mission without external help. That is why the Communist International called on all the Balkan Communist parties to support the Bulgarian Communist Party to enable it to assume power. The Bulgarian Communist leader, Vasil Kolarov, representative of the Communist International and head of the Balkan Communist Federation, judged that the issue which all the combat forces in Bulgaria could rally around, in order to offer their brotherly support to other communist parties, was the Macedonian Question. And as a solution it was necessary for the creation of an independent Macedonia – and an independent Thrace – with a Labour-Agrarian government. This development would lead to domination by the communists in Bulgaria and, thereafter, in the other countries, so as to eventually create an honorary Union of Independent Balkan Democracies.⁸⁹ The curious thing is that in later texts (the documents of Vienna), the creation of a unified,

independent Macedonia, which in fact would have extended their geographical limits, was considered a requirement for the creation of a Balkan Federation. It is worth mentioning that all the related texts refer to a "Macedonian people" [makedonski narod] not a "Macedonia nation", and in fact named the nationalities which lived on Macedonia soil and constituted the Macedonian people.⁹⁰

However, the hasty publication of the texts of the agreement between the communist parties and the Bulgaro-Macedonian rebels of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) and with other smaller groups, on the one hand, turned IMRO against them and resulted in IMRO's murdering most of the leaders of the related movements, and on the other, caused IMRO to expel all the communist parties from the peoples they were supposedly representing, since they were either outlawed, or on the margin of political developments.⁹¹ Despite this, the Soviet representatives persevered and forced the communist parties to support the slogan of a unified and independent Macedonia and Thrace, even though at the end of 1920s this had been left muted on the margins.⁹²

The spread of Fascism throughout Europe at the beginning of the 1930s brought changes in the policies of the Soviet Union and the Communist International. Issues such as self-determination for minority groups, the creation of federations and the Macedonian Question in particular became of marginal interest, since what took priority was the repulsing of the danger posed by Fascism. This policy began to be implemented at the beginning of 1934 and appeared as a doctrine the following year. In accordance with the decisions taken during the 7th Congress of the Communist International (July-August 1935), the communist parties had to collaborate with other related parties and political and social groups to create a popular front so as to be able to counterbalance ideologically and politically the storm of Fascism.⁹³ The ethnic minorities, whose rights the Communist parties ought to protect, had to fight together in this struggle.

In the framework of this policy, the "people of Macedonia" were christened the "Macedonian nation", so as to be in agreement with the party line. The Communist parties conceded ground on the policy of a "unified and independent Macedonia and Thrace", but were forced to recognize "Macedonian" minorities. In the same year, the Macedonian Communist Party was founded.⁹⁴ At its 6th Congress, the Greek Communist Party recognized two ethnic minorities in Greek Macedonia, the Jewish and the "Macedonian", whose rights it began to demand protection for.⁹⁵

Just as the Bulgarian communists had attempted in 1923 to exploit the line taken by the Soviet Union in order to achieve their goals, so too at the end of the 1930s did the Yugoslavian communists make use of their new position in the Communist International in order to serve their purposes. Namely, they maintained the separate "Macedonian" nationality, adapting the idea of a Balkan Communist Federation to the existing conditions in Yugoslavia. Thus, in October of 1940, the Yugoslavian Communist Party called on the "Macedonian people" to struggle against the Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks.⁹⁶

These decisions, which passed unobserved during preparations for the Second World War, later proved to be decisive, as in 1942 the Yugoslavian Communist Party undertook, with the support of the Soviet Union, to include in its programme the creation of a new Yugoslavia and the settlement of the districts of Kossovo and Macedonia.⁹⁷ In 1943, during the second session of AVNOJ, they put forward the foundations for the future Yugoslavian Federation, which would comprise six states, one of which would be Macedonia. In fact, at the second session of AVNOJ, they elected representatives of Greek and Bulgarian Macedonia, who, however, were not present during the business of the session.⁹⁸

5. The Second World War – Civil War

5.1. The Axis Powers

The capitulation of Greece to Germany on the 23rd of April 1941 resulted in the division of Macedonia into three occupied zones: the German zone, which covered the area between the Aliakmon and Strymon rivers, with Thessaloniki as the headquarters of the Thessaloniki- Aegean Military Command. The Italian occupied zone included western Macedonia, which, together with Albania and Epirus, constituted a unified area under Italian administration, while the Bulgarian zone included the part of Macedonia east of the River Strymon and all of western Thrace. In addition, the Bulgarians had been given the greater part of Yugoslavian Macedonia, with the exception of the area around Tetovo, which was annexed along with Kosovo to the Italian held Albania. The Germans saw Macedonia as a centre of German occupation in the Balkans and Thessaloniki as the hub of communications for the Axis powers from Germany to North Africa.⁹⁹

The Bulgarians regarded the occupation as a complete reversal of the decisions made during the Treaty of Bucharest and the Treaty of Neuilly and the implementation of the Bulgaria which was anticipated by the Treaty of San Stefano. That is why they proceeded with the immediate expulsion of the Greek authorities and their replacement by Bulgarians, in order to fully incorporate the abovementioned areas within the Bulgarian state.¹⁰⁰ In fact, on the 14th of May 1941, Bulgaria annexed these lands with an official act, which Germany refused to acknowledge.

At the same time, it took steps to make its presence felt in central and eastern Macedonia, with the appointment of Bulgarian liaison officers in the Italian and German garrisons and the introduction of “Liberation Committees” in certain Slavophone villages. The “Bulgarian Club” aspired to become the centre of Bulgarian propaganda in Thessaloniki.¹⁰¹ In fact, in 1943, Bulgaria tried to extend its dominance throughout the whole of Macedonia. On the 8th of July 1943, the Germans initially agreed to extend the area under Bulgarian occupation to include the area from the Strymon River to the Axios River, since it was striving to release military forces from Macedonia in order to dispatch them towards the eastern front. However, the reaction of the Greeks, both the simple people and the official representatives, discouraged the extension of Bulgarian occupied land in central and western Macedonia after the capitulation of Italy in September 1943. Only in 1944, when there was from then on a shortage of men in the German army on the different fronts, did the Germans allow the Bulgarians to assume control of the area east of the Axios River. Similarly, on the 5th of September of the same year, they allowed the creation of a –stillborn– independent Macedonian state, headed by the leader of IMRO and favourite of Hitler, Ivan Mihailov.¹⁰²

5.2. France

Despite the fact that during this time intense activity developed in connection with the Macedonian Question, France had no part in the developments of the time. It was more concerned with Greece’s position at the beginning of the war and in the postwar period of equilibrium, rather than the events in Macedonia and in the diplomatic field.

Around the beginning of the Second World War, the French proposed a revision to the Balkan front of the First World War with the fortification of Thessaloniki, which would function as a base for the surge towards the Romanian oil fields which Germany

was using to replenish its supplies. Greece was prepared to discuss this plan, but the French had limited forces at their disposal for its implementation.¹⁰³ On the other and, the British proposed the creation of a coalition of neutral states in the Balkans, and that is why the French idea was soon abandoned.

After the end of the First World War, France sided with Great Britain and the USA in the discussions related to Greece which took place within the framework of the United Nations. In particular, it voted down together with the remaining powers – with the exception of the Soviet Union and Poland – the Ukrainian appeal against the invasion of Albania by Greek forces and supported the corresponding Greek appeal to the Security Council of the United Nations against the assistance which was being given by the neighbouring Communist states to the rebels of the Democratic Army and their interference in Greek affairs. More specifically, it supported the American proposal for the formation of a commission which would work to improve the relations among the Balkan states (UNSCOB) as well as the findings and the work of UNSCOB, in addition the proposals of Great Britain and the USA to stop Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria from supplying the rebels of the Greek Democratic Army.¹⁰⁴

5.3. Great Britain

The present day regime which exists in the Macedonia with the maintenance of the frontier line determined under the Treaty of Bucharest is largely the result of the efforts of Great Britain in 1944. The leaders of Great Britain, including the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and the Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, not only stood without reservation in favour of a return to the pre-war regime for Macedonia but also fought to achieve it. Naturally, on their part, the British were worried by the advance of the Soviet army in Romania and the possibility of their reaching as far as the shores of the Aegean.

More specifically, in September 1944, the collapse of the Axis alliance and the advance of the Soviet army in Romania created new conditions. On the 2nd of September, the president of the Agrarian Party in Bulgaria, Konstantin Mouraviev, became Prime Minister of a new government, which was subsequently toppled on 9th September, when the Soviet army entered the country. The Patriotic Front took over the governing of the country, with Kimon Georgiev as Prime Minister. These governments maintained the Bulgarian occupation forces in eastern Macedonia, aiming at territorial gains in the region. In fact Georgiev placed the Bulgarian army units at the disposal of the Russian Field Marshall Tolbuhin.¹⁰⁵

From as early as May 1944, Churchill had already sent a plan to Stalin in which he proposed the free movement of the Soviets in Romania with a corresponding arrangement for Great Britain in Greece; this plan had been accepted by the Soviet leader.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Eden, in a telegraph to Churchill on the 6th of September 1944, observed bluntly that “if we had to choose between two countries (Bulgaria and Greece) it is obvious that Greece comes first, because it is an ally of ours and struggled in the war and, on the other hand, because as far as our postwar position in the eastern Mediterranean is concerned, Greece is of more interest to us than Bulgaria”.¹⁰⁷ On the 21st of September, Churchill once again informed the Soviets that British troops were being sent to Greece and requested that the Soviet Army not enter Greece without first obtaining his consent.¹⁰⁸

The final adjustments to the borders of Macedonia appear to have been decided on at the meeting between Stalin and Churchill, which took place in Moscow on the 9th of October 1944. There, Greece passed into the British sphere of influence seeing that

Churchill proposed 90% Soviet influence in Romania, 75% in Bulgaria, 90% British influence in Greece and 50-50% influence of both powers in Yugoslavia, something which Stalin agreed to.¹⁰⁹

The Soviets honored the agreements with the British as the Soviet army under Tolbuhin stopped at the Greek-Bulgarian frontier line in September 1944, refusing to cross the border in order to end the German occupation of Macedonia or to help its new “ally”, the Bulgarian army, in eastern Macedonia. Indeed, on the 11th of October, just two days after the agreements between Stalin and Churchill, the Bulgarian army was ordered to vacate Greek soil within fifteen days, something which it did by the deadline.¹¹⁰ At the Yalta Conference, Stalin assured Churchill once again that he would not interfere in Greece.¹¹¹

The collaboration between the Soviets and the British gave the latter the ability to request that Tito refrain from all activities against Greek Macedonia. On the 9th of December in particular, the head of the British mission, Maclean, asked for an explanation from Tito in connection with the assembling of the “Macedonian Brigade” warning him not to proceed to take any kind of action against Greece. Tito gave his word that he would not proceed to engage in aggressive activities against Greece.¹¹² Consequently, during the December clashes, the request for reinforcements which Tito received from the Greek Communist Party was ignored and the units under Gotsev were ordered by Tito to move further north in pursuit of the German forces and the Albanian nationalists in Kosovo instead of crossing the Greek-Yugoslavian border. A similar request made by the Greek Communist Party to Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, met with a negative response.¹¹³

But even more generally, the British tried to discourage the stirring up of the Macedonian Question. Consequently, at the beginning of 1945, it took a stand against the unification of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria into a Federal state as well as against Yugoslavia’s territorial claims.¹¹⁴ However, even on the question of the creation of a single “united and independent Macedonia”, which had been put forward by Tito and the heads of the recently formed confederate states, British policy was negative, as it considered that in such a case it would mean Slavs and Greeks having to co-exist in the same state, where there would be continual tension and that would revive the ethnic rivalries, creating the same problems which existed at the beginning of the 20th century.¹¹⁵

In the spring of 1945, a significant change in Yugoslavian policy towards Greece was observed, as Tito proceeded with a plethora of statements that he would accept unification between Slavo-Macedonians in the Greek provinces and Yugoslavia, at the same time condemning Greece for systematically oppressing them. The British, as well as the Americans, suspected that this aggressiveness on the part of Tito was a consequence of a change in the position of the Soviet Union. They advised Greece to keep a low tone, but rejected the charges made against Greece in all cases even during the related discussion during a meeting of the UN Security Council in February 1946.¹¹⁶

At the peace conference which began on the 25th of April 1946, Great Britain supported Greece every time the Soviet Union or the representatives of other countries which had Communist regimes formulated charges against Greece but it did not offer, in the same way as the Americans did, any help to Greece for the realization of its territorial claims, which included the secession of northern Epirus from Albania and its incorporation within Greece as well as the advancing of the Greek border in the direction of Bulgaria to a depth of 36 miles. They considered that the Greek claims did not offer any improvement in the defence capability of the country, while at the same time they would trigger off a reaction from the Soviets. Together with the Americans, they suggested that Greece seek its security within the framework of the recently formed

United Nations (UN). Despite all this, the British representative presented to the Council of Foreign Ministers in New York, in November 1946, the changes in the Greek-Bulgarian frontier which Greece had requested, but did not show any will to discuss the matter further when the American representative refused to support them.¹¹⁷

The British, together with the Americans, continued to support the territorial integrity of Greece in the following years from 1947-1949 and to remonstrate acrimoniously to the Bulgarians and the Yugoslavians over their statements and activities concerned with the accession of parts of Greek, Bulgarian and Yugoslavian Macedonia to a south-Slav federation.¹¹⁸

5.4. The USA

The United States, for their part, were opposed throughout 1944 to the creation of spheres of influence within Europe and preferred to handle the whole issue with discussions among the Allies.¹¹⁹ They did not have either adequate information from their sources on events in Greece or a clear position on the future situation in the Balkans in general. They believed that everything could be determined at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. Public opinion in America reacted negatively towards the action taken by the British during the December clashes, but Roosevelt gave his consent for the British action.¹²⁰ However, generally until the summer of 1945, the USA was not active in any particular way. The situation changed in the summer of 1945, when the USA announced that it was sending a delegation to Greece in order to ensure the freedom of expression of the Greek people in the Bulgarian elections.¹²¹

The USA had a clear position especially on the Macedonian Question. The frontier line Greece-Bulgaria-Yugoslavia which existed before the war had to remain as it was without any changes, unless that was what the populations of the countries desired. The Greek sector of Macedonia was inhabited by Greeks who had no desire for changes in the frontiers or to participate in the creation of a "Macedonian" state. Indeed, for the Americans neither a "Macedonian" nation nor a "Macedonian national consciousness" existed. Accordingly, every attempt to bring changes in Macedonia would find the Americans diametrically opposed.¹²²

The Americans took the initiative in supporting Greece at the peace conference and at the UN during 1946, but they refused, in the same way as the British, to support the claims for annexation of land to the Greek state. The American representatives rejected with vigour and candour the charges leveled against Greece by the Soviets and other Communist powers, while they refused to discuss the eventual detachment of land from Greece for the benefit of neighbouring states and confronted the Soviet aggressiveness towards Greece by strengthening their ties with the country, even despatching a strong force of warships on a visit to the port of Piraeus.¹²³ However, the real strengthening of Greek-American relations took place with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, on the 12th of March 1947, for the support of Greece and Turkey against the imposition of Communist influence and the approval of a loan amounting to 400,000,000 USD as aid to these two countries.¹²⁴

As far as the Macedonian Question is concerned, the USA continued to guarantee the territorial integrity of Greece and strongly opposed every attempt to create a separate "Macedonian" state, which would include Greek land. But, unlike the British, the Americans considered that the Communist countries of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria could settle the Macedonian Question as they wished, either with their consent or with their opposition, but they could not agree to the detachment of Greek land which would be annexed to that new state.¹²⁵ Consequently, the Americans reacted strongly from time to

time to every action by Yugoslavia and Bulgaria which appeared to challenge the integrity of Greece, the most important among them being the issue of their recognition of the Provisional Democratic Government in 1948 and the creation of an independent Macedonia, announced by the Greek Communist Party and based on a decision reached during the Fifth Plenum of 1949.¹²⁶

From the moment the defeat of the Democratic Army solved the problem of the national security and integrity of Greece, the Americans urged the country to improve its relations with Yugoslavia. The USA considered it propitious that Yugoslavia had been expelled from the Cominform. However, the first attempt to improve Greek-Yugoslavian relations following the appointment of Plastiras as Prime Minister in 1950, stumbled as a result of Tito's demand for the granting of minority rights to the "Macedonians" in Greece. The talks were halted and later resumed only after pressure was put on Tito by the Americans and British to stop meddling in minority matters of other countries.¹²⁷ Tito replied with a clarifying statement that the progress of the bipartite relations did not depend on the position of the Slavo-Macedonians in Greek society, a statement which led to an improvement in the relations between the two countries. The fact that Tito had not retracted his statements about the "Macedonian" minority in Greece, did not bother the Americans since the main problem for them was the territorial integrity of Greece and from then on Tito's expulsion from the Communist bloc.

The problem of the security of the Greek border, especially to the north, was virtually solved with the accession of Greece to the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) on the 22nd of October 1951, since the security of the country was placed at a different level, that of the relations between two rival coalitions. Accordingly, every attack against Greek Macedonia would be repulsed by NATO forces. With the encouragement of the Americans, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece signed a tripartite treaty of friendship and cooperation on the 28th of February 1953, which determined that the three states had an obligation to support each other's independence and territorial integrity if threatened by any other power.¹²⁸

5.5. The Soviet Union

After the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union viewed the Macedonian Question not as a separate issue to be dealt with, but as a piece on the diplomatic chess-board with the British and the Americans. As the Axis powers had capitulated in 1945, the Soviet Union turned its attention to the incorporation of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria within the Communist bloc and to the promotion of its influence in Greece, with the backing of the Greek Communist Party and the Communist parties of the neighbouring states, and with the increase in its occupation troops in Iran. According to George Kennan, the US Charge d' Affairs in Moscow at the time, the activities were conducted either directly by the Soviet government through formal diplomatic channels, or through pressure which was exercised by local Communist parties, whose actions, it claimed, it was not responsible for. In this way, if the activities of the Soviet Union met with opposition from the other powers, then the pressure was continued with the activities of the Communists at local level.¹²⁹

The Greek Civil War, which was begun by the Greek Communist Party in 1946 with an attack on Litochoro on the day the Bulgarian elections were being conducted, showed the abovementioned characteristics of Soviet policy. The Soviet Union authorized the Greek Communist Party to begin the armed struggle, which if it had succeeded would have led to the Sovietization of Greece, and if it had failed, the defeat would have burdened the Greek Communist Party and not the Soviet Union itself.¹³⁰

At the peace conference, the Soviets adopted a tough line against Greece, as it encouraged and supported the territorial claims of the neighbouring states which had been defeated in the war and which had Communist regimes that opposed the victorious Greece. More specifically, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Dimitri Manuilsky supported Bulgaria's demand for an outlet to the Aegean and the annexation of western Thrace to Bulgaria, and the same support was expressed by the Yugoslavian representative, Mose Pijade.¹³¹ Naturally, the Soviet Union refused to discuss, either at the peace conference or at the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Greek territorial claims which were potentially to the disadvantage of its allies, Albania and Bulgaria.¹³² On the other hand, the Ukraine, a member of the Soviet Union and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, appealed against Greece on the 24th of August 1946 because Greece was oppressing the minorities in Macedonia and Thrace and because it had demanded the detachment of northern Epirus from Albania. The purpose of the appeal by the Ukraine was to block future discussion of the Greek territorial claims at the expense of neighbouring Communist states.¹³³

The Soviet Union continued to assist the Greek Communist Party in its efforts to seize power as well as Yugoslavia in its attempt to unite with Bulgaria in the form of a Federation. However, when Stalin realized that Tito was working towards establishing cooperation with the other Communist states, which could either oppose his own policy or determine its own policy, he proceeded to have Yugoslavia expelled from the Cominform and Tito accused, before the entire Communist world of that time, of revisionism.

The case for the creation of a separate "Macedonian" state, which had been promoted by Tito until then, was not forgotten; it was just that the Soviets tried to put it into effect in opposition to Tito by calling the population of the People's Republic of Macedonia (Yugoslavian Federate State) to self-determination with the help of the Bulgarians and the Greek Communist Party, so as to create an "independent Macedonia" within the framework of a Balkan Communist Federation.¹³⁴

However, when the Soviets discovered at the beginning of 1949 that the Greek Communist Party had lost the struggle and the Greek army was once again in fighting condition so as to constitute a threat to the other Communist countries, the Foreign Minister, Gromyko, asked for a cessation of fighting in Greece. During the talks, he denied any responsibility on the part of the Soviet Union in connection with the case for creating an independent Macedonia.¹³⁵

The statements by Gromyko did not mean that the activities of the Soviet Union in connection with Macedonia would stop thereafter. On the contrary, in the following years, an organized propaganda campaign issuing from Bulgaria was developed with the encouragement or the tolerance of the Soviets, who called on all the "Macedonians" in Yugoslavia and Greece to unite with their brothers in Bulgaria.¹³⁶ These activities aimed to create the proper conditions for the overthrow of Tito. However, after the death of Stalin, the Macedonian Question ceased to be an issue of high-powered politics for the Soviet Union.

5.6. The Last period

The accession of Greece to NATO virtually brought the disengagement of the Macedonian Question from the questions of changes in the frontier lines and dominance in the region of Greek Macedonia. Eventually, it evolved into the question of whether or not "Macedonians" existed, into their national identity and into the claims for a historical past and cultural heritage for Macedonia.

From time to time, tension was provoked between Athens and Belgrade, as the former considered and still considers that a “Macedonian minority” and a “Macedonian race” do not exist, while Belgrade has been asking it to accept the reality, as it has interpreted. However, the main point of tension exists in the relations between Belgrade and Sofia, as Belgrade recognized and still recognizes the “Macedonians” as a separate race and Sofia either accepted the arguments of Belgrade – when relations between Belgrade and Moscow were good – or considered them a part of the “Bulgarian race”, when Moscow accused Tito of “revisionism”.

The Soviet Union itself, while it usually nurtured hostile intentions towards Belgrade, nevertheless did not ever accept the position of the Bulgarian Communist Party on the Bulgarianism of the Macedonians, seeing that from 1934 it had recognized the “Macedonian” nationality and demanded its right to self-determination. It is just that during the time when the relations with Yugoslavia were strained, it was suppressing the issue completely, but when times were favourable, it proceeded with actions which expressed either directly or indirectly its support for Skopje and Belgrade.¹³⁷

Besides, the leaders of the Greek Communist Party, who were in exile and were under the complete control of the Soviets, supported the same position as Yugoslavia, that is, the existence and suppression of Slavo-Macedonians in Greece, regardless of the continued and malicious attacks against the Yugoslavian Communists.¹³⁸

The position of the USA in the new phase of the Macedonian Question was determined mainly by the need to support Yugoslavia and have it maintain constant bad relations with Moscow and good relations with the neighbouring states. Consequently, in the Greek-Yugoslavian crisis of 1962, which was precipitated by statements made by Yugoslavian officials to the effect that there were “Macedonians” in the Greek state and the resultant postponement by Greece of the implementation of the 1959 agreement on border communications, certain American officials, according to the Greek press, urged Athens to “give way” or to recognize the minority, and others advised both sides to show some reserve.¹³⁹ Naturally the question of the territorial integrity of Greece was a completely different matter and the firm opinion of the Americans was that every threat to the territorial integrity of the **country** would be seen as a threat to the USA.¹⁴⁰

The verbal agreement relating mainly to the Macedonian Question, concluded in Athens on the 2nd of December 1962 between the Greek Foreign Minister Averoff and his Yugoslavian counterpart, Popovits, virtually downgraded the Macedonian Question until the imposition of a dictatorship in Greece.

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 136. Kofos, *Makedoniko [The Macedonian Question]*, p. 267.

137. See notes on the visit of the Patriarch of Moscow Alexios to Skopje in June 1962. (Sotiris Vanden, *Ellada-Giougoslavia. Gennisi kai exelixi mias krisis*. [Greece-Yugoslavia. *The Birth and Evolution of a Crisis*], Athens 1991, p. 33).
138. See notes on “Programmatiki Diakyrixi tou KKE pros ton Elliniko Lao [The Programmatic Declaration of the Greek Communist Party to the Greek People]”, *Saranta chronia KKE 1918-1958* [Forty Years of the Greek Communist Party 1918-1958] (n.p., 1958), pp. 669-691. “Apofasi tis 7^{is} Plateias Olomeleias tis KE tou KKE [Decision of the 7th Full Plenary of the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party]”, *Neos Kosmos* [New World], 3 (March 1957), 17. “Eisigisi tis KE tou KKE sto H’ synedrio tou KKE [Explanation of the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party to the 8th Conference of the Greek Communist Party]”, 8^o *synedrio tou KK* [The 8th conference of the Communist Party] (n.p., 1961), pp. 74-76. Radio Bulletin R/S “Phoni tis Alitheias [The Voice of the Truth]”, 12/1/1962.
139. Valden, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91.
140. See the statements of the American vice-President Lyndon Johnson during his visit to Greece in 1962 (Valden, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91).