

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS  
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

LIV



2023

# BALCANICA

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ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

UDC 930.85(4-12)

BELGRADE 2023

ISSN 0350-7653  
eISSN 2406-0801

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## **The Question of Christian Slavic Refugees and the Russian Occupation of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia (1877–1879)<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The modern Bulgarian state was founded as a result of the Russian intervention on the Balkan Peninsula in 1877–1878. Until June 1879, the tsarist army occupied the newly created state, which was divided into the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia pursuant to the decision of the Congress of Berlin. During this period, the Russians made all the most important decisions in the eastern Balkans, including those concerning migrations. As a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, about 100,000 Christian Slavs left their homes fleeing the hostilities. After the cease-fire, at the beginning of 1878, most of the refugees came back home; however, the Christians from Macedonia and Thrace, the lands which remained under the Ottoman Empire's control in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin of July 1878, also started to migrate to Bulgaria. This was a result of unsuccessful uprisings as well as the will to live in a country ruled by the men of the same religion and ethnicity.

**Key words:** Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, migrations, Russia, Bulgaria, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian occupation of Bulgaria (1877–1879), refugees

### *Introduction*

The modern Bulgarian state was founded as a result of the Russian intervention on the Balkan Peninsula in 1877–1878. The Russians played a crucial role in building the structures of the Principality of Bulgaria (which functioned as a protectorate of the Romanov Empire until 1885) as well as Eastern Rumelia (the autonomous province with the capital in Plovdiv). The tsar's army occupied these two territories until the first half of 1879. During this time, the Russians took the most important decisions and shaped policies of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia regarding the key questions, including

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<sup>1</sup> The research presented in this article was financed by the grant from the Polish National Science Centre: *The Balkan Migration Processes in the 19th Century. Cases of Bulgaria and Serbia* (2017/25/N/HS3/00576).

migrations. As a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, about 100,000 Christian Slavs left their homes in the territory of the future Bulgarian state, fleeing from the Ottoman army to take refuge in the areas away from the theatre of war or territories taken over by the tsarist forces. After the cease-fire, at the beginning of 1878, most of these refugees came back home. However, the Christians from Macedonia and Thrace, the lands which remained (or would remain) under the Ottoman Empire's control in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin of July 1878, started to migrate to Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia as well. About 100,000 people, mostly from Turkey-in-Europe, reached the Principality and Eastern Rumelia by the end of 1879.

Some of the analysis are devoted to the emigration from Macedonia (Manastir and Thessaloniki Vilayets with Skopje Sanjak of Kosovo vilayet) and Thrace (Adrianople Vilayet) to Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, and it indirectly addresses the question of self-identity of the most numerous population of these territories. In view of the on-going nation-building processes in the Balkans in the nineteenth century, it is impossible to make an unequivocal answer regarding the nationality of the Slavs living in the Ottoman Empire, especially considering most of them were illiterate rural population. Characterizing this population at the end of the 1870s we can be sure about the language they used (the dialects of the South Slavic languages) as well as the religion (Orthodoxy divided between two sovereigns: the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Bulgarian Exarchate created in 1870) so the terms “Slavs,” “Christians,” or “Christian Slavs” are the most accurate.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> B. Jezernik, *Dzika Europa. Bałkany w oczach zachodnich podróżników*, tłum. P. Oczko (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 177–200. See also P. Детрез, *Не търсят гърци, а ромеи да бъдат. Православната културна общност в Османската империя. XV–XIX в.* (София: Кралица Маб, 2015); H. Poulton, *Who Are the Macedonians?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); P. Kitromilides, *An Orthodox Commonwealth. Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007). There is no doubt that some of the Slavs in Macedonia considered themselves Bulgarians, some Serbs, and some Macedonians, however, the problem is so complex that it would require completely different analyses. There is a very rich historiography on this subject in Macedonian (Manol Pandevski, Ivan Katardžiev, Risto Kirjazovski, Stojan Kiselinovski), Serbian (Jovan Cvijić, Vladimir Stojančević, Kliment Džambazovski, Mihailo Vojvodić, Milorad Ekmečić, Slavenko Terzić, Dušan Bataković, Uroš Šešum), Bulgarian (Hristo Silyanov, Ivan Snegarov, Dino Kiosev, Kosta Tsarnushanov, Tsocho Bilyarski, Stoyan Raychevski, Naum Kaytchev), or Greek (Nikolaos Martis, Michael Sakellariou, Evangelos Kofos, Kariophiles Mitsakis, George B. Zotiades) which represent – to a greater extent in some cases, to a lesser in others – the national perspectives on that matter and identify majority of population of Macedonia and Thrace with a specific national group. I. Stawowy-Kawka, *Historia Macedonii* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2000), 326–331. See more: V. Roudometof, *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian Question* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002).

The topic of the Slavic migrations to Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in 1877–1879 has not been thoroughly analysed in the scholarly literature. There are some valuable comprehensive works (for example, by Goran Todorov or Mariya Manolova) as well as a collection of documents about the Russian occupation, but they do not focus on the problem of migrations.<sup>3</sup> The same can be said about the publications about mobility after the “Great Eastern Crisis,” which do not deal strictly with Bulgaria under the Russian occupation.<sup>4</sup> Specific studies about it were published by Hristo Gandev, who based them on materials from the Historical Archives at the National Library of Ivan Vazov in Plovdiv<sup>5</sup>, as well as works by the Russian historian Marina Mihaylovna Frolova, who focused on the period of the 1877–1878 War using Russian printed materials.<sup>6</sup> The addition of archival materials from Sofia (Central State Archives, Historical Archive in the National Library of St. Cyril and Methodius), Varna (State Archives), and London (British National Archives) as well as the literature and document collections published more recently could bring us new conclusions about the Russian occupation authorities’ policy towards Slavic migrations, especially taking into account that it was seemingly inconsistent.

<sup>3</sup> See Г. Тодоров, *Временното руско управление в България през 1877–1879* (София: Изд-во на Българската комунистическа партия, 1958); М. Манолова, *Нормотворческата дейност на временното руско управление в България (1877–1879)* (София: СИ-ЕЛА, 2003); *Русия и възстановяването на българската държавност (1878–1885 г.)* (София: УИ “Св. Климент Охридски”, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> See С. Райчевски, *Бежанците от Македония и техните братства в България* (София: Захарий Стоянов, 2016); М. Пандевска, *Присилни миграции во Македонија во годините на Големата источна криза (1875–1881)* (Скопје: Институт за национална историја–Книгоиздателство Мисла, 1993); *Миграционни движения на българите 1878–1941*, т. 1: 1878–1912, съст. Вера Василиева, Венцислав Гигов, Горица Стоянова, Кръстина Георгиева, Катя Недевска, (София: УИ “Св. Климент Охридски”, 1993); *Българските бежанци в Бургас и региона 1878–1945 г.*, съст. Светлозар Елдърров, Милен Николов, Пламена Кирова, Иванка Делева, (Бургас: Фабер, 2018); К. Попек, “The Bulgarian Migrations and the End of Ottoman Rule in Bulgaria (1878–1900)”, *Historijski Zbornik* LXXI(1) (2018), 45–59.

<sup>5</sup> Х. Гандев, “Преселението на тракийски българи и гърци в България през 1878–1879 г.” *Архив за поселищни проучвания* 1(2) (1933), 3–15.

<sup>6</sup> М. М. Фролова, “Русское гражданское управление в Болгарии и проблема болгарских беженцев в свете становления болгарской государственности (1877–19.02.1878 гг.)”. In *Славяне и Россия: проблемы государственности на Балканах (конец XVIII–XXI вв.)*, отв. ред. Светлана И. Данченко, (Москва: Институт славяноведения РАН, 2020), 106–150.

### *The war of 1877–1878*

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 led not only to the restoration of the Bulgarian state on the map of the Balkan Peninsula but also to mass migrations. Ones of the most brutal acts of violence against Christians in the Eastern Balkans took place in Dobruja. They were described not only by the Russians and foreign correspondents but also by the local Muslims. In May 1877, there was information about eighteen completely empty villages in the Sanjak of Tulcha, where houses and churches had been burnt down and people were repressed by “hordes of Circassians, Anatolians, Tatars, and Turks.”<sup>7</sup> In August (July OS) 1877, about 2,000 Christians escaped from Kavarna to Balchik.<sup>8</sup> The brutal massacres during the war took place in Osman Pazar (today Omurtag) and Eski Dzhumaya (Targovishte) at the beginning of 1878. The Christians from the former town received guarantees from the local Ottoman authorities that they would be under protection no matter the situation. However, during the night of 25 and 26 (13 and 14 Old Style) of January, houses were set on fire, many people died in the flames, and those who tried to escape into the streets were murdered. Those who survived ran away to Eski Dzhumaya, where they also received guarantees that they would be safe. However, the perpetrators from Osman Pazar arrived in the city and, with the support of the local Muslims, attacked the Christian refugees and residents. The British Consul of Shumen received reports about “the streets covered by human bodies; some of them were badly injured, some without heads, some of the bodies were cut into pieces.” Once again, the Christians were forced to escape – about 200 people reached

<sup>7</sup> “Превод на доклад от Е. Лангле до Л. Ш. Деказ, Тулча 24.05.1877”. In *Извори за историята на Добруджа*, т. 4: 1853–1878 (Чуждестранни документи), ред. Велко Тонев, (София: БАН, 2003), 340–343.

<sup>8</sup> “Vice-Consul Dalziel to Mr. Layard, Varna 25.07.1877”. In *Ethnic Minorities in the Balkan States 1860–1971*, vol. 1: 1860–1885, ed. Bejtullah Destani, (Cambridge: Cambridge Archive Editions, 2003), 277–281; “Commandor Durmont to Mr. Layard, Varna 25.07.1877”. In *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, 281–282; “Statement made at Baltschik before Commander Drummond and Vice-Consul Dalziel, Varna 25.07.1877”. In *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, 282; “Mr. Layard to Earl of Derby, Therapia 1.08.1877”. In *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, 291–292; *Извори за историята на Добруджа*, т. 4, 334–357; “Показания на българина Илия Н. Танасов за положение в Шумен, Търговище и Разград, Русе 04.1878”. In *След Сан Стефано и Берлин 1878 г. Изследване, документи и материали за освобождението на Североизточна България от османска власт*, съст. Велко Тонев, (София: Анупис, 1999), 90–91; “Sadoullah Bey à Aarifi Pacha, Berlin 27.07.1877, no. 549”. In *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on “the Eastern Question”*, vol. X: *The Balkan Crisis 1875–1878*, part 4: *The Turco-Russian War, May 1877 – January 1878*, eds. Sinan Kunalalp, Gül Tokay, (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2013), 314; “Aarifi Pacha à Sadoullah Bey, Constantinople 30.07.1877, no. 563”. In *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents*, vol. X, part 4, 321–322; Ф. Каниц, *Дунавска България и Балканът*, т. III, прев. Петър Горбанов, (София: Борина, [no date]), 238–239.

Shumen.<sup>9</sup> The scale of the violence could be illustrated by the fact that before the war there were 1,671 Christians in Eski Dzhumaya and after there were none.<sup>10</sup> In February (January OS) 1878, there was also information about 6,900 Slavic refugees from Silistra and Balchik in villages in the Dobruja region: Kyusendzha (nowadays Kostantsa), Medidiye, Cherna Voda, Harsovo, and Machin.<sup>11</sup> Outside of Dobruja, the cities in which Christian inhabitants suffered the most in 1877–1878 were Stara Zagora, Kazanlak, and Karlovo.<sup>12</sup> The war was also a time of repressions against the Christians who were not in the centre of war activities. In Thrace, in the region of Lozengrad (Kırklareli), about 600 houses as well as seventeen churches were burnt down by the soldiers from the defeated Ottoman armies, Circassians, and Muslim refugees (*Muhajirs*).<sup>13</sup>

Most refugees did not escape very far – they hid in the forests, mountains, and camps organized by the Russians, to wait the war out and return home after the situation calmed down. The civilians from the territories where the Ottoman irregular troops and marauders were active were moved with the Russian army and left the villages where there were no garrisons organized.<sup>14</sup> We know reports about people who migrated further away, for instance to Anatolia.<sup>15</sup> This was mostly connected to kidnapping young girls or children, who became slaves or were taken as hostages, as well as cases of servants who migrated with their

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Office Archives, Public Record Office, London (FO), 913/4/258–261, To Reade, Shumla 30.01.1878.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kiel, “Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period: The Place of Turkish Architecture in the Process”. In *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority*, ed. Kemal Karpat, (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1990), 112.

<sup>11</sup> “Превод от Е. Ланге до У. Х. Вадингтон, Тулча 26.01.1878”. In *Извори за историята на Добруджа*, т. 4, 474–476.

<sup>12</sup> Народна Библиотека “Св. Св. Кирил и Методий” – Български исторически архив (НБКМ-БИА), ф. 22 оп. 1 а.е. 806 л. 1–4, Писмо от жителите на Ески Заара до Найдено Геров до левският митрополит Геврасий в Пловдив, Ески Заара 5.08.1876; Народна Библиотека “Иван Вазов” – Български исторически архив (НБИВ-БИА), ф. 19 а.е. 5 passim; *Репортажи за Освободителната война 1877–1878*, съст. Людмила Генова, (София: ОФ, 1978), 138–139.

<sup>13</sup> С. Райчевски, *Източна Тракия. История, етноси, преселения XV–XX в.*, (София: Отечество, 1994), 154–155.

<sup>14</sup> НБИВ-БИА, ф. 19 а.е. 3 л. 22, Прошение от Слав Танев до Пловдивския градски началник, Пловдив 21.03.1878; *Репортажи за Освободителната война*, 125, 213–214; Some of the authors write about 200,000–400,000 Christian refugees. М.М. Фролова, “Русское гражданское управление”, 122, 128.

<sup>15</sup> Централен държавен архив, София (ЦДА), ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 97, Препис от прошение на Атанас Ичевич до Представител на окръжен съд в Кюстендил, Кюстендил 31.05.1879.



employers.<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that during the War of 1877–1878, about 100,000 Christians from the future territory of the Bulgarian state were forced to escape and it was one of the Russians' most important tasks to enable them to return.<sup>17</sup> It was not easy because of the devastation of the cities and villages – as a result of bombarding, there were a lot of destroyed buildings in Vidin, Nikopol, Ruse, or Lovech; Stara Zagora was almost completely burnt down, as was the new Bulgarian capital, Sofia, which greatly suffered during the hostilities.<sup>18</sup>

While moving south and taking power over eastern Balkans, the Russians started organizing the occupation administration in July 1877. The authorities had a clear position on the matter of Christian refugees – they fully supported the migrants in returning home and helped with food and shelter in the difficult situation. For example, before the key moment of the conflict, the capture of Pleven in November 1877, the Governor of Svishtov, Kiryak Tsankov, organized the return of 400 fugitives to the region of the besieged citadel.<sup>19</sup> The most complicated cases were those of the Christians who had been kidnapped and transported to Anatolia – they wrote petitions to the Russians, asking for help with coming back home.<sup>20</sup> The return of the fugitives to their homes lasted

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<sup>16</sup> ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 9 л. 112, От Министерство на външните дела и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 16.05.1880; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 9 л. 113, От Министерство на външните дела и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 3.06.1880; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 16 л. 96, Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 16.12.1880; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 16 л. 105, Списък на зароблените от башибозуци във войната през 1877/78 български деца из Врачанското окръжие, [12.05.1881]; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 16 л. 113, Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 14.05.1881; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 16 л. 114, Свидетелство на Изворска общинско управление, Извор 1.05.1881; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 16 л. 119, Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 3.10.1881; ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 16 л. 120–121, Дознание, Самоков 19.08.1881.

<sup>17</sup> К. Иречек, *Княжество България. Негова повърхнина, природа, население, духовна култура, управление и новейша история*, ч. I: *Българска държава*, (Пловдив: Хр. Г. Данов, 1899), 160; М. М. Фролова, "Русское гражданское управление", 117.

<sup>18</sup> Ф. Каниц, *Дунавска България и Балканът*, т. I, прев. Михаил Матлиев, (София: Борина, 1995), 70, 81–82, 176–177; *Идет, Дунавска България и Балканът*, т. II, прев. Петър Горбанов, (София: Борина, 1997), 33–34.

<sup>19</sup> НБКМ-БИА, ф. 5 а.е. 20 л. 10–11, Писмо Свищовскиего губернатора Киряку Цанкову, Свищов 3.11.1877; НБКМ-БИА, ф. 5 а.е. 20 л. 14, Списък на имената на фамилиите заселени в плевенски села; НБКМ-БИА, ф. 5 а.е. 20 л. 15, Рапорт Киряка Цанкова Свищовску губернатору, Свищов 11.11.1877.

<sup>20</sup> НБИВ-БИА, ф. 19 а.е. 4 л. 75, Прошение от Камина Димитрова до Пловдивския градски полицмайстор, Пловдив 26.04.1878.

long after the cease-fire signed in Adrianople in January 1878 – some of them were still returning in the 1880s.<sup>21</sup>

The Russians offered the refugees help for humanitarian reasons and due to Slavic solidarity but also for political motivations. Their main goal during the war (taking control over the Eastern Balkans) was strongly linked to the ethnic map of that area, and we should not forget that about half of the population inhabiting the Danube and the Adrianople Vilayets were Muslims.<sup>22</sup> It was important to the Russians to maintain the Slavic and Orthodox character of these territories so that it would be easier to control them after the war. They also wanted to ensure that the local population would support the future Russian administration.

### *Russian Occupation Administration in 1878–1879*

At the beginning of 1878, the Russians occupied the territories of the Danube and Adrianople Vilayets. In accordance with the Treaty of San Stefano of March (February OS) 1878, these territories were organized into the Principality of Bulgaria, so-called Great Bulgaria, to which most of Macedonia (without Thessaloniki with Chalkidiki) was added, but a significant part of Thrace was separated (among others, Adrianople, which was still controlled by the Russians). The territory of the Principality was reduced, in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin of July 1878, to northern Bulgaria (former Sofia, Vidin, Varna, Tarnovo, and Ruse Sanjaks). In southern Bulgaria (former Plovdiv and Sliven Sanjaks), Eastern Rumelia, an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire, was created. Macedonia and most of Thrace were returned under the sultan's direct control; however, the Adrianople Sanjak would be occupied by the Russians until March 1879.<sup>23</sup> The head of the Russian administration in Bulgaria was Vladimir Alexandrovich Cherkassky and after his death in March (February OS) 1878, this position was held by Prince Alexander Dondukov-Korsakov. After the Congress of Berlin, there were separate commissars for the Principality (Dondukov-Korsakov) and for Eastern Rumelia and the Adrianople Sanjak (Arkady Dmitrievich Stolypin).

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<sup>21</sup> ЦДА, ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 29 л. 76, Прошение от жител из Лом до Ломския окръжен управител, Лом 12.05.1882.

<sup>22</sup> FO, 881/3574/3, 5, Statistical Information as to the Populations of European Turkey, printed for the use of the Foreign Office, June 1878; М. Тафрова, *Танзиматът, вилаетската реформа и българите. Администрацията на Дунавския вилает (1864–1876)* (София: СИЕЛА, 2010), 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Historia Bułgarii 1870–1915. Materiały źródłowe z komentarzami*, vol. 3: *Polityka wewnętrzna*, eds. Jarosław Rubacha, Andrzej Malinowski, (Warszawa: Neriton, 2009), 35–36.



However, there was no stabilization in the Balkans – some parts of Macedonia became an arena of further fighting. After the Ottomans restored control over the region in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin, there were retaliations against the Slavic population, who became the scapegoat for the empire's failures. Between July and September 1878, there were a lot of reports about repression in Macedonian villages, which made people escape to the territories occupied by the Russians.<sup>24</sup> These events as well as the hope linked to a revision of the Treaty of Berlin were the fuel for the anti-Ottoman uprising which started in October. The movement, the so-called Kresna-Razlog Uprising, which concentrated in South-Eastern Macedonia, was pacified by the Ottomans by June (May OS) 1879. Foreign correspondents wrote about the extreme brutality of crimes against Christians – there was information about pogroms, expulsions, torture and kidnapping committed by the Ottoman troops, for example, in such villages as Banya, Chereshnitsa, and Berovo.<sup>25</sup> At the end of 1878, according to Russian data, about 30,000 people from Macedonia took refuge on the lands controlled by the tsar's army, most of them (23,000) in the Principality of Bulgaria. Three fourth of them were women and children. They were concentrated near the border, in the Kyustendil and Samokov areas; however, the authorities organized their resettlement to the eastern parts of the country.<sup>26</sup>

The situation in Thrace was more stable than in Macedonia due to the fact that until March 1879 the region was occupied by the Russians. Despite this, the Christians also emigrated *en masse* from there, knowing that Thrace would be returned under the sultan's administration. The vision of the restoration of the Ottoman rule and the fear of retaliation strongly affected the Christian communities. It is estimated that in that period about 35,000 people emigrated from Eastern Thrace to the north – to the Principality and to Eastern Rumelia.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> М. Пандевска, *Присилни миграции*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> FO, 78/2838/96–99, Palgrave to Marquis of Salibury, Sofia 25.11.1878; FO, 78/2838/116, Palgrave to Marquis of Salibury, Sophia 28.11.1878; *Британски дипломатически документи по българския национален въпрос*, т. 1: 1878–1893, съст. Весела Трайкова, Александър Гребенаров, Румен Караганев, Румяна Прахова, (София: Македонски научен институт–Институт по история при БАН, 1993), 79, 99–104; М. Пандевска, *Присилни миграции*, 58–65. See more about the Kresna Uprising: Д. Дойнов, *Кресненско-Разложкото въстание 1878–1879* (София: БАН, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> FO, 78/2838/158–159, Palgrave to Marquis of Salibury, Sophia 12.12.1878; FO, 78/2838/120–126, Report I on Bulgaro-Macedonian Refugees by Palgrave, Sophia 9.12.1878; Н. Овсяный, *Русское управление в Болгарии в 1877–78–79 гг.: Российский Императорский Комиссар в Болгарии, генерал-адъютант князь А. М. Дондуков-Корсаков*, (Петербург: Воен.-ист. комис. Гл. Штаба, 1906), 108; Г. Дракалиев, “Пристигане и установяване на бежанци от Македония в Бургас 1878–1928 г.”. In *Българските бежанци в Бургас*, 252.

<sup>27</sup> Н. Овсяный, *Русское управление в Болгарии в 1877–78–79 гг.: Восточная Румелия и Адрианопольский санджак*, (Петербург: Воен.-ист. комис. Гл. Штаба, 1907), 45–46.

There were statements, formulated among others by the British, that the Russians supported the migrations from Macedonia and Thrace, hoping that the Orthodox Slavic element would be strengthened in the controlled territories.<sup>28</sup> In reality, the official Russian position was more complicated. In August 1878, the tsar's representatives in Bulgaria clearly stressed that the Christians' emigration from the territories controlled by the Ottomans was unfavourable to Bulgarian as well as Russian interests and had to be prevented.<sup>29</sup> The Russian Imperial Commissar Alexander Dondukov-Korsakov pointed out that the administration did not have the appropriate resources to deal with such a high number of refugees and that the latter could not all settle due to the limited quantity of free land. The problems were also linked to the scale of the conflicts between the Christian refugees and the returning Muslims over the houses and territories abandoned during the war.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the Russian occupation authorities wanted the Slavs to stay in their homes in Thrace and Macedonia, which became the destination for the Muslims from Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and other lands separated from the Ottoman state. This was part of the attempts to rebuild "Great Bulgaria", which would play the role of a Russian satellite in the Balkans. The Russians believed that the frontiers specified in the Treaty of San Stefano could be restored in the nearest future and that it was important to maintain the Slavic and Orthodox character of these territories.<sup>31</sup> However, among representatives of the Russian occupation authorities, there were also voices that it was necessary to support Christian settlement, especially in Eastern Rumelia. According to them, like during the war, the migration should be an instrument to keep the Orthodox and Slavic character of the lands south of the Balkan mountains as well as to counteract

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Британски дипломатически документи*, т. 1, 40–42, 46–48.

<sup>29</sup> "Съобщение от ген.-майор В. Золотарьов до Ал. Липински, Филипопол 27.07.1878". In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 21–22.

<sup>30</sup> НБИН-БИА, ф. 19 а.е. 6 л. 9, Прошение от 400-те фамилии български от Чоп-къой до Пловдивския губернатор, Пловдив 10.1878; "Предписание от ген. адютант княз Дондуков-Корсаков до П. Алабин, б.м. 21.08.1878", In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 23–24; "Молба от българи от с. Чоп къой до губернатора на Пловдив, Пловдив 5.10.1878". In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 28–29; See more: K. Popek, "De-Ottomanisation of Land. Muslim Migrations and Ownership in the Bulgarian Countryside after 1878". In *Turkish Yoke or Pax Ottomana. The Reception of Ottoman Heritage in the Balkan History and Culture*, eds. Krzysztof Popek, Monika Skrzyszewska, (Kraków: Nowa Strona, 2019), 85–110.

<sup>31</sup> The Russian position was supported by the Bulgarian Church authorities, represented by Exarchate Bishop of Adrianople Sinesiy. The Bulgarian hierarchy sent to Thrace special emissaries who tried to convince the local population to stay home. A somewhat surprising fact was that the Ottoman local government also shared the Russian position – the Adrianople Vali Reuf Pasha was afraid of the depopulation of his province.

the alleged Ottoman plan of “de-Bulgarization” of the province and making it an integral part of the empire once again by strengthening the Muslim element. This kind of pro-migration thinking was also not rare in the Principality of Bulgaria, about one third of which was inhabited by non-Christian populations in the first years after its emergence.<sup>32</sup> These two contradictory positions affected the political line of the Russian authorities, which was inconsistent in many aspects.

Due to the repressions which affected the Christian Slavs in Macedonia and Thrace, the borders were opened at the turn of 1878 and 1879, and the Russians let the refugees in. The occupation authorities openly claimed that the refugees’ stay in the Principality and Eastern Rumelia could be only temporary and after the situation stabilized in Turkey-in-Europe they would have to go back home.<sup>33</sup> In December 1878, in the Plovdiv and the Sliven Governorates, there were 30,000 Christian refugees, in the Sofia Governorate – 20,000. The Governorates of Tarnovo, Ruse, Vidin, Varna, and Sliven were open to accepting exactly 72,335 people.<sup>34</sup> During the winter months, there was a dynamic increase in the number of refugees – in February 1879, there were about 115,000 Christians, mostly from the Ottoman Empire. Exactly 15,833 families were registered in the Principality of Bulgaria and 7,040 in Eastern Rumelia.<sup>35</sup>

The next migration wave took place after the end of the Russian occupation of Thrace in March 1879, when 20,000 Slavs and Greeks moved with the tsar’s last soldiers to Eastern Rumelia. There was information that in the region of Lozengrad (Kırklareli) about twenty-two of thirty-one Christian villages were abandoned. The people had escaped, fearing retaliation from the Ottomans after the Russians’ departure. Some of them were afraid of collective responsibility, some were guilty of offenses against the local Muslim population,

<sup>32</sup> *Британски дипломатически документи*, т. 1, 40–42, 46–48; Г. Генадиев, *Бежанците във Варненско 1878–1908*, (София: ВМРО, 1998), 21–22; Р. Георгиева, “Бежанският проблем в контекста на демографския профил на Сливен през 1878–1880 г.” In *Българските бежанци в Бургас*, 438; А. М. Мirkova, “Population Politics’ at the End of Empire: Migration and Sovereignty in Ottoman Eastern Rumelia, 1877–1886,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* LV\4 (2013), 962.

<sup>33</sup> НБИВ-БИА, ф. 19 а.е. б л. 19, Санджаковое Казначейство Филиппольскому губернатору, Филипполь 11.10.1878; “Ведомост за броя на бежанците от Адрианопол в Княжество България и Източна Румелия от 28 септември 1878, Адрианопол 11.10.1878.” In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 31–32.

<sup>34</sup> “Протокол на Съвета на руски комисар в България, [Пловдив] 9.12.1878.” In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 44–49.

<sup>35</sup> “Из отчет на княз Дондуков-Корсаков до ген. Тотлебен, София 6.02.1879.” In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 63.

for example, in Adrianople, the Slavic and Greek poor plundered Muslim properties during the war.<sup>36</sup>

Facing the mass migrations from Thrace, the Russians decided to close the border shortly after they moved their troops to the north. They officially stated that the situation in the region was stabilized and there was no need to treat the people coming to the Principality and Eastern Rumelia as refugees. The authorities also needed to focus on deployment and on ensuring appropriate conditions for those who were on the controlled territories.<sup>37</sup> The borders with Thrace and Macedonia remained closed until the end of the Russian occupation administration of Eastern Rumelia (April 1879) and Bulgaria (June 1879).

The Russians were generally against the settlement of refugees from Thrace and Macedonia – the victims of violence were let in but there was expectation that after the situation in the Ottoman Empire stabilized, they would have to return home. However, it did not mean that Christians from Turkey-in-Europe had not settled in the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia during the Russian occupation. Many did so, which was related to the followed circumstances: (1) they used the chaos of the first months after the war, when it was hard to control the movement of people, and took over abandoned Muslim land and houses; (2) if they had enough money, they could buy property; (3) some of the local governments did not listen to the central occupation authorities and supported the settlement due to the post-war depopulation in some regions (mostly the local authorities in the eastern parts of the Principality). Analyses show that, generally, the refugees gathered in the north were planning to settle and the ones in Eastern Rumelia were just waiting to go home.<sup>38</sup> This discrepancy was visible when the Russian occupation ended: the government in Sofia generally continued the migration strategy proposed by the tsar's representatives but a separate policy was pursued by some local governments, which often decided to transfer free land to the incoming population at their own discretion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Обръщение на жители от Централните Родопи (Смолянко) до граф Н. П. Игнатиев за присъединяване към България (Ахъ-Челеби, 25.03.1878)”. In *История на българите 1878–1944 в документи*, т. 1: 1878–1912, ч. 1: *Възстановяване и развитие на българската държава*, ред. Величко Георгиев, Стойко Трифонов, (София: Просвета, 1994), 14; *Британски дипломатически документи*, т. 1, 28, 35–38, 120–125.

<sup>37</sup> Х. Гандев, “Преселението на тракийски българи”, 8–11.

<sup>38</sup> “Писмо от окръжния началник до Градски съвет в Самоков, София 15.05.1879”. In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 66–67; С. Райчевски, *Източна Тракия*, 161–163; М. Пандевска, *Присилни миграции*, 80–81.

<sup>39</sup> ЦДА, ф. 20к оп. 1 а.е. 178 л. 55–56, Прошение до Постоянна комисия на Източна Румелия, 31.03.1880; ФО, 195/1311 (по pagination), Lascalles to Layard, Sofia 19.04.1880, no. 16; “Писмо от окръжния началник до Градския съвет в Самоков, Са-

The biggest opportunities to settle were on the land of the Turks, Circassians, Tatars, and Pomaks (Slavic-speaking Muslims) who had escaped during the war. Contrary to their political line, the Russians generally accepted the settling of the Christians from Macedonia and Thrace to block the return of the *Muhajirs*.<sup>40</sup> The Russian Ministry of War's decree concerning the areas of the former Tulcha Sanjak of 21 (9 OS) March 1878 stated that the Muslim refugees could not return to lands where the Christians had settled. There was a direct order that in the case of a conflict between a Muslim and a Christian, the latter should be favored.<sup>41</sup> The lands which were the easiest to get were the Circassian ones – the Circassians, who had settled in the Balkans in the 1860s, were the first to emigrate after the collapse of the Ottoman rule. Their appearance in the Balkans was linked to the previous conflict with the Russians during the conquest of the North Caucasus. During their short stay in the region, they did not adapt well and had difficult relations with the local population, not only the Christians but Muslims as well. Additionally, the Circassians were used by the Ottoman authorities to pacify the local insurrections. The suppression of the uprising of May (April OS) 1876 (the so-called April Uprising), in which the incomers from the Caucasus played a key role, had a particularly bad reputation. That is why the Russian authorities officially forbid the return of all Circassians on 14 (2 OS) August 1878 and their lands were taken by refugees from Macedonia and Thrace at first.<sup>42</sup> The concentration of the Christian refugees on northern Bulgarian lands (the former Danube Vilayet) was linked to the fact that there had been many Circassians there before the war.<sup>43</sup>

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моков 5.09.1879". In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 73; "Доклад от Т. Бурмов до княз Александър Батенберг, София 24.11.1879". In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 83–84; "Из протокол на общински съвет на Айтос, Айтос 29.03.1900". In *Миграционни движения на българите*, т. 1, 155–156.

<sup>40</sup> М.М. Фролова, "Русское гражданское управление", 118–119.

<sup>41</sup> Държавен архив във Варна (ДА-Варна), ф. 717к оп. 1 а.е. 2 л. 2–4, Циркулярно Министерство Военного, 9.03.1878.

<sup>42</sup> ДА-Варна, ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 1 л. 1–6, Журнал императорского Российского Коммисара в България, 2.08.1878; Cf. e.g. ДА-Варна, ф. 681к оп. 1 а.е. 2 л. 2, Прощение от преселенците в черказко село Шеремет до Провадийски окръжен началник, Провадия 7.05.1879; ЦДА, ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 107 л. 67, От Ловчански окръжен управител до Министерство на финансите, 10.09.1886; НБИВ-БИА, ф. 20 а.е. 13 л. 45–47, 58–59, Татар-Пазарджикският околийски началник до префекта на Татар-Пазарджикския департамент, Татар-Пазарджик 09.1882.

<sup>43</sup> В. Тонев, *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София: АИ Проф. Марин Дринов, 1995), 47; М. Жагодић, "Колонизациони процеси у Европској Турској 60-тих и 70-тих година 19. века и Кнежевина Србија". In *Империји, граници, политики (XIX – началото на XX век)*, съст. Пламен Митов, Ваня Рачева, (София: УИ "Св. Климент

## Conclusions

The Russian occupation authorities in Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia pursued a clear policy towards the Christian refugees during the Russo-Turkish War – they created conditions for the people who had emigrated during the hostilities to return home. The goal was to keep the Slavic and Orthodox character of these lands and to gather support of the local population – the Christian element was a guarantee of future control over the Eastern Balkans. The policy after the ceasefire in January 1878 was not so consistent. At first, the Russians assumed that they needed to oppose the migrations of the Slavs from Macedonia and Thrace to the newly created Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. As was the case earlier, they wanted to keep the ethnic and religious character of Turkey-in-Europe, which would be important for the future plan of regaining control over these lands. However, this policy had many exceptions. First of all, the Russians let in the Christian refugees escaping from the repressions in Macedonia and Thrace, especially in the former region, where the pacification of the Kresna-Razlog Uprising was really brutal. They expected that after the stabilization of the situation in the Ottoman Empire, the fugitives would return home and would not settle in the Principality and Eastern Rumelia. Again, there were exceptions, for two reasons. Firstly, this rule was contradictory to the other goal of the migration policy of the Russian occupation administration – blocking the return of Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Given the fact that about half of the population of the Danube and Adrianople Vilayets (more or less the future Principality and Eastern Rumelia) before the War of 1877–1878 was Muslim, the Russians wanted to change this proportion and the settlement of Christian refugees could become a useful instrument for enacting this scenario. Secondly, the Russians could not control everything, which is why during the chaos during the war and the first months after it, the refugees simply used the situation and took over land without the authorities' permission. The tsarist representatives also could not strictly control all the local governments, which pursued their own policy with regard to this matter.

The inconsistency of the migration policy of the Russian occupation authorities of Bulgaria was a result of the complexity of the question which affected many aspects of public life and caused many challenges. The migrations were not treated as a priority but as one of the many problems linked to the building

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Охридски”, 2016), 82–83; Н. Тодоров, *Балканският град XV–XIX век. Социално-икономическо и демографско развитие* (София: Наука и изкуство, 1972), 307.

<sup>44</sup> See more K. Popek, “To Get Rid of Turks. The South-Slavic States and Muslim Remigration in the Turn of 1870s and 1880s”. In *Crossroads of the Old Continent. Central and Southeastern Europe in the 19th and 20th Century*, eds. Krzysztof Popek, Michał Bałogh, Kamil Szadkowski, Agnieszka Ścibior, (Kraków: Petrus, 2021), 63–85.



of the new state in the Balkans. Facing such a big challenge and dealing with such a mass phenomenon (we should not forget that thousands of people were migrating at that time), it was nearly impossible to formulate simple answers and consistently apply the rules that the occupation administration set out. The Russians had to react to a changing situation.

The Russian occupation authorities played a key role in the creation of many aspects of the modern Bulgarian state: the administration, police, army, judiciary, as well as migration policy. The attitude towards the migrations from Macedonia and Thrace more or less persisted until 1912, when the Ottoman Empire lost control over these territories. As long as the Bulgarian authorities hoped to incorporate Macedonia and Thrace, they cared about the Orthodox and Slavic character of these territories, which meant having the people identified by the authorities in Sofia as Bulgarians stay there. However, this political line was as inconsistent as the Russian one.

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ISSN 0350-7653



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