

The 1913 Ottoman Military Campaign in Eastern Thrace: A Prelude to Genocide?

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ABSTRACT

The first large-scale military ethnic cleansing operations were organised during the Balkan Wars. Much has been written about the cleansing undertaken by Serb, Bulgarian and Greek forces but little about Turkish operations in the aftermath of the recapture of Edirne in 1913. The Ottoman counteroffensive in Thrace seems to have been overshadowed by two contemporaneous events. The main theatre of operations of the Second Balkan War unfolded at the same time and the Armenian Genocide started less than two years later. Official Turkish historiography still seems to glorify the recapture of Edirne and its conqueror, Enver Pasha, whose portrait proudly hangs on the walls of the military museum in Istanbul and whose remains have recently been transferred to the Monument of Liberty cemetery. It would, therefore, be worthwhile examining the importance of possibly the first example of ethnic cleansing undertaken by the Young Turk leadership. Having witnessed and been themselves the victims of mass expulsion, Turks in turn adopted these methods as their own. The “Special Organisation” carried out its first mass deportation operations in Thrace. Consequently, the 1913 Turkish campaign is worth examining closely not just as an important component of the Balkan Wars but also as a prelude to practices that would be later used on a wider scale during World War I. Was the military campaign in Eastern Thrace a prelude to the mass deportations that took place in Anatolia during and after World War I? Can Western literature, diplomatic archives and contemporary newspapers, which were often sympathetic toward the Young Turks and especially Enver Pasha whom they saw as moderniser, help us examine the 1913 campaign?

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Literature Review

While studying this topic, I relied upon three main types of sources: 1) primary sources, mostly from the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Carnegie report, but also several documents retrieved from the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva 2) Greek and Bulgarian works of propaganda and 3) general studies covering the Thracian campaign. Listing such sources is in itself an avowal that the present study will be incomplete at best : my modest aim is to provide a clearer picture of what took place in Eastern Thrace between July 1913 and June 1914.

The 1913 Ottoman military campaign in Eastern Thrace and its immediate aftermath have never been the subject of a specific and thorough study. In the historiography of the Balkan Wars, the ottoman offensive has been treated as sideshow — which, from a military point of view, it was — whereas Ottoman historiography has traditionally devoted little attention to the Balkan wars as a whole. Only in recent years has their impact on the Ottoman Empire received more attention ; in spite of this, the Eastern Thrace campaign has never been studied as a specific and separate event. This study will therefore, I hope, serve as an initial inquiry into a crucial and yet forgotten moment in late Ottoman History and reveal certain dynamics and tendencies; it will be up to later studies, relying on Ottoman documents and Turkish sources which I have not been able to consult, to analyse them more closely.

Anyone wishing to look into this event is thus immediately confronted with the problem of sources. This study relies primarily on reports written by French diplomats stationed in Constantinople, Adrianople, Sofia, Salonica, Philippopolis and Bourgas. These documents provide a fairly detailed account of the major events during and after the campaign. The Balkan Wars

aroused considerable attention in European chancelleries which were flooded by reports from their diplomatic agents across the region. Through these reports one can follow the diplomatic negotiations day by day.

Another crucial source of primary information is the report written by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, published in 1914. Already at the time, the report caused quite an uproar among the belligerent States, with most of them accusing, not without basis, the Commission of being biased and favouring this or that country. Two of the four authors of the report, the Russian liberal historian, Paul Milioukov, and the British journalist, Henry Noel Brailsford, openly favoured Bulgaria¹. Miliukov was also the most significant contributor to the final report, writing four out of the seven chapters². More recently, the Carnegie Commission's work has also been described as a typical example of early XX century orientalism. Although this was undoubtedly the case, it does not diminish the importance of the report or invalidate its findings : for all its orientalism, and despite the somewhat partisan feelings of some of its authors, the report is without a doubt the most accurate and impartial contemporary analysis of the Balkan Wars and the crimes committed during them. Moreover, whatever the personal preferences of the authors might have been during the war, they were most certainly overshadowed by their commitment to international law. The members of the commission were first and foremost men who had made ample proof of their dedication to the cause of law and peace; they were convinced

¹ Nadine Nadine, "An Unexpected Outcome of the Balkan Wars: The Carnegie Report of 1913", International Conference on *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: New views and interpretations*, Belgrade, October 24 to 25, 2012 p. 296. Both made numerous journeys to the Balkans, and Bulgaria especially: Miloukov had first come to Bulgaria in 1897 as a university professor hired by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, before joining the Russian legation in Sofia the following year. Brailsford's first close experience with the Balkans also came in 1897 when he joined the Philhellenic legion as a volunteer during the Ottoman-Greek war. Dzovinar Kévonian. "L'enquête, Le Délit, La Preuve : Les « Atrocités » Balkaniques De 1912-1913 à L'épreuve Du Droit De La Guerre." *Le Mouvement Social* 222, no. 1 (2008): 13. p. 26

² Kévonian, "L'enquête, Le Délit, La Preuve : Les « Atrocités » Balkaniques De 1912-1913 à L'épreuve Du Droit De La Guerre." p. 30

that norms and international litigation could prevent war, and if not, then they could at least limit its destructive powers. Most importantly, the Commission members were all experts in their fields and their report was methodologically sound. Both Milioukov and Brailsford spoke Bulgarian and were considered eminent specialists of the Balkans, who were well acquainted with the local conditions. For example, Brailford's ethnographic and historical study of Macedonia, published in 1903 upon his return from the region, where he headed the British relief mission, was considered a work of great authority. The two other members of the Commission were Justin Godart, a French socialist and humanitarian, well-known for his defence of the Armenian cause, and Samuel Dutton, a law professor from Columbia University. The authors therefore combined a thorough knowledge of the Balkans, legal expertise and humanitarian commitment. These features were reflected in the fine quality of the final report.

The Carnegie Commission thought of itself as a fact finding mission aiming to establish as rigorously as possible the truth behind the numerous and often conflicting reports of atrocities spread by newspapers and States. It was therefore of the utmost importance to gather the most reliable information from the widest range of sources possible. The bulk of the information was collected during visits to the war-stricken regions where the authors held interviews with witnesses and refugees on all sides, documenting all evidences of atrocities. The Commission also relied on various other official and unofficial documents such as governmental reports, news articles, private correspondences and medical reports. Once the information had been laid out in written, the texts were collectively edited under the supervision of Paul d'Estournelles de Constant, the renowned French lawyer and Nobel peace prize laureate (1909), thus ensuring that the report would remain as impartial and objective as possible³.

³ Constant for instance personally edited certain passages in Miliukov's chapters which he considered overly pro-Bulgarian. Akhund. "An Unexpected Outcome of the Balkan Wars". p. 299

Far less reliable are works written by Bulgarians and Greeks for propaganda purposes. Both States sponsored reports on the eve of the 1919 Versailles conference in order further their territorial and moral claims. The *Pereseuction of the Greeks in Turkey, 1914-1918*, published in 1919 by the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople and J. Ivanov's *Les Bulgares devant le Congrès de la Paix, documents ethnographiques et diplomatiques* are clearly partisan works as one would expect, but they should not be discarded as mere forgeries. The detailed accounts they provide can in certain cases be confirmed by other, more reliable documents. When they do, such works of propaganda can be used, albeit with great caution.

When it comes to the Greek and Bulgarian view of the Thracian events of 1913-1914, I drew from the information provided by Yannis G. Moureles in "The 1914 Persecution and the first attempt at an exchange of minorities between Greece and Turkey", Kiril Kosev in *Podvigat, 1912-1913* and Stoyan Raichevski in *Etnicheskoto prochistvane na bulgarite v Iztochna i Zapadna Trakiya i Mala Aziya (1903-1913-1923) (The Ethnic cleansing of Bulgarians from Eastern and Western Thrace and Asia Minor)*. All of these studies rely heavily on archival documents. Raichevski's book should be singled out as a particularly important source of information; it is a collection of primary sources, Bulgarian consular reports from 1914 and testimonies written by the refugees or dictated to the local Bulgarian administrators in 1924 during an appraisal of the stolen property in the places from which they were expelled. Unfortunately, I have not been able to verify neither these archival documents nor those used by other Bulgarian and Greek authors. With this in mind, and considering the highly politicised nature of the topic, such sources should also be used cautiously.

What these primary or would-be primary sources cannot reveal is the motivations and the decision-making process of the Ottoman State and statesmen. French diplomats can describe their

encounters with government officials and even at times make deeply insightful observations, but most of their analyses were in fact conjectures rather than substantiated claims and, however reasonable they might be, they must be treated as such. The CUP was a deeply secretive organisation whose inner workings are notoriously hard to ascertain. Without access to the Ottoman archives, I have had to rely on secondary sources to try to establish how the Porte made its decisions and executed them. For this purpose, I consulted a number of books dealing with the Constitutional period or covering the Thracian campaign from the Ottoman perspective, such as Taner Akçam's *Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*, Doğan Çetinkaya's *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement: Nationalism, Protest and the Working Classes in the Formation of Modern Turkey*, Naim Turfan's *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military and Ottoman Collapse*, Polat Safi's *The Ottoman Special Organization - Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: an inquiry into its operational and administrative characteristics*, and Feroz Ahmad's *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914*.

Introduction

1. Young Turks, Unionists and the Constitutional Era⁴

Before entering the substance of the study we must present the historical context, describe its main actors and do away with some of the common misconceptions related to the period. The term “Young Turk”, essential for this topic, is somewhat vague and misleading to the extent that it is often used to describe people who sometimes held radically opposed views. It is therefore essential to clarify what exactly we mean by it. The Young Turks were initially a group of students from the military medical college who were dissatisfied with the slow pace of the transformations promised by Ottoman reformers. In 1889, they founded the Ottoman Unity Society (*Ittihadî Osmani Cemiyeti*) with the aim to oppose sultan Abdülhamid’s repressive regime and restore the constitution that had briefly existed (1878-1879) before it was prorogued by the sovereign. The secret society quickly spread within and even outside the Empire⁵ so that by 1896, it seemed as though the moment for revolution was ripe. However, just before it was launched, Abdülhamid’s agents uncovered the underground movement and smashed it. Its leaders were imprisoned or exiled. Only the Paris-based cell of the society survived.

It took some time for the movement to recover. Those who managed to escape the repression fled to Paris and began to reorganise an opposition there. It is then that they began to call themselves “Young Turks”⁶. Meanwhile, inside the Empire, Mehmet Talat started recreating

⁴ For this section I rely on the following sources Erik Jan Zürcher. *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. ; Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks; the Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. ; Naim M. Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military and Ottoman Collapse*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000. ; Fatma Muge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁵ A major cell was established in Adrianople by Mehmet Talat, a local postal clerk and, in 1895, a branch was opened in Paris by Ahmed Rıza.

⁶ It is also at that time that the Young Turks clearly articulated their goals forcing them to split into two factions: a more liberal one, advocating the decentralisation of the Empire, headed by Prince Sabahattin, and a more centrist and nationalist one led by Ahmed Rıza.

the underground network after 1906 and merged it with the Paris cell to form the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Only this time, Talat envisioned a different approach: realising that the success of any future revolution depended on the support of at least a part of the military establishment, he began to recruit members among disgruntled Ottoman officers stationed in Macedonia. This is how a man who was to play a momentous role in the late history of the Ottoman Empire, Enver pasha, was recruited into the underground movement⁷. This was an entirely new generation of Young Turks: they were overwhelmingly young — their average age was 29 in 1908 — educated and ambitious men who believed providence had bestowed upon them the sacred mission to save the Empire from further territorial losses. All that was needed was a pretext to spur them into action.

On June 9-10, 1908, King Edward VII and Tsar Nicholas II met in Reval. One of the matters to be discussed during their meeting was a plan for the reform of Macedonia. Convinced that the region was about to be made autonomous and demilitarised — in other words, that it would de facto become independent — Enver and Niyazi bey mutinied in Bitola along with barely several hundred other soldiers, and demanded the restoration of the constitution in order to foil the European reform plan. The army sent by the sultan to quell the uprising defected to the revolutionaries leaving Abdülhamid with no choice but to proclaim a constitutional regime. Therefore, with the exception of Talat bey and several other figures, the revolution was carried out by the second generation of Young Turks. From then on, the CUP was controlled by them, despite the return of the founding father from exile.

⁷ Many others, such as İsmet İnönü, Kâzım Karabekir, Ali Çetinkaya, Niyazi bey and Kâzım Özalp joined. It is estimated that around 2000 Ottoman officers were members of the organisation by 1908. Zürcher, *The Young Turks; the Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics*, pp. 100-101

The restoration of parliament brought great hopes, but also ushered in a period of great instability. The collapse of Abdülhamid's regime effectively created a power vacuum which nobody, not even the Unionists could fill. They did not to assume power directly but chose instead to remain in the shadows as the self-declared guardians of the freshly instated constitution. The government was controlled by an older generation of opponents of Abdülhamid who had at some point all belonged to the traditional ruling elite. These "old Young Turks" often opposed the methods and goals of the younger CUP faction. An uneasy and ineffective cooperation between them ensued which was duly exploited by their opponents. In 1909, the latter exploited the assassination of Ahmet Samim, a journalist critical of the CUP, to launch a counterrevolution in the capital that was followed by massacres in the provinces, in particular in Adana. With the help of a loyal faction within the army, the CUP managed to restore order, but the ease with which they had been swept from power encouraged them to use more and more extralegal measures to ensure their rule.

From the onset, the Unionists were ill-suited to the task of guarding a parliamentary regime. The leaders of the CUP differed from the traditional ottoman ruling elite in fundamental respects: 1) they were overwhelmingly young and 2) they were much more prone to violence. In both respects this was a radical departure from Ottoman tradition: prestige and authority came with age and there was no shortcut to power; patience and time were the only means to rise to the top. One Ottoman statesman commented on the contrast between the CUP and the traditional ruling class by saying that "we the Ottoman elite are sober, serious-minded people with foresight. We do not like adventures the way they [the CUP] do because a state's destiny cannot be tossed like a

backgammon dice”⁸. Although the comment is self-congratulatory, its author was not too far off the mark when describing the CUP as adventurers.

In addition to being gamblers, the Young Turks also contrasted with the traditional elite by their use of violence. Massacres and mass movements of populations were part of traditional means of rule used by the sultan, but political assassinations, especially by the end of the XIX century were certainly not. In spite of his paranoia, Abdülhamid did not order his political opponents to be killed. In most cases, disgrace or exile were the preferred solutions. The Young Turks on the other hand, impetuous by nature, tended to view violence, including political assassinations, as the easiest solution to complex problems. One Ottoman politician pointed out that the CUP “had learned politics from the Balkan guerrilla fighters”⁹.

2. The various meanings of Ottomanism

The 1908 revolution was followed by an outburst of enthusiasm in all corners of the Empire. Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Jews and many others celebrated the end of Abdülhamid’s tyranny and the advent of an ideology, Ottomanism, which was meant to guarantee freedom and brotherhood. This enthusiasm was followed by a flurry of literary activity: the newly found freedom of press enabled a lively public debate to emerge and discuss the various concepts of freedom, equality, civic rights and nationhood. During the constitutional era, the Ottoman Empire essentially experienced the birth of print capitalism described by Benedict Anderson¹⁰. This allowed the various communities of the Empire to discuss the nature of Ottoman identity. But

⁸ Göçek, *Denial of Violence*. p. 160

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

did this lead to the creation of an Ottoman imagined community? In reality, the unanimous clamour after the revolution was deceptive. Ottomanism proved to be a very vague ideology which meant different things to different people, and some of these interpretations were completely contradictory. For instance, for the Armenian Patriarch and his followers, Ottomanism was supposed to protect the traditional national privileges which had been granted to them by the sultans¹¹. They thus envisioned an association of autonomous communities in a decentralised Empire. Although some Young Turks shared this view, most, especially the CUP faction, had other ideas. For the latter group, the overriding preoccupation was how to spare the Ottoman Empire from further territorial losses, or worse, prevent its complete collapse. Ottomanism was seen not as a goal in itself but as a means to achieve this; it was therefore only of secondary importance. A far more important task was to centralise the State and establish a firm control over the disparate provinces of the Empire. This required rescinding some of the ancient privileges of the non-Muslims. But the Empire's various nationalities were not prepared to relinquish rights which they considered essential to their national and Ottoman identity.

However, the CUP naively believed that by merely reestablishing the constitution, it would secure the cooperation of the various communities to centralise the State. After realising that the non-Muslims would not support them in this policy, the CUP began to view Ottomanism — and the religious communities — not as a means of saving the State but rather as an obstacle. Nevertheless, they did not begin to oppose the communities immediately; in an Empire where, before the Balkan Wars, non-Muslims constituted about one quarter of the population, they were conscious of the need to find at least a temporary *modus vivendi*. So, they continued to pay lip-service to Ottomanism, but what was probably much closer to their true beliefs was the traditional

¹¹ Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015., p. 64

Ottoman belief of Muslim superiority. One Young Turk acknowledged that the “only obstacle to achieving such equality [between the Muslims and the non-Muslims] was our national pride and grandeur. [This equality] had always been kept away from the imagination of the [Muslim] populace because of the grandness of our past and our limitless esteem and trust in our religion”¹². Already in 1909, Hüsein Cahit, the editor of CUP’s newspaper, went so far as to openly advocate the ruling nation concept: he argued that the Ottoman Empire was the land of Turkish speaking Muslims and that if they wanted to preserve their way of life, they needed maintain power. He believed that if authority were given to the non-Muslims, Ottoman national — meaning Muslim — interests would not be the priority¹³. This illustrates that, rather than creating a single imagined community, the constitutional era led to the development of multiple and sometimes conflicting Ottoman identities.

3. The CUP abandons Ottomanism

Although the ruling nation concept was a powerful current on the eve of the Balkan Wars, it was not the only one. More importantly, the people who governed the country in 1912 did not adhere to it. Just before the outbreak of the war, the CUP had been ousted from power by a coalition of liberal Young Turks who favoured cooperation with the non-Muslims and still believed in the driving force of Ottoman brotherhood. Therefore, when the war began it was presented as a patriotic of all the Ottomans. But as the catastrophic defeats multiplied it gradually transformed into a war of Muslims against the crusading Balkan States aided by treacherous Ottoman Christians. The same print capitalism which attempted to create an Ottoman imagined community

¹² Göçek, *Denial of Violence*. p. 163

¹³ Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution*. p. 56

was now set in motion to attempt to make sense of the catastrophe that befell the Turks. After sifting through the available contemporary Ottoman accounts of the war, Eyal Ginio concluded that: “ All the Ottoman(...) sources describe the outcome of the first Balkan war in the most apocalyptic terms found in the Turkish-Arabic vocabulary: *felâket* (‘disaster’, ‘catastrophe’), *inhizam* (‘defeat’), *maglubiyet* (‘defeat’) and *glrdab* (‘maelstrom’) are the principal keywords that recur in Ottoman writings on the Balkan wars. (...) They all describe the war as a major watershed in the history of the Ottoman nation; a complete catastrophe that could be repaired only if the Ottoman state could draw the right conclusions; a very last warning before the Ottoman state collapsed and disintegrated”¹⁴. The nearly unanimous opinion of Muslim authors was that Ottomanism had failed to provide a real sense of belonging. The soldiers, it was argued, were demoralised because they were fighting for an empty ideal. More importantly, many concluded that Ottoman Christians were to blame for the military defeats. It was claimed that, not only had they defected to the enemy, but that they had committed unspeakable horrors during the war. A whole new genre of atrocity literature appeared, providing the public with daily accounts of the suffering of Muslims in Eastern Thrace¹⁵. The war stirred up unprecedented resentment against not just the invaders but also the Ottoman Christians: in Ginio’s view, “eastern Thrace became the main arena in which this alleged treachery took place. The loyalty of its non-Muslim populations was repeatedly debated and questioned in the press. Most writers believed they had enough proofs to indicate the non-Muslims’ betrayal and enmity toward their Muslim neighbors”¹⁶. Among the many stories of cruelty and treason, one event stood out by its magnitude: the siege of Adrianople.

¹⁴. Eyal Ginio. "Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream." *War in History* 12, no. 2 (2005): 156-77. p. 169

¹⁵ Eyal Ginio. “Paving the way for ethnic cleansing: eastern Thrace during the Balkan wars (1912-1913) and their aftermath”. in Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz. *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2013. p. 291

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 288

This former Ottoman capital was surrounded by the Bulgarian forces in the beginning of November 1913. The slow suffering of the population, cramped behind the fortifications contributed greatly to the feeling of desperation and anger. Over the course of the war, Adrianople simultaneously became the symbol of Ottoman Muslim bravery and Christian barbarity. It was the last Ottoman foothold in Europe. Once it finally succumbed to the Bulgarians in March 1913, after five long months, all of European Turkey had disappeared and the road to Constantinople itself lay open.

The inability to defend Adrianople came to exemplify the profound crisis of the Ottoman Empire¹⁷. Many Ottomans, especially the leaders of the CUP, many of whom had volunteered to fight during the war, were traumatised by the events. Enver Pasha was one of them : “How could one forget those plains and plateaus irrigated by the blood of our ancestors; to leave to yesterday’s servants those open spaces where the Turkish frontier warriors once rode their horses; to depart from our mosques, tombs, religious lodges, bridges, and castles. To be expelled from the Balkans into Anatolia is something a person cannot bear. I am willing to give the rest of my life to get vengeance from the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Montenegrins”¹⁸.

It is not difficult to understand why the loss of Rumelia was so painful for the Ottomans. This region had always been considered the heartland of the Empire; it was the first territory to be conquered by the Ottomans — as early as the XIV century — and was also the richest. Many of the greatest servants of the sultan, such as Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Pargalı Ibrahim Paşa, or the Köprülüs were originally from the Balkans. Without this constitutive element, the Ottoman Empire

¹⁷ Eyal Ginio. “Constructing a Symbol of Defeat and National Rejuvenation: Edirne (Adrianople) in Ottoman Propaganda and Writing during the Balkan Wars”. in Stefan Goebel, and Derek Keene. *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011. p. 89

¹⁸ Göçek. *Denial of Violence*. p. 238

could no longer be the same. Nevertheless, the Young Turks did come to terms with the loss of the Balkans, but only by adopting Anatolia as their new fatherland and as the last bastion of the Turks that needed to be defended at all costs¹⁹. Clearly, by the end of the war, the Ottoman “mental map” was radically reshaped: the fatherland was reduced to the Anatolian plateau and the non-Muslims were permanently excluded from the Ottoman nation. Hüsein Cahit expressed this clearly in an article: “the nation would not need those who were clearly not attached to the motherland”²⁰.

* * *

The Balkan War was seen as a struggle for the survival of the Ottoman State. This feeling of desperation coalesced around the hugely symbolic city of Adrianople. Filled with some of the grandest Ottoman monuments, it symbolised the former greatness of the Empire, stirring up that ancient feeling of Muslim pride. Saving the city became an obsession for the CUP. On January 23, 1913, as the government was preparing to cede it to the Bulgarians, an armed band headed by Enver pasha stormed the Sublime Porte and forced the government to resign. Soon thereafter, the former Balkan allies began to quarrel over the spoils of war; a second Balkan War broke out between them, giving the Young Turks the chance to reclaim Adrianople and some of the territories they had lost. The Unionists seized this opportunity and launched an offensive into Eastern Thrace in July 1913.

The military coup marked the end of any kind of semblance of Ottomanism and the beginning of an effort to establish the Ottoman Empire on Turkish Muslim foundations. Was the

¹⁹ Erik Jan Zürcher, “The Young Turks - Children of the Borderlands?”. in *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9/1–2 (2003), pp. 275–86.

²⁰ Eyal Ginio. “Paving the way for ethnic cleansing”. p. 293

1913 Ottoman campaign in Thrace the first in a series of measures the Unionists would take to rid the Empire of the non-Muslims?

Part I: A new form of urban warfare?

The reoccupation of Eastern Thrace by the Ottoman army was not a “uniform” process; rather, different methods of coercion were employed in different parts of the province. This differentiation was most pronounced between urban settlements and rural areas, and it is therefore necessary to look into the mechanisms of violence employed in each case. Urban violence has been a frequent occurrence in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the late XIX and early XX century, and in this sense, the fact that massacres occurred in Eastern Thrace in 1913 is in itself nothing new. However, we must examine closely what were the similarities between those and earlier massacres, what methods were used, and in particular, whether the aims in Eastern Thrace were different from those in earlier cases.

1. The massacres of Rodosto and Malgara

The first town to be recaptured by the Ottomans in Thrace was Rodosto (nowadays called Tekirdag) on July 14, 1913, when a group of 200 volunteers²¹ arrived there. Their first act was to issue a proclamation to the Christian and Jewish population of the area: “Anyone in possession of goods or arms belonging to the government or cattle or goods belonging to emigres in the local population, which have been appropriated during the Bulgarian occupation, is invited to come and restore them to the Special Commission sitting at Rodosto. Two days' delay are allowed, starting from today (July 5/18) for those who are in Rodosto, three days for those dwelling in the villages. After the lapse of this delay any one found with appropriated goods in his possession will be treated

²¹ The volunteers are referred to in various ways in contemporary accounts: “irregulars”, “başbozüks”, “Arabs”, “Kurds” and “Muslim haiduks”

with all the rigor of the laws”²². Such a proclamation, which explicitly addressed the non-Muslims as potential thieves who opportunistically acquired Muslim possessions during the Bulgarian occupation, could only foster the vengefulness of the returning Muslim refugees. This is exactly what happened: rather than wait for the agreed upon date, the refugees and the volunteers immediately divided themselves into groups, each of which was headed by four or five başbozuk, and began pillaging the town. 19 people were killed in the attack and another 81 had disappeared before the consuls of the Great Powers could intervene²³. The wealthy inhabitants of the city were forced pay for their lives to be spared.

The fact that the population did not resist this assault clearly shows that it was unarmed and that, contrary to what the official proclamation claimed, the non-Muslims had not acquired weapons during the Bulgarian occupation. Despite officially aiming to restore order, it is more than likely that the proclamation was actually intended to provide an excuse for pillaging the town. In fact, the entire endeavour looks suspiciously premeditated: the fact that the volunteers, usually much less disciplined than the army, and prone to mistreating civilians, had been landed on the coastal town of Rodosto by a battleship of the Ottoman navy, seems to indicate that military authorities organising the campaign were more than willing to turn a blind eye on the disorder and perhaps even incite it. Furthermore, the fact that the town had already been evacuated by the Bulgarian forces when the volunteers arrived, gave them and the returning refugees the perfect window of opportunity to plunder the wealthy port, before official authority was restored. Finally, the swiftness of the attack and the smooth coordination between the refugees and the volunteers further points to their premeditated nature.

²² *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914., p. 128

²³ *Ibid.* 129 This figure is confirmed by a collective report written by the vice consuls of the Great Powers in Rodosto

Once the vice-consuls intervened²⁴, the mob left Rodosto and began ransacking the outskirts of the town where their deeds could go unchecked. In the nearby town of Malgara, where there was no European diplomatic presence, the damage during the reoccupation was far greater, but once again methods used were very similar. Just like Rodosto, Malgara remained without any public authorities, the Bulgarian forces having left the town on July 14th²⁵. According to the report of the commission later sent by the Armenian Patriarchate to investigate the events, this brief interlude during which the town was left to its own devices, caused great agitation and heightened the animosity between the Christians and the Muslims. Anticipating a disaster, sixty Armenians fled to Bulgaria. Nevertheless, no incidents took place that day. On July 15, as the Ottoman army was approaching the town, a deputation of anxious Greek and Armenian notables was dispatched to meet the troops, hoping they would ensure order. But instead of reassuring the Christians, the Ottoman commander met them with an insult. At the same time, a rabble which did not seem to come from Malgara, had joined the army and began to excite the soldiers with stories of Greek and Armenian treachery. They claimed that the Bulgarian army had caused them no harm but that it was the *giaours* — a derogatory term designating the infidel Christians — that were responsible for all the disaster which had befallen the country. In particular, it was not difficult to convince the soldiers of Armenian treachery; one Ottoman sub-lieutenant bitterly stated: “You other Armenians, you have largely assisted the Bulgarians, but today you shall have your reward.”²⁶ Naturally, such words further encouraged the mob to spread resentment against the Christians.

²⁴ France, Great Britain and Russia had representatives in Rodosto.

²⁵ “Reports of the Delegation of the Armenian Patriarchate: The Disaster of Malgara”, in *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914. p. 347

²⁶ *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914. p. 129

When the Ottomans entered Malgara, the same proclamation was issued as in Rodosto, only this time it specifically addressed the Armenians: “Armenian traitors, you have in your possession arms and other objects stolen from the Moslems”. Later, public criers went around the Armenian quarter ordering “those who have stolen goods belonging to Moslems or who are in possession of arms, to give them up”²⁷. The tension was steadily building up, but in spite of this, no disturbances took place for two whole days. Only a few officers, led by başıbozüks, were seen going around the Armenian quarter and taking notes. On the July 16, the mob, having suddenly become more aggressive, began looting the Armenian shops in the marketplace. After their owners submitted an official protest, the military authorities reassured the Armenians but subsequently made no official proclamation and issued no strict orders to calm the situation. Such a course of action was interpreted by the rabble as a virtual authorisation to begin a widespread attack on the Armenians. Only a pretext was needed for it to begin. That opportunity presented itself when an Ottoman officer stopped two Armenians to inquire about directions; frightened by the officer’s orders, the Armenians fled to their homes. Immediately, soldiers accompanied by başıbozüks ran after them and set fire to their houses and began looting the Armenian neighbourhood. At the same time, the mob began to pillage the marketplace and kill Armenians. According to a survivor later interrogated by the Armenian commission, the order to kill had been issued by Ottoman officers²⁸. The rampage lasted for several hours; 12 Armenians were killed, 8 went missing and 87 houses were burnt²⁹.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 129

²⁸ “Reports of the Delegation of the Armenian Patriarchate: The Disaster of Malgara”. p. 348

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 349

Beyond the obvious resemblances between the massacres in Rodosto and Malgara, these two events also share numerous similarities, both in terms of the causes and the methods used, with previous urban massacres in the Ottoman Empire, particularly those which occurred in Adana in 1909. Urban massacres, especially against the Armenians, had been taking place with increasing regularity at least since the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876 - 1909), but those of Adana are a useful point of comparison for our purposes because they were the first case of large-scale violence to occur during the constitutional period. Just like in Adana, the massacres were an act of vengeance against a population accused of treachery: in 1909, the Armenians of Cilicia were declared traitors to the revolution and were suspected of plotting an uprising in order to establish an independent Kingdom. After the first massacre, nearly all the Muslim inhabitants of Adana were convinced that the Armenians had set fire to their own houses in order to bring about a European intervention³⁰. In Thrace in 1913, the Armenians were not just traitors to the revolution but to the Ottoman nation. Once again they were accused of connivence with the enemy. What made such claims particularly potent was the fact that some Armenian revolutionaries had indeed sided with the Bulgarians. Andranik Ozanian, the famous guerrilla fighter and a former member of the Armenian Revolution Federation, had been living in Sofia for a number of years where he maintained close contact with Macedonian revolutionaries, and joined the Bulgarian army when the war erupted in 1912. Under Andranik's leadership, the Armenian band comprising of some 230 volunteers fought quite successfully on the Thracian front. Unfortunately for the Armenians residing in the Ottoman empire, Andranik's exploits received far more attention in the Empire and even across Europe,

³⁰ Der Matossian. *Shattered Dreams of Revolution*. p. 168

than the 8000 Armenians fighting on the Turkish side and who had, in the words of General Yaver Pasha, provided “valiant service in the Balkans”³¹.

In addition to punishing traitors, another common cause for the massacres in Thrace and in Adana was the desire to loot Christian shops and houses. In Malgara and Rodosto as well as in Adana, the disorder started in the marketplace. The Patriarchate’s report goes so far as to assert that the fire which was set in the Armenian quarter of Malgara was intended to divert the attention of the local Armenians while the marketplace was being looted. The fact that shops were specifically targeted — 218 of them were pillaged in Malgara — makes such a claim more than feasible³². Furthermore, these actions are fully consistent with the economic boycott movement which had already been hostile toward Ottoman non-Muslims before 1912, and was beginning to target them openly as a result of the Balkan Wars³³. In Adana, the massacre was instigated by local notables who felt threatened by the triumphant rise of an Armenian bourgeoisie of Cilicia³⁴. The Armenians of Thrace were not nearly as numerous or wealthy but by 1913 they had become, in the view of the State, economic enemies of the nation like all other Christians.

In addition to having very similar causes, massacres in Thrace and Cilicia were committed following a similar, and one might even say, well established method. In the first stage, nearly identical rumours were spread to cause resentment and agitation. In Malgara and Rodosto, this was that Christians had somehow acquired arms during the Bulgarian occupation whereas in Adana, the Armenians were believed to be digging tunnels in order to reach the city’s arsenal. In the second phase, the soldiers were roused against the Christian population; in Adana this was done when

³¹ Garabet Moundjian, *Struggling for a Constitutional Regime: Armenian-Young Turk Relations in the Era of Abdülhamid II, 1895-1909*. (PhD diss., University of California, 2012). pp. 415-416

³² “Reports of the Delegation of the Armenian Patriarchate: The Disaster of Malgara”. pp. 348-9

³³ See chapters 3 and 4 in Dogan Çetinkaya. *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement Nationalism, Protest and the Working Classes in the Formation of Modern Turkey*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013.

³⁴ Moundjian, *Struggling for a Constitutional Regime*. p. 457

shots were fired at their camp, supposedly from the Armenian quarter, but in fact from a Muslim's house, while in Malgara a mob was spreading stories of atrocities among soldiers as they were approaching the town. The rumours which spread throughout Cilicia were however more sophisticated and took place over a much longer period of time than in Thrace, where tensions were already high as a result of the war, and creating an atmosphere of fear, resentment and mistrust required much less preparation. In the third stage, once the tension had reached its peak, a pretext was sought in order to launch the massacre. Once it was found, the reaction in Adana and Malgara was nearly identical: the soldiers pursued the distraught Armenians to their houses and set them on fire³⁵. Once the trouble began, local authorities in Thrace and in Cilicia made no efforts to stop them, thus sanctioning or even encouraging the violence. That violence was in all three cases the collective work of civilian gangs, refugees³⁶, başıbozüks and soldiers.

The whole affair had an identical ending. On July 25, Auguste Boppe, first counsellor of the French Embassy in Constantinople, reported that “the Interior Minister went to Rodosto in person where he had around thirty Muslims arrested — the authors of the crimes and their accomplices — as well as more than one hundred Armenians guilty of ‘having had an inadequate attitude during the disorders’. Such distributive justice has not reassured the Armenian patriarch who addressed the embassies, imploring them to protect his nation against the Turkish army”³⁷. As a result of their démarches, the Ottoman Council of Ministers decided to send an investigative commission to Rodosto which concluded that the responsibility for the massacres rests entirely on

³⁵ The first massacre in Adana began after an Armenian, having been attacked by a gang of Turks, killed the leader of their leader. After his funeral, an angry mob went to the Armenian quarter in search of the assassin, pillaged his house and mistreated his family.

³⁶ Mainly as a result of numerous Ottoman-Russian wars, thousands of Muslim refugees had fled the Balkans and the Caucasus, settling across the Ottoman Empire, including in the province of Cilicia.

³⁷ 206CPCOM 278, pp. 243-244

the Bulgarians. In response, the vice-consuls in Rodosto issued their own collective report in which they “denounced the violent intimidation used by the authorities to collect fake testimonies”³⁸. The whole affair unmistakably reminds us of how the Porte dealt with the Adana massacre. There too a commission was sent to investigate the events; unlike in Rodosto, the blame was put on the Muslims but justice was served in an equally distributive manner: most of the Muslims who were hanged were not the real culprits and, of course, neither were the Armenians who suffered the same fate. Evidently, the purpose of this charade was to avoid displeasing too much the local notables and to pretend as if nothing serious had happened.

These striking similarities should not, however, lead us to conclude that the events in Rodosto and Malgara on the one hand, and Adana on the other, were identical in all respects. One crucial difference transpires: while the massacre in Adana was a strictly local event, provoked by local notables, those of Rodosto and Malgara bear all the hallmarks of an atrocity orchestrated and closely supervised by the State. In Adana, the central government, struggling to retain power in Constantinople, had no interest whatsoever in fostering any kind of disorder in the provinces. When it dispatched the army to Adana, it was genuinely seeking end the upheaval, even though the soldiers were tricked, once again by a scheme hatched by the local notables, into participating in the slaughter. Nevertheless, the central organs of the CUP cannot be blamed for causing the massacre; at best, they tried to cover it up³⁹. In Thrace, the picture is altogether different in this respect: the landing of the *başbozüks* in Rodosto by a cruiser of the Ottoman navy, the mysterious presence of a mob following the army into Malgara, the fact that soldiers initiated the massacre by

³⁸ 206CPCOM 279, p. 261

³⁹ Moundjian, *Struggling for a Constitutional Regime*. p. 456-547. In addition to being logistically unable to organise such a massacre, the Porte was so afraid that the renewal of the Armenian question would cause a Russian diplomatic, and perhaps even a military, intervention, that instigating disorder would have been a suicidal act. Feroz Ahmad. *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. pp. 22-23

setting fire to an Armenian house, and finally the order to kill given by an Ottoman officers, all indicate that the State, or at least the military, had planned and executed the atrocities.

2. The case of Adrianople: an exception that proves the rule?

Considering the numerous reports of atrocities committed all over Thrace throughout the Balkan wars, it is quite remarkable that no disorders took place when Adrianople was recaptured by the Ottomans on July 22, 1913. In fact, the army's entry into the city was so orderly, that the European consuls felt obliged, in spite of the fact that the Great Powers had denounced the reoccupation, to congratulate Enver Pasha on the rigorous discipline of his troops⁴⁰. This raises the obvious question why no massacres occurred in Adrianople whereas in Rodosto and Malgara they did. Was it because the conditions in the city did not lend themselves to disorder? Were tensions less acute in Adrianople than in the two other cities, making massacre more unlikely? Quite the opposite seems to be true. Over the course of the war, Adrianople experienced a similar sequence of events which had the effect of heightening tensions and animosity between the different communities.

In 1912, Adrianople was the second largest Ottoman city in Europe after Salonica, with a population of approximately 90 000, out of which 47 000 were Turks, 20 000 Greeks, 15 000 Jews, 4000 Armenians and 2000 Bulgarians⁴¹. It was a truly cosmopolitan city in the best sense of the word, where the various communities coexisted quite harmoniously. On occasion, the boycott

⁴⁰ "La population d'Andrinople est heureuse du retour des Turcs". *Le Matin*. July 30, 1913.

⁴¹ Eyal Ginio. "Constructing a Symbol of Defeat and National Rejuvenation: Edirne (Adrianople) in Ottoman Propaganda and Writing during the Balkan Wars", in Stefan Goebel, and Derek Keene. *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011.

movement⁴² threatened to sour relations between them, but otherwise, Adrianople was one of the rare places in the Empire that actually seemed to live up to the ideals of Ottomanism. This situation changed during the war; gradually, suspicion, animosity and finally, overt hostility began to creep into the city. The first stage of this collapse of the common good that characterised public life in Adrianople came as soon as the war erupted in October 1912; as it became clear that the Ottoman army was loosing badly, echoes of Bulgarian atrocities reached Adrianople and were amplified by the thousands of refugees which flooded the city, seeking a safe haven from the Bulgarian armies⁴³. Such disasters could only have an adverse affect on the relations between the different communities. It was claimed that the Bulgarian inhabitants of Mustafa Pasha, a town located 36 km from Adrianople, were massively volunteering to fight for Bulgaria⁴⁴. Such accusations of Bulgarian treachery became much more frequent when Adrianople was besieged on October 23. On the same day, the water supply was cut, and a rumour spread immediately that the city's Bulgarian population had poisoned the pipes⁴⁵. From then on, accusations of treachery were levelled against not just the Ottoman Bulgarians but also the Greeks with increasing regularity. The governor of the province, Halil bey, reported on April 30, that the local Bulgarian and Christian bandits helped cut the telegraph and railway lines between the Adrianople and the capital, condemning the city to a long siege. The diary of Angèle Guéron, an Ottoman Jew and director of the Alliance Israélite Universelle girls' school in Adrianople, illustrates this mistrust toward the Christians of Thrace: "The intelligence that the Bulgarians possess within the country strengthens

⁴² The Ottoman boycott was a largely popular movement carried out against Greek in response to of Ottoman-Greek territorial disputes.

⁴³ Estimates of the number of refugees in Adrianople vary between 20 000 and 50 000. Avigdor Levy. *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002. p.163

⁴⁴ Gustave Cirilli. *Journal Du Siègè D'Andrinople: (Impressions D'un Assiégé)*. Paris: Chapelot, 1913. p. 26-27

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 35

them. They need not exert themselves in order to conquer. The Bulgarian and Greek peasants welcome them with open arms and rally to their cause (...). The enemies' situation would have been different had they not been aided by spies in such a cowardly manner"⁴⁶. Another witness to the siege, the French war correspondent, Gustave Cirilli, went so far as to assert that "The Turks can in no way rely on the support or sympathy of the other elements of the population. In particular, the Bulgarian faction is systematically hostile; it is here to spy and be detrimental. One must wonder why, under such conditions, the local government has not proceeded to collectively expel those who it believes with certainty to be traitors and spies"⁴⁷. These claims certainly had a grain of truth in them as the Bulgarian army seemed surprisingly well informed of what went on inside the city⁴⁸. In any case, when Adrianople fell on March 26, it became difficult to deny that at least a fraction of the population was disloyal to the Ottomans. According to Cirilli, the Bulgarians were met with "indescribable enthusiasm. Greeks, Jews, Armenians (...) are clamouring today their joy and saluting with ovations the troops of their new Cesar"⁴⁹. Guéron also described her deep anguish: "I was particularly incensed by the noise and cruel happiness of the (local) Greeks and Bulgarians who rushed to meet the victors"⁵⁰. Being a citizen of Adrianople, her words probably reflect the state of mind of many people in the city.

On the following day, the city was sacked; although some Bulgarian soldiers did take part in the pillaging, all sources indicate that Greeks were the primary culprits⁵¹. Even after some order

⁴⁶ Levy. *Jews, Turks, Ottomans*. p. 165

⁴⁷ Cirilli. *Journal Du Siège D'Andrinople*. pp. 31-32

⁴⁸ Levy. *Jews, Turks, Ottomans*. p. 179 and pp. 185-186

⁴⁹ Cirilli. *Journal Du Siège D'Andrinople*. p. 153

⁵⁰ Levy. *Jews, Turks, Ottomans*. p.190

⁵¹ A former Bulgarian military magistrate by the name of Topaldjicov stated in an official report that "The local Greek population alone are to be blamed for these crimes (pillaging). I was able to see this and to verify it personally many times (...) When order was reestablished in the city, numerous complaints and offences committed by the Greeks, such as the looting of houses, incendiarism, pillage and so on, were addressed to me". Paul Christoff wrote: "In contrast to the calm dignity of the Turks, the Greek mob showed an ever increasing meanness. They did not yet dare to insult

had been restored, they continued to loot whenever they could. The Bulgarian commander of the city received between 200 and 300 complaints per day⁵². What enraged the Muslim population the most was the looting of the Selimiye Mosque's precious library⁵³. While all the communities suffered from the pillaging, it was Turkish houses, especially those of Ottoman officers, that sustained by far the most damage⁵⁴.

The Bulgarian administration of Adrianople seems to have been, generally speaking, quite even-handed, even though excesses were committed here and there. The Turks even acknowledged this officially on several occasions. It was the cruel treatment of Ottoman prisoners of war which caused anger toward the Bulgarians. One particular case is worth mentioning because of the uproar it caused. In the disorder following the brief reoccupation of the Bulgarians after their first evacuation, an officer by the name of Rechid bey was killed and his body mutilated by the Bulgarian soldiers. His death produced a "profound impression in the Turkish army" as well as in the city. "The (Carnegie) Commission's investigator was shown the monument set up to his memory and recently consecrated on the Mustapha Pasha road."⁵⁵

It was necessary to recount all these details in order to illustrate the deprivations which befell the Muslim military and civilian population during the five month long siege. They reveal that the people of Adrianople had lived through the same process of deteriorating relations as the inhabitants of Malgara and Rodosto: rumours, distrust, and accusations of disloyalty poisoned relations between the various communities of Adrianople, even more so than in the two other cities which were not besieged. After witnessing the rejoicing of Greeks and Bulgarians and suffering

their disarmed masters, but began to pillage like madmen, to an accompaniment of yells, blows and blasphemies. The Turks let them carry off everything without saying a word." *Report of the International Commissions*. p. 111

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 115

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 114

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 113

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 123

from the looting that did not spare even the most sacred monument of Adrianople, the Selimiye mosque, one would expect the Muslims, especially the destitute villagers, who had taken refuge in the mosque during the occupation, to take revenge on the Greeks and Bulgarians once the city returned to the Ottoman fold. Yet, as Cirilli commented, Adrianople remained calm: “Many people feared an explosion of fanaticism inside this city left to the provocations of the hodjas and softas that roamed the streets in far greater numbers than usual. (...) It is a remarkable fact that in the middle of this enormous mass of soldiers, already roused by the smell of blood, among the 50 000 or 60 000 Muslims, where the Christian is almost drowned, no incident likely to cause public unrest occurred”⁵⁶. It is indeed surprising that after so much pent up resentment and anger, no disorders took place when Adrianople was retaken by the Ottomans. Even more than in Rodosto and Malgara, the conditions for a massacre were ripe; after the gruesome death of Rechid bey and the pillaging of the military club and officers’ homes, the army in particular had reason to take revenge. Certainly, the Christian populations expected the wrath of the Muslims. The French consul in Adrianople wrote that the “panic had been great” just before the arrival of the Ottoman army; “masses of Armenians and Greeks took refuge in my consulate”⁵⁷. One must wonder why no disorders broke out.

The short answer to this question is that in Adrianople the authorities acted forcefully to prevent massacres, as much as they purposefully incited them in Rodosto and Malgara. Throughout the duration of the siege, the municipal administration continued to govern the city in an even handed way, refusing to give in to the communal and religious opposition that lurked beneath the surface. Gustave Cirilli remarked that in spite of such tensions “non-Muslims, especially the

⁵⁶ Cirilli. *Journal Du Siège D’Andrinople*. p. 37

⁵⁷ 206CPCOM 278, p. 23

foreigners, feel as much safe (in Adrianople) as in the best-policed cities of Europe”⁵⁸. The army also took all the necessary precautions for disorders not to erupt; and when they did, it acted to stop them. Before occupying the city, the Ottoman army sent a parliamentarian to the Bulgarian commander of the Adrianople, summoning him to abandon the city, so as to avoid unnecessary violence. They even gave the commander enough time to consult his government first⁵⁹. Once inside the city, the Ottoman army put an end to the plundering which had begun in the neighbourhood of Kara-Agach⁶⁰.

* * *

On July 18th, just as the Ottoman counteroffensive in Thrace was beginning, Auguste Boppe was received in audience by the Grand Vizier Said Halim Pacha. In an emotional speech, the Ottoman statesman told the French diplomat that “from Catalca to the Enos Midia line, our troops have found only ruins, burnt villages, bodies of women and children, bones of men. Will we be able to prevent Turkish soldiers from wanting to exact vengeance from such acts of barbarism?”⁶¹. The conspicuous absence of violence in Adrianople belies this rhetorical question⁶². It proves that, even when all the conditions were there, when tensions were on the verge of boiling

⁵⁸ Cirilli. *Journal Du Siège D’Andrinople*. p. 37

⁵⁹ 206CPCOM 278, p. 81

⁶⁰ The Carnegie Report does not mention any pillaging after the Ottoman entry into the city.

⁶¹ 206CPCOM 277, p. 146

⁶² I chose to focus on Adrianople because the information available on the conditions and events in the city during the war is far greater than for other cities. Nevertheless, the case of Kirkkilise is also noteworthy for its absence of violence. Like in Adrianople, the Ottoman army and the Muslim population had every reason to take revenge for what happened in and around the town during the war. G. von Hochwächter, a German officer serving in the Ottoman army during the first Balkan War wrote in his diary on October 23, 1912, that the Christians of Kirkkilise were shooting at the soldiers from their windows. Moreover, the entire area was swarming with spies and armed Christian bands. In spite of this, since Kirkkilise, like Adrianople, was a town where Great Powers had consuls, such blatant acts of treason were not punished. The town’s reoccupation was peaceful. G. Von Hochwächter. *Au Feu Avec Les Turcs*. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1913. p. 27

over, the State still had the means to prevent a disaster. But why then did it choose to derail one in Adrianople, and encouraged it in Rodosto and Malgara?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that those in charge of maintaining order in Thrace must have been extremely weary of the reaction of the Great Powers. The Porte was already gambling when it ordered its army to cross the Enos-Midia line, into the territory which had been attributed to Bulgaria by the Treaty of London on May 30, 1913. By doing so, the Ottomans were defying the Great Powers. This was in itself risky enough, and there was no need to further provoke Europe. Committing or allowing a massacre to take place in Adrianople, under the eyes of European consuls⁶³ could only undermine Ottoman aims. The Great Powers were perhaps ready to tolerate the violation of the Treaty of London, but it is difficult to tell how they would have reacted had a massacre taken place in a large city such as Adrianople, which had a significant number of European inhabitants and was a major stop of the Orient Express. One can only imagine what effect a ravaged Adrianople would have on Europeans aboard the train⁶⁴.

If by misfortune any of their nationals in the city were harmed, the Great Powers might well have overcome their differences and taken direct measures. A telegram written from Sofia on July 16th by the French minister indicates that the Powers were expecting the worse and were considering all options: “Great anxiety was noted among the Muslim population in Adrianople (...) and if the Ottoman troops continue to advance, this anxiety will transform into violent action. The Powers must immediately impose an armistice by a forceful intervention. The worst evils are to be expected if we wait for the Nis conference.”⁶⁵. When these evils did not materialise, the

⁶³ According to the French diplomatic directory form 1912, France had representations in following towns in Thrace: Consular agencies: Kirk Kelise (M. Dodopoulos), Rodosto (M. Aslan), Gallipoli (M. Ch d’Andria), Dedeagach et Enos (M. Jean Tachella), Kavala (Bulgarides), Serres. Vice-Consulate: Adrianople (M. Parson).

⁶⁴ According to the 1914 *Guide Bleu*, the Orient Express passed through Adrianople twice a day. *De Paris à Constantinople*. publié sous la direction de Marcel Monmarché, Paris: Hachette, 1914.

⁶⁵ 206CPCOM 277, 20

Ottomans had effectively mollified the Powers and Western public opinion, strengthening their moral claim to Adrianople in the process. The correspondent of *Le Matin* reported from the city that “the ottoman army not only captured Adrianople, more importantly, it conquered the (hearts of) Adrianopolitans. A meeting took place in which 20.000 people participated. Greeks, Armenians and Jews made passionate speeches, asking Europe to maintain Adrianople under Ottoman sovereignty. The population is undoubtedly favourable to the Turks”. How spontaneous and sincere these manifestations of joy actually were matters less than what impression they made on Europeans. The correspondent concluded this article with a description of the dazzling Turkish army: “The (Ottoman) princes were present at the revue of the infantry and cavalry commanded by Enver bey and Ibrahim bey, who were also the first to enter Adrianople. The troops were superb”⁶⁶. Yet, this very same cavalry commanded by Envery bey was massacring and pillaging villages all around the city: thus, by their civilised conduct in the Adrianople, the military authorities were diverting attention from the atrocities which were being committed in the countryside.

Fear also explains the military’s actions in Rodosto and Malgara. In the former, a much smaller and less important town than Adrianople, massacres were allowed to occur, but were stopped as soon as the vice-consuls protested. And even then, the State took the precautions to justify itself before the Powers; no official ottoman soldier participated in the disorders, only irregulars, which enabled the Porte to claim that the massacre was an unfortunate side effect of war. In Malgara on the other hand, a town far from the coast and the major railway lines, where no European diplomats were present, the disaster was much greater and this time the army participated in it directly. Those responsible for the atrocities showed themselves to be very shrewd

⁶⁶ “La population d’Andrinople est heureuse du retour des Turcs”. *Le Matin*. July 30, 1913

judges of character: the massacre in Rodosto displeased the Great Powers who instructed their consuls to issue a common report on the events. Those of Malgara, on the other hand, are mentioned nowhere in diplomatic correspondences. This makes Rodosto seem almost as a test to see if the Great Powers would react to such crimes. When the Unionists realised that they would, collectively if necessary, the worst possible scenario for the Empire, they decided to refrain from overt provocations, concentrating instead their activities on areas beyond the gaze of the Great Powers. As a result, the damage in Malgara was far greater than in Rodosto. But even there, one might say that the actions were “restrained” if we compare them to previous urban massacres in the Ottoman Empire. Essentially, Rodosto and Malgara only witnessed smaller versions of the massacres of Adana in 1909 or Constantinople in 1895. They were intended to terrorise the Christians, deprive them of their wealth and affirm Ottoman Muslim lordship over the Empire. The CUP did not yet dare to implement mass expulsions or executions in towns as it did in the countryside.

Part II: Ethnic Cleansing in the Aftermath of the War

When the war against Bulgaria officially ended in September 29, 1913, the CUP continued to expel Bulgarians (and later Greeks) with the same caution which characterised its conduct in Thracian towns during the war. In peacetime it was even more difficult for the Porte's policies to go unnoticed and unchallenged. Massacring, pillaging and terrorising the population all too openly was no longer possible. Foreigners, diplomats and missionaries were now free to travel across Eastern Thrace and make observations which was impossible during wartime; Christians from Thrace could also now easily petition the representatives of the Great Powers and solicit their aid — a course of action which they used abundantly — ; and finally, journalists and officials, such as the members of the Carnegie Commission, were investigating allegations of crimes in the region. Therefore, it was of the utmost importance for the Ottomans to keep a low profile while pursuing their policies of ethnic cleansing.

Yet, in spite of the precautions taken by the Ottoman authorities, a remarkably clear-sighted telegram sent by the French Embassy in Constantinople to the Quai d'Orsay on April 25, 1914 shows that the Great Powers were well aware of what was taking place in Eastern Thrace. Ambassador Auguste Bompard reported : “The violence of this emigration and its rapid expansion leaves no room for doubt that we are in the presence of an unrest provoked by the central government, which is following the same method it had already used with regard to the Bulgarians, and seems determined to resort to any means necessary in order to bring about the complete emigration of the Greek population of Thrace...”⁶⁷. Hence the need for the Ottomans to act in such

⁶⁷ The original text reads: “La violence du mouvement et son extension rapide ne permettent guère de douter que nous nous trouvons en présence d'une agitation provoquée par le gouvernement central, qui, fidèle au plan déjà suivi par lui à l'égard des Bulgares, paraît décidé à recourir à tous les moyens pour amener une émigration générale de la population grecque de Thrace...” 206CPCOM 291, p. 196

a way that their actions would not cause too much outrage, forcing the Great Powers to intervene.
How did they achieve this?

1. Ordering the exodus

The mass expulsions and massacres of the military campaign seem to have been immediately followed by deportations after the peace treaty with Bulgaria was signed on September 29, 1913. During the war, the Ottoman army was responsible for expelling the undesirable civilian. Once the military campaign ended, although the goal remained the same, the methods differed considerably: task of expelling Christians from Thrace was left to the Ministry of Interior headed by Talat Pasha. The Greeks and Bulgarians were still intimidated, harassed and at times even killed, but they were not subjected to the sort of mass atrocities carried out under the auspices of the Ottoman army. The Interior Ministry's primary task was to organise the deportations of Christians, make an inventory of the belongings they left behind them and resettle the Muslim refugees in their stead. The Ministry executed these tasks almost as a kind of impassive accountant who was simply computing numbers, rather than deciding the fate of thousands of people.

Already in October 1913, just a few days after the signature of the Bulgarian-Ottoman peace treaty, deportations of Bulgarian citizens were taking place in villages and towns across Thrace⁶⁸. Ottoman Bulgarians from Thrace were the first to be targeted, but slightly later those from the Province of Balikesir, just across the Marmara Sea, were included as well: some 60 000 Bulgarians lived in the province of Balikesir, mostly concentrated in and around the coastal town

⁶⁸ Stoyan Raichevski. *Etnicheskoto prochistvane na bulgarite v Iztochna i Zapadna Trakiya i Mala Aziya (1903-1913-1923)*. Sofia: Zahari Stoyanov. 2013. p. 291

of Bandirma and were subjected by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the same measures. Although they were living in a different province, their deportation has been documented more thoroughly, giving us a greater insight into the treatment of Thracian Bulgarians. Moreover, from a military point of view, the provinces of Thrace and Balikesir constitute a single geographical area; French Ambassador Bompard wrote about Thrace: “In Constantinople there is a clear intension to get rid at all costs of all populations whose loyalty is questionable and leave behind only those who demonstrated their obedience in a province which may become the bulwark of the capital’s defence in case of a new war”⁶⁹. Balikesir and Thrace were the outskirts of the capital and as such they were seen as a particularly vulnerable region, inhabited by unreliable populations. For the Ottoman authorities, the 60 000 Bulgarians of Bandirma, just like the Bulgarians of Thrace, were a fifth column which could in any future war sabotage the defence of the capital. Therefore, their expulsion was a matter of national security.

As the Ministry was getting accustomed to its new task, the deportations slowly but surely gained in scope and sophistication so that by January 1914, the expulsions had developed into a well oiled system⁷⁰. Whenever it could, it encouraged voluntary emigration by providing free of charge transportation and removing any administrative or other obstacles to population flight. The Ministry had been informed that, in the province of Balikesir, emigration was hampered by the fact that Bulgarians were prevented from selling their belongings and by their demands for remittances of various debts. Therefore, on March 13, 1914, the newly established Special Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs instructed the governor of the province to resolve these issues

⁶⁹ Original: “On veut évidemment à Constantinople se débarrasser coûte que coûte de tous les éléments dont le loyalisme peut être sujet à caution et ne laisser qu’une population dont la fidelité est éprouvée dans une province qui peut devenir, en cas de nouveau conflit, le boulevard de la défense de la capitale”. 206CPCOM 291, 196

⁷⁰ Taner Akçam. *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012. p. 63

in order to ensure the swift deportations of the Bulgarians⁷¹. However, another administrative problem occurred: many Bulgarians had taken up a loan from the Ottoman Agricultural Bank, which demanded that they settle this debt before emigrating. In response, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued another telegram overriding this request; it stated that whatever immovable property the Bulgarians left behind, will suffice to cover the debt. The Ministry then emphasised that “the allowance and facilitation of their departure is in the better interest of the state”⁷². Nearly identical telegrams were being sent to Thrace in the same period. On April 14, 1914, Talat Pasha instructed the authorities in Rodosto to ensure the deportation of the villagers which had assembled in the town. Several days later, the State hired a Greek-flagged steamship and gave the following instructions: “Please have the passengers ready (to embark), since compensation will have to be paid if it remains (in dock) for more than three days”⁷³.

The goal was not simply to empty Thrace but to resettle Muslims in their stead. The Ministry stated to the provincial authorities that “it is suitable that the new immigrants coming from the occupied (Balkan) cities be settled in the houses left empty by those who immigrated to Bulgaria”. In the same telegram, it regretted that “no value has yet been placed on these houses and one of the two copies of the certified registry that is to be put together for this purpose must be sent here”⁷⁴. Soon, the system of emigration became more efficient as the State began to compile detailed information on the number of people expelled and the nature of the properties they left behind. Once this information was received, the State began settling the Muslims immigrants. In a telegram sent to Bursa on August 24, 1914, the Ministry drew the governor’s attention to the fact

⁷¹ Ginio. “Paving the Way for Ethnic Cleansing”. p. 283

⁷² Akçam. *The Young Turks' Crime*. p. 74

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 77

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 65

that “there are as many as 1500 families of non-Agricultural Albanians who have yet to be resettled in your province; these must be sent, by way of Tekfurdagi, to the areas in the province of Edirne (Adrianople) in which there are still empty houses and fields”⁷⁵.

The Ottoman State did its utmost to maintain control over the entire process and ensure the orderly deportation of all Christians. For instance, the same boat which transported the refugees from Rodosto to Salonica was boarded by Ministry officials dressed as civilians who were to ensure that everything went as smoothly as possible⁷⁶. From time to time, local authorities, and especially refugees from Macedonia, took initiatives without authorisation from the Ministry, causing disorder. In such cases, they were severely reprimanded. Upon hearing that a Greek villages in Thrace was besieged and looted by neighbouring Muslims, the Ministry sent a telegram to Adrianople on April 22, 1914 requesting the governor “to provide an immediate report on what happened and the circumstances surrounding the events”⁷⁷. When the situation was clarified, the Ministry sent another telegram several days later in which it harshly condemned any such acts: “Regardless of the circumstances of attacks or intimidation directed against Greek villages, the guilty parties must be arrested immediately and sent here so that they may be delivered to the Court-Martial for punishment, while the villages themselves must be put under protection. In the event that the villages do not receive protection and that such events continue to occur or that the perpetrators are not apprehended, local village guards and gendarmes, lower level officers and enlisted men (will be punished) by being sent off to serve in Yemen, while higher ranking officers (will be) severely (punished) by being dismissed from the military”.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 78

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 71

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.71

Talat clearly summarised the attitude of the State in a another telegram to Adrianople slightly earlier: “if there is nothing to be said against those who are emigrating, then certainly it cannot be acceptable that they would be attacked on their journey”⁷⁸. However, this seemingly peaceful and moderate statement should not be taken to mean that the Interior Minister opposed the use of violence in principle. Rather, he disapproved of violence which was not under the Ministry’s firm control.

Whenever “peaceful” methods proved insufficient to cause the emigration of Christians, the State did not hesitate to use more forceful means. The ire of the State was particularly felt in those areas where the local population had aided the invading Bulgarian army or molested the Muslim population. In the Thracian villages of Inceköy, Kastampolis, Palamouti, Sendoukion and Simitly, Greeks, who had looted their Turkish neighbours and forced them to flee, were later expelled with particular duress⁷⁹. The village of Vize was entirely emptied of its Greek population by May 1914 because it had rebelled against the Ottomans⁸⁰. But their expulsion cannot be attributed to the desire for revenge alone: the town also happened to be of great strategic importance⁸¹, and it was therefore essential to ensure that the population there would henceforth be reliable. In the Ministry’s view, the only way to achieve this was by deporting the Greeks and replacing them with Turks.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.73

⁷⁹ Elisabeth Kontogiorgi. “Forced Migration, repatriation, Exodus. The Case of Ganos-Chora and Myriophyto-Peristasis Orthodox Communities in Eastern Thrace”. Essay presented at the Symposium “Aspects of the Asia Minor Question. Historical Approach and Implications”. Thessaloniki, Aristotle University, Department of Modern and Contemporary History and Folklore, October 16-17. p. 22

⁸⁰ Çetinkaya, *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement*. p.192

⁸¹ According von Hochwächter, “the town of Viza is located on an altitude of 800 meters, at the foot of the Istrandja Dag. It is junction of important roads and it is probable that the headquarters of the 3rd corps stayed there. The surrounding area is hilly and covered with forests. It is traversed by armed bands who have allied with the Bulgarians.” G. von Hochwächter *Au feu avec les Turcs*. p. 43

Threats seem to have been a usual measure in the Ministry's repertoire. Numerous reports testify to the fact that Christians across Thrace and around the Marmara Sea were intimidated regularly: for instance, the Bulgarians of Bandirma sent a delegation to the Bulgarian minister in Constantinople, asking for permission to settle in Bulgaria "because the Turks had threatened them that if they did not leave voluntarily, they will be expelled"⁸². When even threats were not enough, the inhabitants were attacked. According to a Bulgarian refugee from Ciftlikköy, he was forced to flee in 1914 after başıbozüks looted his village and injured him with a knife⁸³. This incident reveals that the State was occasionally willing to resort to the sort of methods it used during the war, but only after other less coercive means had failed to frighten the Christians into leaving. However, as soon as the Bulgarians Greeks gave in to the pressure, their security would be ensured, and their departure facilitated.

The attack on Ciftlikköy was not the only instance in which irregular soldiers intimidated the population; nevertheless, less Bulgarians were intimidated and tended to leave sooner. The Greek Legation in Constantinople submitted an official complaint to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry that "some 29 gendarmes, accompanied by a number of irregular troops, came to the town of Sanduki, which is attached to Malgara, and after seizing the inhabitants' property they beat some of them". According to the same undated complaint, the inhabitants of several other villages were molested and even killed⁸⁴. These seem to have been some of the more extreme cases. Usually, stealing property and depriving the Christians of their livelihoods was more than enough to "persuade" them to flee the Empire. The Ministry was essentially transforming the popular pre-war boycott movement into an official policy encouraged and partly carried out by local

⁸² Raichevski, *Etnicheskoto prochistvane*. p. 347

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 339

⁸⁴ Akçam. *The Young Turks' Crimes*. p. 81

authorities. The Christians were subjected to requisitions, statute labour and arbitrary tax levies with the intention of making agricultural work impossible, and life unbearable. In the end, those who somehow endured would simply be deported, and their belongings would be given to Muslim refugees. Grigor Germanov from the village of Dereköy described how he and his neighbours were expelled: “We were forced by the Turkish official authorities to leave our homes and to empty the village in 24 hours. They told us, take with you from your home only what you can carry, and not towards Malko Trnovo, but straight across the Balkan (mountain), so that we couldn’t take even household items. Most of the cattle was stolen by the local Turks who came from the nearby villages and supported one another’s claims that it is theirs. We passed the border at Göktepe village, Malko Trnovo region, which remained in Bulgaria (after the war)”⁸⁵. That the events described by Germanov were neither fabricated nor isolated is proven by a report from the French consul in Burgas, written on October 28, 1913: “For several weeks now many émigrés from Thrace have continuously been arriving to Bourgas, having been expelled from their homes both by mob justice and by the local authorities themselves. The latter — probably wanting to administer in what remains of their European territories only those populations which are peaceful, homogenous and already faithful followers of Islam — are shamelessly making it clear to all the Bulgarians living in places near the border that they must leave Turkey in a matter of 24 hours. They are allowed to take only several pieces of clothing which they are able to load on their carriages, or in certain cases on their shoulders; often, at the border, their modest belongings are confiscated”⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ Raichevsky. *Etnicheskoto prochistvane*. p. 235

⁸⁶ 206CPCOM 288, p. 123

Overall, when reading consular reports, refugee's testimonies and even telegrams sent by the Ministry of Internal Affairs⁸⁷, one has the impression that the State exerted violence that was controlled and contained. In this sense, the means employed to frighten the population differed considerably from the often unrestrained violence during the military campaign.

2. Formalising the displacement

All the while the Ottoman government was carrying out a systematic policy of expulsion and intimidation, it was engaging in the diplomacy of population resettlement. Between September 1913 and May 1914, the Porte signed a total of three population exchange agreements⁸⁸. The first such agreement was signed with Bulgaria in the form of a protocol annexed to the peace treaty signed between the two countries in Constantinople on September 29, 1913. The protocol declared that “the two Governments are in agreement to facilitate the optional and reciprocal exchange of Muslim and Bulgarian populations on either side, as well as their properties in a territory of 15 kilometres at most, along the entire common border”⁸⁹. The protocol further provided that the exchange would proceed village by village and that the exchange urban and rural properties would be carried out under the supervision of the the two governments. In order to carry out this complex task, a mixed commission, consisting of 6 Turkish and 9 Bulgarian delegates, was established and met for the first time in Adrianople on November 15, 1913. To facilitate the exchange, two sub-

⁸⁷ Refugee testimonies are compiled in Raichevski. *Etnicheskoto prochievane*, Interior Ministry Telegrams are quoted in Çetinkaya *The Young Turks and the Boycot Movement*, and in Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crimes* while diplomatic reports are unpublished documents from the archives of the French Foreign Ministry.

⁸⁸ The Ottoman Empire concluded agreements with Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece in 1913 and 1914. Akçam. *The Young Turks' Crimes*. p. 65

⁸⁹ Stephen Ladas. *The Exchange of Minorities; Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey*. New York: Macmillan, 1932. p.18

commissions were later formed, one was to operate on the Ottoman Empire, and the other in Bulgaria.

The Ottoman-Bulgarian protocol on the exchange of populations gives the impression of being an altogether reasonable, legitimate and legal document, implemented by an equitable and just commission. In fact, its real purpose was to legalise a *fait accompli*. This was quite explicitly acknowledged when the delegates agreed that “the Bulgarian peasants of the districts of Kirk-Kilise and Adrianople are to be settled in the Moslem villages of Thrace ceded to Bulgaria which have been abandoned by their inhabitants, since these districts are now occupied by the Moslem refugees who came from Thrace”⁹⁰. Between June 1914 when it began its work, until October of the same year when it ceased its activities, the commission drew up a list of 46 764 Bulgarians from Thrace and 48 570 Muslims from Bulgaria who were to be exchanged. In practice, the majority of these people, especially the Ottoman Bulgarians, had already fled Eastern Thrace during the second Balkan War. Those who remained behind after the conflict were being expelled even before commission could begin its work, further indicating that, for the Ottoman government, the protocol served to formalise the mass expulsions of the refugees during the war, making it legally impossible for them to return.

In addition to not respecting the formalities of the agreement, the Porte also ignored its scope when it decided to deport the Bulgarians of Bandirma. As the exchange of populations located outside the 15 kilometre territory along the border was not provided for in the agreement, the Ottoman legation in Constantinople lodged numerous complaints to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accusing the “Turkish side of exploiting (the agreement)”. And indeed it was; Bulgarian complaints were simply ignored and the deportations continued. Ultimately, there was very little

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.19

the defeated and isolated Bulgaria could do to halt the exodus of their coreligionists, especially since the protocol on population exchanges made it seem as though the Porte was acting legally and in accordance with an international agreement. The fact that violence was restrained and rather inconspicuous during the deportations lent further credence to the lie that the exchange was voluntary and legal.

Ottoman relations with Greece followed a similar pattern. Once again, the exchange agreement was intended to formalise the deportations once they had already occurred. The major difference was that Greece, unlike Bulgaria, was much more reluctant at first to sign such a document. The Ottoman Empire had no great difficulty in imposing its terms on the defeated Bulgarians, but Greece was another story; it came out the Balkan Wars victorious, emboldened, and closer than ever to realising the *Megali Idea*. There was nothing farther from its interests than expelling the close to 2 million Ottoman Greeks which it quite openly hoped to redeem. The Ottomans therefore had to compel Greece to sign an agreement which was essentially against its interest, and they did so by using the same methods as those directed toward the Bulgarians. The Porte began expelling Greeks with increasing intensity in April and May 1914, long before any agreement was made. This decision was followed by Greek protests which were, for the most part, ignored⁹¹. Whenever tensions between the two countries risked boiling over, the Ottoman government would restrain the deportations, only to resume them when tensions subsided. Ambassador Bompard remarked that this astute policy “provoked not so much anger as despondency in the Hellenic legation. They (the Greek diplomats) seem to be aware that Greece, caught in financial difficulties and in the middle of its military reforms, which are far from being completed, and forced to expend great energy in order to absorb its new and vast territories, has

⁹¹ Kontogiorgi. “Forced Migration, repatriation, Exodus”. p. 22

nothing to gain by exacerbating ottoman rancour”⁹². Furthermore, it was not so difficult for the Porte to justify its actions, since Greece was also systematically ridding its newly acquired territories of Muslim inhabitants. This duplicitous game continued until an exasperated Greek government finally gave in and consented to an agreement. Georgios Streit, the Greek foreign minister, justified this decision by “the need (...) to spare to the widest extent possible these populations which are leaving behind their homes to seek refuge in Greece, by channeling this movement and combining it usefully with the voluntary emigration of Macedonian Muslims”⁹³.

The Greek government had reluctantly come to the conclusion that an exchange agreement was the only way it could potentially influence and restrain the actions of the Ottoman authorities. On May 22, Prime Minister Elefthérios Venizélos officially declared that Greece would accept an exchange, but only if the “populations were to emigrate voluntarily under the control of mixed commissions which would be tasked to ascertain the spontaneous intention to emigrate, and evaluate the wealth in order to permanently settle accounts between the two Governments”. The Porte accepted these proposals and a preliminary agreement was struck the next day⁹⁴. When a commission gathered in Smyrna on July 11 it seemed as though everything was heading toward a mutually satisfactory solution. This did not prove to be the case; from the onset, the delegates engaged in bitter arguments and were unable to find a common ground. This was hardly surprising, since they had completely opposed views as to what the commission’s purpose actually was: for the Greeks it was intended to stall the mass emigration from the Ottoman Empire and perhaps even enable some Ottoman Greeks to return, whereas for the Turks, the commission was only there to formalise ad hoc the displacement which had already occurred, and legitimise future expulsions.

⁹² 206CPCOM, 291, p. 197

⁹³ Yannis Mourellos. “The 1914 Persecutions and the First Attempt at an Exchange of Minorities between Greece and Turkey”. *Balkan Studies*, 26 (1985), 392. p.395

⁹⁴ Ladas. *The Exchange of Minorities*. p. 22

Under such conditions, the commission proved unable to function and was forced to adjourn less than a month after it first commenced its work. It reconvened in November, only to be suspended permanently on December 14, 1914⁹⁵. The still-born nature of the exchange agreement did not bother much the Ottomans. In a way, they had already achieved their goal: as in the Bulgarian case, the mere existence of a bilateral commission enabled them to claim that their actions were legitimate and legal. The Porte thus continued to expel Greeks before the delegates could ever examine their case. This attitude led the Greek Foreign Minister to call the commission a “pure sham”⁹⁶, and he was probably right, but what he failed to mention is that his government was actively contributing to this farce; after all, Ottoman treatment of Christians was no worse than Greek treatment of Muslims.

3. Wooing the Great Powers

As the deportations were being put in motion, the Young Turks had engaged in a diplomatic campaign in Europe in order to get the Great Powers, if not to approve, then at least to condone them. The Porte had developed a synergy between its diplomatic initiatives and its policy of expulsion: the reason why the deportations were, so to speak, “restrained” was because any outburst of violence in Thrace would immediately cause outrage in Europe. The Ottomans were guided by the same caution as in Adrianople during its reoccupation in July 1913. If anything, this caution needed to be even greater in times of peace when violence was more noticeable, and the Powers could exert greater pressure. This explains why Talat gave explicit orders for unruly agitators to be punished and only allowed violence to the extent that it did not cause an

⁹⁵ Mourelos. “The 1914 Persecutions”. p. 410

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 411

international crisis. There were moments when matters risked spiralling out of control — many dispossessed Muslims refugees from Macedonia were taking matters into their own hands and began attacking Christians, seizing their properties without the authorisation of the Ministry — but somehow the violence always seemed to hover on the brink of crisis without ever actually turning into a fully fledged one. On every occasion Talat succeeded in restoring the semblance of order. This in turn enabled him and his coterie to make the somewhat contradictory claim that the Christians of Thrace were emigrating voluntarily and that the terror or intimidation was not the government's doing but rather the unfortunate consequence of a war started by the Balkan States.

The Porte began its diplomatic campaign during the war by denouncing the attitude of Bulgaria and other Balkan States which were massively expelling Muslims from the conquered territories in Macedonia long before the Porte opted for the same measures. On July 20, 1913, just as the Ottoman army had crossed the Enos-Midia line, the Porte issued a communiqué to the Great Powers in which it expressed regret for having to resort to such a decision: “The Ottoman Imperial Government would have preferred to settle this issue with Bulgaria by diplomatic means. Unfortunately, the horrors committed with such indescribable barbarity and vandalism by the Bulgarians in the occupied territories (...) are preventing the Imperial Ottoman Government from waiting for a diplomatic solution (...). Under such conditions, the Imperial Ottoman Government is forced as of now to occupy the (old) border”⁹⁷.

Later on, the Porte would use the exact same arguments against Greece: when the Hellenic government issued an official protest against the treatment of Greeks in Thrace, the Porte replied with typical accusations of its own. A memorandum sent to the Great Powers on May 1, 1914, it stated that the “situation of Muslims in Macedonia is becoming more and more intolerable each

⁹⁷ 206PCOM 277, pp. 240-241

day. All sorts of abuse are continuously being committed against them, their honour, their property, religion, the memory of their dead, and their religious and educational institutions”⁹⁸. Several days later, the Porte submitted another detailed report, listing all the abuses suffered by the Muslims of Macedonia and giving the total number of refugees which had arrived to the Ottoman Empire recently. It stated that, as a result of the persecutions, 234 807 Muslims had arrived from Macedonia since November 1912, out of which more than 47 000 arrived in the first three months of 1914⁹⁹. Since the French consular reports from Salonica tended to confirm these figures, Ambassador Bompard was forced to recognise that the “claims by (Unionist) newspapers in Constantinople that the responsibility for the events rests entirely on the Hellenic government is not unfounded”¹⁰⁰.

The Ottoman government made it seem as though it was merely responding in kind to measures which the Greeks had already been taking¹⁰¹, but when Talat was confronted by the Great Powers, he flatly denied that the Porte played any hand in the deportations. To assuage the Powers and show the government’s good will, Talat Pasha resorted to the age-old Ottoman trick: he promised to head, yet another, investigative commission in order to ascertain the nature and causes of the mass flight. The Interior Minister toured Eastern Thrace, visiting even small towns and villages, reassuring the Greeks and urging them not to leave their houses. Upon his return on April 27, he issued an official declaration claiming that “except for a few blows and injuries common to all emigrations, the investigation has not observed any act which would lead us to believe that pressure has been exerted (on the Greeks)”¹⁰². While recognising that a strong wave of emigration

⁹⁸ 206CPCOM 292, p. 11

⁹⁹ 206CPCOM 292, p. 26

¹⁰⁰ 206CPCOM 291, p. 197

¹⁰¹ 206CPCOM 291, p. 238

¹⁰² “L’Emigration des Grecs de la Thrace”, *Le Jeune Turc*, 27 April, 1914

did indeed exist, he maintained that it “must be attributed to the Greek peasants’ desire to acquire the abandoned houses of Turks who were expelled from Macedonia, as well as by fear that the Muslim population would exact vengeance on the Greeks for having aided the enemies of the Empire during the Bulgarian invasion”¹⁰³. The official declaration then listed all the measures taken by the government in order to put an end to the emigration, but on the very same day, 3000 Greeks arrived to from Thrace to Greek Macedonia¹⁰⁴.

As we have already seen, some of these measures were genuinely intended to reduce the violence just enough to placate the Great Powers, but others were merely rhetorical farce. As yet another French telegram from Bompard indicates, the Great Powers were fully aware of the Interior Minister’s duplicity: “The overall tone of the communiqué written by Talat Bey (to the Vali of Adrianople) gives the impression that the Ottoman Government intends to take only token measures against an emigration which is in line with his intentions, but will endeavour instead to formalise it as much as possible so as to avoid any extreme actions which would likely draw Europe’s attention”¹⁰⁵. But if the Powers were conscious of the Porte’s intentions, why then did they not intervene or obstruct its actions in some way? One obvious reason was that it was difficult for them to garner domestic support for a matter which did not concern them directly. Ambassador Bompard’s words should be understood as a tacit recognition that, as long as the crimes were not so outrageous as to force the Powers to intervene, they would remain mere spectators. As in Adrianople, Unionists had guessed right and their cynicism once again proved effective in deterring foreign intervention.

¹⁰³ 206CPCOM 291, p. 245

¹⁰⁴ 206CPCOM 292, p. 22

¹⁰⁵ The original text reads: “Du ton général du communiqué rédigé par Talaat Bey, se dégage l’impression que le Gouvernement Ottoman n’entend combattre que pour la forme un mouvement qui répond à ses vues et qu’il se contentera de le régulariser autant que possible de manière à éviter que des excès trop retentissants ne viennent à émouvoir l’opinion Européenne.” 206CPCOM 292, p.22

However, more important than European reluctance to intervene was the Porte's skilful exploitation of the population exchange agreements in order to justify its actions before other European States. Once the mixed commissions were established, it became difficult for Europeans to object to measures which the Greeks and Bulgarians had themselves accepted. This attitude is exemplified by a statement made by Ion Bratianu, the Romanian Foreign Minister, whom the Greeks approached in search of support: "Romania will not allow the Turks to wage a war against Greece and violate the treaty of Bucharest. However, now it is Greece which is provoking and disturbing a peace which everyone desires, and this changes the situation; according to the most recent information I have, the Turks are willing to compromise and consequently Greece must do the same in order to come to a peaceful solution, otherwise there will be complications whose consequences she will have to bear"¹⁰⁶. In other words, European States were consciously playing into the hands of the Unionists. The Balkans had been an incessant headache for the Great Powers ever since the war began and now that peace was restored, they were looking forward to the prospect of calmer diplomatic tides. If this meant turning a blind eye on the crimes which were being committed by all the Balkan States, then so be it. As one diplomatic dispatch shows, there was also a feeling among the Great Powers that the expulsions were inevitable and that, not only was it futile to oppose them, but that the population exchanges might even be a necessary evil:

"The entire Balkan Peninsula is currently experiencing horrors similar to those which followed the great migrations of peoples ; these horrors are the logical consequence of the recent events and, it is sad to say that, perhaps the only way to put an end once and for all to the disorder and anarchy, the deaths and destruction which are ravaging European Turkey, is by exchanging Balkan populations according to the nationality of the States party to the Bucharest treaty; it is a painful but permanent solution to a problem which neither Turkey nor Europe have been able to solve for a century. It is nevertheless useful for Europe to make representations to Belgrade, Sofia and especially Constantinople and Athens in the hope of restraining the expulsions to some extent and preventing animosity from threatening peace in the Balkans once again"¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁶ Mourelos. "The 1914 Persecutions". p. 398

¹⁰⁷ *Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Documents Diplomatiques, Les Affaires Balkaniques 1912-194*. Tome III, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale. pp. 125-126

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The expulsion of Christians in peacetime was carried out following the same logic as the expulsions during the war: in both cases they were preceded and accompanied by rumours of the torture, rape, the desecration of mosques and fiery speeches by local notables and diatribes in newspapers. The *Tanin* even went so far to claim that an invasion of Constantinople by Greece was imminent. Interestingly, in doing so, it was spreading the exact same fear and resentment that had gripped the inhabitants of Adana in 1909 when they were convinced by local newspapers that a foreign intervention was about to take place. Only this time, it was the State, and not the local notables, that was directly responsible for the stirring up hatred against the Christians.

However, if the process of the violence was the same during and after the war, the means differed considerably: unlike the army, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was essentially resorting to measures which were, formally speaking, legal. Technically, it was not illegal for the State to devise special taxes for Christians or to encourage Muslims to boycott non-Muslim shops. Of course, these pseudo-legal methods were also complemented by outright illegal terror which was both denied and justified by the Ottoman authorities. Talat consistently held that the emigration was strictly voluntary, but other prominent Unionist officials, such as Rahmi bey, acknowledged the violence. In a conversation with a British diplomat, he stated that the aggression against Christians should come as no surprise: “it was too much to expect of gendarmes or police sent against the Moslems to carry out their orders, so strongly did they sympathise with their brethren in Macedonia”¹⁰⁸. This attitude amounted to an inherently contradictory claim that the Christians

¹⁰⁸ Çetinkaya. *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement*. p. 201

deserved the wrath which the Muslims were not inflicting upon them. The same argument would later resurface in the official Turkish stance on the Armenian genocide.

This cynical strategy pursued by Talat and his Unionist associates was difficult to counter. The Great Powers conceded that in principle Muslim consumers could not be reproached for boycotting Christian businesses, so they concentrated their energies on limiting the harassment which accompanied the boycott¹⁰⁹. But even then their task was made difficult by the clever way in which violence was concealed. The whole endeavour to rid Eastern Thrace of Christians was given a semblance of legality by the various exchange agreements. The principle of population transfer was an established practice having already been used by Western European States. Two notable examples are: Schleswig after 1864 and in Alsace-Lorraine after 1871. Article XIX of the Treaty of Vienna, which ended the Second War of Schleswig between Denmark on the one hand and Austrian and Prussia on the other, provided for a period of 6 years during which the inhabitants of the territories ceded to Austria and Prussia wishing to retain their status as Danish subjects were free “to export their movable property (...) and to withdraw with their families into the States of his Danish Majesty”¹¹⁰. Those who chose to remain in the ceded territories had to relinquish their status as Danish subjects. The Treaty of Frankfurt signed in 1871 between France and Germany had the same stipulation: Article II stated that French subjects from Alsace-Lorraine wishing to retain their French nationality would have to leave the region by October 1, 1872¹¹¹. The agreements the Ottoman Empire made with Bulgaria and Greece seemed to be of the same sort. Unlike the treaties of Frankfurt and Vienna, the Turko-Bulgarian and Greco-Turkish agreements

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 176-177

¹¹⁰ *Traité de Vienne*. Austrian Empire, Kingdom of Prussia, Kingdom of Denmark, October 30, 1864, <<http://documentsdedroitinternational.fr/traites-de-paix/>>

¹¹¹ *Traité de Francfort*. France, German Empire, May 10, 1871, see: <<http://documentsdedroitinternational.fr/traites-de-paix/>>

of 1913 and 1914 were officially not binding; Christians on either side of the border were not given a deadline to choose their nationality and leave their homes; rather, the emigration was purely voluntary and, later, the commissions were there to “facilitate the optional exchange” and ascertain the “spontaneous” desire to leave. Of course, in practice, all the Balkan governments made sure that the populations “spontaneously” desired to leave, and the Powers were well aware of this. Nevertheless, by resorting to a measure apparently rooted in the European legal tradition, the Porte could claim that it was adhering to the practices of civilised nations: what’s more, those agreements are recognised as the first to use the term *échange de populations*. The Turko-Bulgarian agreement even talks of “human rights”. The Ottomans had adopted and perverted the language of Europe, and this completely disarmed the Great Powers.

Part III: Mass Atrocities in the Countryside During the War

While the reconquest of Adrianople was being celebrated in orderly pomp, the army along with the returning Muslim refugees were committing numerous crimes over the Christians in the countryside. In itself, this was nothing unexpected or new; wars have always caused crimes and atrocities, and those committed by the Ottoman army in Thrace were, at first glance, no different from crimes committed countless times in earlier wars. In his emotional plea to Auguste Boppe, Said Halim Pasha claimed that the atrocities that were about to take place were an inevitable, if unfortunate, consequence of the war. The Grand Vizir made similar remarks to the Russian Ambassador: “the systematic destructions committed by the Bulgarians in the evacuated areas are causing an indignation among the troops which is becoming difficult to contain”¹¹². Therefore, according to him, the violence was a spontaneous reaction to the heinous acts of the Bulgarian army and its Christian agents in Eastern Thrace. This was a particularly forceful argument because it confirmed the Europeans’ belief that Turks were inherently violent and that their defeat on the battlefield was bound to cause a large-scale massacre¹¹³. Nevertheless, the Grand Vizier’s words should not be dismissed as a purely cynical attempt to justify any planned or systematic attack on the Christians. It is likely that he himself had adopted Western perceptions of Turks and that he was honest when saying the Turkish soldiers would massacre Christians. Moreover, the Bulgarian army had indeed ravaged parts of Eastern Thrace during the occupation and Ottoman Christians had truly committed acts of treason. The atmosphere of rage was unprecedented on the eve of the campaign: stories of betrayal and gratuitous cruelty circulated widely, and it is not too difficult to

¹¹² 206CPCOM, 277, p. 234.

¹¹³ In November 1912, when the routed Ottoman army was retreating toward Istanbul, the fear among European diplomats that massacres would take place was so widespread and so strong that they decided to send a fleet to Constantinople in order to ensure their own security. The ambassador of Austria-Hungary even had his nationals evacuated from the city. Von Hochwächter who was in the Ottoman capital at the time wrote: “There is fear that the army rabble will come and pillage, but such a fright is ridiculous”. von Hochwächter p. 61

imagine Ottoman soldiers, many of whom had suffered tremendously during the first Balkan War, running amok in 1913 when fortunes began to swing in their favour. Enver Pasha certainly expressed the feelings of many in the army when he wrote in a letter to his wife that “if I could only tell you about the atrocities committed by the enemy... at just a stone’s throw from Istanbul, then you would understand what is going on in the minds of Muslims far away. Yet our anger is growing: revenge, revenge, revenge, there is no other word for it!”¹¹⁴.

Such bitter statements tend to corroborate Said Halim pasha’s claim of that the Ottoman army was simply unable to control its (justified) rage. Yet, Auguste Boppe suggested that the violence was not as spontaneous as it might seem at first sight, and that the desire for revenge was, if not encouraged or instigated, then at least condoned by the military. On July 29, 1913, he wrote: “Every day brings clearer and more alarming news of the disorders which have followed the reoccupation of Thrace. Intelligence provided by the Ecumenical Patriarch, which is confirmed by consular reports from Rodosto as well as numerous matching testimonies, seems to indicate that Kurdish irregulars as well as some regular soldiers, especially those from Lazistan and Adana, have pillaged and burned all the Christian villages on their path, killing the men and raping the women, whom they sometimes take with them (...) the situation is very serious and is made even more grave by the return of Muslim émigrés whom the authorities are bringing back to their homes without taking any particular measure to settle them properly: infuriated to see their houses destroyed by the Bulgarians, people scarcely resist the temptation to exact vengeance on their Christian neighbours”¹¹⁵. The report makes it clear that vengeance played an important role during the campaign: to what extent was this the case? Boppe also describes a certain pattern in the

¹¹⁴ Uğur Ümit Üngör. “The Armenian Genocide, 1915”, in: Barbara Boender and Wichert ten Have (ed.), *The Holocaust and Other Genocides: An Introduction*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012., pp.45-71. p.50

¹¹⁵ 206CPCOM 279, p. 209

violence which, if true, allows us to raise an important question: to what extent were these atrocities motivated by reasons other than vengeance? If they were, what was the motivation of their perpetrators?

1. Seeking vengeance?

In order to determine whether the actions of the Ottoman army were reprisals, we must first ascertain the nature of crimes committed the Bulgarians during their brief occupation of Eastern Thrace. Like all Balkan States, Bulgaria had embarked on a policy of mass expulsion during the war and this applied to Eastern Thrace as well. Muslims were forcibly removed from their villages and their houses destroyed in order to prevent them from returning. That the violence was not indiscriminate but rather targeted Turks specifically can be seen from the fact that, in mixed villages, Christians were spared from any mistreatment. Thus, in Havsa, which was inhabited by Bulgarians and Muslims, the Bulgarian houses were left intact by the Bulgarian army, whereas the Muslim neighbourhood was almost entirely burned¹¹⁶. Such actions were not only motivated by the practical desire to prevent any returns, they were part of a design to humiliate and damage all that is Muslim. Both of Havsa's mosques were desecrated: one was transformed into an arsenal whereas the other was badly damaged; its pillars were broken, while inside, the Coran verses on the wall were spoiled, and the Moaphil destroyed. The sacrilegious intent was even more visible in the Muslim cemetery where many of the headstones were smashed. Similar misdeeds were carried out across Eastern Thrace: for instance, out of the 87 houses in the Muslim village of Suyutlidere, only 8 to 10 remain, the rest having been burned or destroyed. The village school and

¹¹⁶ *Report of the International Commission*. p.123

mosque were razed to the ground. According to the Carnegie commission, “The Conclusion to be drawn from this description is, that as a matter of fact, at the outbreak of the first war the Bulgarians destroyed the Mussulman villages, that the population fled almost to a man, and that the national Mussulman institutions, mosques and schools, suffered specially. Evidently these are not isolated or fortuitous events. They represent national tactics”¹¹⁷.

After the Bulgarians withdrew and the Ottoman army began to reoccupy Eastern Thrace, its first reaction seems to have been to avenge these crimes committed by the enemy. The atrocities committed against the Muslims of Havsa were avenged in the nearby Bulgarian village of Osmanly. There, the Turkish army committed nearly identical atrocities as had the Bulgarians in Havsa and Suyutli: every single one of the 114 Bulgarian houses in the village was burned and the church was torn down¹¹⁸. One Bulgarian survivor from Osmanly later recounted how the Turks “started to shout ‘*Ghiaours*, now you will see Bulgaria’ and began butchering men, dishonouring women and 10 to 12 year old girls”¹¹⁹. Many of these crimes were committed by the returning Muslim refugees who were armed by the military¹²⁰. Their actions can only be interpreted as vengeance for the suffering they had to endure as a result of the first Balkan War.

Like the Bulgarians, the Turks targeted Christian national institutions, churches in particular. The monastery of Mostrartli was thus pillaged as soon as the Muslims from nearby villages heard that the Turkish cavalry was about to takeover the area. Moreover the violence seems to have been more intense where the local population was suspected of treason. In one instance, a village by the name of Khojatli was even spared because the local Bulgarians had

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 125-126

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.125

¹¹⁹ Raichevski. *Etmicheskoto prochistvane*. pp. 301-302

¹²⁰ 206CPCOM 277, p. 17

protected their Muslim neighbours during the Bulgarian occupation; upon their return, the Ottoman soldiers had received specific orders from Constantinople not to molest the villagers.

These facts seem to indicate that the Ottoman counteroffensive in Thrace was envisioned as an act of vengeance. However, they do not explain the nature of the violence. In many places, the atrocities followed an identical pattern: the villages were first pillaged and burned, then the men were killed and the women raped. The village of Tatarköy was one of the many places where such a pattern is visible: Ivan Georgiev told that: “17 people from the village, males, were forcibly expelled, thrown out by the Turks, murdered by the local Turks and the authorities. All the women were gathered, subjected to suffering, beaten, tortured and dishonoured.”¹²¹.

The most emblematic of such massacres took place in the ominously named village of Bulgarköy, or, “Bulgarian village”. During the first Balkan War, the inhabitants of this rather large settlement consisting of some 420 houses had dispossessed the local Muslims. When the Kurdish cavalry came in the summer of 1913, it looted the village and carried away the Bulgarians’ livestock. Nothing happened for the next few days, until the July 2 (old style) when an order was given to round up the male population the village, supposedly for instructions. Simultaneously, the soldiers went from house to house, searching for men over the age of 15. Finally, when they were gathered at the required location outside the village, the soldiers shot them. The massacre seems to have lasted for several weeks when finally the violence subsided. The Turks began to put posters on the walls, declaring that order had been restored. Reassured, men began to return, but as soon as they did, they were captured and taken into a gorge where they were shot. Around 450 out of the 700 men in the village of Bulgarköy were killed in this way. The Carnegie Commission, which examined the massacre of Bulgarköy closely, relying on refugee testimonies made on locations far

¹²¹ Raichevski. *Etnicheskoto prochistvane*. p.317

apart, concluded that “From all these sources an absolute certainty emerges that the purpose was the complete extermination of the Bulgarian population by the military authorities in execution of this plan”¹²².

Although it is clear that such a massacre could only have been carried out according to a premeditated plan, the question which arises is: what was this plan intended to achieve? Certainly, part of the answer has to do with the fact that the inhabitants of Bulgarköy were suspected of treason, and the massacre was therefore orchestrated as an act of revenge. But more importantly, it was intended to terrorise, not just the Bulgarians of that particular village, but also those in the surrounding areas, into fleeing. The news of the bloodbath in Bulgarköy had the desired effect; it served as a warning to all Bulgarians of what might happen to them if they decided to remain in Thrace. A villager from Trnovo later explained to the Bulgarian authorities why he had fled the region: “As he saw that almost all of the Bulgarians from the nearby village of Bulgarköy were massacred by the Turkish army, he got scared of being massacred as well and thus came to Bulgaria with his family with the retreating Bulgarian armies in 1913”¹²³. The smoke from the burning villages and the sight of fleeing Bulgarians was often times enough to persuade people from the yet unharmed places to pack their things and leave.

The violence inflicted on women had exactly the same purpose: the rapes were to ensure that the women would not stay behind with their children even when their husbands and brothers had been killed. A woman from the village of Tatarkoy vividly expressed this fear of being raped: “The Turks dishonoured many women and maidens by threatening them that whoever doesn’t stay still will be murdered butchered etc... And indeed if a woman or a maiden did not agree she would

¹²² *Report of the International Commission*. p. 130

¹²³ Raichevski, *Etnicheskoto prochistvane*. p. 326

inevitably be stabbed or butchered. That's why we ran away. To save ourselves from dishonouring"¹²⁴.

Although such evidences suggest that the atrocities were premeditated and intended to expel the Bulgarians, they do not provide incontrovertible proof, and one can still argue that massacres, rape and pillaging do not have to be planned in order to take place; after all, atrocities are a very common feature of wars, even those which do not aim to "cleanse" a region. Therefore, the skeptical reader might still think that the atrocities in Eastern Thrace were a spontaneous act of revenge. But if the desire for revenge was truly so unrelenting and uncontrollable, how can the systematic expulsions and deportations of Bulgarians be accounted for?

In many places, the looting, massacres and rape were followed by simple orders to leave the Ottoman Empire. Often, but not always, the Kurdish cavalry and the Arab irregulars would arrive first to a village and terrorise the population, rob them, kill a few people and then leave. As a result, many Bulgarians would run away, but those who nevertheless chose to remain, or come back after the irregulars had departed, would then be expelled by the Ottoman army. Todora Charkova from the village of Karahandir recalled that: "After the retreat of the Bulgarian troops came the Arab troops which chased us most violently and godlessly, making no distinction between (us) and the Turkish ladies. And after them came the Turkish army and gave us a 24h deadline, made us leave everything there, food and whatever we had just collected and threw us out"¹²⁵. There were cases, as in Bulgarköy and Tatarköy, when the regular and irregular soldiers committed the massacres together, but in general there seems to have been a grim division of labour between them: the başıbozüks were in charge of the dirty work whereas the army would order the Bulgarian population to leave. Frequently the villagers would be given a delay of 24

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 318

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 269

hours, sometimes even much less, an hour at most, to take their things and go. One refugee from Sinekli recounted how the Turkish soldiers took each person out of their house and gathered them outside the village. Then, a Turkish officer checked them and ordered them to leave, saying: “This is not Bulgaria, go to Bulgaria!”¹²⁶. The Bulgarians of Kaliçli, Urumbeyli, Korudere, Madzura, Tatarköy, Karamasli and Skopo were given the exact same order. In certain cases, the Ottoman army would personally drive the population out to the Bulgarian border. Vulko Kiryakov from Karahandir recalled how he and his neighbours were expelled from Thrace: “They gathered all the villagers in the church. One Turkish officer held a speech and told us: ‘By tomorrow no one should remain, everyone should take whatever they have with a cart or a donkey and return to your fatherland, and from there will come our Turks. You are desired by Tsar Ferdinand, everything is prepared and you will be settled in a property’. In the morning, they took us in a convoy and drove us to Malko Trnovo and gave us to the Bulgarian soldiers, and from then up to now nothing turned out according to his word”. Time and again, such orders were given and not just in areas where the population committed acts of treason, but in places located far apart. Evidently, there was a large-scale plan to get rid of all the Bulgarians of Thrace by terrorising and deporting them. According to the Carnegie Commission “An ‘Arab’ soldier, a Catholic, actually admitted to one of his friends that *express orders* of their captains were first to burn and ravage, then to kill all the males, next the women (...); and that he had personally carried out the orders given him”¹²⁷. The main question is who gave these orders?

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 311-312

¹²⁷ *Report of the International Commission.* p. 127

2. The Special Organisation

The answer is not as obvious as one might think. The highest authority in the Empire, the Grand Vizier himself, does not seem to have been in control of the situation in Thrace. In one revealing dispatch, Auguste Boppe described a conversation he had with the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople. The Russian diplomat had just received news that the Ottoman army had marched from Eastern Thrace into Bulgaria proper, and immediately decided to send his dragoman to protest against this course of action. “The Grand Vizier declared that he was not informed of these events the Bulgarians are complaining about; he asserted that the Ottoman army had not crossed the Bulgarian border”. Furthermore, he assured the Russian ambassador’s envoy that that he would immediately send a telegram to Ahmed Izzet Pasha, the commander of the army, ordering him not to cross the border. This order was either never given, or simply ignored. Ambassador de Giers believed the latter was the case¹²⁸. So, if the Grand Vizier was not the one making the decisions, then Ahmet Izzet, as commander in chief of the army, is to be held responsible for the events in Thrace. But this too seems to have been untrue. The British ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Louis Mallet, suggested that control over the army was actually held by Enver pasha. And indeed, the young officer’s influence over the army was considerable and continued to increase. He was the main protagonist of the 1913 military coup, which established him as one of the key figures in the Ottoman army. Enver’s authority seems to have been such that he was able to counter the decisions of senior officers and generals. Even the immensely prestigious Mahmut Şevket Pasha who had crushed the 1909 counterrevolution and restored the Constitution, was at times forced to bow down to the young Enver. In the fateful days preceding the fall of Adrianople, while Mahmud Şevket, then Grand Vizier, facing a deplorable military situation, was considering

¹²⁸ 206CPCOM 278, p. 248

to yield to European pressure, and cede the city to Bulgaria, Enver prevented him from reading the collective note of the Great Powers. Şevket himself admitted that he was unable to control young officers such as Enver. This incident therefore reveals that it was neither Muhmut Şevket, nor Said Halim Pasha, nor Ahmed Izett who controlled events in Thrace, but the young Enver bey.

Yet Enver's preeminence in the army again raises more questions than it provides answers; at the time of the Ottoman offensive in Thrace, Enver was still only an officer commanding the cavalry: how was it possible for a soldier with such a relatively low rank to hold so much power? This was a complete reversal of the Ottoman tradition where authority came with age. If we are to explain how such a situation came about, we must look into the inner workings of the CUP and its military members.

The Young Turks were initially barely more than an exiled political club made up of mostly liberal intellectuals and ideologues who provided barely more than feeble opposition to Abdülhamid. When it became painfully obvious that their legal and gentlemanly methods would not succeed in overthrowing the sultan and establishing a constitutional regime, the Unionists decided to change tactics. In its 1907 Congress, the CUP made the momentous decision to transform itself into a sophisticated revolutionary machinery capable of carrying out propaganda, fomenting disorder and revolt and committing acts of terror¹²⁹. In order to achieve this goal, the Unionists looked to the Bulgarian IMRO and the Armenian Dashnaktsutium for inspiration. Both of these were highly militarised revolutionary organisations and the Unionists concluded that they must emulate them by creating their own volunteer units¹³⁰. Soon after, Enver, Talat, Dr. Nazım, Dr Bahaettin Şakir and Talat began recruiting so called “self-sacrificing

¹²⁹ Polat Safi. *The Ottoman Special Organization - Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: An inquiry into its operational and administrative characteristics*. (PhD diss., Bilkent University, 2012). p. 76

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 84-5

volunteers” among young officers, who came to form what was known among the CUP’s detractors as the “Serez Committee”. Regardless of whether or not this was its actual name, it is clear that by 1908 a branch of volunteers existed within CUP and was responsible for carrying out risky operations in times of crisis: these units were the ones who started the revolution against Abdülhamid and assassinated the CUP’s political opponents; according to Rıza Nur, they were the “instrument, power, and executive apparatus of the central committee (of the CUP)”¹³¹.

The Serez Committee was not disbanded after the proclamation of the Constitution; instead, its membership continued to expand within the military and offer valuable services to the CUP. A watershed moment for the volunteers was the war in Libya. This remote province of the Ottoman Empire, physically detached from the other Ottoman territories, was attacked by Italy in 1911. The Ottomans were unable to send their army to defend the territory because the British would not grant them passage through Egypt, and the sea route was controlled by the Italian navy. As a result, the only way to oppose any resistance to the Italians was by sending clandestine soldiers to Libya. A total of 107 Ottoman officers — among them Enver pasha, Kuşçubaşı Eşref, Süleyman Askeri and Mustafa Kemal — were thus infiltrated into the province, and most of them seem to have been self-sacrificing volunteers¹³². According to his own account, it was Enver who was in charge of organising the resistance to the invading Italians, which would make sense, since he was already the leader of the volunteers¹³³. Together they mobilised and trained the local Arabs, making them into fierce guerilla fighters.

The war against the Italians had an important impact on Enver and his men, enabling them not just to perfect their methods in guerilla warfare, but also to develop new modes of fighting the

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p. 88

¹³² *Ibid.* p. 94

¹³³ Charles Stephenson. *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912: The First Land, Sea and Air War*. Ticehurst: Tattered Flag, 2014. p. 93

enemy. It would appear that during his time in Libya, Enver discovered the potency of Islam as a means of motivating the fighters: In a letter dated October 20, 1911 he described how the understanding the he was related to the Caliph made a huge impression on the Arabs¹³⁴. In another letter, written slightly later, he clearly stated his intention to instigate religious fanaticism and hatred of the enemy among his troops: “Our dead and wounded are not weakening us because there is always a brother or a son or a father who is willing to take up a rifle and replace the dead in order to fanatically avenge the victim. You now understand what incredible power I have at my disposal (...) If I tell you that among the wounded, there was a 9 year old boy who followed his father into combat, he was wounded by a bullet in his right arm but he nevertheless remained with us, — you see how the new generation is preparing for the resistance!”. Enver got his first taste of psychological warfare and was enthused. The Italian soldiers were killed and tortured in the most atrocious ways with the deliberate aim to strike fear into their comrades¹³⁵. Enver would later use the same psychological methods in Thrace to excite his soldiers, but this time with a different aim.

Their fighting experience in Libya also created an *esprit de corps* among the volunteer officers which was strikingly similar to that of other secret military organisations in the Balkans, such as the Serbian Black Hand. Just like Colonel Apis, the leader of the Black Hand, Enver created a group fanatically loyal warriors whose inner most circle was known as the *Aşere-i Mübeşşere*, or literally the “Ten Who Were Promised Paradise”¹³⁶. Through them, Enver managed to establish within the army an authority disproportionate to his title of colonel, and through the army he exercised control over the politics of the country.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 96

¹³⁵ Safi. *The Ottoman Special Organization*. pp. 146-147. For a description of the atrocities see Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*. pp. 100-101

¹³⁶ Turfan. *Rise of the Young Turks*. p. 346

In 1913, Enver redeployed his guerrilla fighters in Thrace. They played a particularly active role across the Maritza river, in Western Thrace, where Enver had them proclaim a puppet State which he hoped to annex to the Ottoman Empire¹³⁷. The treaty of Bucharest which put an end to the second Balkan War in August 1913 assigned Western Thrace to Bulgaria. The Ottomans had formally accepted the decision but still hoped to recover this region inhabited predominantly by Muslims. As Cemal Pasha himself confessed in his memoirs, the guerilla fighters were perfectly suited to the task of reclaiming the region: “When the army advanced to Adrianople the Government had issued a note in which clear assurances were given that the Maritza would not be crossed. But, notwithstanding this fact, a few individuals who were the leading spirits in the army succeeded in convincing the Government and the General Staff that this promise was untimely, and *compelling them* to shut their eyes to the activities of an unofficial ‘special organisation’ which had been formed. In this way this organisation has a free field on the other side of the river”¹³⁸. The Republic of Western Thrace was ultimately a short-lived experiment, having been dropped after 52 days in exchange for the recognition that Adrianople was Ottoman¹³⁹. What is more important for our purposes is that Cemal pasha’s astonishingly candid words illustrate how powerful this organisation was within the Ottoman State and to what extent the CUP came to rely on paramilitary methods to accomplish its goals. They also reveal that the volunteers were already

¹³⁷ Tancred Josserean, “L’Empire contre-attaque, la Turquie et la deuxième guerre balkanique”, *Les clés du Moyen-Orient*, 7 August 2013, accessed on 18 December 2015

¹³⁸ Cemal Paşa. *Memories of a Turkish Statesman: 1913-1919*. New York: George H. Doran, 1922. p. 49

¹³⁹ The Ottoman government had at that time already secured favourable conditions for the Muslims of Western Thrace and was contemplating an alliance with Bulgaria against Greece. The two countries agreed in principle to divide Greek territories in the following way: Greek Macedonia would go to Bulgaria whereas Western Thrace would return to the Ottomans. However, the Bulgarian precondition for the negotiations to continue was for the Ottomans to evacuate for the time being the Special Organisation from Western Thrace. Although the alliance never materialised due to the advent of World War I, the negotiations were taken very seriously by both sides, and it is the very real prospect of a reannexation of Western Thrace which persuaded the Ottoman government to recall its agents. After some persuasion by Cemal pasha, the Special Organisation acquiesced and the Provisional Government was dissolved. See Cemal Paşa. *Memories of a Turkish Statesman* pp. 50-55 and Igor Despot. *The Balkan Wars in the Eyes of the Warring Parties: Perceptions and Interpretations*. Bloomington IN: IUniverse, 2012. p. 163

known by the name of “Special Organisation”, which would later become infamous for its role in the Armenian genocide. Although not yet an official military unit, Cemal’s description shows that by the time of the second Balkan War, there existed an informal but very real paramilitary group to which various officers and volunteers claimed membership. Kuşçubaşı Eşref and Süleyman Askeri were among its most prominent members operating in Western Thrace. Their successes in Libya and Western Thrace paved the way for the institutionalisation of the Special Organisation (SO) on November 13, 1913¹⁴⁰.

3. The Special Organisation in Eastern Thrace

Although the unofficial existence of the Special Organisation, and its involvement in Western Thrace is a well documented fact, the same could not be said for its role in Eastern Thrace during the war. Since the SO was not yet formalised at the time of the second Balkan War, it is not possible to find any contemporaneous official documents attesting to its involvement in the campaign. However, several later sources suggest that it was; for instance, an official journal published in 1914 by Committee for National Defense¹⁴¹ gives a summary account of the organisation’s activities from February 1, 1913 to February 1, 1914 and confirms its presence in the field during the campaign. Furthermore, the journal states that around 2000 volunteers were recruited into the SO, mainly among the Muslim refugees from Macedonia, and served in the war¹⁴². Finally, we know that members of the SO were present in Eastern Thrace: Kuşçubaşı Esref and his brother were among the first to enter Adrianople alongside Enver pasha on July 22, 1913.

¹⁴⁰ Safi, *The Ottoman Special Organization*. p. 72

¹⁴¹ Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks*, note 14 p. 368

¹⁴² Safi, *The Ottoman Special Organization*. p. 148

On August 5, Suleyman Askeri, the head of the whole operation, crossed the Maritsa river into Western Thrace with a large staff of officers¹⁴³. It is therefore likely that the SO participated in the military campaign but in what capacity exactly and whether or not it played a role in the massacres and deportations is difficult to establish.

The historian Polat Safi who studied the origins and development of the SO argues that, unlike in Libya where it was given the task to organise a guerrilla war, in the Balkans, the Special Organisation carried out paramilitary activities in support of the regular army¹⁴⁴. But just what exactly these activities were is unclear. Non-Ottoman contemporary sources cannot provide an indisputable answer either, simply because they were not aware of the Special Organisation's existence. Nevertheless, by analogy, these sources may allow us to hypothesise what the SO's activities actually were. The Carnegie Report, diplomatic dispatches and refugee testimonies are replete with references to *başbozüks*, irregulars and Muslim *haiduks*; could it be that all of these terms are in fact designating the same thing, that is, the Special Organisation? It is impossible to give an altogether positive or negative answer to this question, but we do know for a fact that only the SO, and not the regular army, was involved in Western Thrace, which must mean that, when the Carnegie Commission talks of crimes committed there by the *başbozüks*, it is in fact describing the activities of the Special Organisation.

¹⁴³ Yigit Yücel, "II. Balkan Savası'na yeni yaklaşımlar : Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nin kokenleri". *Turkish Studies International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic Volume 10/1 Winter 2015*, p. 825-837. P. 833

¹⁴⁴ To support his claim, Safi gives the following information: "the correspondence of the Military Passports Center in Istanbul to investigate the identity and reliability of a certain Cihângirzâde İbrahim and his brother Hasan, as well as of a certain Mustafa Beyzâde Sâdik, his brother Hamid and his associate Hasan Efendi, who had all requested permission to travel to Kars, confirms the conclusion that the SO carried out paramilitary activities throughout the Balkan War in support of the regular army. In the correspondence, it was stated that Cihângirzâde İbrahim, commander of the Mujahidin Cavalry Regiment, had been a member of the SO active in Rumelia during the Balkan War and in Van and Baghdad at the beginning of World War I. Similarly, in his petition to Dersaadet Central Command, Çerkes Mehmed Nuri, a staff sergeant in the SO, states that, 'I have been serving in the SO for three years'. The date of the letter is October 9, 1915." Safi. *The Ottoman Special Organization*. pp. 148-149

The Commission describes how, after the withdrawal of the Bulgarian army from Western Thrace in late July 1913, the region was swarmed with Greek and Turkish irregulars. Frightened by their presence, some 15 000 Bulgarians from the countryside fled to the outskirts of the coastal city of Dedeagaç. But instead of finding a safe have there, they were surrounded by the başıbozüks, robbed and taken toward Bulgaria. Along the way they encountered a group of Bulgarian volunteers who managed to free most of the Bulgarian refugees. Together, they continued their flight toward Bulgaria but the başıbozüks soon caught up with the rear of this convoy, killed 100 women and children and carried off another 100 to 150 of them. On the following day, the same convoy of Bulgarian refugees came across another group of Başıbozüks; this time, 500 people were massacred and 200 women and children were made prisoners. The survivors continued their miserable journey and, just as they were reaching Bulgarian territory, they were ambushed yet again by the başıbozüks; another 800 refugees perished in this third and final encounter. The fate of those who chose to stay behind in Dedeagaç was no better. For several days, public criers in the city shouted orders for the Bulgarians to leave the town. Those who refused were killed.

Overall, during the Special Organisation's brief occupation of Western Thrace, 22 Bulgarian villages were burned and several thousands of people massacred¹⁴⁵. The deportations and the intensity of the violence seem to indicate that the Special Organisation was not only there to establish a rudimentary Republic but also to ensure its viability by emptying the region of its Bulgarian population. That the Special Organisation was directly involved in the mass expulsion of Bulgarians in Western Thrace does not necessarily imply that the başıbozüks or irregulars who ravaged Eastern Thrace were also members of the SO. Nevertheless, the crimes which took place on either sides of the Maritza are so similar that it is possible to make the claim that they were

¹⁴⁵ Carnegie Report, p. 135

perpetrated by the same group. As in Eastern Thrace, the Bulgarian were robbed and deported, and their villages were burned. The fate of Dedeagaç in particular bears unmistakable resemblances with that of Malgara: there too, public criers went around town giving orders which, although not identical, had the same purpose: to rouse the local population against the Christians. All of this was done solely by the members of the Special Organisation.

The possibility that the SO was behind the massacres in Eastern Thrace as well is corroborated by numerous diplomatic reports. The representatives of the Great Powers all suspected the Ottomans of having formed some kind of clandestine military organisation which they then deployed during the campaign. August Boppe seems to have been the first, at least among French diplomats, to come to such a conclusion. In a dispatch dated from July 18, 1913, he gave the following opinion: “it would appear that the (ottoman) government is swept along by the military faction and by the advanced elements of the Committee of Union and Progress”¹⁴⁶. Several days later, the French minister in Sofia made the same claim when reporting to his government that “the (ottoman) army is accompanied by a band of irregular soldiers commanded by Enver bey”¹⁴⁷. The Russian ambassador also held the same view. Although these opinions are by no means proofs, it is difficult to imagine what these bands of volunteers, recruited by the CUP, commanded by Enver and sent ahead of the army to wreak havoc among the Bulgarians, could have been if not the Special Organisation itself. Indeed, it makes perfect sense that, after pillaging, burning and massacring in Eastern Thrace, they would have carried their destructive endeavours across the Maritsa river into Western Thrace.

¹⁴⁶ 206CPCOM 277, p. 134

¹⁴⁷ 206CPCOM 278, p. 4

What's more, it is possible to make the claim that the Special Organisation was also involved north of Thrace, in the region of Harmanli. After retaking Adrianople, Enver was poised to capture the Bulgarian city of Philipopolis¹⁴⁸. On his orders, the Ottoman army pursued its drive north and crossed into Bulgaria proper on July 23¹⁴⁹. However, threats from the Great Powers quickly forced the regular Ottoman army to withdraw back into Thrace, but Enver's volunteers remained in Bulgaria. On July 30, Panafieu reported from Sofia that "the Turkish army appears to be beyond the former border, but the Kurdish cavalry is burning villages in the old (Bulgarian) territories"¹⁵⁰. According to the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, this attack was orchestrated by the CUP. In a conversation with Auguste Boppe, de Giers opined that "the Grand Vizier is not well informed about the movement of the army; at the same time, he was willing to believe the information which he had just received that the Committee is organising and arming bands of volunteers destined to ravage Bulgaria"¹⁵¹. It is not clear how long the volunteers stayed in there before they too were compelled to withdraw into Thrace, but we do have a fairly accurate picture of what they did during their incursion. If we are to believe an official Bulgarian report submitted to the Great Powers, the Turkish forces systematically burned Bulgarian settlements. In the village of Lubimetz for instance, 800 houses were set on fire, and only 20 were left intact; Siva-Reka, Malko Gradichte, and Bilitza suffered the same fate; Lozen was completely burned

¹⁴⁸ On July 28, Boppe reported to his government: "The representatives of the Havas Agency who has just returned from Adrianople found that the commanders of the army are determined to pursue their successes. Enver bey made it clear that his intention is to march on Philippopolis". 206CPCOM 279, p.164

¹⁴⁹ On July 24, the French Consul in Burgas wrote the following report: "The commander in chief of the area informs me that the Turks are advancing along the right bank of the Toundja with four squadrons of Bachi-Bozuku and the regular army (25 000 men). On their path, they are burning and killing. The population of Yamboli is abandoning the city and fleeing toward Sliven." 206CPCOM 278, 181. The French Minister in Sofia confirmed this information on the same day: "The Kurdish cavalry and 25 000 regular Turks are devastating the territory of old Bulgaria between Yamboli and Mustapha-Pacha." 206CPCOM 278, p. 184

¹⁵⁰ 206CPCOM 279, 234

¹⁵¹ 206CPCOM 278, p. 248

down¹⁵². There were relatively few deaths in the process since nearly all the inhabitants had already fled their homes but, evidently, the intention of the Turks was for them not to return. The volunteers not only burnt their homes, they also carried off the livestock of the Bulgarian peasants and set fire to the grain. As in Eastern Thrace, the volunteers were depriving them of their livelihoods in order to prevent their return. But the major difference is that, as in Western Thrace, these acts seem to have been solely by volunteers. Could it be that Enver pasha was plotting in the region of Harmanli the same kind of covert operation which was later carried out by the Special Organisation in Western Thrace?

Unfortunately we only have circumstantial evidence to support this hypothesis. What is clear, however, is that throughout the second Balkan War, a *modus operandi* existed in the Ottoman army. Whether they are called irregulars, başıbozüks, Arabs or Kurdish cavalrymen, they all committed identical atrocities in Eastern Thrace, Harmanli and Western Thrace, with the same intention to chase out the Bulgarians and deprive them of their property. The systematic nature of the crimes committed by these groups was already noted by contemporaries: “As the (Carnegie) Commission left Constantinople (to pursue the investigation), they met everywhere in Thrace the traces of this Arab cavalry, following on local reprisals and hatreds, and excesses of the bashi-bozouks who took advantage of the anarchy inevitable in transition from one regime to another”¹⁵³. These actions, which we can now state beyond any doubt that they were committed by the SO in Western Thrace — and may also have been their doing in the other regions — would later become the trademark of the organisation in Asia Minor against the Greeks and in Eastern Anatolia against the Armenians.

¹⁵² 206CPCOM 280, p. 190

¹⁵³ *Report of the International Commission*. p. 128

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The atrocities in Eastern Thrace paved the way for a very specific peace agreement with Bulgaria. The treaty of Constantinople, signed on September 29, 1913, provided in Article 9 that “the Bulgarian communities in Turkey shall enjoy the same rights as the other Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire. The Bulgarians subjects of the Ottoman Empire shall retain their movable and immovable assets and shall not be inhibited in any way in the exercise of their human and property rights. Those who left their homes during the recent events shall be allowed to return within a period of no longer than two years.” This clause is very different from those which were usually included in similar peace treaties at the time; Stelio Séfériadès, an internationally renowned law professor, wrote a chapter on population exchanges for the *Recueil des Cours - 1928* of the Hague Academy of International Law, in which he explained : “Most of the cession treaties, following particularly the treaty of Ryswick of 1697, provide for the ceding population to keep its nationality *only* under the express condition of leaving the country, but recognize the right of the population to retain its assets. In the case of reciprocal cession treaties, this optional clause, which became almost a matter of style, can be considered as providing the concerned population with the following rights: a) the right to continue to live in the territory provided it abandoned the nationality of the ceding state and accepted the nationality of the annexing state; or b) the right to leave the territory and preserve its current nationality; *but c) in any event, the right to retain and dispose freely of its movable and immovable assets.*”¹⁵⁴. In the Treaty of Constantinople, not a word is to be found concerning the Bulgarians who fled the Ottoman Empire and their right — a right confirmed by international customary law — to retain

¹⁵⁴ Stelio Séfériadès. "L'échange Des Populations." *Recueil Des Cours, Collected Courses, Volume 24 (2007), 1928, 307-439. p. 351*

the assets which they left behind. This conspicuous omission is all the more surprising in light of Article 7 of the same treaty concerning the Muslim Turks of Western Thrace; using the standard wording, which was omitted in the case of Bulgarians, it clearly stated that Turkish subjects residing in the territories ceded to Bulgaria could opt either to remain there or to return to the Ottoman Empire, but that in any case, their property rights would be guaranteed. Another study of population transfers therefore concluded that the treaty was “poorly regulated, poorly prepared and poorly executed”¹⁵⁵. In fact, nothing could have been farther from the truth: the Ottoman negotiators deliberately conceived the Treaty of Constantinople in such a way that the Bulgarian properties in Eastern Thrace would be spoliated. It is not possible to claim that the Ottomans were unaware of the standard legal procedures since they used them in the provisions which concerned Turks in Bulgaria. What made matters even worse for the Bulgarians is that, those rights that were granted to them by the treaty were rendered void by what had taken place during the war : in spite of the treaty, the Bulgarians could not return to their homes, most often because those homes had been burnt and their movable property looted. Essentially, what the treaty guaranteed, was the right to own property which either no longer existed or whose whereabouts were unknown. The peace agreement also provided for an amnesty for all those guilty of crimes during the war, which meant that those who had burnt or pillaged Bulgarian property in Ottoman lands would go unpunished. The Bulgarian government insistently protested against this blatant violation of the customary right to own property, but to no avail. There was no way for the crimes to be undone; the nature of the violence in Thrace during the war — the burning of villages, the pillaging, the mass deportations and the rape of women — was such that it made it virtually certain that any peace treaty after the

¹⁵⁵ *Les Transferts Internationaux De Populations*. Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 1946. p. 22

hostilities, no matter how legitimate, sound or liberal on paper, would end up enshrining a fait accompli. Was this a mere coincidence?

The outburst of indiscriminate violence which was so feared by the Great Powers and the Grand Vizier never truly materialised. Although the military campaign was used by many, especially the returning Muslim émigrés, as an opportunity to pillage and take revenge, the violence was in most cases not a spontaneous outcome of war. It was first planned by Enver pasha and his lot, and then carried out by the volunteers he had assembled before the war. They were sent ahead of the army with instructions to pillage, burn and kill the Bulgarians. Enver probably used some of the psychological methods which proved so effective against the Italians in Libya, to prepare his warriors for the grisly task they had been given. At least one account leads us to believe that this was in fact the case: the Arab soldier who confessed that express orders were given to ravage the countryside was asked by the members of the Carnegie Commission why he had taken part in such atrocities: “I did as the others. It was dangerous to do otherwise” he answered. This typical example of solidarity among soldiers, who had to “suffer” together, as it were, while they perpetrated their crimes, indicates that they were conditioned as a group before being unleashed in Thrace.

Their task was not only to terrorise the Bulgarian villagers, but perhaps more importantly, to seize the movable and destroy their immovable property. However, this enterprise would have been incomplete without a proper diplomatic conclusion. The purposefully lopsided peace treaty was exactly that. Just as the Ottoman diplomats had foreseen, it immediately led to trouble: the Muslims from Bulgaria who were leaving Western Thrace in accordance with the treaty, began to expel Ottoman Bulgarians from their houses and settle in their stead as soon as they arrived to Eastern Thrace. Prevented by the agreement from going to Bulgaria and claiming the villages

vacated by the Turks, the expropriated Bulgarians roamed the countryside until, finally, on November 15, 1913 a genuine population exchange agreement was signed. The effect of this agreement and the work of the commissions it established was already discussed but is only now, in light of the present findings, that we can assess its full significance: the population exchange protocol was the third and final stage of an effort to uproot the Bulgarians from Eastern Thrace. In the first stage, they were terrorised by the volunteers into fleeing ; then a carefully crafted peace treaty prevented them from reclaiming their property ; finally, a population exchange agreement made it certain that these properties would permanently remain in Turkish hands. Even more than a campaign of mass expulsion, the second Balkan War was for the Ottoman Turks a campaign of mass expropriation.

Conclusion

The disastrous defeats in the Balkan Wars convinced the Unionists that a strong, stable and modern State could only be built on the firm ground of an Ottoman Turkish nation. After trying, however half-heartedly, to accommodate the Empire's numerous non-Muslims, the CUP came to the fateful conclusion that, not only were the Christians unreliable partners, but that they were internal enemies. Halil Menteşe, a prominent Unionist and at one time president of parliament, wrote that Talat Pasha's "priority was cleansing the homeland of elements whose treason was revealed during the Balkan War"¹⁵⁶. This was a most formidable undertaking: even with the loss of so many territories in 1913, there were still approximately 3,4 million¹⁵⁷ Christians living in the Ottoman Empire, and all of them were potential traitors. How does one rid a country of so many internal enemies? This is what the present study has attempted to determine. One method the Unionists concocted was to sign population exchange agreements and expel Christians with some semblance of legality. But this was a long and obstacle ridden process which inevitably led to protracted negotiations, disputes and tensions; under such conditions, it would take years to uproot unreliable populations from strategic areas such as Eastern Thrace or Asia Minor, and time was a luxury the Unionists could not afford. Since the 1908 revolution, the Empire was losing territory with frightening speed; this disintegration needed to be halted immediately.

The Young Turks devised a sophisticated and systematic method which they thought would save their country from an impending disaster. On the eve of the second war, officers hardened by their experiences in Libya returned from the Tripolitanian desert and were reintegrated into the army. Bands of "irregular" soldiers were formed and refugees were armed to support the army.

¹⁵⁶ Elçin Macar. "The Muslim Emigration in Western Anatolia." *Ceb Cahiers Balkaniques*, no. 40 (2012). p. 2

¹⁵⁷ Kemal H. Karpat *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Before the offensive was launched, areas of particular strategic importance were identified. These military preparations were accompanied by intense propaganda on a national level which led many Muslims to equate Ottoman Christians with the enemy armies. Once the campaign finally began, the stage had been set for a very specific type of violence: the Ottoman irregulars were sent ahead of the regular army with very precise instructions to pillage, set fire to the Christian villages, kill men, and rape the women. Once they departed, leaving destruction in their wake, the regular army would come and finish the job if necessary; Bulgarian villagers were ordered to leave and sometimes driven out to the border by the army in such a way that they could only take their rags with them. In certain cases, the atrocities were committed jointly by the army and the irregulars, especially in places considered to be hotbeds of sedition, such as the village of Bulgarköy. Once the hostilities had ceased, the displacement of the refugees and the misappropriation of their properties was made permanent by a deliberately ambiguous peace treaty. Behind the seemingly liberal wording of the agreement lay the harsh reality that the refugees could not return, both because the treaty had in fact prohibited it, and because, in many cases, they had nothing to return to. The Bulgarians as well as the Great Powers were ultimately tricked by the Unionists' hypocrisy. Subsequent Bulgarian protests only caused the Porte to make token concessions which prolonged the negotiations without changing the ultimate outcome. The members of the Turko-Bulgarian, like those of the Greek-Turkish commission only led to quarrels and further obstruction by the Ottomans while the expulsions simply continued.

The only shortcut to the solution the CUP was looking for was war. The military campaign in Thrace made it abundantly clear that only then was it possible to expel so many people in such little time. The number of refugees, although contested, undoubtedly confirm this assessment: the Turko-Bulgarian commission officially exchanged 46.764 Bulgarians against 48.570 Turks, but

most of the Bulgarians appear to have fled during the war¹⁵⁸. In comparison to the later population exchanges, this figure may seem relatively low. However, one must bear in mind that the military campaign lasted a mere three weeks during which, according to the Carnegie Commission, 15,960 Bulgarians were “either killed burned in the houses or scattered among the mountains” (133); several thousand more were massacred in Western Thrace.

What made these war-time solutions so appealing to some people within the CUP leadership was that precautions which had to be taken in times of peace were no longer necessary in the fog of war. The Young Turks were prepared to carry out “orderly” or “legal” expulsions when this was necessary, but negotiating agreements, setting up commissions, taking care not to irritate the Great Powers and professing international norms, even when they were not respecting them, was a constant nuisance to the Unionists. War, on the other hand, relieved them of these constraints and provided nearly unlimited freedom of action. Even population transfers in times of peace were an outcome of international conflict: no exchange agreements would ever have been signed had there not been major upheaval in the Balkans. The Unionists therefore concluded that war was the precondition success.

This logic led people such as Enver pasha to seize the opportunity for war: when WWI erupted in July 1914, the impetuous general was among those who led his country into the European conflict¹⁵⁹. Using the same methods which had been tested and perfected in Eastern Thrace, the Unionist wrath descended on the Greeks of Asia Minor and the Armenians of Anatolia. The massacres and deportations took place not just in 1915 but lasted throughout the war, ending once again with identical exchange agreements. As in Thrace, they were mere confirmations of

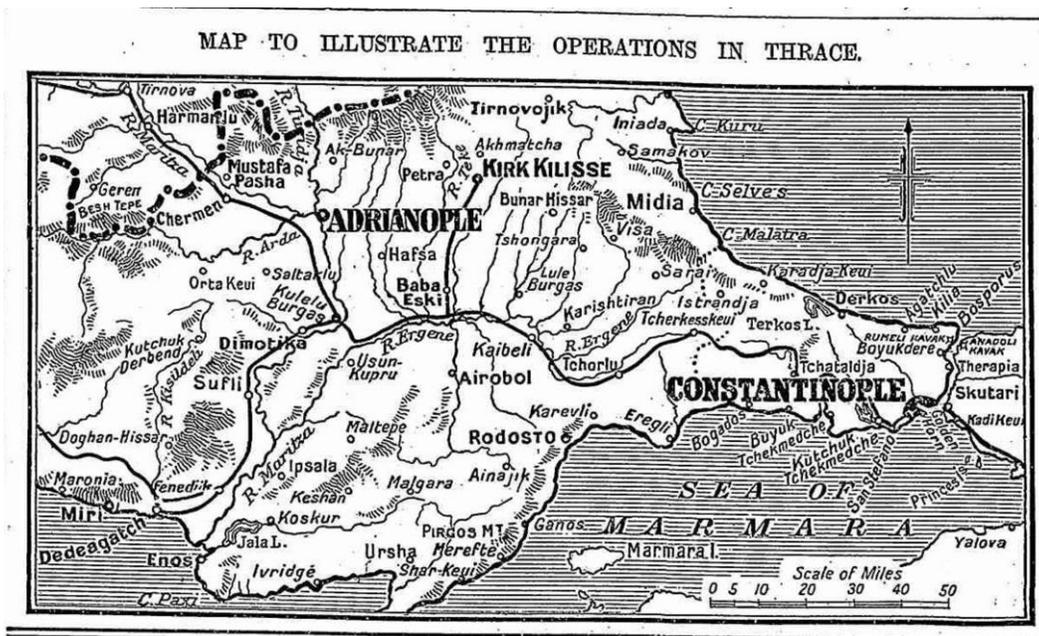
¹⁵⁸ Ladas. *The Exchange of Minorities*. p. 20

¹⁵⁹ For a brilliant analysis of the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war and the role played by Enver, see: David Fromkin. *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922*. New York: H. Holt, 1989.

the crimes which could only have been perpetrated during a great upheaval. In light of this, the Ottoman military campaign in Eastern Thrace clearly emerges as the first step in a monumental effort to carve a Nation State out of a multinational empire. For the Unionists, Eastern Thrace is where everything began and where their policies were carried to their furthest logical conclusion. A study on minorities in Central and Eastern Europe written several decades after the events we have discussed, concluded its section on Turkey in the following manner: “C’est au nord des Détroits que la politique ethnographique du gouvernement turc voulut par excellence constituer une population ethniquement homogène. C’est là que les immigrants, les échangés, les expulsés turcs furent installés en premier lieu. Si, selon la Statistique générale, la Turquie comprend environ 10% de minorité ethnique, il n’y en a pas en Thrace plus de 5%.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Institut National De La Statistique Et Des études économiques. *Les Minorités Ethniques En Europe Centrale Et Balkanique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 1946. p. 82

Appendix : Photographs and Illustrations



1) Eastern Thrace during the Balkan Wars (*Times*)



2) An Ethnographic map of Thrace according to Lyubomir Miletich



3) The besieged city of Adrianople



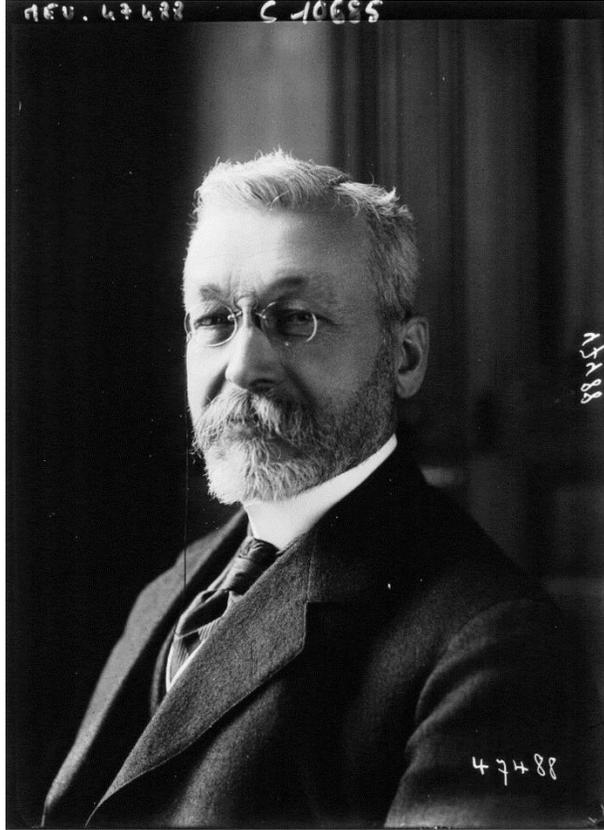
4) The Aivaz Baba fort of Adrianople conquered by the Bulgarians (source: .edirnetarihi.com)



5) Mehmed Talat pasha (source: skepticism.com)



6) Enver pasha was suspected by the Carnegie Commission of being responsible for the atrocities (source: <http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/art-141869/Enver-Pasha>)



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

7) Ambassador Maurice Bompard believed the population exchange are a necessary evil
(source: gallica.fr)

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