

# **The Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization and the Idea for Autonomy for Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace, 1893-1912**

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## **Abstract**

The current thesis narrates an important episode of the history of South Eastern Europe, namely the history of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization and its demand for political autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Far from being “ancient hatreds” the communal conflicts that emerged in Macedonia in this period were a result of the ongoing processes of nationalization among the different communities and the competing visions of their national projects. These conflicts were greatly influenced by inter-imperial rivalries on the Balkans and the combination of increasing interference of the Great European Powers and small Balkan states of the Ottoman domestic affairs.

I argue that autonomy was a multidimensional concept covering various meanings white-washed later on into the clean narratives of nationalism and rebirth. Indeed, for the most of the period and for the greater part of IMARO activists autonomy was seen as a transitional phase towards future unification with Bulgaria based on the example of Eastern Rumelia. However, there were alternative voices. The strong leftist faction within the Organization advocated autonomy for these two regions within the Ottoman Empire where the different communities should live in harmony. Furthermore, they viewed autonomy as a first step towards a Balkan Federation. This comes to show that Balkan historiography all too often takes a national consciousness during the Ottoman period for granted and that the national option was by no means inevitable.

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## Introduction

The fall of communism in the Balkans and the war in Yugoslavia completely changed the political map of the peninsula and re-established the image of the Balkans as a backwater region of Europe where nationalism is firmly entrenched and “ancient hatreds” are still alive.<sup>1</sup> It is a commonplace nowadays to differentiate between the liberal, civic and inclusive nationalisms in Western Europe and the irrational, ethnic and exclusive nationalisms in Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> But what is more important is that even among the Eastern European category Balkan nationalism is seen as an extreme case, as a phenomenon impervious to rational explanation.

The emergence of the Republic of Macedonia as an independent state and the subsequent and still ongoing name dispute with neighboring Greece revived the interest in the history of the geographical and historical region of Macedonia as a whole. The famous “apple of discord” in the Balkans, the main cause for the conflicts between 1878 and 1944 once again attracted the interest of not only politicians and diplomats but also historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and social scientists in general.<sup>3</sup>

In the current thesis I will address an important episode of the history of South Eastern Europe, namely the history of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization and its demand for political autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. I argue that far from being “ancient hatreds” the communal conflicts that emerged in Macedonia were a result of the ongoing processes of nationalization among the different communities and the

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<sup>1</sup> See Kennan, George, 1993. “Introduction - The Balkan Crises: 1913 and 1993,” in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present by George F. Kennan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1993): 3-16. For criticism of this approach see Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 3-21.

<sup>2</sup> See Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Historical allusions are abundant even in serious scholarly production. For example a collection of articles dedicated to the political situation in post-Yugoslav Macedonia is referred to as “the new Macedonian question.” James Pettifer, *The New Macedonian Question* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press), 1999.

competing visions of their national projects. These conflicts were hugely influenced by the inter-imperial rivalry on the Balkans and the increasing interference of the Great European Powers and small Balkan states within the Ottoman domestic affairs.

Homogeneity and unilinearity are the basic myths of nations and nationalism, and this is precisely what is not true even with respect to the tiny intellectual elite of a national movement, I focus on in this thesis. I will elaborate on that later but the main findings could be presented here. Autonomy for Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace was not a coherent idea. It was a multidimensional concept covering various and different meanings.

Indeed, for the most of the period and for the greater part of IMARO activists autonomy was seen as a transitional phase towards future unification with Bulgaria based on the example of Eastern Rumelia. However, there were alternative voices and Bulgarian nationalism was by no means unanimous within IMARO ranks. The strong leftist faction within the Organization advocated autonomy for these two regions within the Ottoman Empire where the different communities should live in harmony. Furthermore, they viewed autonomy as a first step towards a Balkan Federation in a way similar to and influenced by the programs of the Balkan social democratic circles. This comes to show that Balkan historiography all too often takes a national consciousness during the Ottoman period for granted. There were many activists still very much engaged with the Ottoman political system and cultural milieu, which means that the national option was by no means inevitable.

National movements in the Balkans are much more complicated phenomena white-washed later on into the clean narratives of nationalism and rebirth. In this respect there is a serious gap in historical knowledge, and with the current thesis I aim to bridge this gap. I will attempt to connect two academic disciplines – Bulgarian/Balkan National History and Ottoman History, which are inextricably bound by a common cultural, social and political tradition, yet unfortunately treated separately. I hope it will contribute for a better

understanding first of the history of Macedonia and second, for a better understanding of the late Ottoman Empire and Balkan nationalism.

I will trace down the origins of the demand for autonomy from the foundation of the Organization in Ottoman Salonika in 1893 to the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912. Most of the scholars who have treated the subject usually examine only the Hamidian period, finishing in 1908 and do not pay special attention to the next four years when the Young Turks were in power. However, I think that this approach is not justified and that despite the different characteristic of the subsequent four years it is much more logical to stop at the Balkan wars which ended the Ottoman rule of this land.

The thesis is organized chronologically in relation to major political events in this period which caused shifts in IMARO's policy. The chronological approach also helps for a simultaneous examination of all political factors involved – the revolutionaries themselves, the Ottoman authorities, the neighboring states, and the Great Powers.

The text is divided into four chapters. The first chapter discusses the existing literature and sets the theoretical framework within which the thesis is situated. My purpose is to challenge the narrow views of the different Balkan national historiographies' tendency to present the history in terms of "national awakening" and "struggles for freedom." I will analyze the different views of scholars on how nationalism in general and Balkan nationalism in particular emerge, what were its specificities and similarities compared to European nationalism in general.

In the second chapter I will trace back the emergence of the autonomy concept among the Balkan nations in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, paying special attention to its development after the Congress of Berlin and answering why IMARO adopted this idea as its guiding principle. The chapter will elaborate on the development of IMARO to the *Ilinden*

Uprising of 1903. I will discuss factors that led to this uprising, what were the agendas of the rebels and why it ultimately failed.

The third chapter deals with the period after 1903 to the outbreak of the Young Turk Revolution. This was a time which saw bitter conflicts between the different national movements in the European *vilayets* of the Empire. I will address the issues of the split in the Organization into two factions with very different agendas and views on autonomy. I will examine the two reform projects, namely the Vienna and the Murztsteg plans, analyzing what they achieved and what they did not.

The fourth chapter deals with the period from the Young Turk Revolution to the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, which practically was the end of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. I will address the questions of the relations between the Young Turks and the Macedonian-Adrianople revolutionaries, examine the programs of the two parties that they founded, their different agendas, and analyze why subsequently the revolutionaries rejected the overtures of the Young Turk regime. I will trace the restoration of the Organization in the years 1910-1911 and its new policy. I will also analyze the role IMARO played in the outbreak of the First Balkan War.

The thesis is based both on primary sources and secondary literature. The primary sources that I used can be divided into three main groups. I concentrated mostly on the numerous collections of documents that have been published in Bulgarian, Macedonian, and some of them in English. These documents are diverse in character and include the official documentation of the IMARO executive organs and leadership - statutes, regulations, protocols, declarations, etc. Another group of published primary sources are the reports of the official diplomatic agents of the Great Powers and the Balkan states.

A second group of sources that I use are the different articles, polemics and interviews in the Bulgarian press of the period that can be found in the “St. St. Cyril and Methodius



National Library” in Sofia. In the press the Macedonian revolutionaries tried to explain their goals, argued about the methods they used, justified and very often changed their opinions.

Another group of primary sources are the memoirs of IMARO leaders and activists. These have to be treated very critically but are essential because offer valuable information that is often missing in the official documentation or the in polemics in the press. To this group I can also add the different, tracts, pamphlets, brochures, etc. which were too large to be included in a newspaper or a magazine and were printed separately.

The secondary literature which will be discussed in the first chapter is enormous. Macedonia was a point of intersection for many conflicting interests and this fact can explain the enormous interest on the topic. I tried to include as much as possible of the existing literature in both Macedonian and Bulgarian. For the other conflicting perspectives unfortunately I had to rely almost entirely on the scholarly production that has been published in English.

In the period under study the revolutionary organization had a number of names.<sup>4</sup> For the first years 1893-1896 no documents had been found yet. According to the memoirs of some of the founders it was called Macedonian Revolutionary Organization or Macedonian Revolutionary Committee. From 1896 to 1902 it took the name Bulgarian Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committees (BMARC). In 1902 the name was changed to the Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (SMARO) and in 1905 finally to Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (IMARO). For facility's sake

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<sup>4</sup> The periodization of the Internal Organization's names used to be a matter of debate. The problem was that both the BMARC and SMARO statutes were not dated. Konstantin Pandev was the first to introduce this periodization in 1969. On the basis of a critical examination and contextualization of sources, he convincingly argued that such was the chronological order of the documents. Pandev, Konstantin. "Ustavi i pravilnizti na VMORO predi Ilindensko-Peobrazhenskoto vastanie" [IMARO Statutes and Regulations before the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising] *Isricheski pregled* (1) 1969, 68-80. With the finding of a BMARC regulation dated 1896 later on the problem seems to be solved. Tzochko Bilyarski, "Introduction" in *Vatreshnata Makedono-Odrinska Revolyutzionna Organizatziya (1883-1919). Dokumenti na tzentralnite rakovodni organi (ustavi, pravilnizti, memoari, deklaratzii, okrazhni, protokoli, neredbi, rezolyutzii, pisma)* [The Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (1883-1919). Documents of the Central Executive Organs (Statutes, Regulations, Memoranda, Declarations, Circular Letters, Minutes, Orders, Resolutions, Letters)] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 2007), 9.

throughout the whole thesis I will refer to it with its final name by which it is most widely known today or simply as the Internal Organization.

I tried to use other the names of towns and cities in the way they were referred to in English language at that time. Thus I preferred Salonika (instead of Selanik, Solun or Thessaloniki), Adrianople (instead of Edirne, Odrin) and Monastir (instead of Bitola). Wherever necessary, further explanations are provided.

Throughout the text several non-English terms are used. According to the Ottoman administrative division in this period a *vilayet* is the biggest administrative unit within the Empire which corresponds to a province. A *vilayet* consists of smaller units or *sancaks*, and they in turn consist of *kazas*. A *cheta* refers to a Bulgarian or Serbian armed band and a *chetnik* is a member of such a band. *Andartes* are the members of Greek bands. *Komitajis* is a general term for a member of the Bulgarian revolutionary committees.

Since most of the sources I use are in Bulgarian language, the translated excerpts which cite a Bulgarian source are mine. In all other cases when I cite sources translated into English, I use the official translation.

## II. Literature Review and Theoretical Approaches

In this chapter I discuss the existing literature dedicated to IMARO's history and set the theoretical framework for my research. My purpose is to challenge the anachronistic nationalistic views which present Macedonian history in terms of a "national awakening" and "struggles for freedom." I argue that these interpretations were largely based on the respective national projects of the Balkan nation states. I will also analyze the different views of scholars on how nationalism in general and Balkan nationalism in particular emerged, what were its specificities and similarities compared to European nationalism in general.

### II.1. Literature Review

Ottoman Macedonia at end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a fascinating but at the same time highly debated and controversial topic in the field of Modern Balkan history. It has caused different and as a rule mutually exclusive interpretations in the course of more one hundred years.<sup>5</sup> The irredentist goals of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia vis-a-vis Macedonia necessarily sparked a fury of teleological and anachronistic discourses about the history of the region. The situation was further complicated with the establishment of a Socialist Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia at the end of WWII where history in a similar fashion was used to legitimize the process of Macedonian state and nation building.

Due to all these obstacles facing the historian it is better to start from the very beginning. There is a huge corpus of published documentation and secondary literature for the over one century-long history of the Internal Macedonian Adrianople-Revolutionary Organization since its foundation in 1893 until now. In the first years, quite naturally for a rebel conspiracy which aimed at overthrowing the existing order, there are not many written

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<sup>5</sup> For general overview of the historiography see Vassilis Gounaris and Iakovos Mihailidis "The Pen and the Sword: Reviewing the Historiography of the Macedonian Question" in Roudometof, Victor ed. *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics*, (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2000), 99-142.

sources. Contemporary newspapers started mentioning the Organization around 1901 when the first clashes with the Sofia-based and already widely known Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee occurred. There are numerous articles in the Bulgarian press from this period which treated the conflict between the two organizations, their goals and activities.<sup>6</sup>

Much information can be found in the Memoir of the Internal Organization published after the uprising in 1904 in Bulgarian and French.<sup>7</sup> The IMARO activists quickly realized how useful for their cause publicity was and started to publish newspapers to propagate their ideas among Bulgarian society and abroad.<sup>8</sup> In the post-*Ilinden* period when the internal structure, strategy, and the policy pursued so far had been questioned and re-examined, one of IMARO's leaders Hristo Matov wrote several tracts.<sup>9</sup> The first history of the revolutionary movement which treated it in its thoroughness appeared at the end of the WWI.<sup>10</sup>

After WWI the Bulgarian linguist and ethnographer from Macedonia Lyubomir Miletich started publishing a series of memoirs of IMARO activists many of which were recorded before the Balkan Wars.<sup>11</sup> Materials concerning the Adrianople region were

<sup>6</sup> The most important being the official organ of the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committee *Reformi: Organ na Varhovniya Makedonski komitet* [Reforms – Organ of the Supreme Macedonian Committee], 1899 – 1905.

<sup>7</sup> *Makedoniya i Odrinsko (1893-1903). S dve karti. Memoar na Vatreshnata organizatziya* [Macedonia and Adrianople Region, 1893-1903. With Two Maps. A Memoir of the Internal Organization], 1904. in French – *La Macedoine et le vilayet d'Adrianople (1893-1903). Avex deux cartes. Memoire de l'Organisation interieure*, s. l., 1904.

<sup>8</sup> Some of the more important are: *Avtonomiya (L'Autonomie): Zadgranichen list na Vatreshnata Makedono-Odrinska organizatziya* [Autonomy: Foreign Newspaper of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Organization], 1903; *Ilinden*, 1907 – 1908; *Konstituzionna zarya: Organ na Makedono-Odrinskata revolyutzionna organizatziya* [Constitutional Dawn: Organ of the Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization], 1908 – 1909; *Revolyutzionen list: Vatreshna Makedono-Odrinska revolyutzionna organizatziya* [Revolutionary Newspaper: Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization], 1904-1906.

<sup>9</sup> Hristo Matov, *Osnovi na Vatreshnata revolyutzionna organizatziya (opit za podbirane i formulirane na "Osnovite")* [Fundamentals of the Internal Revolutionary Organization (An Attempt to Select and Formulate the "Fundamentals")] (Sofia, 1904); Idem, *Shto byahme – shto sme* [What We Were, What We Are] (Plovdiv, 1905); Idem., *Za upravlениeto na Vatreshnata revolyutzionna organizatziya* [On the Management of the Internal Revolutionary Organization] (Sofia, 1905); Idem, *Vastanishki deystviya* [Rebel Activities], (Sofia, 1906).

<sup>10</sup> Angel Tomov and Georgi Bazhdarov, *Revolyutzionnata borba v Makedoniya* [The Revolutionary Struggle in Macedonia] (Skopje, 1917), (Sofia, 1918).

<sup>11</sup> *Materiali za istoriyata na makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie*, kn. I-IX saobshtava L. Miletich [Materials for the History of the Macedonian Liberation Movement, books, I-IX, reported by L. Miletich] (Sofia: MNI, 1925-1928); *Materiali za istoriyata na makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie kn*, X saobshtava St. Avramov [Materials for the History of the Macedonian Liberation Movement, kn. X, reported by St. Avramov] (Sofia: MNI, 1929); *Materiali za istoriyata na makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie kn*, XI saobshtava Boyan Mirchev

collected by the Bulgarian historian from Thrace Ivan Ormandzhiev.<sup>12</sup> In 1923 fifty-two Bulgarian intellectuals, most of them born in Macedonia, founded the Macedonian Scientific Institute which was very active in propagating the Bulgarian point of view on the question.

The large quantity of documentation gathered by this time allowed Hristo Silyanov to publish the first volume of his work “The Liberation Struggles of Macedonia” in 1933, which dealt with the history of the organization from 1893 to the *Ilinden* Uprising. The second volume appeared in 1943 and treated the events after *Ilinden* to the Young Turk Revolution.<sup>13</sup> Himself a historian, writer and also participant in many of the major events he described, Silyanov managed to give a complete and more or less objective historical picture of the period. However, he sympathized with the right wing within the Organization and this explains why sometimes the characteristics of the ideological opponents are a little far-fetched. Silyanov was also the first who used the state archives introducing documents that were unknown prior to him including Serbian official documentation captured by the Bulgarians in WWI which adds an element of comparative analysis to his study.

After the end of WWII the Bulgarian historiography on the Macedonian question underwent a profound change under the command of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the adopted policy of recognizing a separate Macedonian nation. Thus, the history of IMARO had to be re-written and treated as an element of the larger history of the Macedonian nation. Likewise, the Macedonian Scientific Institute in Sofia was closed down. A large number of works from the earlier period were banned, or access to them was restricted. At that time the topic was mostly treated by Dino Kyosev and Tushe Vlahov.<sup>14</sup>

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[Materials for the History of the Macedonian Liberation Movement, kn. XI, reported by Boyan Mirchev] (Sofia: MNI, 1931).

<sup>12</sup> Ivan Ormandzhiev, *Prinosi kam istoriyata na vastanicheskoto dvizhenie v Odrisko (1896-1903)* [Contributions to the Rebel Movement in Adrianople Region] kn. I (Burgas, 1927), kn. II-IV (Sofia, 1929-1941).

<sup>13</sup> Hristo Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite borbi na Makedoniya* [The Liberation Struggles of Macedonia] in two volumes, (Sofia: Izdanie na Ilindenskata organizatziya, 1933 and 1943).

<sup>14</sup> Dino Kyosev, *Borbite na makedonskiya narod za osvobozhdenie* [The struggles of the Macedonian People for Liberation], Sofia 1950; Idem, *Istoriya na makedonskoto natsionalnorevoluzionno dvizhenie* [History of the Macedonian National Revolutionary Movement] (Sofia, 1954); Tushe Vlahov, *Varhovizmat i velikobalgarskite*

In the beginning of the 1960s the Bulgarian Communist Party policy towards Macedonia took another shift returning to the earlier understandings and historians were allowed more freedom, but the real change came in 1979 when Konstantin Pandev published a very important and highly influential work.<sup>15</sup> Based on everything that was written on the subject and using many new sources he created an overall picture of the Macedonian-Adrianople revolutionary movement from the Berlin Congress to the *Ilinden* Uprising, revised some of Silyanov's earlier theses, and established the basic periodization that is still valid today.

From the 1980s onwards hundreds of monographs and articles devoted to the different aspects and episodes in the history of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Macedonia appeared in Bulgaria. After the fall of communism the Macedonian Scientific Institute was re-established and resumed its activity. In the period 1994-2003 the Macedonian Scientific Institute in conjunction with the Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences published a general four-volume work of what can be called the "official" Bulgarian version of the Macedonian-Adrianople revolutionary movement.<sup>16</sup>

In Bulgarian historiography there are several established trends that can be noticed: diplomatic history,<sup>17</sup> the history of the Bulgarian Church and education,<sup>18</sup> and the official

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*shovinisti – krepiteli na balgarskiya monarhizam* [Supremists and Great Bulgarian chauvinists – Supporters of Bulgarian Monarchism] (Sofia, 1947).

<sup>15</sup> Konstantin Pandev, *Natzionalnoosvoboditelnoto dvizhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinsko 1878-1903*, [National-Liberation Movement in Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace, 1878-1903] (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> *Natzionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiyskite balgari* [National-Liberation Movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians] in four volumes, (Sofia: Macedonian Scientific Institute, Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1994-2000).

<sup>17</sup> Stoyan Germanov, *Ruskata obshtesvenost i revolyuzionnoto dvizhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinsko (1893-1908)* [Russian Public and the Revolutionary Movement in Macedonia and Adrianople Region, 1893-1908] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", 1992); Nina Dyulgerova, *Balgarskiyat natzionalen vapors v politikata na Rusiya i Avstro-Ungariya* [Bulgarian National Question in the Policy of Russia and Austria-Hungary] (Sofia: Izdatelsvo na BAN, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Voyn Bozhinov, *Balgarskata prosveta v Makedoniya i Odrinska Trakiya* [Bulgarian Education in Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1982); Konstantin Pandev, "Narodnostna deynost na balgarskata ekzarhiya (1878-1912)" [National Activity of the Bulgarian Exarchate, 1878-1912, *Istoricheski pregled* (1) 1986; Petar Petrov and Hristo Temelski, *Tzarkva i tzarkoven zivot v Makedoniya* [Church and Church Life in Macedonia] (Sofia: MNI, 2003).

policy of Bulgaria in Macedonia and Thrace,<sup>19</sup> However, all this extensive literature treats the subject in a rather traditional way, as historians engage mainly in the reconstruction of historical facts. Their base for interpretation comes mainly from nineteenth-century historicism and is largely untouched by debates on nations and nationalism on a global scale not to mention the more current debates on social and cultural history. The demand of autonomy is also examined through this prism.<sup>20</sup> One of the rare exceptions are the works of Tchavdar Marinov.<sup>21</sup>

In Macedonian historiography which started right after WWII, the history of IMARO is examined through the assumption of the existence of a Macedonian nation already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. IMARO is viewed as the legitimate representative of the Macedonians which fought against the irredentist aspirations of neighboring states. The political differences between the rival factions within the movement are seen as national antagonisms. Thus, in this formulation the Sofia-based Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee was a tool of the Bulgarian propaganda advocating the annexation of Macedonia and Thrace by Bulgaria.

<sup>19</sup> Svetlozar Eldarov, „*Varhovniyat makedono-odriniski komitet i makedono-odrinската organizatsiya v Balgariya* [The Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee and the Macedonian-Adrianople Organization in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Ivray, 2003); Idem. *Taynite ofitizerski bratsva v osvoboditelnite borbi na Makedoniya i Odrinsko (1897-1912)* [The Secret Officers' Fraternities in the Liberation Struggles of Macedonia and Adrianople Region, 1897-1912] (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Konstantin Pandev, „Politicheski iskaniya na balgarskoto natsionalnoosvoboditelno dvizhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinsko, 1878-1912” [Political Demands of the Bulgarian National-Liberation Movement in Macedonia and Adrianople region], *Istoricheski pregled* (6) 1980, 21-48; Kostadin Paleshutski, „Genezis i razvitie na ideyata za avtonomiya na Makedoniya” [Genesis and Development of the Idea for Autonomy of Macedonia] in *Aspekti na etnokulturnata situatsiya v Balgariya i na Balkanite* [Aspects of the Ethno-Cultural Situation in Bulgarian and the Balkans]. (Sofia: BAN, 1982); Dimitar Gotzev, *Ideyata za avtonomiya kato taktika v programite na natsionalnoosvoboditelnото dvizhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinsko (1893-1941)* [The Idea of Autonomy As Tactics in the Programs of the National-Liberation Movement in Macedonia and Adrianople Region, 1893-1941], (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Tchavdar Marinov, „Za lazhitte na makedonizma i mitovete mitovete na balgarshtinata v Makedonia” [About the Macedonism Lies and the Myths about the Bulgarianship in Macedonia]. *Kritika i humanizam* (12) 2001, 55-88; Idem., „Istoriografiyata i obuchenieto po istoriya mezhdu pretentziyata za nauchnost i natsionalniya romantizam” [Historiography and the Teaching of History: Between Scientific Pretensions and National Romanticism], *Sotsiologicheski problemi*: (1-2) 2002, 331-339; Idem., „Anticomunist, But Macedonian: Politics Of Memory In PostYugoslav Macedonia,” *Currents of History (Tokovi istorije)* (1-2) 2009, 65-83; Idem., „“We the Macedonians”: The Paths of Macedonian Supra-Nationalism (1878-1912)” in *We, the People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), 107-139.

IMARO on the contrary fought for the establishment of a Macedonian nation state<sup>22</sup> and the demand for political autonomy within the Ottoman Empire is viewed as such.<sup>23</sup>

The independence of Macedonia marked a new period in the development of Macedonian historiography and initiated a rethinking of some of the earlier established theses. Interpretations of Macedonian historians slightly changed and some of them even recognized the Bulgarian character of IMARO. Ivan Katardzhiev for example called for a more nuanced approach that would distinguish between the national separatism of Krste Misirkov and Dimitrija Chupovski<sup>24</sup> on the one hand, and the IMARO's political separatism on the other.<sup>25</sup> However, in modern Macedonian historiography the tendency to downplay the predominantly Bulgarian character of IMARO is still strong.<sup>26</sup>

Greek historiography naturally focuses on their own national movement in the contested regions or the "Great Macedonian Struggle" as the period between 1904-1908 is usually known.<sup>27</sup> IMARO is considered an agent serving the interest of Sofia and oppressing the local Greek population. Analyzing the establishment of the Organization and its goals

<sup>22</sup> Slavko Dimevski, *Makedonskoto nacionalno osvoboditelno dvizhenie i Egzarhiyata (1893-1912)* [The Macedonian National Liberation Movement and the Exarchate] (Skopje: Kultura), 1963; Manol Pandevski, *Natzionalnoto prashane vo makedonskoto osloboditelno dvizhenie, 1893-1903* [The National Question in the Macedonian Liberation Movement, 1893 – 1903] (Skopje: Kultura, 1974); Krste Bitovski, *Makedonija i knezhestvo Bugarija, 1893-1903* [Macedonia and the Principality of Bulgaria] (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Aleksandar Hristov, "Printzipite na avonomna Makedoniya vo programata na Vnatreshnata makedonska revolutzionerna organizatziya" [The Principles of Autonomous Macedonia in the Program of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization], *Glasnik na INI*, Skopje, (2) 1962, 5-31; Manol Pandevski, *Natzionalnoto prashane vo makedonskoto osloboditelno dvizhenie, 1893-1903* [The National Question in the Macedonian Liberation Movement, 1893 – 1903] (Skopje: Kultura, 1974); Idem., *Vnatreshnata makedonska revolutzionerna organizatziya i neovrhovizmot, 1904-1908* [The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and Neo-supremism] (Skopje, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Early advocates of the view that Macedonian Slavs are neither Bulgarians nor Serbs, but a separate Macedonian nationality. Misirkov's most important work was *Za Makedontzkiye Raboti* (On Macedonian Matters) published in 1903 in which he advocated the creation of a standard Macedonian language. However, Misirkov is a highly controversial figure. During his life he several times switched opinions from Macedonian to Bulgarian nationalism. K.P. Misirkov, *Dnevnik 5.VII – 30.VIII 1913 g.* [Diary] (Sofia-Skopje: Darzhaven arhiv na RM, Darzhavna agentziya „Arhivi" RB, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Ivan Katardzhiev. *Sto godini ot formiranjeto na VMRO – sto godini revolutzionerna traditziya* [One Hundred Years From the Formation of IMRO – One Hundred Years Revolutionary Tradition] (Skopje: Kultura, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> See for example Blazhe Ristovski. *Istoriya na makedonskata nacija* [History of the Macedonian Nation], (Skopje: MANU, 1999), Ibid., *Soznajbi za jazikot, literaturata i nacija* [Evidence of Language, Literature and Nation] (Skopje: MANU, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897-1913* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966).



Evangelos Kofos argues that autonomy was chosen by the more moderate Bulgarian nationalists in opposition to the more extreme ones as the better method for the future annexation of the region by Bulgaria.<sup>28</sup>

Serbian authors emphasize the “artificial nature” of the movement which is seen as nothing more than an agent of Sofia that expanded Bulgarian influence through brutal terror.<sup>29</sup> Examining the Serbian foreign policy in a comparative perspective Slavenko Terzic argued that the Serbian claims to Macedonia were caused by mainly economic and geostrategic interests. According to him the demand for autonomy was coined to call for the intervention of the Great Powers and once autonomy was attained it would imminently lead to a Bulgarian annexation.<sup>30</sup>

In regard to the existing literature in English, authors have written about this topic throughout the past century.<sup>31</sup> In a popular and much cited book the British journalist Henry Brailsford who led a relief mission in Macedonia after the uprising summarized his impressions of an eye-witness as early as 1905.<sup>32</sup> Albert Sonnichsen’s memoirs in which he described his experience as a member in an IMARO armed band are also of particular interest and offer a rare view from below.<sup>33</sup> A complete analysis of the origins of the Macedonian question, the interests of all the actors involved, and statistic material is to be found in the

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<sup>28</sup> Evangelos Kofos, *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1964), 25.

<sup>29</sup> M. Vojvodic M. *Srbija u medunarodnim odnosima krajem XIX i pocetkom XX veka* [Serbia in the International Relations in the End of XIX and the Beginning of XX Century] (Belgrade: SANU, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> Slavenko Terciz, *Srbija i Grcka (1856 – 1903): Borba za Balkan* [Serbia and Greece, 1856-1903, The Struggle for the Balkans], (Belgrade: Istorijski institut SANU, 1992); Ibid., “The Serbs and the Macedonian Question” in *The Serbian Question in the Balkans* (Belgrade: Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> I will not discuss Fikret Adanir’s classical study of the Macedonian Question here because, to my knowledge, it has never been translated from German into English and does not fit into this category. However, the thesis heavily draws on this and Adanir’s other works, so they will be discussed many times in the text. I used the Bulgarian translation of the book. *Makedonskiyat vapros* [Bulgarian translation of Idem, *Die Makedonische Frage: Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1908*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979] (Sofia: Amicitia, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> H.N. Brailsford, *Macedonia, Its Races and Their Future* (London: Methuen and Co, 1905).

<sup>33</sup> Albert Sonnichsen, *Confessions of a Macedonian Bandit* (New York: Duffield and Company, 1909).

Report of the Carnegie Commission, which investigated the origins and the consequences of the Balkan Wars.<sup>34</sup>

In 1950 the British historian Elisabeth Barker published a book in which she examined the complicated Macedonian controversies through the prism of diplomatic history and the Eastern Question.<sup>35</sup> A year later the British this time geographer H.R. Wilkinson after careful examination of several hundred different maps of Macedonia convincingly showed the political interest standing behind the ethnographic representations of the region.<sup>36</sup> In 1978 and 1988 respectively another British historian Mercia MacDermott dedicated biographies to the two prominent IMARO leaders Gotse Delchev and Yane Sandanski.<sup>37</sup> Duncan Perry concentrated on the terroristic aspect of the IMARO activities arguing that it set the pattern for similar national movements which appeared later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perry offered a touch of sociological approach presenting not only the events but also analyzing the social structure of the leadership and supporters of the movement.<sup>38</sup>

The 1990s saw the reviving of the interest in the history of the Balkans. Along with the old school diplomatic treatment of the subject<sup>39</sup> appeared works which questioned the supposed impermeability of the ethno-linguistic labels established in the region. In this regard Anastasia Krakakasidou's study of the nation building processes in Greek Macedonia was of great importance.<sup>40</sup> Hugh Poulton published a study on Macedonian national identity asking:

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<sup>34</sup> Carnegie Commission. *Report of the International Commission to Inquire the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*. (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1914).

<sup>35</sup> Barker, Elisabeth. *Macedonia, Its Place in Balkan Power Politics*, (London and New York: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1950).

<sup>36</sup> H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia*, (Liverpool: University Press, 1951).

<sup>37</sup> Mercia MacDermott, *Freedom or Death: The Life of Gotse Delchev*, (London and New York: The Journeyman Press, 1978); Idem., Mercia MacDermott, *For Freedom and Perfection: the Life of Yane Sandanski* (London: Journeyman, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893-1903*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Nadine Lange-Akhund. *The Macedonian Question 1893-1908 from Western Sources* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Anastasia Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages into Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

“Who Are the Macedonians?”<sup>41</sup> Loring Danforth analyzed the national claims and counter claims in Macedonia from an anthropological perspective, explaining these as an emanation of a natural struggle for ethnic and national identity that can be found in all parts of the world.<sup>42</sup> The German scholars Stefan Troebst and Ulf Brunnbauer<sup>43</sup> studied the recent development of Macedonian historiography in connection with the nation building processes and Victor Roudometof edited several collections of articles that offered an inter-disciplinary approach to the topic.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Ipek Yosmaoglu examined the transition of Christian peasants of Macedonia into nationhood at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and convincingly argued that the communal conflict commemorated as a “nationalist liberation struggle” by all parties involved was more of a historical contingency rather than being set firmly on presumably impermeable dividing lines like language or religion.<sup>45</sup>

In sum, the literature dedicated to the problem is extensive, diverse and controversial. Most of the Balkan national historiographies have been influenced significantly by the political interests of their countries and have been mostly preoccupied in “proving” why Macedonia should belong to them. However, the recent development of the way the subject is treated shows new and fresh tendencies which fundamentally changed the theoretical base, the political parameters and the intellectual atmosphere of the studies and helped for a better understanding of the complex history of a contested region.

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<sup>41</sup> Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?* (London: Hurst and Company, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> Loring Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> Stefan Troebst, “‘Metarazkazite’ i politicheskite interferentzii v istoricheskata nauka na Republika Makedoniya predi i sled 1991 g.” [Political Interference in History and Historical Meistererzählungen in Macedonia before and after 1991], *Istorichesko badeshte* (12) 2002, 20-36; Ulf Brunnbauer, “Serving the Nation: Historiography in the Republic of Macedonia” in *Historiein* (4) 2003-4, 161-182; Idem. “Historiography, Myths and the Nation in the Republic of Macedonia” in *(Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, (Muenster: Lit-Verlag), 2004, 165-200; Idem. “Pro-Serbians against Pro-Bulgarians: Revisionism in Post-Socialist Macedonian Historiography,” *History Compass* (3) 2005, 1-17.

<sup>44</sup> Victor Roudometof, ed. *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics* (Boulder: East European Monographs), 2000; Idem., *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian Question*, (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Ipek Yosmaoglu-Turner, *The Priest's Robe and the Rebel's Rifle: Communal Conflict and the Construction of National Identity in Ottoman Macedonia 1878-1908* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Princeton University, 2005).

## *II. 2. Theoretical Approaches*

The history of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization can not be properly understood and examined if it is not portrayed in its natural context – the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Balkans, a complicated context woefully ignored by the Balkan national historiography. Indeed, throughout this thesis, I argue that Balkan nationalism is only one element of the general process of nationalization and nation building that took place all over the European continent in the last two hundred years. That is why it is necessary before proceeding to what lead to the formation of the Macedonian revolutionary movement in particular to analyze several aspects of the global debate on nationalism in general.

Traditionally nations were seen as everlasting phenomena that existed throughout human history based on common elements like ethnicity, territory, language, religion, etc.<sup>46</sup> They were considered “natural” communities which had the right of their own national state according to the principle of self-determination.

As already mentioned, Balkan historiography too often takes a national consciousness during the Ottoman period for granted. Most of the existing literature discussed here treats it in this way. This outdated “national awakening” paradigm presents nations as existing since Antiquity or at least the Middle Ages and views their history as unilinear and evolutionary. Thus, a multi-national empire like the Ottoman Empire is seen as “unnatural,” alien anachronism in which the Balkan nations stayed in a latent condition for centuries until they rediscovered themselves somewhere in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. Balkan national meta-

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<sup>46</sup> Despite the predominance of this primordialist view of nations it must be noted that even in the nineteenth century other voices could also be heard. In a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882 the French philosopher Ernest Renan analyzed what nation is in a way that is surprisingly similar to our modern concepts. Rejecting any ethno-linguist or biological determinism and emphasizing on the voluntary human choice, he describes the nation as consisting of two main principles: “...One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together...” and describes it as: “a daily plebiscite”. Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, available at: <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what/renan.htm>

narratives uncritically posit that this “rediscovery” initiated processes of first cultural and then political emancipation.

It was in the 1970s when Eugene Weber published his seminal work on the modernization of France<sup>47</sup> that started a new wave of discussions what nations and nationalism are. By stressing the huge role that the state and state institutions like schools and the army played in the process of “turning peasants into Frenchmen,” he initiated a complete rethinking of existing paradigms of nationalism and therefore can be considered a precursor to the modernists.

Modernist theories of nationalism concentrate on the modern nature of nations. The most prominent representative of this school Ernest Gellner clearly states that “nations, like states are a contingency, and not a universal necessity.”<sup>48</sup> Eric Hobsbawm is even more categorical: “nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round.”<sup>49</sup> Modernists view nationalism as a political ideology of the industrial society and emphasize especially the influence of the state upon the identity of its citizens.

In contrast, more recently post-modernist see the nation mostly as a cultural construct, a product of certain “constructors” for given political and ideological purposes. They stress the nation’s “imagined” nature and the unifying myths that create a community because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>50</sup> In opposition to the social and economical overdeterminism of the modernists, post-modernists are much more interested in the cultural dimensions and the multiplicity of conflicting human agencies.

Modernist and postmodernist paradigms, however, have been criticized by thinkers like Anthony Smith who finds them too rigid and offers what he calls an “ethno-symbolist”

<sup>47</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977).

<sup>48</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 6.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities* (revised edition), (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 5.

approach. He emphasizes the existence of ethnic groups in the pre-modern times and stresses the importance of the “ethnic heritage” for the creation of nations in modernity. Nation building was not entirely constructed but was a complex interaction between different “agents” since “their [the nationalist constructors’] interpretations must be consonant not only with the ideological demands of nationalism but also with the scientific evidence, popular resonance and patterning of different ethnohistories.”<sup>51</sup>

In fact, Smith’s approach stands close to the modernist and post-modernist understandings, and I view it as a variation of the former that treats the subject in a more nuanced manner. It is clear from this discussion that the formation of nations is a relatively new process which took place only in the last two hundred years, and the nation is a modern construct. It is exactly on these grounds that I consider general theories on nationalism inapplicable for Macedonia before the advent of the nation states there in 1912. It is important in the Macedonian case not to analyze the processes of nationalization as entirely dependent on the state. The state was not the omnipotent entity behind all human agency in that period.

In this regard Miroslav’s Hroch treatment of nation building provides some help.<sup>52</sup> He examines the phenomenon of nationalism as a movement which underwent a prolonged and complex transition before turning into a nation. Hroch distinguishes three phases in the development of the national movement. In the initial period, or “Phase A,” the national movement is still not numerous and consists mainly of people “devoted to scholarly enquiry into and dissemination of an awareness of the linguistic, cultural, social and sometimes historical attributes of the non-dominant group.” In the next period, or “Phase B” “a new range of activists emerged, who now sought to win over as many of their ethnic group as possible to the project of creating a future nation.” If and when this period of patriotic

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, Anthony D. “Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations.” *Nations and Nationalism*, (1) 1994, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe,” *New Left Review* 1 (98), 1993, 3-20, available at: <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=1702>

agitation succeeds the intellectual and elite movement could be transformed into a mass popular movement. According to Hroch, in “Phase C” the movement is very likely to be split into “conservative-clerical, liberal and democratic wings, each with their own programmes.”<sup>53</sup>

Hroch’s approach is, indeed, valuable, but at the same time, his classification is too general and practically can be applied to all national movements without analyzing them in depth. Besides, in Macedonia there were at least several national movements in very different phases of their development. They actively interacted and influenced each other making it hardly possible to draw clear boundaries between phases.<sup>54</sup>

In a short but insightful article on the rise of nationality in the Balkans Feroze Yasamee analyzes the general patterns that are usually offered as a model of explanation and convincingly argues none of them are sufficient. According to him it was a process that did not simply encompassed “the progressive dissolution of larger religious identities (Orthodox, Moslem) into smaller linguistic ‘national’ units.” Neither was it as simple as the “progressive absorption of smaller, local identities into the larger linguistic nation.” Choosing one approach to national identity at the expense of all others would be an oversimplification:

In sum, in the modern Balkans, as elsewhere, group identities are comprised of an amalgam of allegiances, and the emergence of national identities in their modern form is best understood not as a process of displacement, creation or rebirth, but as a process of reconstruction and reinterpretation, in which old and new allegiances combined and were partially redefined. This process was not of necessity definitive: there remained the possibility of further change, particularly under the pressure of compelling events.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Fikret Adanir is skeptical how useful this three-phase periodization is in the case of Macedonia. See Fikret Adanir, “The Macedonians in the Ottoman Empire, 1878-1912”, in: *The Formation of National Elites*, ed. A. Kappeler et al. (Aldershot, Hants: Dartmouth / New York: New York University Press, 1992), 161-91.

<sup>55</sup> F. A. K. Yasamee, “Nationality in the Balkans: the Case of Macedonians,” in *Balkans: A Mirror of the New World Order*, (Istanbul: EREN, 1995), 121-133, available at: <http://www.promacedonia.org/en/other/yasamee.html>

Instead of choosing a single pattern that will cover all the diverse cases which, in my opinion is practically impossible, I think it is better to start from the beginning, namely 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Macedonia. On the three most well-known ethnographic maps of the Balkan Peninsula before 1878 – the maps of Amie Boue (1847) Gustave Lejean (1861) and Heinrich Kiepert (1876), Macedonia was portrayed as territory populated mostly by Bulgarians. It was one of the reasons why Count Ignatiev, the Russian ambassador to the Sublime Porte, demanded from the delegates to the International Conference gathered in 1876, all regions marked on Kiepert's map as "Bulgarian" to be included in the planed autonomous Bulgaria. It was largely on the basis of this map that the borders of San Stefano Bulgaria were drawn.<sup>56</sup>

This fact is important not because it corresponded to the national feelings of the population, if there were such, but rather because it played an important role in the way future IMARO leaders viewed the ethno-confessional situation in Macedonia. They thought of language as the most decisive criterion for the defining of belonging to a national community. Thus, they became typical representatives of this concept of a nation which was the basis for the unification of Italy and Germany in 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup>

The different statistics produced by the conflicting parties after 1878 in order to legitimize their territorial claims on Macedonia will not be considered here.<sup>58</sup> However, what seems clear is that strictly in linguistic terms the Slavs were a majority or at least plurality and were followed by Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Vlachs, Jews, and Gypsies.<sup>59</sup>

Apart from sheer numbers it is the national consciousness of these Slavs that constitutes the most complicated point of contention, and it is here where the ethnographic

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<sup>56</sup> Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> As Fikret Adanir points out, the priority of the linguistic criterion borrowed from European ethnographers for the "scientific" justification of the Bulgarian claims to Macedonia is beyond any doubt. Ibid., 16.

<sup>58</sup> For a general summary and comment of the conflicting perspectives see: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Carnegie Endowment: Washington DC), 1914, 21-31.

<sup>59</sup> According to Fikret Adanir the Slavs were the biggest ethnic group constituting between 40 and 50% of the population. Adanir, *Makedonskiyat*, 18. Elisabeth Barker defines them as a "bare majority." Elisabeth Barker, "The Origin of the Macedonian dispute" in James Petifier ed., *The New Macedonian Question*, 5.



method which finds national features in linguistic groups did not correspond to Ottoman realities, namely the system of *millets*. As understood by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman administrators the term referred to “church affiliation, which was not as broad as religious identity, and by no means as narrow as ethnic.”<sup>60</sup> For example, for the Bulgarian-Muslims or *Pomaks* language did not matter at all as identity marker. They identified themselves either as Muslims or as Ottomans but definitely not as members of the Bulgarian national community. In the course of the armed struggle between the communities in Macedonian and Thrace they were considered enemies by IMARO and vice versa.<sup>61</sup>

In regard to the Orthodox Christian communities, their unity was broken with the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870 based primarily on ethno-linguistic grounds. Henceforth, religion was seen more and more in secular terms. According to Kemal Karpat, with the choice Orthodox communities made between the Exarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate they in effect made a political declaration of Bulgarian or Greek nationality. In fact, the situation was not at all that clear but was characterized with much confusion in national and religious affiliation.<sup>62</sup> These complex processes continued until 1912 when the Balkan nation states partitioned the Ottoman European territories and initiated long-term policies of national homogenization.

Notwithstanding all ambiguities and the transformation of the *millet* system, prior to 1912 the different communities in the Empire based their political loyalties, albeit transient loyalties, on their respective *millet*. The data provided below should be treated extremely carefully and not taken in absolute terms, but perhaps it still offers a more fruitful orientation

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<sup>60</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's*, 119.

<sup>61</sup> Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Karpat describes it the following way: “Some Bulgarian-speaking groups remained with the Patriarchate in Istanbul and were regarded as ‘Bulgarian-speaking Greeks,’ while a few Greek-speaking groups chose the Exarchate and became ‘Greek-speaking Bulgarians.’ The Romanian-speaking Vlachs largely remained with the Patriarchate and were in good part Hellenized. Those choosing the Exarchate were Bulgarized.” Kemal Karpat. *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 49 -50.

than the nationalistic accounts.<sup>63</sup> According to the 1904 Ottoman census, the population in Macedonia was distributed as follows: Muslims 1,508,507; Exzarchists: 896 497; Patriarchists: 307,000; Serbs: 100 717; Vlachs: 99,000.<sup>64</sup> In other words, the Muslims loyal to the Sultan were the most numerous part of the population. The importance of this fact for IMARO's prospects of success could hardly be underestimated.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, in the current thesis I will base my argument not on any ethno-linguistic or religious interpretation as a source for communal mobilization in the late Ottoman Empire but on the growing politicization of ethnic and religious differences between communities which prior to 1878 did not seem to constitute a point of contention. The basis of identities was redefined largely due to political circumstances,<sup>66</sup> and that is why I will treat the various national movements mainly as political forces in relation to external factors and one another. It is against this background that I will analyze IMARO's demand for autonomy.

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<sup>63</sup> An excellent analysis how perplexing the process of "taking the nation out of denomination" can be found in Ipek Yosmaoglu's "Counting Bodies, Shaping Souls: The 1903 Census and National Identity in Ottoman Macedonia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, v. 38, (1) 2006, 55-77. The census authorities run into such cases that make any attempt at drawing a "general patten" impossible.

<sup>64</sup> Numbers cited according to Adanir, *Makedonskiyat*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> It must be noted that Ottomans well understood this number game and the process is more complex than the statistics showed. Muslim identity on the ground did not automatically meant "loyalty" to the Porte. This is especially valid about the Albanians who had a long tradition of rebelling against the Sultanate. In this period Albanian leaders also well understood that they were in a dangerous situation vis-à-vis Balkan irredentism and they often switched their loyalty.

<sup>66</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's Robe*, 247.

## **II. Hopes and Disillusionment: the First Ten Years, 1893-1903**

This chapter will present the different factors that led to the emergence of the “Macedonian Question” as such and had tremendous impact on the subsequent course of events. I will trace back the origins of the demand for autonomy among the Macedonian emigrants in the Bulgarian Principality who were the first to push for political attention regarding their native homes. I will analyze how they viewed autonomy and argue that when the Internal Organization was founded in 1893 it adopted a model established by emigrant organizations. I will follow the subsequent evolution of the idea where it came to acquire different meanings for different factions within the Macedonian-Adrianople movement. I will argue that this caused contradictions in the behavior of the Organization and led to an inconsistent policy during the *Ilinden* uprising of 1903. I will analyze the IMARO demands during the uprising, how it tried to appeal to the local population and the external political factors and provide an answer regarding why I believe that IMARO ultimately failed to achieve its goals.

### ***II.1. General Background***

As I argued in the previous chapter the Macedonian Question should not be seen in terms of “ancient hatreds” or “national awakening.” It was a combined result of Ottoman policies versus foreign intervention in the Ottoman domestic affairs, the competing nationalism projects of the neighboring states, and the growing politicization of communal differences. But if the Macedonian Question is a modern phenomenon it also holds true concerning the term Macedonia itself. The territory described as Macedonia varied in different times. The Ancient Macedonia did not include the same territories as the Medieval Byzantine province, and there was never an administrative unit within the Ottoman Empire to named Macedonia. In this period, the European territories of the Empire were divided into the

following provinces or *vilayets*: Edirne (Adrianople, Odrin), Selanik (Salonika, Thessaloniki), Monastir (Bitola), Yanina (Ioannina), Skutari (Shkoder) and Kosovo.<sup>67</sup>

It was actually the classically educated nineteenth-century European travelers who should be merited with the reinvention of the ancient term “Macedonia.”<sup>68</sup> Although the exact boundaries of which territories precisely comprised Macedonia remained disputed, it was generally accepted to be defined by the territory between the Shar and Rila Mountains in the north; the Rhodope Mountains in the east; the Aegean coast and the Pindus Mountains in the south; and the lakes of Prespa and Ohrid in the west.<sup>69</sup> This corresponded roughly to the Ottoman *vilayets* of Salonika and Monastir, as well as the *sancak* of Uskub (Skopje) in the *vilayet* of Kosovo.<sup>70</sup> In regards to the Adrianople region or Adrianople Thrace it corresponded to the *vilayet* of Edirne according to the Ottoman administrative division.<sup>71</sup>

The first factor that led to the emergence of the Macedonian Question as such was the creation of a Bulgarian church separate from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. On 28 February 1870 following decades of Bulgarian efforts, the Sultan issued a decree or *ferman* for the creation of an autocephalous Bulgarian Exarchate. Thus, the Bulgarians acquired the status of a *millet* inside the Ottoman Empire, and what is more important, for the first time a *millet* was based on almost entirely ethno-linguistic grounds.

The conflict between the two churches did not concern differences of dogma which almost did not exist but concerned the territorial scope of the Exarchate. The Patriarchate was willing to recognize the church if it were strictly limited north to the Balkan range. The Bulgarians, however, opposed any territorial restrictions. The *ferman* attempted to evade the

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<sup>67</sup> Adanir, *Makedosnkiyat*, 13

<sup>68</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priests's Robe*, 59-60.

<sup>69</sup> Fikret Adanir. „Socio-political Environment of Balkan Nationalism: the Case of Ottoman Macedonia, 1856-1912“, in *Regional and National Identities in Europe in the XIXth and XXth Centuries*, Hans-Georg Haupt (ed.) (The Hague-London-Boston: Kluwer Law International, 1998), 241.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 240-241.

<sup>71</sup> Dimitar Sazdov, “Politichesko, sotzialno-ikonomichesko, demografsko i narodnostno polozhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinska Trakiya v kraya na XIX i nachaloto na XX vek” [Political, Socio-economical, Demographic and National Situation in Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace at the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century] in *Natzionalnoosvobotilenoto*, vol.2, 9.

question, and all the territories granted, with the exception of Veles (Koprulu), were north of the Balkans. At the same time, however, article 10 provided that:

If all, or at least two thirds of the Orthodox Christian population in other places, besides those enumerated above, are willing to accept the supremacy of the Bulgarian Exarchate in religious matters and, if this is duly proved, they will be allowed to do so, but this shall happen only by the will and with agreement of all or, at least, two thirds of the population.<sup>72</sup>

This was to become a source of bitter conflicts in the future with the growing nationalization of church adherence. The Exarchate was not the first church that sought independence from the Patriarchate. For example, the Church of Greece, which was established in 1833, had not been recognized by the Patriarchate in Istanbul until 1850. The difference in the Exarchate's creation was that church independence had preceded political autonomy from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the Bulgarians had an official Bulgarian institution within the Ottoman administrative system.

After the Patriarchate declared the Exarchate to be schismatic, the Bulgarians proceeded to the provisioned plebiscites. The first two were held in 1872 in Skopje and Ohrid. Not only was the necessary majority of two-thirds achieved, but even nine-tenths of the Orthodox population of the Skopje eparchy sided with the Bulgarian Exarchate. In Ohrid the victory of the Bulgarian party was even greater.<sup>74</sup>

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was the most important factor for the emergence of the Macedonian Question and was, in fact, the most decisive event that shaped Balkan history until 1912. The war ended with a Russian victory with the preliminary Treaty

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<sup>72</sup> Document №110 "The Firman for the establishment of a Bulgarian Exarchate in Macedonia" in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*. Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, Bulgarian Language Institute, 1978, available at: <http://www.promacedonia.org/en/ban/index.html>

<sup>73</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's*, 153.

<sup>74</sup> Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 82. Although after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 the Exarchate lost all its eparchies in the Empire, surprisingly it managed to keep its seat in Istanbul. What is more, in the 1890s in coordinated actions with the Bulgarian government it managed to obtain new metropolitan seats from the Sublime Porte for the following eparchies: Skopje and Ohrid in 1890, Nevrekop and Veles in 1894 and Monastir, Debar and Strumitza (Usturumca).

of San Stefano which was signed in February 1878. The Treaty created a Greater Bulgaria which covered much of Thrace and most of Macedonia.

The Great Powers, notably England, however, were not satisfied with Russian influence advancing to the Mediterranean, and revised the treaty at the Congress of Berlin in July 1878.

The territory north of the Balkan range and the *sancak* of Sofia constituted the newly established autonomous Principality of Bulgaria. The territory south of the Balkan to the Rhodope Mountains was separated in the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia, which was controlled by a Christian governor appointed by the Porte. South Thrace and Macedonia were returned under the direct authority of the Sultan. Moreover, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania acquired independence.<sup>75</sup>

The San Stefano treaty provoked concerns not only among the Ottomans and European Powers. The other Balkan states were also displeased with the provisioned Great Bulgaria, since it covered territories to which they also believed they had legitimate claims. The Albanians, still stateless, were also concerned that both the San Stefano and Berlin treaties gave territories populated by Albanians to other states.

The Russo-Turkish War was also a catalyst of huge waves of migration and demographic changes. Between 1877 and 1879, approximately a million Muslims were driven from the Principality and Eastern Rumelia. Some of them returned, but more than 500,000 became permanent refugees mainly in Macedonia and Thrace.<sup>76</sup> The Austro-Hungarian “condominium” of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided another source of refugees.<sup>77</sup> These

<sup>75</sup> Lange-Akhung, *The Macedonian*, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Approximately 260,000 Bulgarian Muslims were killed or died of disease, starvation or cold. Justin McCarthy. *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*. (Princeton: The Darwin Press Inc., 1999), 90-91.

<sup>77</sup> According to the Treaty of Berlin Austria-Hungary was granted the province for a period of 30 years. In fact, it was never given back.

refugees were settled in the contested regions and borderlands which played an instrumental role for the way communities within the Empire negotiated power and authority.

The impact of geography for the development of Macedonia as the principal point of contention in this period could be hardly underestimated. With the creation of Bulgarian Principality and Eastern Rumelia, and their subsequent unification in 1885, when Serbia acquired the territory around Nis, Pirot, and Vranja according to the Berlin Treaty and when in 1881 Greece took Thessaly, all the small Balkans states had a border with Macedonia. Ottoman Macedonia was henceforth transformed into a border region where the interests of the Ottoman Empire, European diplomacy, the Balkan states, and the local national movements intersected. This borderland character of the region can to a large extent explain why the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization chose autonomy as its goal.

## ***II.2. Why Autonomy?***

Autonomy was a wide-spread idea and practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Balkans. Almost all Balkan states, with the exception of Greece, had gone through an autonomous status in one form or another.<sup>78</sup> The autonomous principle was also present in the programs of the Bulgarian revolutionaries in 1860s-1870s.<sup>79</sup> The Constantinople Conference in 1876, which gathered to solve peacefully the “Great Eastern Crisis,” envisaged the creation of two autonomous Bulgarian states – one with its center in Tarnovo, and the other with its center at Sofia, in which Macedonia was included.<sup>80</sup> Autonomous were both San Stefano Bulgaria on

<sup>78</sup> Milcho Lalkov, *Balkanskoto natsionalno osvoboditeleno dvizhenie prez XIX vek* [Balkan National-Liberation Movement during XIX century] (Sofia: 1982), 14-52.

<sup>79</sup> Hristo Hristov, *Osvobozhdenieto na Bulgariya i politikata na zapadnite darzhavi* [The Liberation of Bulgaria and the Policy of the Western States] (Sofia: 1968), 63-79.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 87.

the one hand and the Bulgarian Principality and province of Eastern Rumelia created after the Congress of Berlin, on the other.

It is obvious that autonomy is a vague term which actually has very different meanings covering a whole range of various administrative and political systems. In order to understand the origins and specificities of IMARO's demand in this period one needs to examine it in the local context after the Congress of Berlin. Article 23 of the treaty provided that:

The Sublime Porte undertakes scrupulously to apply in the Island of Crete the Organic Law of 1868 with such modifications as may be considered equitable. Similar laws adapted to local requirements, excepting as regards the exemption from taxation granted to Crete, shall also be introduced into the other parts of Turkey in Europe for which no special organization has been provided by the present treaty. The Sublime Porte shall depute special commissions, in which the native element shall be largely represented, to settle the details of the new laws in each province. The schemes of organization resulting from these labors shall be submitted for examination to the Sublime Porte, which, before promulgating the Acts for putting them into force, shall consult the European Commission instituted for Eastern Roumelia.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, the Organic Law of Crete which was pointed out as a model for the settlement of the other European provinces of the Empire, provided for broader representation of the Christian population in the local administration but did not foresee autonomy.<sup>82</sup> As a whole the content of the article was too general and ambiguous. This allowed for a diverse interpretation of the provisioned reforms by all actors involved in a way that would best suit their interests – from limited administrative reorganizations to complete political self-governance. In this broad diapason were situated the views of the Ottoman authorities, Great Powers, the Balkan states, and the revolutionaries.

<sup>81</sup> Document №177 "Treaty of Berlin – Article 23" in *Documents on the Struggle of the Macedonian People for Independence and a Nation-State*, vol. 1. (Skopje: The University of 'Cyril and Methodius', Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History, Institute for National History, 1985): 239-241.

<sup>82</sup> The Cretan Organic Law provided for "the involvement of Christians at every level of the administrative machinery and in composition of the courts, for the equal use of the Turkish and Greek languages in the administration... and perhaps most importantly of all, for the election of a general assembly with legislative competence at local level." Leonidas Kallivretakis, "A Century of Revolutions: The Cretan Question between European and Near Eastern Politics" in Paschalis M. Kitromilides ed., *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 2006), 21.



The first clear formulation of autonomy as a political demand came from among the Macedonian émigrés in the Principality of Bulgaria. It was the Memoir of the Bulgarian-Macedonian League in Ruse to the European Commission who had gathered in 1880 in Istanbul for the implementation of article 23.<sup>83</sup> At this early stage the movement was peaceful in character and confined to strictly legal methods of action - mainly through protests, petitions, memoranda, etc. Additionally, during this period the idea of San Stefano Bulgaria was very popular and the hope for direct unification of its parts widespread. The two ideas existed simultaneously, not being clearly delineated or opposed to each other.<sup>84</sup>

What is more, it was not until 1885 when Macedonia as well as the Adrianople region came to the forefront of Bulgarian attention which prior to that was mainly preoccupied with Eastern Rumelia since it already enjoyed an autonomous status and the prospects for unification with the Principality were much greater. After the successful unification act Sofia turned its attention to Macedonia and Thrace.<sup>85</sup>

The Eastern Rumelia example was to have a huge influence on the origin and development of the Macedonian revolutionary movement. This act strongly compromised the autonomous idea internationally and caused suspicions among all interested factors as to what an eventual Macedonian autonomy could represent. As a result of these fears, the reluctance to enforce autonomy in Macedonia was increasing. If up to 1885 the Bulgarians hoped that Russia would impose autonomy on the Sublime Porte, after Prince Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg-

<sup>83</sup> Pandev, *Natzionalnoosvoboditelno*, 40.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Unification or annexation, of course, depends on the point of view. According to international law the act was an annexation. However, I prefer the term “unification” to emphasize that the act started on an Eastern Rumelian initiative which took the political leaders in Principality completely by surprise and they simply accepted the *fait accompli*. In the years prior to 1885 the local Bulgarians managed to acquire complete control over the administration and the local armed forces. The most important thing was that the Porte, despite the provisions of the Berlin Treaty, never stationed garrisons in the province. The act itself was a *coup d'état* organized by the Eastern Rumelian militia which overthrew the authority of the Eastern Rumelian general governor who was also ethnic Bulgarian and recognized the Bulgarian prince as a ruler. Elena Stelova, *Iztochna Rumeliya (1878-1885). Ikonika, politika, kultura* [Eastern Rumelia, 1878-1885. Economy, Politics, Culture] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestveniya front, 1983) and Idem. and Andrey Pantev, *Saedinienieto na Knyazhestvo Balgariya i Iztochna Rumeliya 1885 godina* [The Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in 1885] (Sofia: Narodna prosveta, 1985). As will be discussed many occasions below, Eastern Rumelia case was instrumental in shaping the initial views on Macedonian autonomy.

Gotha took the throne in Bulgaria, which was seen as an extension of the Austrian influence in the country, Russia no longer supported this as a practical solution.<sup>86</sup>

The Bulgarians, however, drew completely different conclusions. The ultimate success of the unionist act of 1885 sanctioned autonomy, and it was viewed not only as possible but also as a necessary phase of the process of “national unification.” Macedonian autonomy and then ultimate union with the Principality seemed to the Bulgarians as the two sides of the same problem and were by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>87</sup> In the second half of the 1880s autonomy was gradually accepted in all circles of the Macedonian emigration in the Principality as a goal that is more realistic, easier to achieve and above all as a guarantee of preserving the so much disputed territorial integrity of Macedonia.<sup>88</sup>

### *II.3. Autonomy for Whom?*

In this regard IMARO accepted a well established model. The revolutionary organization was founded on 23 October 1893 in Salonika by six local young men from Macedonia - Damyan Gruev, Hristo Tatarchev, Ivan Hadzhinikolov, Patar Poparsov, Andon Dimitrov, and Hristo Batandzhiev. All were Bulgarian Exarchists, and most of them were school teachers in the Exarchist schools.

The name of the organization that they established still remains unknown. Since no documents of the first meeting were preserved, it has to be reconstructed almost entirely on memoirs. According to Hristo Tatarchev, the name was Macedonian Revolutionary

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<sup>86</sup> Kostadin Paleshutski, “Genezis i razvitie na ideyata za avtonomiya na Makedoniya” [Genesis and Development of the Idea for Autonomy of Macedonia] in *Aspekti na etnokulturnata situatziya v Balgariya i na Balkanite* [Aspects of the Ethno-Cultural Situation in Bulgarian and the Balkans]. Sofia: Center for the Study of democracy, “Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 1992, 169.

<sup>87</sup> *Makedoniya* [Macedonia], №36, 19 August 1889, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Pandev, *Natzionalnoosvoboditelnoto*, 36-66.

Organization run by a Central Macedonian Revolutionary Committee.<sup>89</sup> In contrast, Petar Poparsov called it a “Secret Committee for Acquiring the Political Rights of Macedonia Granted to It by the Berlin Treaty.”<sup>90</sup>

The name being not the most important thing, the founders’ memoirs seem to agree on the following things: first, they insisted on the implementation of article 23; second, at this early stage the idea encompassed only Macedonia; and third, there were two basic opinions in the discussions of the goal – autonomy or direct joining to Bulgaria. In his memoirs Ivan Hadzhinikolov attempted to summarize the basic principles upon which the future IMARO had been founded:

1. The revolutionary organization should be founded in Macedonia and be active there so that the Greeks and Serbians should not consider it as a weapon of the Bulgarian government.
2. Its founders should be local citizens living in Macedonia.
3. The political slogan of the Organization should be autonomy of Macedonia.
4. The Organization should be secret and independent and should not establish contacts with the governments of neighbouring countries.
5. From the Macedonians in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian population it should ask only for moral and material support for the struggle of the Macedonian revolutionaries.<sup>91</sup>

Damyan Gruev in his memoirs twice mentioned that the goal of the first committee was “a demand for the implementation of the Berlin Treaty” and that their motto was “Implementation of the provisions of the Berlin Treaty.”<sup>92</sup> Hristo Tatarchev gave more information about the debates during the meeting:

<sup>89</sup> *Osvobodilenoto dvizhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinsko: Spomeni i Materiali* [The Liberation Movement in Macedonia and Adrianople Region. Memoirs and Materials] vol.1. (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1983), 103.

<sup>90</sup> Petar Poparsov, “Proizhod na revolyutzionnoto dvizhenie v Makedoniya i parvite stapki na Solunskiya komitet za pridobivanie politicheski prava na Makedoniya, dadeni i ot Berlinski dogovor.” [Origins of the Revolutionary Movement in Macedonia and the First Steps of the Salonika Committee for Acquiring the Political Rights of Macedonia Granted to It by the Berlin Treaty] in *Byulletin na Vremennoto predstavitelstvo na obedinenata bivsha VMORO*, № 8, 19 July 1919, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Document № 38 “Ivan Hadjinikolov on the Serbian propaganda in Macedonia which led to the creation of the Revolutionary Organization” in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*.

<sup>92</sup> Document № 101 “Damyan Gruev on the creation of revolutionary organization in Macedonia,” Ibid.

We discussed the aims of this organization at length and later we settled on the autonomy of Macedonia, with the predominance of the Bulgarian element. We could not accept the principle of the ‘direct unification of Macedonia with Bulgaria’ because we could see that this would be opposed by the Great Powers and by the aspirations of the small neighbouring states and Turkey. It came to our minds that an autonomous Macedonia could later be more easily united with Bulgaria, or, if this could not be achieved, it could be the uniting link of a federation of the Balkan peoples. The district of Odrin [Adrianople], as far as I remembered, did not enter into our programme at the beginning, and I think that later we thought of including the area as a part of an autonomous Macedonia.<sup>93</sup>

Actually these early discussions to a large extent reflected the debates among the Bulgarian public at the same time. All of the founders of the Internal Organization were unanimous in that they based their program on what they considered practically possible.<sup>94</sup>

In parallel with the revolutionary movement in Macedonia, the Macedonia emigration to Bulgaria was also proceeding to its formal organization. In March 1895 all existing Macedonian societies united in a Macedonian Organization led by a Macedonian Committee that later came to be known as the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee (SMAC).<sup>95</sup> My aim here is not to discuss the relations between the two organizations, which were mixed during the whole ten-year period of the Committee’s existence but to rather demonstrate that SMAC was not an unequivocal champion of Greater Bulgaria, as it is usually presented.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Document №142 “From the memoirs of Dr. Hristo Tatarchev on the foundation and aims of the Internal Macedonian Adrianople Revolutionary Organization” Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Hristo Silyanov, the first historiographer of the Organization and himself participant in the movement, shares the same opinion. In his own words: “for the Organization the concept of autonomy overlapped with the provisions of article 23 of Berlin Treaty, which if implemented, were considered an absolutely satisfactory acquisition.” Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol. 1., 40.

<sup>95</sup> Like most of the organizations in this period, the name changed very often: in March 1895 it was Macedonian Committee; from December 1895 – Supreme Macedonian Committee; from 1901 – Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee. Svetlozar Eldarov, *Varhovnoyat makedono-odrinski komitet i Makedono-odrinskata organizatziya v Bulgariya* (1895-1903) [The Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee and the Macedonian-Adrianople Organization in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Ivray, 2003).

<sup>96</sup> Even prominent scholars like Mark Mazower misinterpret the differences between the two organizations by stating: “the Bulgarians were weakened by a murderous split in their own ranks between those who fought for a Greater Bulgaria and the members of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), who wanted autonomy for Macedonia.” Mazower, Mark, „Building the Nation-State“ in *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2000), 99. Actually in this period all existing organizations, not only IMARO and SMAC, fought for the autonomy for Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace. What they meant by “autonomy” is of course a much more complicated question that the current thesis analyzes.

Formally, the autonomous principle in the Macedonian revolutionary movement first appeared in the statutes of this organization.

The Supreme Committee saw its goal as “acquiring by the populations in Macedonia and Adrianople region a political autonomy, applied and guaranteed by the Great Powers.” In order to achieve this goal the Committee would exert influence “upon the Bulgarian governments and the public opinion in Bulgaria and Europe” through a variety of methods: press, agitation, meetings, sending of memoranda and delegations to the European governments, negotiations with the other Balkan states for joint action and last through supporting candidates for MPs in the Bulgarian parliament of such persons that would help and act for the achievement of the goal of the Macedonian societies.<sup>97</sup>

With regard to the concrete building blocks of the concept of autonomy as a status and a form of government, these were developed in the project of the Supreme Committee in 1896 on the invitation of the Bulgarian prime-minister Konstantin Stoilov, who at that time was holding negotiations with the Sublime Porte. The project was called “A Note on the Reforms That Are to Be Introduced in Macedonia in Order to Pacify the Agitated Population There.” In the Explanatory Note to the project, the Committee stated that these reforms were based on the proposals of the Constantinople Conference of 1876, the Berlin Treaty and the Bill of Reforms for Turkey drawn up by the Eastern-Roumelian European Commission in 1880. The very word “autonomy” was avoided, and only the more diplomatic “reforms” was used.<sup>98</sup>

The first demand was that: “the present Soloun [Salonika], Bitolya [Monastir] and Skopje [Uskub] *vilayets* should be merged into one *vilayet* with Soloun as its centre.” At the head of the province should be appointed a person “who belongs to the predominant nationality in the *vilayet*”. The SMAC recommended the two former Eastern Rumelian

<sup>97</sup> “Statuti na makedonsite druzhestva” [Statutes of the Macedonian Societies], *Pravo*, №25, 9 May 9 1895, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Document №46 “Circular letter 141 of the Supreme Macedonian Committee to the Macedonian Societies in Bulgaria setting out the history of the plan for reforms” in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*. Names below are cited as in the official translation of the document.

governors Aleko Bogoridi and Gavril Krustevich because, according to SMAC, this “would best suit and satisfy the Christian population in the *vilayet*.”<sup>99</sup>

The newly created *vilayet* was to be governed by an assembly, “which should be elected from among the population strictly observing the rights of the minority groups.” The administration was to be built upon ethnic lines, and all officials, gendarmes and officers “should belong to the nationality which is in the majority in the region in which they are appointed.” The official language, along with Turkish, should be “the language of the nationalities constituting the majorities in the *vilayet*” and “the educational matters of the Christian nationalities should be left in charge of the respective school organizations.”<sup>100</sup>

The project also demanded that “similar reforms should be introduced into the *vilayet* of Odrin [Adrianople].” This project was narrowly national in character, and it was obvious that these demands expressed the interests of the Bulgarians. Without a doubt the example of Eastern Rumelia heavily influenced this program. It is rather doubtful how wise it was to remind the Sublime Porte about the Eastern Rumelian case so openly. After all, it was only ten years after the Ottomans lost the province.

SMAC project is important not only because it was the first but also because it demonstrates how IMARO viewed autonomy at that time. When the leaders of the Internal Organization met in Salonika in the spring of 1896, they accepted this project without discussion. Gyorche Petrov remembers: “the principle of autonomy has already been pointed out in Sofia, and we did not discuss this question at all.”<sup>101</sup>

In fact, the Salonika Congress can be seen in many ways as the founding congress of the Organization. It adopted the name Bulgarian Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> And also adds: “This political formulation – goal, was approved by the political world in Bulgaria and silently it became the final goal of the Internal Organization too, even though until today none of us has dwelled on this issue.” Gyortche Petrov, “Makedonsko osvoboditelno delo “[Macedonian Liberation Cause], *Makedonski pregled*, №3 25 June 1905, 39.

Committees. The goal was defined as “full political autonomy for Macedonia and the Odrin district [Adrianople region].” Membership was provided to “any Bulgarian, irrespective of sex.”<sup>102</sup>

The structure was hierarchical and centralistic. The leading body was the Central Committee seated in Salonika. The territory had been divided into regions which formed regional committees and in turn governed the district committees reflecting the Ottoman administrative division. During this period the structure had not been clarified but later included six regions, namely: Salonika, Monastir, Skopje, Serres, Strumitza, and Adrianople.<sup>103</sup> The Organization clearly saw the achievement of its goal through propaganda which later would lead to an open revolt against the authorities stating that it “must arouse a feeling for self-defense among the Bulgarian population of the areas mentioned in Article 1, to disseminate revolutionary ideas among it through the press or by word of mouth, and to prepare for and raise a general uprising.”<sup>104</sup>

The Cretan Crisis of 1897 and the subsequent war between the Ottoman Empire and Greece were another important factor for the course of events in Macedonia. There is a direct connection between the two since in both cases Christian groups’ desired to secede from the Empire and the events in Crete, indeed, were monitored closely by IMARO. They wanted to evaluate how successful eventual rebellion could be. In this direction the result was rather encouraging. Although in military terms the Ottomans defeated both the rebels and the Greek troops which supported them, finally Cretans were given by the Great Powers what they

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<sup>102</sup> Document №41 “The Statute of the Bulgarian Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committees” in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*.

<sup>103</sup> On this congress seven regions were established: Salonika, Monastir, Skopje, Strumitza-Dzhumaya, Veles-Tikvesh, and Adrianople. Sveltozar Eldarov, “Razrastvane na natsionalnoosvoboditelno dvizhenie, 1896-1899” [Development of the National-Liberation Movement, 1896-1899] in *Natsionalnoosvoboditelno*, vol2., 111-112. However, the practice in the next years imposed the above mention six-region structure as more effective. Another institution that was found was the so called Foreign Representation or Representation Abroad. This was a two-three-member institution set in Sofia in order to keep contacts with the Bulgarian government and the foreign diplomatic agents. It was almost as important as the Central Committee.

<sup>104</sup> The Statute of the Bulgarian...

wanted – autonomy.<sup>105</sup> The revolutionary organization drew its own lesson from the crisis. All they needed to do was just raise the population and this would be enough to cause European intervention which could secure autonomy for Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace.

#### *II.4. The Evolution and Failure of an Idea*

The first practical steps towards building a network of committees dates back to 1894 but the Organization's expansion took on a more intensive course after the Salonika Congress. Gradually IMARO lost its urban intellectual character to become a large movement with committees in almost every village. This change in social structure had huge repercussions on the ideology of the Organization. The diverse picture of the Macedonian-Adrianople populations which were a mix of various ethnic and religious groups made the leaders attempt to appeal to them as well. Some of IMARO leaders understood that they could transform the Organization from a narrowly Bulgarian one into a wider movement of all nationalities in the Empire.

This change in policy was assisted by the fact that many social democrats, anarchists, and leftists in general joined the movement and for whom national or religious differences did not matter very much. It was actually under the direct influence of the socialist thought in the Principality that some of the revolutionary activists started to view their final goals in a novel way.

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<sup>105</sup> The similarities between the two movements are intriguing and the Cretan case illustrates well the ambiguities and inconsistent character of autonomism in this period. For example, after Greece was defeated by the Ottoman Empire in 1897, the so called "autonomists" in the Cretan revolutionary movement had a sharp conflict with the unionists led by Eleftherios Venizelos who was accused of being "an agent of the Greek consulate." Several years later Venizelos had to reject the accusations of political separatism because he opposed the immediate union between Crete and Greece and stood his ground for widening of the Cretan autonomy as a more realistic policy for the moment. A. Lilly Macrakis, "Venizelos' Early Life and Political Career in Crete" in Kitromilides, *Eleftherios*, 58-76.



The main bearers of the new ideas were the socialists organized in the Macedonian Revolutionary Socialist Group headed by Vasil Glavinov as well as some other groups close to it.<sup>106</sup> As early as 1895 in the newspaper *Revoltyuziya* (Revolution) published in Sofia, the Macedonian socialists declared that they intended to bring new elements to the movement and to find new ways and methods of struggle. They insisted on the independence of the movement and that it should not rely on any foreign help. Autonomy, according to them, should aim to create a democratic republican political system.<sup>107</sup> Later in 1898 the Macedonian revolutionary socialists published their own program according to which they saw their final goal as “full political and economical liberation of the peoples, which inhabit Macedonia and Adrianople region.” With regard to the autonomy they gave it a wider interpretation: “All nationalities in Macedonia to be allowed to organize small cantons, in which according to the majority of the population to arrange their social affairs.”<sup>108</sup>

Ideologically similar to the revolutionary socialists were the members of the so called Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee (MSRC) and Macedonian Revolutionary Committee Union (MRCU). The Committee condemned the existing national antagonism among the nationalities and declared that it will strive to unite all for a common struggle against the Sultan’s authority. And after this was achieved the nationalities would be given the opportunity to choose whether they wanted to join any of the existing states or to organize the land as a separate polity. The committee was willing to accept within its ranks the peaceful “Turkish” population if it expressed the desire to struggle for the abolishment of the Sultan’s absolutism.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Dobrin Michev, “BRSDP i natsionalniya vapros (1891-1918) [Bulgarian Workers’ Social Democratic Party and the National Question, 1891-1918] in *Izsledvaniya po makedonskiya vapros* [Studies on the Macedonian Question] (Sofia: MNI, 1993), 80-151.

<sup>107</sup> Konstantin Pandev “Politicheski iskaniya na balgarskoto natsionalnoozvoboditelno dvizhenie v Makedoniya i Odrinsko, 1878-1912” [Political Demands of the Bulgarian National-Liberation Movement in Macedonia and Adrianople region] in *Istoricheski pregled* (6) 1980, 21-48.i, 28-29.

<sup>108</sup> *Politicheska svoboda*, №1, 6 February 1898, 3.

<sup>109</sup> Pandev, *Politicheski*. 29

The MRCU activists further developed these views. According to them, in order to overcome the suspicions of the other nationalities which they had towards Bulgarians, as well as to avoid the danger of partitioning Macedonia and the Adrianople region between the neighboring states, the revolutionary struggle should be conducted entirely on an international level. They strongly opposed the SMAC's 1896 reform project as nationalistic and instead insisted that "from the *vilayets* of Salonika, Bitola, Skopje, and Adrianople to be formed one federative republic, absolutely independent from Turkey." They also stipulated that the population should be grouped, as in Switzerland, according to nationality in separate districts or cantons, which should have absolute freedom in all local matters. The official language in the canton will be the language of the majority and on federal level – three from the most widely spoken languages. A member of MRCU could be "any person regardless of sex, religion and nationality, who agrees with the principles of the Union and desires to work for their victory."<sup>110</sup>

As already mentioned, the ideas of the Macedonian socialists in Bulgaria without a doubt influenced the development of IMARO's ideology. At the same time, not all of IMARO activists shared the leftists' views, and many stuck to their previous understandings. This evolution, however, led to the changes in the Statute and the Regulations from 1902. The Bulgarian character was no longer emphasized, and the Organization took the name "Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization." The goal this time was much broader: "uniting in a whole all the discontented elements in Macedonia and the Adrianople region, regardless of nationality, to win, through a revolution, a full political autonomy for these two regions." A member of SMARO could be "any Macedonian or Adrianopolitan." Nationalism of whatever kind was categorically condemned, and the Organization struggled to: "obliterate the chauvinist propagandas and nationalist quarrels that are splitting and enervating the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 30.

Macedonian and Adrianople population in its struggle against the common enemy.” Uprising was again the main vehicle of the revolution and the way to autonomy, but this time it was even further elaborated that the Organization not only “acts to introduce revolutionary spirit and consciousness among the population” but also “uses all the means and efforts for the forthcoming and timely armament of the population with all that is needed for a general and overall uprising.”<sup>111</sup>

In this period the idea of autonomy started to live a life of its own. It was becoming increasingly popular among the Bulgarian public, being accepted by almost all groups by no means limited only to the socialists. The Supreme Committee in this period also seemed to have broadened up their understanding of autonomy. Now they too insisted that autonomy excluded unification with Bulgaria and that the revolutionary organization should struggle to unite all nationalities.

For example, in an article called “Political Separatism” published in the newspaper *Pravo* (Rights) edited by Nikola Naumov and Toma Karayovov and considered the unofficial organ of the Internal Organization, they specified the essence of the demand for the separation of Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace in an autonomous polity:

The Bulgarians from the Principality — if there are still any who dream of Bulgaria of San Stefano - have no reason to be dissatisfied with the political separatism of the Macedonian population. In spite of all the harm which the dream of a Bulgaria of San Stefano may bring both now and in the future, in spite of all the advantages which the political separatism promises, there is one essential and significant consequence from this doctrine, namely, the preservation of the Bulgarian people whole, undivided and united through its spiritual culture, even though politically separated. Without this political separatism, the spiritual integrity of the Bulgarian nationality seems

<sup>111</sup> Document №29 “Ustav na Taynata makedono-odrinska revolyutzionna organizatziya” [Statute of the Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization] in *Vatreshnata Makedono-Odrinska Revolyutzionna Organizatziya (1983-1919). Dokumenti na tzentralnite rakovodni organi (ustavi, pravilnitzi, memoari, deklaratzii, okrazhni, protokoli, neredbi, rezolyutzii, pisma)* [The Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (1983-1919). Documents of the Central Executive Organs (Statutes, Regulations, Memoranda, Declarations, Circular Letters, Minutes, Orders, Resolutions, Letters)]. (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Ohridski,” 2007), 179-182.

impossible. It is in the interests of the Bulgarian Principality not only to support this idea, but to continue to work for its realization.<sup>112</sup>

SMAC's newspaper *Reformi* (Reforms) also approved of IMARO's new course of attracting "non-Bulgarian and non-Slav elements." Stanishev welcomed this fact and stated that it can "strengthen the hopes of mutual respect and joint work for the common cause."<sup>113</sup>

However, all these hopes very soon proved to be nothing more than illusions. In this regard, it is important here to note the existing contradictions within the movement. At the same time when they preached these new ideas, the Internal Organization and its supporters in Bulgaria did not reject their old understandings. When the Russian foreign minister Vladimir Lambsdorff visited Sofia in December 1902 a delegation of both the Supreme Committee, led by Stanishev and Karayovov, and the Internal Organization, led by Hristo Matov and Hristo Tatarchev, handed him a project which was almost identical to the one from 1896.<sup>114</sup> As already discussed, this program secured the priority of the Bulgarian element. That is why, despite all assurances, the neighboring states and the other nationalities in the Ottoman Empire remained suspicious and mistrustful concerning IMARO's intentions.<sup>115</sup>

The start and the course of the *Ilinden* Uprising<sup>116</sup> of 1903 revealed the same contradictions. In the beginning, the rebels attempted to secure if not the sympathy then at

<sup>112</sup> Document №63 "Political Separatism - an article in the newspaper *Pravo*, in which the essence of the demand for autonomy of Macedonia is revealed " in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*.

<sup>113</sup> Document №68 "From an article in the newspaper *Reformi*, entitled 'Elements Necessary for Macedonia's Autonomy', which notes that one of these elements is the presence of a compact Bulgarian population in Macedonia" in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*

<sup>114</sup> See Document №72 "Circular letter No. 111 of the Supreme Committee of the Macedonian-Adrianople Organization, headed by Hristo Stanishev, setting out demands for reforms in Macedonia and the region of Odrin [Adrianople]" in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*

<sup>115</sup> Pandev, *Politicheski*, 31.

<sup>116</sup> The uprising is called *Ilinden* because it started first in the Monastir region on St. Elijah's day – 20 July 1903 (according to the Julian calendar). In Bulgarian historiography it is referred to as "Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising" because of the uprising in Adrianople region which started on *Preobrazhenie* (The Day of Lord's Transfiguration) in the beginning of August. Besides Monastir and Adrianople, the third wave of armed clashes was in the Serres region which started in mid-September on *Krastovden* (Feast of the Cross). In English information about the uprising can be found in Henry Brailsford, *Macedonia. Its Races and Their Future*. (London: Methuen and Co., 1906) and Mercia MacDermott, *For Freedom and Perfection: the Life of Yane Sandansky*. (London: Journeyman, 1988). On the process regarding how *Ilinden* became the cornerstone of

least the neutrality of the Muslim population. The declaration for the outbreak was full only with general phrases like: “Down with Turkey! Down with the tyrants!” and “Long live freedom!”<sup>117</sup> The famous Krushevo Manifesto hints in the same direction:

Dear neighbours! We understand that you as Turks, Arnauts and Moslems might think that the empire is yours and that you are not slaves since there is no cross on the imperial flag but a star and a crescent. You will soon see and understand that this is not so and that you are wrong. Nevertheless, if you honour does not allow you to join us and declare yourselves against the Sultan’s tyranny, we, your brothers in suffering and of the same homeland, shall do you no harm and shall not hate you. We will fight alone both for you and us, and if necessary, we will fight to the last man under the banner for our and your freedom, for our and your justice. <sup>118</sup>

In fact, what was more important for the revolutionaries was to win European public opinion for their cause. They presented their goals as modestly as possible trying to persuade European diplomacy that the roots of the problem were in the “bad and corrupt” Ottoman administration. They raised only two demands: first, “the appointment with the consent of the Great Powers of a Christian general governor who has never belonged to the Turkish administration and independent from the Sublime Porte” and second, “the establishment of an international control – collective, permanent and having broad rights of sanction.”<sup>119</sup>

In practice the situation was much more complicated than the rebels presented it in their appeals. If in principle, the Internal Organization wanted to unite the entire population regardless of language or religion to rise up against the Sultan, in practice this proved to be an impossible task. In fact, in many places the insurgents did attack Patriarchists and Muslims despite prior orders and assurances to the contrary. Other acts such as singing Bulgarian songs

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Macedonian national identity and the conflicting interpretations see Keith Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>117</sup> Document №82 “The Proclamation of the General Staff of the Bitolya Revolutionary District announcing the Ilinden Uprising in Macedonia” in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*.

<sup>118</sup> Document №274 “The Krusevo Manifesto” in *The Struggles*, 432-424

<sup>119</sup> Document №94 “Deklaratziya ot TMORK, sastavena ot Hr. Matov, dr. Hristo Tatarchev i Simeon Radev do predstavitelite na Velikite sili za prichinite doveli do izbuhvaneto na vastanieto v Makedoniya i Odrisnko [Declaration from the Central Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committee, comprised of Hr. Matov, dr. Hristo Tatarchev and Simeon Radev to the Representatives of the Great Powers in Which They Explain the cause for the Outbreak of the Uprising in Macedonia and Adrianople Region] in *Vatreshnata*, 310.

and waving Bulgarian flags compromised IMARO's intentions for a general uprising, and the rebels were associated by most with Bulgaria.<sup>120</sup>

Not only did other communities not join the uprising, but in fact, they actively opposed it. In the region of Kastoria the Patriarchist, led by the metropolitan Germanos Karavangelis, started organizing their own units to support the Ottoman troops to quell the rebellion. The Albanians in the regions of Debar and Ohrid also joined the Ottoman army with their own bands. The reactions in Belgrade and Athens were especially sharp and against the uprising.<sup>121</sup>

The uprising appeared to lack a clear strategy. If the leaders hoped in the beginning to unite "all discontented elements," they definitely failed in that and in the course of actions relied on the well-known formula of attacking Muslim villages, provoking retaliations in turn and thus causing foreign intervention. When it became clear that the Powers were not willing to intervene the rebels' last hope was the Principality. In a memorandum sent to the Bulgarian government, the General Staff of the Monastir Insurgent District (Damyan Gruev, Boris Sarafov, Anastas Lozanchev) clearly tried to provoke Bulgarian military intervention:

In view of the critical and terrible situation of the Bulgarian population of the Bitolya vilayet following the devastations and cruelties perpetrated by the Turkish troops and bashibazouks, in view of the fact that these devastations and cruelties continue systematically, and that one cannot foresee how far they will reach; in view, furthermore, of the fact that here everything Bulgarian is running the risk of perishing and being obliterated without a trace by violence, hunger and by approaching poverty, the General Staff considers it its duty to draw the attention of the Esteemed Bulgarian Government to the fatal consequences for the Bulgarian nation, if it fails to discharge its duty to its own brothers here in an impressive and energetic manner, made imperative by force of circumstances and by the danger threatening the common Bulgarian homeland at the present moment.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's Robe*, 52.

<sup>121</sup> Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 189-195.

<sup>122</sup> Document №92 "Letter No. 534 from the General Staff of the Second Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Region to the Bulgarian Government on the position of the insurgent population, requesting assistance from Bulgaria in Macedonia" in *Macedonia. Documents and Materials*.

However, Bulgaria was not able to intervene on behalf of the rebels, and the uprising was quelled. Although the insurgents claimed that they only temporarily ceased activities “due to the winter conditions” and that the uprising will be “resumed again as soon as there are favorable conditions for military actions,” this was hardly possible.<sup>123</sup> This was in fact their first and last attempt in the examined period and it was a failure.

In the first ten years of IMARO existence the idea of autonomy underwent a profound evolution. The autonomous principle as such was adopted from the programs of the Macedonian émigré organizations in Bulgaria. The example of Eastern Rumelia provided them with an established political-administrative model to follow, and later, the Cretan uprising convinced them that autonomy could be achieved through a general uprising.

At the time when IMARO was undergoing a transformation from a small conspiracy circle into a mass revolutionary movement the leaders attempted to expand the networks of committees inviting “all discontented elements” to join their ranks. This change in policy was caused by the complicated ethno-confessional situation in Macedonia and Thrace in which the revolutionaries convinced themselves during their practice on the ground. It was also heavily influenced by the views of the socialist and social democratic circles in the Principality of Bulgaria, many of whom actively participated in the movement. At the same time many of the activists continued to view autonomy primarily as a “Bulgarian autonomy” and stuck to their earlier understandings. In this period this did not seem to constitute a problem but would have enormous repercussions for the future.

All the other actors involved – the Ottoman authorities, the Great Powers, neighboring countries, as well as the other communities in the Empire – had great suspicions about the sincerity of IMARO’s principle of autonomy. Not only did other national groups refrained

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<sup>123</sup> Document №121 “Okrazhno Pismo na Glavniya shtab na Bitolskiya revolyutzionen okrag za prekratyavane na vastanicheskite deystviya, za zakrivaneto na Glavniya shtab i za deystviyata na TMORO v ramkite na formuliranite i tzeli i programa” [Circular Letter of the General Staff of the Monastir Revolutionary Region for the Ceasing of Rebel Activities, for the Disbanding of the General Staff and for the SMARO actions within its Goals and Program] in *Vatreshnata*, 336-336.

from joining the movement, but in fact, they actively opposed it and in turn started to create their own “internal organizations.” This was about to lead to a fierce armed inter-ethnic and inter-confessional rivalry within Ottoman Macedonia during the years 1904 – 1908.

European diplomacy made its own conclusions concerning the uprising. Indeed, it proceeded to impose a reform program on the Ottoman government but, contrary to IMARO’s hopes, the reforms had exactly the opposite goal – to make the demand for autonomy unfounded.



### III. The Split within the Organization, 1904-1908

If after the Congress of Berlin, Macedonia became a point of intersection between many and mutually exclusive interests, it is during the post-*Ilinden* period that the full conflicting potential of the question of Macedonian autonomy was reached. This chapter will analyze how the prospect of Macedonian autonomy led to the increasing interference of the Great European Powers and the small Balkan states in Ottoman domestic affairs which resulted in a fierce inter-communal war in the region. I will argue that this inter-communal conflict was instrumental for the growing ideological conflicts within the Organization and the emergence of two very different projects of autonomy. I will analyze the complexity of their different agendas and show how multi-dimensional these processes were even among the elite intellectuals of the movement - many of whom strongly opposed nationalism and were drifting towards working for a general democratization within the Ottoman political system.

#### *III.1. Autonomy, Reforms and the Great Struggle for Macedonia*

The *Ilinden* uprising of 1903 might have ended in failure but at the same time it attracted considerable international attention. As indicated in the previous chapter, European diplomacy proceeded to impose reforms on the Ottoman government, but their goal was exactly the opposite of IMARO's hopes. The reforms were not meant to be the first step towards autonomy, but rather the contrary - to make the demand for autonomy unfounded.

As early as 1897, the two "most interested" Powers in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary and Russia, concluded an agreement for preserving the *status quo* in the region.<sup>124</sup> In this

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<sup>124</sup> Nina Dyulgerova, "Mezhdunarodni aspekti na Ilindesko-Preobrazhesnkoto vastanie"[International Aspects of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising] in *100 godini ot Ilindesko-preobrazhenskoto vastanie (1903). Sbornik ot dokladi ot Mezhdunarodnata nauchna konferentziya, Sofiya, 26-27 septemvri 2003* [100 Years Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising. Collection of Papers from the International Academic Conference, Sofia, September 26-27, 2003] (Sofia: Paradigma, 2003), 223-225..

regard any turmoil in Macedonia caused only irritation for them. At the same time, the two claimed to be protectors of the Christian populations in the Empire and could not for long abstain from taking at least some measures if they wanted to keep their prestige among the local Christians. The leaders of the national movements were well aware of this fact and this was exactly what they tried to manipulate by forcing the Ottomans' rivals into action.

Sultan Abdul Hamid understood this well. He felt that reforms were imminent and if he were not the one to formulate them pre-emptively, the European versions could be too radical. In December 1902 the Sultan introduced his own program directed not only at the three *vilayets* but at all provinces of the Empire in Europe thus creating a new administrative unit - the General Inspectorate of Rumeli. Huseyin Hilmi Pasha, an experienced Ottoman administrator was appointed in charge of the Inspectorate with the title General Inspector of Rumeli.<sup>125</sup> Some of the more important points of the program included: "the gendarmes will be recruited in the provinces among the Moslems and Christians;" the method of selecting judges will be changed and "half the number will be Moslems and half Christians;" in villages with more than fifty houses primary schools will be established; and "5 percent of the general revenue of each province will be appropriated to works of public utility."<sup>126</sup>

However, this act coincided with another escalation of violence – an abortive uprising in November 1902 organized by the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee. This time it was the Powers' turn to propose measures in order to save face. Russia and Austria-Hungary elaborated their own project and in February 1903 announced it to the states signatories of the Berlin Treaty who approved it.<sup>127</sup> When the project was delivered to the Ottoman government it, contrary to the expectations, was quickly accepted it. Obviously the Sultan saw only minor changes to the measures he had already ordered.

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<sup>125</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's Robe*, 49

<sup>126</sup> Document №283 "Instructions for the Vilayets of European Turkey, 12th December 1902" in *Documents on the Struggle*, 444-448.

<sup>127</sup> Lange-Akhund, *The Macedonian*, 135-141.

Indeed, in addition to the original proposals of the Sublime Porte, the Vienna Reform Plan provided that: “for the reorganization of the police and the gendarmerie, the Ottoman government will use the assistance of foreign specialists;” the gendarmerie will consist of “Christians and Moslems in proportion to the numbers of each population in the regions in question;” the Ottoman Government “will grant an amnesty for all the accused and condemned for political reasons;” and “the payment of the civil and military services, including the way of collecting the tithe will be modified.”<sup>128</sup>

However, the moment was poorly chosen. During a time in which IMARO was preparing for the big uprising of 1903 it is no surprise that these reforms failed,<sup>129</sup> but the same pattern of a revolt and reform project followed the next year. The *Ilinden* uprising and the huge repercussions it had in the European press forced diplomats to act again. In September 1903 the head of states of Russia and Austria-Hungary Nicolas II and Franz Joseph met in Murztseg. During their discussions the English government submitted a memorandum in which it suggested that the Vienna Reform Plan should be expanded. London proposed that in Macedonia either a Christian general governor should be appointed, or if the general governor is to remain Muslim, a European should be attached to him. The decisions of Murzsteg were submitted to the Ottoman government on 2 October 1903 from the Russian and Austria-Hungarian ambassadors and included a compromise between the interests of Austria-Hungary and Russia on the one hand, and Great Britain, France and Italy on the other.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Document №284 “The February Program of Reforms, 21st February 1903” in *Documents on the Struggle*, 448-449. These reforms came to be remembered by the local population only with the unsuccessful inclusion of Christians in the local police and were referred to them with the mocking term “field-guard reforms.” Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol2., 212-225.

<sup>129</sup> As Steven Sowards summarized the results from the Vienna Reform Action, the amnestied Bulgarians returned to subversive activity and only a few Christians applied to join the police, Albanian filed-guards were preferred by villagers because they better protected them from Muslim extortions. The new judges were largely ineffective because they were not familiar with the local realities. Steven Sowards, *Austria's Policy of Macedonian Reform* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989), 27.

<sup>130</sup> Lange-Akhund, *The Macedonian*, 141-145.

The Murzsteg Program was not very much different from the previous one, except for the provisions it introduced for implementation of the measures. Russia and Austria-Hungary were allowed to appoint two “civil agents” whose task was to oversee how reforms have been carried out. All the powers were assigned different zones for which they would be responsible with their main goal being the establishment of security.<sup>131</sup>

Besides these clauses in which the big European states seemed much more concerned in securing their own interest than improving the lot of the local population, there was one clause which must have been overlooked, namely articles III and IV which stated:

III. As soon as a certain pacification of the country ascertained, to demand from the Ottoman Government a modification in the territorial delimitation of the administrative units for the more regular grouping of the different nationalities.

IV. Simultaneously to demand reorganization of the administrative and judicial institutions, in which it would be desirable to give access to the indigenous Christians and favour the development of local autonomy.<sup>132</sup>

This was a well-intentioned measure aimed at satisfying both the demand for autonomy and preserving Ottoman territorial integrity intact. In practice, however, this provision forced the national movements of the Christians to mobilize all their forces and to first cleanse in due time as much territory as possible from other Christian elements in the regions they controlled and second, to expand their regions of control so if one day this local autonomy was really given it could suit the best interest of their respective community. Since IMARO claimed the whole of Macedonia as its own, bloody conflicts were soon to follow.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The partition of zones between the Great Powers was the following: the *sancak* of Skopje, part of the *vilayet* of Kosovo - Austria-Hungary; in the *vilayet* of Monastir, the towns of Monastir, Kastoria and Serfice – Italy; the *vilayet* of Salonika was divided into three zones, the *sancak* of Salonika went to Russia, the *sancak* of Drama to Great Britain and the *sancak* of Serres to France. Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's Robe*, 53-55.

<sup>132</sup> Document №288 “The Murzsteg Programme for Reforms, 2nd October, 1903” *Documents on the Struggle*, 455-457.

<sup>133</sup> I called this period the “Macedonian Struggle” because I think it best describes the full-scale inter-communal war that was going on there in the period 1904-1908. Actually it is a well established term in the Greek historiography like the Bulgarian “national-liberation movement.” See Dakin, Douglas. *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897-1913*. (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies), 1966.

The Organization itself was not satisfied with the reforms. In the Memoir published in 1904 they are referred to as: “a set of recommendations and kind wishes lacking that sanction from which any innovation in Turkey remains an illusion.”<sup>134</sup> IMARO also opposed the decision taken under the Sultan’s explicit insistence that the *vilayet* of Adrianople would not be included within the scope of reforms. To demonstrate its discontent IMARO recommended that the Bulgarians should refrain from enrolling in the police or gendarmerie.<sup>135</sup>

The other very important diplomatic act dealing with the consequences of the *Ilinden* uprising was the agreement that Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire managed to reach in April 1904 in Istanbul. It provided that Bulgaria would ban all revolutionary committees and armed bands within its territory. In return, the Ottoman government would carry out all the reforms provided and, most importantly, it would give a general amnesty for political crimes.<sup>136</sup> The number of political criminals released until 9 May 1904 in the three *vilayets* amounted to 1,640.<sup>137</sup> The Bulgarian-Ottoman agreement contributed greatly to the temporary satisfaction of the Exarchist population in Macedonia but at the same time caused the bitter resentment of the Muslim and Greek communities.

In 1904 the first incursions of Greek *andartes* started. The activity came as a result of the pressure that IMARO was exerting on Patriarchist villages to convert to the Exarchate, justifying it with the provisions of article 3 of the Murzsteg Agreement. The Greek bands were assisted by the overlooking and even silent cooperation of Ottoman authorities, who viewed them as a counterweight against IMARO. The local Muslims also actively joined the bands.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, Serbian *chetniks* were quick to have appeared in Kosovo and Northern

<sup>134</sup> *Memoar na Vatreshata organizatziya*, 265.

<sup>135</sup> Stoyan Germanov, “Makedoniya i Odrinsko sled vastanieto” [Macedonia and Adrianople Region after the Uprising] in *Natzionalnoosvobotilno*, 36.

<sup>136</sup> Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 224.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>138</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest’s Robe*, 56-58.

Macedonia. Muslim and Albanian bands that protected the Muslim villages from the attacks of Christian bands in turn also attacked Christian villages.<sup>139</sup>

The extremely complicated ethno-confessional situation in Macedonia, which prior to that moment was presented in Europe mostly in black and white terms as Ottoman Muslim oppression upon the Macedonian Christians, was beginning finally to be grasped by the foreign observers:

At least it should be known that the bigger part of what has been published in the European press is not true, namely there are no “Macedonians”, but Turks, Albanians, Pomaks, Vlachs, Exzarchist and Patriarchist Bulgarians, and that the mutual hatred between the local Christians from the different nationalities is a much stronger factor for the anarchy, than the confrontation between Christianity and Islam.<sup>140</sup>

Despite the reforms and the European presence in the area, security did not improve but in fact deteriorated during this period. Approximately 8,000 people were killed in Macedonia between 1903 and 1908 with only 3,500 being band members and the rest civilians.<sup>141</sup> It was in this situation of virtual civil war that IMARO tried to find novel ways in which to fulfill its main goal – the autonomy of Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace.

### ***III.2. Two Trends: The Emergence of the Left and Right Wing***

After the *Ilinden* uprising the Organization was in total disarray. Around 1, 000 rebels were killed and twice more arrested. The victims among the civilian population were around 4, 500. As a result of the violence, over 25, 000 people emigrated to Bulgaria.<sup>142</sup> Due to the loss of many leaders and members, the whole network of revolutionary committees was collapsing. The activists were discouraged, and the discipline was poor. Many leaders thought

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>140</sup> German ambassador in Istanbul Marschal to the Foreign Ministry. Cited in Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 217.

<sup>141</sup> Yosmaoglu, *The Priest's Robe*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> *Memoar na Vatreshnata organizatziya*, 249-256.

the time had come for a radical change in policy. The differences in views that existed before gave way to a new strong reformist tendency.

When in the beginning of 1904 the bigger part of the Macedonian leaders gathered in Sofia to discuss the situation, the left group under the leadership of Yane Sandanski demanded structural and personal changes in the organization. On the contrary, those defined by Silyanov as “moderates” around Hrsito Matov were willing only to draw a lesson from the uprising without questioning the “solid traditions” of the movement.<sup>143</sup> Following long discussions, the Sandanski group managed to impose the establishment of a commission of two – Dimo Hadzhidimov and Dimitar Stefanov- to work on new “Directives for the Future Activity of the Organization.”<sup>144</sup>

In this period Dimo Hadzhidimov was the main ideologist of the emerging left wing so his views are representative of the whole group. The leftists based their positions on the 1902 statute and pointed out that if they wanted to consolidate their ranks they had “to work in a way in which had they worked before the uprising in the better organized regions, in the spirit of the statutes and regulations of the organization.” They relied solely on local forces and warned “not to deceive the population that Bulgaria or some other state will come to liberate them.” The leftists also advocated that not only the Organization should not avoid but should

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<sup>143</sup> Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol 2, 58-61. The question of the names of the two wings is a complicated matter. In the 1890s the basic division was between the two distinct organizations, the internal – IMARO and the Sofia-based SMAC. Since the former had a Central Committee, they were known as Centralists, and because the latter had a Supreme Committee, they were known as Supremists. After *Ilinden*, with the emergence of the two factions within IMARO, Silyanov defined them respectively as “moderate-conservative” and “radical-reformist”. He also used the term “left” for the latter. The Serres group referred to the more nationalistically-minded IMARO activists as neo-Supremists. Petko Penchev, one of the ideologists of the right wing, defined them as “national-revolutionary” and “international-evolutionary.” Besides, this is the division only on ideological grounds. In practice there were many more factions based on the personal loyalties that a group of activists had to a respective leader like: Sarafists, Sandinists, etc. That is why I have opted for the umbrella terms “left” and “right” as broader and covering the whole ideological spectrum.

<sup>144</sup> Hrsito Matov, *Za svoysta revolyutzionnea deynost. Lichi belezhki* [On His Revolutionary Activity]. (Sofia, 1928), 62.

strive to “include the discontented from the existing regime elements also from other – apart from Bulgarian – nationalities” in the future.<sup>145</sup>

In a series of articles Hadzhidimov further developed the leftists’ views. According to Hadzhidimov, the goal of the organization –autonomy –was “the full political independence of Macedonia and the Adrianople region” and Macedonia and the Adrianople region should be independent and become a separate polity in a future Balkan federation.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, autonomy in this conception completely excluded all ulterior motives for “national unification” or San Stefano Bulgaria. Autonomy should be built upon the principle of political separatism, which would secure the wholeness of the two regions and the principle of federalism (similar as to that in Switzerland) which would serve to “secure the freedom and equality of all nationalities in the provinces.”<sup>147</sup>

The leftists saw as the greatest obstacle to its success the “inconsistency of the Organization.” Leftist leaders argued that in the past, this inconsistency had caused suspicions that IMARO “did the not struggle for any self-government rather was a vanguard of the Bulgarian national aspirations and appetites.” This inconsistency was a result of the centralization of the internal structures which was seen by the left as tyranny and the main reason for all faults at that moment. The solution, they proposed, was a broad decentralization in the management of the organization. According to the leftists, only in this way could the organization become international and federative and win the support of the other

<sup>145</sup> Document №126 “Direktiva za badeshtata deynost na Vatrshnata organizatziya i upatvane za prilaganeto i, izraboteni ot organizatziionnitate deytzi, okolo Yane Sandanski” [Directive for the Future Activity of the Internal Organization and Instructions for Its Application Drawn Up by the Organization Activists around Yane Sandanski] in *Vatreshnata*, 342-347.

<sup>146</sup> *Revolyutziionen list* [Revolutionary List], №.7, 9 December 1904, 5.

<sup>147</sup> Document №159 “Kritika na Dimo Hadzhidimov na printzipite na VMORO, izlozheni v knigata na Hristo Matov „Osnovi na vatrshnata organizatziya” [Dimo Hadzhidimov’s Criticism on the IMARO Principles presented in Hristo Matov’s book “Fundamentals of the Internal Organization] in *Vatreshnata*, 452-457.



nationalities. In addition, the organization should be absolutely independent from external influences.<sup>148</sup>

Critics of the leftist perspective like Matov, however, criticized these “directives” as attempts to impose social democratic principles in the Macedonian-Adrianople movement. With a view to the situation in the region, he considered these principles to be completely irrelevant and of little practical importance. He accused Sandanski and Chernopeev of uncritically accepting the views of “Marxist dogmatists” like Hadzhidimov.<sup>149</sup> In opposition to the left, such activists stood firmly on the statute of 1896 and were also coming closer to some of the principles of the Supreme Committee. Despite the changed conditions before and especially after the uprising, they thought that for the future they should work on the same traditional principles and did not allow any changes in the composition and the structure of the organization. Matov, the main ideologist of this movement, analyzed the goal of the organization and explained that autonomy was constituted separation only to a certain degree and could mean neither independence nor joining to another state, as this was interpreted in the newspaper *Revolytzionen list*. Once autonomy was achieved the organizations should be disbanded, and the future fate of the province should be decided by the regional parliament and not from the former revolutionaries. According to him, the neighboring countries and the other nationalities were against autonomy not due to one or another intention of the revolutionaries but because Macedonia was inhabited mainly by Bulgarians. In his view, if there were more Greeks or Serbs these states would have undoubtedly accepted autonomy, but then very probably the Bulgarians would have been against it. He thought this was what

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<sup>148</sup> Avicenus [Dimo Hadzhidimov] “Vatresho ustroystvo na organizatziyata” [Intrenal Strucutre of the Organziation], *Revolytzionen list*, №3, 17 September 1904, 8.

<sup>149</sup> Hrsito Matov, *Za svoyata*, 68-71.

caused the “foreign propaganda” rather than Bulgarian policy or any inconsistency of the Internal Organization as the leftists claimed.<sup>150</sup>

While some of the leading figures were theorizing, others were spontaneously reacting to the realities on the ground. The geographical factor could hardly be underestimated in the analysis of the two trends. The right wing was concentrated mostly in the western Macedonian regions – Skopje and Monastir which were heavily exposed to the attacks by Greek *andartes* and Serbian *chetniks*. The most radical leftists came from Serres and Strumitza in the northeast, which were areas not so directly exposed to attacks by armed bands and this fact allowed them to retain more independence as well as more pluralistic outlooks and willingness to work within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Skopje and Bitola regions were drifting more and more towards Bulgarian nationalism. A decision in that direction was officially taken in the beginning of 1904 from the newly formed regional committee in Monastir. They decided to start an open attack on the Patriarchists and sent an order to the *chetas* in Southern Macedonia to force the Patriarchist villages to go to the Exarchate.<sup>151</sup>

In such a campaign against the Patriarchist villages Gorche Petrov saw a betrayal to the Macedonian cause.<sup>152</sup> At the Monastir Regional Congress in the summer of 1904, he pointed out the dangers which might emerge for the Organization in this situation and tried to revise the previous decision. He argued that the power of the IMARO was in its revolutionary, anti-nationalistic positions and thus should not be abandoned. He remembers in his memoirs: “I knew that if one opens our people the door to nationalism, they will all go there, that we

<sup>150</sup> Hristo Matov. *Pisma za Makedoniya. Otgovor na g. Y. Sakazov* [Letters for Macedonia. A Reply to Mr. Yanko Sakazov] (Sofia, 1910), 14-16.

<sup>151</sup> *Materiali za istoriyata na na makedonskoto osvoboditleno dvizhenie* [Materials for the History of the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement], book IX (Sofia: MNI, 1927) 154.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 154-155.

will create an open sore and will abandon the revolutionary idea, and this is what happened.”<sup>153</sup>

Despite his argumentation, Pere Toshev and Damyan Gruev managed to win the majority. Pere Toshev was explicit: “There is no reason why we should hide the national struggle from the eyes of the world. On the contrary, let everyone know that the interest of the Macedonian liberation cause require the complete eradication of *Serbomanism* and *Grekomanism*.”<sup>154</sup> This change of policy did not go unnoticed. The Austro-Hungarian consul in Monastir, August Kral, who was usually one of the best informed foreign diplomats since he kept regular contacts with the revolutionary leaders reported:

Before [The *Ilinden* Uprising] no great importance to denomination was attached and people could completely voluntarily choose either to remain faithful to the Patriarchate or to become Exarchists, as only their national belonging or Christian solidarity was emphasized. Recently the revolutionary people’s army stresses on the passing from the Patriarchate to the Exarchate, with which it admits, that the movement to which so far were made attempts to ascribe certain Macedonian-Christian, anti-Turkish features, is in fact markedly national Bulgarian.<sup>155</sup>

In a situation of total disorganization each regional committee was deciding and acting on its own. After the uprising the reformist trend was very strong, and the ideas of the left had been to a large-extent been accepted by the regional congresses of the Organization in the period 1905-1906. However, the desire for preserving the unity was still strong, and a new general congress was widely anticipated.

This led to contradictory policy like the one adopted by the Skopje Regional Congress in the beginning of 1905. The Directives elaborated by the theoreticians of the left wing in the beginning of 1904 were accepted but under the condition that all Serbs who refused to submit

<sup>153</sup> *Materiali za...*, book VIII, 203.

<sup>154</sup> The terms *Serbomans* and *Grekomans* as used in the sources mean respectively local Macedonian Slavs belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate who identify themselves as Serbs or respectively as Greeks.

<sup>155</sup> A Report of the Austro-Hungarian consul in Bitolya August Kral, cited in Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 213.

to the Organization would be persecuted.<sup>156</sup> This was a provision that fundamentally contradicted the guiding principles in the Directives.

In the summer of 1905 the Salonika Regional Congress was held. The movement had left on the level of a political conspiracy – the delegates observed - without managing to attract political supporters. It was therefore decided that the leadership on the local level would no longer concentrated be comprised merely of Exarchist school teachers and priests. Otherwise, the outside world quite rightly would see in IMARO only an instrument of the Bulgarian Principality. It was also ruled that the attacks on the peaceful Patriarchist population must completely stop. Likewise, it was determined that it was not in the interests of the Organization to treat the innocent Turkish peasants as enemies. Indeed, it was decided that Serbian and Greek propaganda were to be fought rigorously but without propagating Bulgarian nationalism.<sup>157</sup>

The regional congresses were a preparation for the General Congress which took place in October 1905 in Rila monastery in Bulgaria. The ideologists of both factions – Hrsito Matov and Dimo Hadzhidimov were not present. Damyan Gruev was elected chairman of the Congress.<sup>158</sup> The name was changed from Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization to Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization by which it is mostly known today. The goal remained the same: “to unite in one whole all discontented elements in Macedonia and the Adrianople region regardless of nationality to gain full political autonomy for these two regions.” Article 2 stated that “the Organization opposes the aspirations of partition and conquest of these regions by any state.” And in another article it was further specified that “the Organization struggles for the removal of the chauvinistic

<sup>156</sup> Document №155 “Protokol ot Parviya redoven Skopski okrazhen revolyutzionen kongres” [Protocol from the First Regular Skopje Revolutionary District Congress] in *Vatreshnata*, 437-441.

<sup>157</sup> Document №163 “Izvlechenie ot resheniyata na Parviya kongres na Solunskiya revolyutzionen okrag po Myurtzshtegskata reformena programa” [Excerpt from the Decisions Taken on the First Congress of the Salonika Revolutionary Region Regarding the Murztseg Reform Program], Region of Salonika, April 1905 in *Vatreshnata*, 463-465.

<sup>158</sup> Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol.2, 376.

propagandas which split and enervate the population.” Membership was provided to “each inhabitant of European Turkey, regardless of sex, faith, nationality, and convictions.”<sup>159</sup> In this regard, the ritual for entering the organization was deliberately not specified so if Muslims wanted to join they would not be obliged to take an oath to such Christian symbols such as the cross and the Gospel.

On the General Congress the left wing prevailed. Most of the leftists’ demands such as the introduction of special courts, the election of leaders and so on were included in the new statute. What was even more important was that they managed to elect their candidates to the highest posts. In the Central Committee (apart from Damyan Gruev) were elected Pere Toshev and Todor Popantov – advocates of decentralization and Gruev’s opponents. The new foreign representatives, who replaced Matov and Tatarchev were Gyorche Petrov, Dimitar Stefanov, and Petar Poparsov – all the three were supporters of the left wing.<sup>160</sup>

However, it should be noted that the reformists’ victory was not complete. There were certain reserves on some of the clauses. For example, in Circular Letter №2 which contained excerpts from the Congress decisions that were sent to the regions, there is instruction in regard to the broader membership provision. The instruction warned that “it is necessary to pay extreme attention in the applications of this article” because there was a “possibility that dangerous elements could use this article to enter the Organization with a bad intention.”<sup>161</sup>

In this connection there was still a difference made between the armed bands sent from Greece and Serbia on the one hand and Bulgaria on the other. Circular Letter №1, when discussing foreign propagandas and their activity, states:

<sup>159</sup> Document №178 “Ustav na VMORO, priet na Parviya obsht Rislki kongres [IMARO Statute Adopted at the First General Rila Congress] in *Vatreshnata*, 513-517.

<sup>160</sup> Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol.2, 377-379

<sup>161</sup> Document №193 “Tzirkulyar №2 s resheniyata na Parviya Rilski obsht kongres na VMORO” [Circular Letter №2 with the Decisions of the IMARO First Rila General Congress] in *Vatreshnata*, 577-583.

It [the Organization] considers the Greek and Serbian bands organs of these respective governments..., and their activity is openly directed against the goal of the Organization. As such it will pursue them with all its forces and means on the following grounds: a) they are tools of states and governments which want the conquest of the organized territory; b) as such they are against the autonomy of Macedonia and Adrianople region; c) they split the population and thus weaken its strength in the struggle against the Turks; d) kill innocent people for which the organization is obliged to take care of and to protect and d) they work together with the Turkish authorities.<sup>162</sup>

The motives against the Supremist bands were of another character – IMARO was against them to keep the unity in the movement and because it could not tolerate within its own territory “any other groups or corporations with the same goal and task, which have their seat either within its territory, or outside it.”<sup>163</sup> Accordingly, the differences with Serbs and Greeks were in the fundamental goal – they did not accept autonomy, while the Supremists were treated as a rival faction with the same goal.

### ***III.3. The Final Split: the Kyustendil Congress***

The consensus reached at the Rila Congress proved to be ephemeral. The right wing or the “moderates” who after making many concessions with their principles in order to preserve the unity were not satisfied with the results which seemed too radical to them. One of the most difficult things they had to swallow was the election of Dimo Hadzhidimov for editor-in-chief of the IMARO organ *Revoljutzionen list* (Revolutionary List). They were concerned that the newspaper would increase socialist tendencies.

The left wing or the “reformists” were not happy with the undecided character of the congress since they were not able to pass their views in their completeness. The leftists wanted a complete reformist shift in policy. They were also dissatisfied with the fact that they

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

were not able to replace all the previous leaders who seemed to them to be “‘criminals’ and ‘reactionaries’ not suited for the ‘new times.’”<sup>164</sup>

Each side started a propaganda campaign publishing numerous pamphlets, brochures, and articles in the press in order to explain its positions. In an article entitled, “Nationalism or Internationalism” one of the leading theoreticians of the right wing Petko Penchev addressed what was probably the main dividing line in the organization. Penchev analyzed the two poles in Bulgarian political thought – the extreme nationalists and the narrow socialists.<sup>165</sup> The nationalists could not understand the autonomy principle and the striving of the Organization to be independent; they considered them to be “a bunch of adventurers, socialists, anarchists and some other radical elements which experiment with their utopian theories at the expense of the wretched Macedonian population.” The narrow socialists on their part considered the “internationalism” of the Organization as hypocritical while it was a strictly nationalistic movement dependent on the Bulgarian government. Juxtaposing these diametrically opposed views, Penchev attempted to outline the positions of the right. He first examined the membership structure of the organization concluding: “the Organization is purely Bulgarian which means completely national. There are non-Bulgarians in its rank, the Vlachs, but their number is insignificant – only 2-3%.” Since the members were almost exclusively Bulgarians it was quite natural to him that “the Organization is and should remain national” but at the same time “not nationalistic.” According to him, the Bulgarian national character did not prevent members of other nationalities from joining. In his own words: “the Organization would like to have in its ranks all other nationalities living in Macedonia” but being realistic was quick to add: “this is, however, if not impossible, rather doubtful”.<sup>166</sup>

Apart from the problem of the internal structure and the centralization-decentralization dilemma, the most important disputed question was the independence of the Organization.

<sup>164</sup> Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol. 2, 439.

<sup>165</sup> The narrow socialists were the Orthodox Marxist part of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Worker’s Party.

<sup>166</sup> *Makedono-Odrinski pregled* [Macedonian-Adrianople Review] № 19, 1 March 1906.

This vague term actually referred mostly to the relations with Bulgarian governments. In another one of Penchev's brochures, entitled "On Our Disputed Questions," Penchev strongly criticized the leftists' refusal, in the name of the pure revolutionary independence, to accept foreign help. Penchev argued that the Organization needed the help of Bulgaria but at the same time defended its independence and stated that help should be accepted with no obligations in return. He again attacked the socialists stating that they brought to the movement "unacceptable elements."<sup>167</sup>

Hadzhidimov replied to these charges in another article in *Revolytzionen list*. In order to denounce the criticism that socialism is incompatible with the goals of a national movement, Hadzhidimov stated that these "utopians," as Penchev derogatorily called them, "are Bulgarians like you, people who have neither renounced, nor will renounce their nationality." He analyzed the question of Bulgarian help and claimed that if the Organization accepted any help from Bulgaria this will compromise its independence and the principles of internationalism. That would increase the existing national antagonism which the Organization strove to overcome.<sup>168</sup>

In this heated atmosphere of growing tensions came the death of Dame Gruev in a battle with Ottoman troops in December 1906, an event which was a severe blow for the Organization. Gruev, the actual founder of the Organization, was the man of the center and was highly respected by both factions. The confrontation reached a point where the ideological differences were no longer fought with words.

Yane Sandanski and his supporters proceeded to the final split. The Serres Regional Committee passed a death sentence on the foreign representatives Boris Sarafov and Ivan Garvanov and their "tool," the Drama *voyvoda* Mihail Daev.<sup>169</sup> The sentence was justified on

<sup>167</sup> Petko Penchev, *Po nashite sporni vaprosi* [On Our Disputed Questions]. (Sofia, 1906), 54.

<sup>168</sup> *Revolytzionen list*, №11-12, 16 December 1906.

<sup>169</sup> The whole question about the conspiracy is highly doubtful. The Serres activists published only transcripts of some Daev's letters "proving" his guilt but no originals, if such existed were ever found. According to their



the grounds that the “Bulgarian nationalist movement in the Organization” led by the two was planning to “enervate and subjugate” the Serres activists which stood on the “principles of the integrity and independence of the Organization.” Sarafov and Garvanov were defined as “acting on behalf of the Bulgarian state and dynastic interests.”<sup>170</sup>

The decision had been carried out on 28 December 1907 when Todor Panitza killed Sarafov and Garvanov in Sofia. The act caused a huge wave of indignation in both Bulgaria and within the IMARO so the Serres group published two open letters to explain and defend their positions. The first letter actually revealed the biggest difference which stood between the Sandanski group and the other - the attitude towards Bulgaria. For the Serres activists there was no difference between the policies of the three Balkan states anymore: “the policy of conquest on her [Bulgaria’s] part is the same with that of Serbia and Greece.” This was also the first time that the Serres activists clearly stated that Bulgaria should be treated “as a foreign, hostile power.”<sup>171</sup>

After the murders and the open letter any reconciliation between the factions was out of question. The right wingers proceeded to a new congress which was held in the first half of March 1908 in the village of Zhabokart, near Kyustendil. The delegates came from Skopje, Bitola and partly from the Salonika region. However, the representation of the Adrianople region was too formal,<sup>172</sup> and the Serres and Strumitza leaders were not present at all. The

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account Mihail Daev after being discovered committed suicide. In 1913 a commission exhumed his dead body and it became clear that the “suicide” was in fact a murder. Daev had been killed with two bullets, and his hands were tied behind his back. Stoyan Malchankov, “Razkritiya po ubiystvoto na dramskiya voivoda Mihail Daev” [Disclosure Regarding the Murder of the Drama Voyvoda Mihail Daev] in *Sbornik Ilinden* (4) 1925, 52-54.

<sup>170</sup> Document №250 “Protokol ot zasedanie na Okraznhiya komitet na Serskiya revolyutzionen okrag s vzeto reshenie za smartni prisadi na Ivan Garvanov, Boris Sarafov i Mihail Daev” [A Protocol from Session of the Serres Regional Revolutionary Committee and the Decision for the Death Sentences of Ivan Garvanov, Boris Sarafov and Mihail Daev] in *Vatreshnata*, 747-748.

<sup>171</sup> Document №256 “Parvo otkrito pismo na Serskiya okrazhen revolyutzionen komitet za prichinite za osazhdane na smart na Iv. Garvanov, B. Sarafov i M. Daev” [First Open Letter of the Serres Regional Revolutionary Committee for the Reasons for the Death Sentence of Iv. Garvanov, B. Sarafov i M. Daev] in *Vatreshnata*, 757-764.

<sup>172</sup> The Adrianople Regional Committee disavowed its delegate. Document №262 “Stanovishte na Odrinskiya revolyutzionen okrag po utchastieto na Kliment Shapkarev kato predsavitel na Odrisnko na Kyustendilskiya kongres” [A Position of the Adrianople Revolutionary Region On the Participation of Kliment Shapkarev as an Adrianople Representative on the Kyustendil Congress] in *Vatreshnata*, 773-774.

former were not invited because they were considered “splinters,” while the latter were invited but decided not to participate.<sup>173</sup>

In the absence of their adversaries, the delegates’ work proceeded smoothly. The Congress did not change the IMARO attitude towards the Murzsteg reform action which as before remained negative. According to them, the reforms “achieved no practical results.” The goal remained autonomy for the Macedonia and Adrianople region through revolutionary struggle. IMARO again protested against the exclusion of the Adrianople region from the reforms.<sup>174</sup>

The Kyustendil Congress paid special attention to the attitude toward Bulgaria. They stood on the positions that Penchev had described earlier. The Organization stated that it will vindicate its independence and prestige and accused the Bulgarian government of a lack of “clear and consistent Macedonian policy.” At the same time, the delegates stated that they “could not deny Bulgaria’s natural right to take care of her non-liberated compatriots in Turkey.”<sup>175</sup>

The attitude towards the Exarchate was similar. The Organization described it as “the only legal-cultural-educational institution of the non-liberated Bulgarians” and strongly recommended that it should remain neutral towards the revolutionary movement. If the Exarchate was hostile, it “will be persecuted however undesirable it might be.”<sup>176</sup>

On the other side, the attitude towards the Greek and Serbian bands remained extremely negative and delegates recommended that the Organization should “persecute them more energetically than ever before.” With regard to other national movements, IMARO declared that in principle it was open to agreement for joint actions with all other revolutionary organizations. However, in relation to the Young Turk Congress in Paris,

<sup>173</sup> Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol.2., 551.

<sup>174</sup> Document №269 “Rezolyutziya na Kyustendilskiya obsht kongres na VMORO” [Resolution of IMARO Kyustendil General Congress] in *Vatreshnata*, 857-853.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

IMARO decided not to send delegates because the Young Turks' goal - "the revival of integral Turkey" was "at variance with the autonomous ideal of the Organization."<sup>177</sup>

In this period Adrianopolitans also seceded from the Organization and sided with the Strumitza and Serres groups. The newspaper *Odrisnki glas* (Adrianopolitan Voice) advocated the abandoning of the autonomous idea and federating of the peoples in the Empire.<sup>178</sup> Thus Serres, Strumitza, Adrianople, and part of Salonika region founded a new organization. At their joint congress held in Bansko in May 1908, they proclaimed that their final goal was the creation of a "Great Eastern Federation." The majority of delegates agreed that the autonomous idea was already outdated. Only the Serres activists expressed some reserves, finding such views "too radical, inopportune and precipitate." They too accepted federalism but only if it encompassed all the Balkan states. Thus, the federative principle was for the first time officially accepted and acquired program character in 1908.<sup>179</sup>

The post-*Ilinden* period was characterized by the Murzsteg reform action, which as well intentioned as it was, brought in fact a fierce inter-communal war within Macedonia. The Internal Organization was considerably weakened as a result of the uprising and had serious problems in its own ranks. During the course of the on-going debates, outlines of the two main factions became more clearly delineated, which before had only hinted at their existence and were not an obstacle for the unity within the organization. According to the reformists or the left group Macedonia and Adrianople should become an autonomous province in the Ottoman Empire where the different nationalities should live in harmony. Their slogan was: "The Macedonian question will not be solved as long as it is put as a Bulgarian question". The other regions – mainly Monastir and Skopje – on the contrary were looking in the next years for tighter connections with the Bulgarian government. Such were the positions of the two

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Document №266 "Statyiya ot Pavel Deliradev Osashtestvima li e avtonomnata ideya" [An Article by Pavel Deliradev "Is the Autonomus Idea Feasible"] in *Vatreshnata*, 778-782.

<sup>179</sup> Paleshutki, Genezis, 178.

groups in the summer of 1908 when the Young Turk Revolution broke out and completely surprised them all.

#### **IV. The Question of Autonomy during the Hurriyet Donemi (The Time of Freedom): IMARO and the Young Turks, 1908-1912**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the “Great Macedonian Struggle” was a multi-dimensional conflict between many factors involved about the future prospects of Macedonian autonomy. The conflict provoked a rethinking of IMARO’s ideology, led to the emergence of two competing projects of autonomy and ended in formal split. In the current chapter, I will discuss how instrumental this local context was for much larger events which completely changed the course of history in the region, namely the Young Turk Revolution and the Balkan Wars.

I will trace back the origins and the evolution of the Young Turk movement and analyze how deeply it was influenced by the contact with different Macedonian national movements. I will discuss the programs of the both wings within IMARO and the political parties they founded and show that by no means was everyone hostile to the notion of staying within the Ottoman imperial framework. I will argue that the reasons are much more complex and have to be sought in the negotiation of power between the IMARO factions and the Young Turks. It was only when negotiation seemed no longer a possible solution that the different factions united and took on a much more nationalistic course. I will also analyze the Organization’s new strategy and tactics, adopted after its restoration pointing at how important this was for the outbreak of the First Balkan War.

##### ***IV.1. Macedonian Autonomy and the Young Turks***

The Young Turk Revolution was a major event in Ottoman history that not only completely changed the political situation in Macedonia but had a considerable impact on the last 15 years of the Empire’s existence and also shaped the early Turkish Republic. This

means that the question concerning the Young Turks' origins and policy is part of a much grander debate that goes beyond the limits of this study. At the same time, however, the Young Turk movement was deeply connected with the internal development in Macedonia and the complex ethno-confessional situation there, a result of the intersection of Ottoman imperial policies, inter-imperial rivalry, and complications caused by competing nationalisms. That is why before I proceed with the analysis of the IMARO programs in this period, it is necessary to briefly touch upon several more important aspects of the Young Turk movement.

Above all, the movement attempted to struggle with the problems caused by foreign intervention and irredentism and to stop the disintegration of the Empire by bringing together the disparate nationalistic aspirations within the framework of an administratively regulated constitutional regime. The movement began largely as an intellectual one in 1889 when the students in the Army Medical School established a secret committee called *Ittihad-i Osmaniye* or "Ottoman Unity". This group of intellectuals originated from all possible regions of the Empire and the term "Young Turk" is misleading since the majority of them were not ethnic Turks.<sup>180</sup> The Committee's goal was the deposition of Sultan Abdul Hamid who was considered the main reason for foreign interference. However, at this early stage their ideology was still rather rudimentary and did not go beyond the ousting of Adbul Hamid. Parliamentary rule was not the most important element in their ideology which had been shaped much more by the elitist theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Social Darwinism.<sup>181</sup>

Following an unsuccessful *coup d'état* attempt in 1896, most of the Young Turks were forced to seek refuge in Europe. Ahmed Riza, who later became known as the leader of the Young Turk émigrés started a newspaper to propagate his ideas which revolved around the preservation of the Empire's unity and modernization. Riza opposed "Ottoman authority to be

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<sup>180</sup> This is holds true not only for the first Young Turks but also for the whole period. Zurcher, Eric, "The Young Turks: Children of the Borderlands?," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (1-2), 275-86.

<sup>181</sup> Sukru Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

replaced with direct intervention of the foreign Powers” and the selective base on which reforms had been carried: “We want reforms not only for one or another province but for the whole Empire; not only for the benefit of one nationality but for the benefit of all subjects of the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>182</sup>

The First Congress was held in February 1902 in Paris. The delegates belonged to almost all nationalities – Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Kurds, Albanians, and Armenians. The congress, however, resulted in a split. One group led by prince Sabahaddin formed the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization. As the name suggested, they advocated a radical decentralization of the Ottoman Empire. Every *vilayet*, every *kaza*, even every village was to have autonomous rule. Many non-Turks in the movement which wanted to see their provinces autonomous sided with prince Sabahaddin. The group around Ahmed Riza, who advocated preserving of centralism, formed the Committee of Union and Progress (*Ittihad ve Terraki Cemiyeti*). The merit of the Young Turk émigrés was that they informed the internal opposition for the state of world affairs but did not play a major role in the preparation of the revolution.<sup>183</sup>

The committee founded in 1906 under the name the “Ottoman Freedom Society” (*Osmanli Hurriyet Cemiyeti*) in Salonika was the one which actually carried out the revolution. It had no connections, at least in the beginning, with the Young Turks in Europe. Its founders were mainly local clerks and officers like.<sup>184</sup> They were driven not by any theoretical considerations or convictions but from the concrete conditions in Macedonia. Ideologically there were no differences between them and the Paris committee. They pursued the goal of restoring the constitutional regime with the Constitution of 1876 – a goal of all Young Turks.

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<sup>182</sup> Cited in Adanir, *Makedonskiyat*, 248.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>184</sup> Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 212.

The new committee managed to attract many members and followers among the young officers of the Third Army Corps in Salonika. Most of them were commanders of small units which fought against the armed bands. In the numerous clashes with the different bands they learned to value the national idealism of their adversaries.<sup>185</sup> They also had comprehended the uselessness of all their efforts because no matter how successful they were, once captured the rebels were as a rule released either by a sultan's amnesty or by the intervention of some Great Power.<sup>186</sup>

The independent and even sometimes competing groups of the Young Turk movement tried to achieve unification. In September 1907 an agreement for unification was reached between Ahmed Riza's group and the "Ottoman Freedom Society" in Salonika. The common goal was the restoration of the Constitution.<sup>187</sup> This was soon followed by the Second Congress. The initiative came from the Armenian revolutionary federation, *Dashnaksutyun*. As already mentioned, IMARO was also invited but Bulgarians refused to participate because they were not willing to contribute to "the revival of Turkey."<sup>188</sup> The Congress (agreed on the following basic principles: "1) to force Sultan Hamid to abdicate; 2) to change the present administration drastically and 3) to establish a system of *mesveret* (consultation) and constitutional [government]."<sup>189</sup>

While the émigrés tried to oppose the arguments of the advocates of Macedonian autonomy, the Young Turks in Macedonia were facing the local realities. The growing indignation of the Muslims against terror of the Christian bands created a social base for political and military action. In a long sequel of bloody clashes in the years 1907 – 1908 the Third Ottoman Army managed to a large extent to limit the Bulgarian *komitajis* activity. As a

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 222..

<sup>186</sup> Adanir, *Makedonsiyat*, 252.

<sup>187</sup> Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 215-217.

<sup>188</sup> Hristo Matov, *Za svoyata*, 53.

<sup>189</sup> Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 205.



result of this energetic struggle and the internal strife within IMARO lines, at the end of 1907 the Organization was constantly losing positions.<sup>190</sup>

The campaign against the Serbian *chetniks* was also successful. In regards to the Greek bands, the Young Turks' attitude was determined mostly by their cooperation with the Albanians. In 1907 and 1908 Albanians were a target of systematic attacks by the *andartes*. While previously the Greek bands would have been tolerated as a useful counterbalance to IMARO, in the autumn of 1907 the Ottoman troops started a decisive offensive against them in the whole *vilayet* of Monastir.<sup>191</sup>

When the Ottoman army was about to eliminate bandit activity in Macedonia, Great Britain caused another shift in the Macedonian question with a new initiative for reforms. It proposed an expansion of the European gendarmerie forces and the appointment of a foreign general governor of Macedonia. Adbul Hamid hinted that he was prone to appoint Hilmi pasha as a general governor for Macedonia but would never accept a governor under European control. Greece also objected to this intervention, since in her eyes the new reforms would serve the Bulgarian interests. Such was also the Serbian position. On the other hand, the official circles in Sofia were very joyful of the prospects of a future expansion of reforms, something which Bulgarians saw as another step towards autonomy.<sup>192</sup> This time the British seemed determined to act. In a meeting in Reval (Tallinn) on 9 June 1908, the British king Edward VII and the Russian czar Nicolas II reached a principle agreement that by the end of the year a new reform project would be introduced. Its main principle would be the autonomy of Macedonia.<sup>193</sup>

The Young Turks were compelled to act quickly also for another reason. A commission sent by the Sultan found some traces of the existence of their secret organization.

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<sup>190</sup> Adanir, *Makedonskiyat*, 253.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 255-256.

<sup>193</sup> Milcho Lalkov, "Myurtzshtegskata reformena programa" (1903-1908) [Murztseg Reform Program] in *Natzionalnoosvobotileno*, vol 3, 24.

And if the Young Turks did not act immediately, there was the danger that they would be caught and prosecuted. This gave the signal for a revolution. An important and still debated question in this regard is whether the Young Turks sincerely tried to reach an agreement with the national movements or, as some historians have argued, were stern centralists and “Turkish” nationalists from the very beginning.<sup>194</sup> What is clear is that at this early stage of the revolution they needed as much support as they could from all nationalities. Their position on the national question as they presented it during August 1908 included the following demands: the Constitution should be based upon popular sovereignty; the different regions should be guaranteed to a large extent administrative autonomy; primary education should be conducted in the native language; and agrarian reforms were to occur.<sup>195</sup> It is from this platform that the CUP started negotiations with the different national movements within the Ottoman Empire.

#### ***IV.2. The Right Wing: the Union of the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs***

As already discussed in the previous chapter, on the eve of the Young Turk Revolution IMARO was split into two main factions and practically did not function as a single whole. The Central Committee elected at the Kyustendil Congress represented only Bitola, Skopje, and half of Salonika region. Serres and Strumitza activists pursued their own policy to which Adrianople activists were adherent. Following the revolution this gap was widening on the question as to what the attitude towards the newly established regime should be.

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<sup>194</sup> As I already mentioned, the term “Young Turk” is a misnomer. The movement was by no means ethnically Turkish and the members of were coming from very different backgrounds and perspectives. Nationalistic historiography tends to oversimplify the ambiguities of their early policy. In this regard it is surprising, how similar to the Balkan treatment of the subject and the Arab nationalistic historiography are. See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 1997), 1-17.

<sup>195</sup> Fikret Adanir, “Natzionalisticheskayat iredentizam na Balkanite i osmankata politika, 1878-1912” [Nationalistic Irredentism on the Balkans and Ottoman Policy, 1878-1912] in *100 Godini*, 76-78.

The Kyustendil Congress rejected the Young Turk proposal for cooperation due to the different goals of the two organizations.<sup>196</sup> Yane Sandanski's supporters from the end of 1907 and the beginning of 1908 were shifting away from autonomy towards general democratization within the Ottoman political system. This made them a potential CUP ally but, despite common goals, up to the revolution no contacts were established.<sup>197</sup>

The Young Turks took the first step towards negotiations. Shortly before the revolution on 4 July 1908 their Salonika branch sent a letter to the IMARO Monastir Regional Committee. They offered cooperation on the already discussed principles of liberalism, parliamentary rule, and equality for all.<sup>198</sup> On 12 July the Central Committee members Petko Penchev and Pavel Hristov summoned a meeting in Monastir with the representatives of the district committees. They decided to cease armed activities and disband their *chetas*. This decision met strong opposition and was not easily passed. This was a symptom of the prevailing moods in IMARO lines even at this early stage of negotiations.<sup>199</sup>

On the initiative of the Young Turk Committee within the city the negotiations continued between the leaderships of the two organizations. Hristo Matov was skeptical from the very beginning and in his own words joined the negotiations only to save the Organization from disintegration. The IMARO representatives explicitly stressed that they “join the Young Turk movement conditionally” and were ready to resume the armed struggle if “the interests of the Bulgarian population had not been fulfilled.” It was agreed that the *chetas* would be disbanded only if general political amnesty granted. The main point of contention was

<sup>196</sup> Silyanov, *Osvoboditelnite*, vol 2, 563-565.

<sup>197</sup> Zorka Parvanova, “Legalnite Organizatzii i partii na balgarskoto naselenie v Osmanskata imperiya” [Legal Organizations and Parties of the Bulgarian Population in the Ottoman Empire] in *Natzionalnoosvoboditelno*, vol.3, 224.

<sup>198</sup> Document №297 “Pismo №108 ot Osmanskoto progresivno i sayuzno obshtesvto do Bitolskiya okrazhen revolyutzionen komitet na VMORO s predlozhenie za edinodeystvie na vsichki potisnati v Otomanskata imperiya [Letter №287 from the Ottoman Progressive Unionist Society to the IMARO Monastir Regional Revolutionary Committee for Cooperation of All Oppressed in the Ottoman Empire] in *Vatreshnata*, 896-897.

<sup>199</sup> Parvanova, *Legalnite*, 226.

IMARO's demand that the *chetniks* be allowed to keep their weapons.<sup>200</sup> The problem seemed inextricable and after the third meeting the negotiations stopped without any real agreement to be concluded.<sup>201</sup>

During the negotiations with the Committee for Union and Progress, Petko Penchev and Pavel Hristov simultaneously contacted Sandanski's group to agree upon a common platform so that they could present the Young Turks the demands of "the whole Internal Organization." After the arrival of Hristo Matov in Salonika around 25 July the negotiations between the two wings continued. Nikola Naumov, the editor-in-chief of *Makedono-odrinski pregled* (Macedonian-Adrianople Review) magazine, acted as mediator. He drafted a project platform based on the Ottoman constitution, the *Vilayet* Act, some of the Murzsteg reforms, and the IMARO program. The project demanded the creation of an autonomous province similar to Eastern Rumelia.<sup>202</sup> It "was accepted in principle by Matov's comrades but categorically rejected by those of Sandanski as ultra-nationalistic, local and anti-constitutional."<sup>203</sup> At that time Sandanski was already working on a program much more internationalist in character.

With all negotiations failed, the right wing proceeded to form a separate political party. After the revolution the constitutional clubs were the main organizational forms for political activity of the non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire. Although their appearance was stimulated to a certain degree by the Young Turks' efforts to engage the population in a more active support of the new regime, the clubs quickly developed into political organizations with a clearly defined national character.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Borbite v Makedoniya i Odrinsko. Spomeni, 1878-1912 [The Struggles in Macedonia and Adrianople Region. Memoirs] (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo), 1981, vol2, 116.

<sup>201</sup> Parvanova, Legalnite, 227.

<sup>202</sup> Tzoch Bilyarski, "Vatreshnata makedono-odrinska revolyutzionna organizatziya, Sayuzat na balgarskite konstituzionni klubove i Narodnata federativna partiya (balgarska sektziya) sled Mladoturksta revolyutziya" [The Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization, Union of Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs and the People's Federative Party (Bulgarian Section) after the Young Turk Revolution] *IDA* (56) 1988, 136-137.

<sup>203</sup> Tzoch Bilyarski, "Introduction" in *Vatreshnata*, 45-46.

<sup>204</sup> Parvanova, Legalnite, 229.

The first Bulgarian Constitutional Club was created in Salonika on July 27 and quickly started to form clubs in other places.<sup>205</sup> Since its foundation the Salonika Club provisioned a quota of four seats in the leadership for IMARO members. Hristo Matov was instrumental in the drafting of the statute. The main goal was “regional self-government.” Among the other points were “to keep and develop the Bulgarian culture” and to “take care of the economic development of the country” while keeping “brotherly relations with the other nationalities” and working for “the prosperity and the greatness of the Ottoman state.”<sup>206</sup>

The statute of the Salonika Club became the model for the other clubs. The founding congress of the Union of the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs was held in 7-13 September 1908 in Salonika. The UBCC members were mainly former IMARO activists, representatives of the clergy, and the wealthier strata of the Bulgarian population. Despite the disagreements with the Young Turks, the establishment of a constitutional-parliamentary regime was accepted positively. Most of the delegates thought that the Union should stick to the principles within the IMARO statutes. The majority of the delegates supported the formula for regional self-government as different nationalities were to be grouped in separate administrative units.<sup>207</sup> In the program were also included, almost without amendments, the demands that were present in different documents prior to the congress – changes in the Constitution, further democratization of the political system with universal suffrage, etc.<sup>208</sup>

It is not necessary to go into further discussion of UBCC. From what has been said, it is clear that they were nationalistically minded and met Young Turks’ platform with reserves

<sup>205</sup> Georgi Parvanov, “Sazdavane Sayuza na balgarskite konstituzionni klubove (yuli-sept. 1909)” [The Creation of the Union of the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs] – *Vekove* (6) 1982, 10.

<sup>206</sup> Document №294 “Ustav na Balgarskiya konstituzionen klub v Solun” [Statute of the Salonika Bulgarian Constitutional Club] in *Vatreshnata*, 905-907.

<sup>207</sup> This was actually the plan maximum but put in diplomatic tone. The text says: “the grouping of the different nationalities in new administrative units, more homogenous if possible, with regional self-government”. *Dnevni izveštaniya i vtoriya kongres na Sayuza na balgarskite konstituzionni klubove* [Diaries from the Founding and Second Congress of the Union of Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs] (Solun, 1910), 84.

<sup>208</sup> Document №301 “Programna deklaratsiya na Sayuza na balgarskite konstituzionni klubove” [Program Declaration of the Union of the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs] and Document №302 “Ustav na Sayuza na balgarskite konstituzionni klubove” [Statutes of the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs] in *Vatreshnata*, 926-931.

from the very beginning. Under these circumstances the negotiations between the Committee for Union and Progress and IMARO could hardly have proceeded smoothly. In a later evaluation of the events Matov highly appreciated his own efforts for preserving at least the right wing out of “Young Turk schemes” and fiercely attacked Sandanski and Chernopeev for the agreement they made with the CUP.<sup>209</sup> In his memoirs Matov ridiculed CUP attempts to reconcile or even to merge the two organizations.<sup>210</sup> In contrast, Pancho Dorev who was Matov’s interpreter in these negotiations criticized in his memoirs his superior’s arrogant attitude.<sup>211</sup> The Young Turks were also aware of the difficulties of coming to terms with the IMARO right wing. Besides they were not desperate to reach an agreement with them since the prospects of cooperation with the left wing were much higher.<sup>212</sup>

#### ***IV.3. The Left Wing: the Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization and the People’s Federative Party***

As discussed in the previous chapter, even before the Young Turk Revolution some of the leftists who were convinced that no agreement with their ideological opponents was possible within the existing structures founded a separate Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (MARO). Most of its activists came from the IMARO Serres group and MARO was created to a large extent to oppose the former.<sup>213</sup> The swift and dramatic changes that came with the revolution caused a further development of their plans according to the new situation. In a special memorandum addressed to Christians and Muslims alike, Sandanski welcomed the revolution describing it as “the ray of freedom so long awaited.” He assured his fellow-countrymen that “with the joint endeavors of all the

<sup>209</sup> Hristo Matov, *Za svoyata*, 15.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-58.

<sup>211</sup> Pancho Dorev, *Vanshna politika i prichini za nashite catastrofi* [Foreign Policy and the Causes for Our Catastrophes] (Sofia: 1924), 14-19.

<sup>212</sup> Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 245-246.

<sup>213</sup> Document №298 “Pismo ot Solunskiya okrazhen komitet i Proektoprograma na Mekedono-odrinskata revolyutzionna organizatziya, izraboyena ot Serkiya, Solusniya i Strumishki okrazi” [A Letter from the Saloniak Regional Committee and a Draft Program of the Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization made by the Serres, Salonika and Strumitza regions] in *Vatreshnata*, 911-921.

nationalities” they shall win “their full freedom” and at the same time warned them against “the villainous agitation which might be undertaken by the official authorities in Bulgaria.”<sup>214</sup>

After MARO firmly opposed the foundation of constitutional clubs and ended the negotiations with the right wing for a common platform, the Sandanists, as they were known, prepared their own program. The so-called “Draft Program” was published on behalf of Serres, Strumitza, and the Salonika revolutionary regions.<sup>215</sup> The basic principles were the “most radical transformations in the Empire in the spirit of a real democracy,” and MARO demanded from the Young Turks “preliminary guarantees for the rights and freedom.” If these demands were fulfilled, there would be no reason that the Macedonia and Adrianople region should be separated from the Empire because with “the introduction of such an order, in which every nation, including ours – the Bulgarian, will have all guarantees for free political, economical, and cultural development.”<sup>216</sup>

The general political demands included: liquidation of absolutism, popular sovereignty, democratization; constitutionalism, one-chamber parliament, provincial self-government up to the smallest administrative units, and universal suffrage. All central and local administrative offices were to be elective. The passive and active voting rights were to be limited only by the qualification of age. MARO also demanded the abolishment of all national and class privileges and absolute equality for all nationalities and religious communities. Education was to be in the native language, as the primary education would be universal, mandatory, and free of charge. The finance of education would be taken from the state and provincial budgets. MARO also wanted the replacement of the regular army on the

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<sup>214</sup> Document №345 “Manifesto by Yane Sandanski to All Nationalities in the Ottoman Empire” in *Documents on the Struggles*, 542.

<sup>215</sup> Both the Manifesto and the Draft Program were actually written by radical social democrats which came from the Principality and joined Sandanski’s group after 11 July. Gerogi Parvanov “Nardono-federativnata partiya v natzionlanoosvoboditelno dvizhenie” [People’s Federative Party in the National-Liberation Movement] *Vekove* (3) 1989, 33.

<sup>216</sup> Document №298 “Pismo ot Solunskiya okrazhen komitet i Proektoprograma na Mekedono-odrinskata revolyutzionna organizatziya, izraboyena ot Serkiya, Solusniya i Strumishki okrazi” [A Letter from the Salonika Regional Committee and a Draft Program of the Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization made by the Serres, Salonika and Strumitza regions] in *Vatreshnata*, 911-921.

local level with a people's armed militia which would operate only in the region. In a manner similar to that of the regular army, all citizens regardless of nationality and religion would be allowed to serve.<sup>217</sup>

The cooperation between CUP and MARO seemed strange to some foreign observers. On this occasion the Austro-Hungarian diplomat and civil agent in Macedonia Alfred Rapoport stated that:

The Young Turks embarked on negotiations on the Bulgarian program points from which they can have no interest, as is the case with the socialist and anti-clerical ideas of Sandanski, or on the demand for provincial and local autonomy, diametrically directed against Ottoman national interests for the defining of the Bulgarian borders in Macedonia.<sup>218</sup>

Rapoport was both wrong and right. The Young Turks definitely were very much interested in the agreement with Sandanski, especially having in mind the attitude of the right wing, and once achieved this agreement served well CUP as a proof of an alliance with the Bulgarian population of Macedonia.<sup>219</sup> At the same time, he was right in his observation regarding the demand for autonomy. However, from the very beginning the leftists' policies were inconsistent. Despite MARO's sincere desire to find a solution to the national problems in the Ottoman Empire through reforms and democratization, it is clear from the documents that the problem of autonomy was still present. The Draft Program's provision for broad self-government bore many more similarities with the programs of the MARO's adversaries of the right wing than those of their allies – the Young Turks. Some of the left wing activists also stuck firmly to the autonomous beliefs stating that they would struggle for broad autonomy for the Macedonia and Adrianople region, no matter whether the other regions in the Empire would acquire the same status. They tried to harmonize the question of autonomy with the

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> *Avstriski dokumenti za istorijata na makedonskiot narod* (1907-1908) [Austrian Documents on the History of the Macedonian People], vol. 2. (Skopje, 1981), 108.

<sup>219</sup> Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 247.



position of the socialists for the supremacy of the common imperial interests over the national.<sup>220</sup>

In fact, within MARO from the beginning there were different visions between the old revolutionaries and the radical social democrats and socialists which joined the movement. What united them was their support for the Young Turk regime.<sup>221</sup> Without questioning his loyalty to the CUP, Yane Sandanski firmly defended the independence of the organization as “the only representative of the legitimate desires of the Macedonian-Adrianople Bulgarians.”<sup>222</sup> The Strumitza leader Hristo Chernopeev, however, disagreed with Sandanski, rejected autonomism and accepted reformism. According to him, the main principles of the movement should be above all the stabilization of the new regime, the uniting of all political forces around the Young Turk Committee in a single Ottoman democratic party and the union of all nationalities “in the name of the interest of the whole Empire”.<sup>223</sup>

At the end of August 1908 took place the Adrianople Regional Congress. The congress came with resolutions supporting the project program of MARO.<sup>224</sup> On 23 August the Salonika Revolutionary District sent a circular letter in which the date 25 September 1908 was set for the summoning of the general congress of MARO. In a second circular letter of the Salonika District Committee from 21 September 1908 sent to the Adrianople District Committee it is pointed out that the main reason for the congress will be “to discuss the new

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<sup>220</sup> Parvanova, Legalni, 233-234.

<sup>221</sup> At this stage leftists' support for the CUP was unconditional. For example, when Bulgaria declared its independence in September 1908 the leftists categorically condemned this act stating that: “...the Bulgarian monarchism with its conduct and actions gives another categorical proof that in its political plans there is no wish to support the Macedonian Bulgarians in their struggle for rights and freedom as citizens of the Ottoman Empire” Document №306 “Apel na Serskiya okrazhen revolyutzionen komitet za obyavenata nezavisimost na Balgariya [An Appeal of the Serres Regional Revolutionary Committee Regarding the Bulgarian Declaration of independence] in *Vatreshnata*, 939-942.

<sup>222</sup> Draft Program, 925.

<sup>223</sup> *Edinstvo* [Unity], №3, 4 October 1908, 1.

<sup>224</sup> Document №300 “Rezolyutzii ot Izvanredniya kongres na Odriskata revolyutzionna organizatziya [Resolution from the Extraordinary Congress of the Adrianople Revolutionary Organization] in *Vatreshnata*, 922-925.

situation and to elaborate a common platform for negotiations with the Young Turks”.<sup>225</sup> From this document it can be concluded that the activists of MARO were able to attract also the revolutionaries from the Adrianople region.

The activists of IMARO spread throughout Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace in order to carry out a campaign for the congress, but it was spoiled because Sandanski was heavily wounded in an assassination attempt committed by the *voyvoda* Tane Nikolov who was carrying out the death sentence passed on Sandanski during the Kyustendil congress. Thus, the constituent congress of the MARO was not held. This lasted until January 1909 when the two groups centered around the newspapers *Konstituzionna zarya* (Constitutional Dawn) and *Edinstvo* (Unity) agreed to unite into a single party.

Therefore, MARO disappeared from the historical scene, but its principles in the Draft Program became the base of the program documents of the People’s Federative Party. The People’s Federative Party was founded on 3 – 10 August 1909. The party was planned as a horizontal structure or a corporation that would unite the leftist groupings of all nationalities, and the congress was seen as founding only the Bulgarian section of the party. In fact, it remained the only one. Its main principles were almost entirely based on the program of MARO. The only new element here was the general and quite laconic formulation providing for an “Eastern Federation” without any further specifications of the term. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was an old social democratic demand and first appeared in the ideology of the organization at least ten years earlier.<sup>226</sup>

The other program documents reflected the existing contradiction between the old revolutionaries, mainly the group around Sandanski, and the newly arrived social democrats and the uneasy compromises that they were forced to make. The solving of the national

<sup>225</sup> Document №306 Okrazhno pismo ot Solunskiya okrazhen revolyutzionen komitet do Odrinskiya okoliyski komitet za nasrochvane datata na obsjiya kongres na MORO 21 September 1908 in *Vatreshnata*, 939.

<sup>226</sup> *Resheniya na Uchreditelniya kongres na Narodnata federativna partiya* (balgarska sektziya) [Decisions of the Founding Congress of the People’s Federative Party (Bulgarian Section)] (Solun: 1909), 15.

questions was connected with the process of democratization of the Ottoman administrative and political system. The Declaration revealed the contradictory attitude towards the CUP in the summer of 1909. On the one hand, it was characterized as a “promoter of nationalism” but on the other as “the only guarantee for the spread of the democratic rights.” The position towards the constitutional clubs was more straight-forward. They were condemned as “protectors of the interest of the *haute bourgeoisie* and agents of foreign aspirations.”<sup>227</sup>

The fact that the leftists managed to establish a party was an achievement itself, but the existing internal conflicts thwarted any unity in action, and the compromise did not prevent split. First, Sandanski refused to participate in the new leadership, and in the end of 1909, only several months later, Chernopeev left the party to restore the Strumitza Revolutionary Committee. In response, the Central Bureau issued a special declaration which condemned the decision of the Strumitza activists and reassured the CUP in its loyalty. During the discussions in the beginning of 1910 the party leadership once again condemned the restoration of the revolutionary movement and described it as a result of “nationalistic aspiration.”<sup>228</sup>

The People’s Federative Party had neither the political nor the social cohesion to do anything more. Its activity was limited to several initiatives on the agrarian and cultural problems and with the parliamentary speeches of its representative Dimitar Vlahov. In August 1910, however, the PFP was prohibited by the CUP.

#### ***IV.4. IMARO Restored: the Road to War***

The Young Turk project of Ottomanism presumed political loyalty to the Ottoman state on the basis of mutual and equal rights of citizenship. In Macedonia after 1908 this

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 3-8.

<sup>228</sup> *Narodna volya* [People’s Will], №23, 29 August 1910, 1.

definitely meant that the Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, and Albanians were expected to give up their secessionist aspirations – but not by all means their nationality.<sup>229</sup> However, in long run, the idea failed. The goals of the Young Turks and the different national movements seemed to overlap much more in their rejection of the Hamidian regime than on what basis the new order should be built. The idea of Ottomanism managed only temporarily to unite the nationalities or-create a sense of loyalty to the state.

The period of cooperation turned out to be very short. From 1909 on the CUP leaders increasingly resorted to authoritarian measures to tighten the control over the different national movements. The Young Turk regime started to pursue a consistent policy of centralization in the second half of 1909. First, all national political organizations were banned. This was followed by campaigns aimed at disarming the population, and finally, the Vagrants and Suspicious Persons Act and the Bill of Bands practically sanctioned the persecution of the former band members.<sup>230</sup>

Within this strained atmosphere some of the former IMARO activists proceeded to resume armed activity. During the spring of 1909 the Yenice-Vardar *voyvoda* Apostol Petkov openly declared his intention to do so. At the same time, the reports of foreign diplomats began to mention armed bands active in the regions in different regions of Macedonia.<sup>231</sup> Petkov was followed by Hristo Chernopeev in the end of December 1909. In the beginning of February 1910 Chernopeev, together with some of his old-time associates, restored the Strumitza revolutionary region. On 4 March in Sofia former IMARO leaders of both the left and right wing led by Chernopeev, Apostol Petkov, and Tane Nikolov founded a new organization called Bulgarian People's Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization

<sup>229</sup> Fikret Adanir, *Natzionalisticheskayat*, 83-85. Also Aykut Kansy, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 165-240.

<sup>230</sup> Zorka Parvanova, "Birth of the Conflict: the Young Turk Regime and the National Movements in European Turkey, 1908-1910" *Balkan Studies (Etudes balkaniques)* (4) 2000, 39.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

(BPMARO). Among the founders were also members of the former Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee.

The new organization was created “on national grounds with the goal to obtain autonomy of Macedonia and Adrianople region as a phase towards our spiritual and political unification.”<sup>232</sup> Contrary to IMARO, “members can be only Bulgarians regardless of sex or religion,” and its territorial range of action encompassed “not only Turkey but all lands populated by Bulgarians and those in which adherents are to be found”.<sup>233</sup>

In order to propagate their ideas, the revolutionaries wrote an appeal to the adherents published in the newspaper *Kambana* (Bell). No uprisings or reforms were on the agenda anymore. Obviously disappointed by the result of Ilinden, the reform projects and the Young Turk Revolution, BMARO’s goal was not so much to work among the local population, as it was to impose the Bulgarian state to intervene on their behalf, “because there can not be two ideals – state and national and the state should well understand that.”<sup>234</sup> During this period Hristo Matov also shared the same opinion. He accused Bulgaria of being too indifferent and following a policy of “not moving a finger.” In the newspaper *Savremenna missal* (Modern Thought) he stated that a future war between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire was inevitable.<sup>235</sup>

Unity was achieved in early 1911 when the Organization was restored with its old name, statutes, and regulations. The goal remained the same – full political autonomy for Macedonia and the Adrianople region. In the protocol for the unification however, changes were introduced. The restored organization accepted “only members Bulgarian

<sup>232</sup> Document №330 “Rezolyutziya ot Uchreditelnoto sabranie na Balgarskata narodna makedono-odrinska revolyutzionna organizatziya” [Resolution From the Founding Assembly of the Bulgarian People’s Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization] in *Vatreshnata*, 984-985.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> *Kambana* [Bell], №. 987, 1 August 1910, 1.

<sup>235</sup> Zorka Parvanova. “Programme and Organisational Transformations of National Movements in European Turkey (1910-1912): Part Two: The Albanian and The Bulgarian Revolutions” in *Balkan Studies (Etudes balkaniques)* (1) 2002, 55-56.

nationalists.”<sup>236</sup> Taking advantage of the possibilities that the 1908 statute provided, the new IMARO Central Committee was elected through written correspondence, since the term of the old one was over in 1909. It included Hristo Chernopeev, Todor Aleksandrov and Petar Chaulev and a reserve member – lieutenant-colonel Aleksandar Protogerov, an officer in the Bulgarian army and former Supremist *voyvoda*, thus representing almost all factions within the movement. With an open letter from March 1911 the foreign representative in Sofia, Todor Lazarov, reported that the split in the Organization had been overcome, and it was active again.<sup>237</sup>

The restored IMARO chose new tactics– bombing assaults by small specially trained units. The main propagator of such tactics was the new strong man in the Central Committee, Todor Aleksandrov. IMARO started with attack on railways, trains, train stations, bridges in order to affect European interests and provoke intervention.<sup>238</sup> When the Italo-Turkish War broke out in September 1911, Aleksandrov was determined to drag Bulgaria into military action against the Empire and targets were changed. The new tactics was concentrated on bombing explosions in public places which would indiscriminately kill as many people as possible, thus in turn provoke Muslim reprisals on the Bulgarian population and incite Bulgarian public opinion to go to war. In this regard the new tactics succeeded. The bombing attacks in Shtip in November 1911 and Kochani in July 1912<sup>239</sup> were in many ways influential in inciting the Bulgarian public for a war with the Empire.

<sup>236</sup> Document №336 “Protokol №1 za obedinenieto na BNMARO i VMORO v edna organizatziya i printzipite, na koito tq tryabva da stoi [Protocol №1 for the Unification of BPMARO and IMARO into One Organizations and the Principles It Should Be Based Upon] in *Vatreshnata*, 999-1000.

<sup>237</sup> Document №338 “Pismo ot ZP na VMORO za postignatoto edinstvo v Organizatziyata i za zapochvaneto na revolyutzionni deystviya” [A Letter from IMARO Foreign Representation About the Unity Achieved in the Organization and the Starting of Revolutionary Activities] March 1911 in *Vatreshnata*, 1006-1008.

<sup>238</sup> Zorka Parvanova, “Vazobnovyavaneto na vaorazhenata borba i vazstanovyavaneto na VMORO” [Resuming Armed Activities and IMARO Restoration] in *Natzionalnoosvoboditelno*, vol.3, 256.

<sup>239</sup> These are known as *magareshkite atentati* (literally bombing attacks with donkeys) because donkeys with explosives in their saddlebags were used as carriers. Donkeys caused no suspicions and allowed the terrorists to save their lives. The explosion in Shtip was close to the town mosque and killed 1 and injured 29 people. In the panic and the crowd violence that followed 20 Bulgarians were killed and around 300 injured. In Kotchani the bomb exploded on the town market and killed 24 people, most of them Bulgarians. In the retaliations were killed

## Conclusion

In the current thesis I have argued that IMARO's demand for autonomy for Macedonia and the Adrianople region has to be sought in the intersection of Ottoman imperial policies, the interventionist policies of Ottoman imperial rivals, competing national projects of the Balkan states and the ongoing processes of nationalization among the different communities in the Ottoman Empire after the Congress of Berlin. It was a multidimensional concept covering various and deferent meanings in which the nationalist interpretation often did not go unopposed.

The idea of autonomy first for Macedonia and then for Adrianople Thrace was born among the Macedonian-Adrianople émigrés in Bulgaria. The successful unification between the Principality and the autonomous Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia sanctioned it as the successful pattern that was to be followed. Autonomy was considered not only an option but even a necessary phase because first, it was more realistic than unification and second, it guaranteed the preservation of the so much disputed territorial integrity of Macedonia and Thrace.

In this regard the founders of the Internal Organization adopted an already established model. During the first years the Organization worked only among the Exarchist population mainly through propaganda and did not resort to violence. The scheme they wanted to follow was the formula: revolutionarization - uprising - foreign intervention - autonomy.

The Cretan Revolt of 1896, the subsequent war between Greece and the Ottoman Empire and the final settlement of the crisis were another source of inspiration for the revolutionaries. Although the rebellion was quelled and the Ottoman army defeated the Greeks, European diplomacy intervened and granted Cretans what they demanded –

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21 and injured 221 people. Angel Tomov and Georgi Bazhdarov, *Revoljutzionnata borba v Makedoniya* [The Revolutionary Struggle in Macedonia] (Skopje, 1917; Sofia, 1918), 142-144.

autonomy under the suzerainty of the Sultan. To the IMARO leaders it seemed that all they needed to do is to rebel, and success was imminent.

This initiated a new period of intensive armament and a preparation for revolt. In a few years what started as a small conspiracy of Exarchist school teachers in a few towns was transformed into an all-encompassing organization with branches in almost every village. The expansion and the change in social character in turn brought changes to the main principles. The complicated ethno-confessional situation convinced IMARO leaders to attract as many supporters as possible “regardless of nationality or religion.” It was also heavily influenced by the views of the socialist and social democratic circles in the Principality of Bulgaria many of whom actively participated in the movement. The idea evolved from autonomy for Bulgarians to autonomy for all.

Indeed, this was the goal of the 1903 *Ilinden* uprising: to unite all discontent elements in a struggle against the Sultan. However, contrary to the revolutionaries’ expectations, not only did the other communities not accept to join the movement, but they also actively participated against it. The prospect of Macedonian autonomy provoked the other communities to follow IMARO example and to form armed bands to defend their interests.

Another expectation of the rebels, to provoke European intervention, also proved to be wrong. Indeed, European diplomacy intervened with a series of reforms, but these reforms had the exactly opposite goal – to make the movement for autonomy unfounded. The years 1904-1908 saw a full-scale inter-communal war between the different communities in the region. Greek bands were first to appear, followed by Serbian and Albanian ones. The turmoil in Macedonia contributed much for the increasing politicization of the Muslim population in general. The Young Turk movement was deeply rooted in this Macedonian context of endemic violence and threat of foreign intervention.



The defeat of the uprising caused regrouping, serious conflicts and eventual split in IMARO lines catalyzing processes that were born before 1903. The left wing within the movement advocated the idea of autonomy based on the principles of political separatism and federalism. This understanding was based on the premises that, first, the demand for autonomy excluded joining to Bulgaria and should be interpreted as Macedonia and the Adrianople region becoming independent polity, and second, that the future autonomous polity should be built as a federation of all communities.

The representatives of the other faction kept to the pre-*Ilinden* understandings – self-governing of a national majority and guaranteed rights for the minority groups. In these years they were drifting more and more toward Bulgarian nationalism. The Rila Congress of 1905 was the last attempt to bring the left and right wing to terms. The murder of Ivan Garvanov and Boris Sarafov in 1907 on the order of left wing leader Sandanski made any attempt at reconciliation impossible.

The Young Turk Revolution caused another shift in programs of the Macedonia-Adrianople movement. It followed a general tendency in the political ideology of the national movements in the Ottoman Empire catalyzed by the great change after July 1908. Some of the leftists dropped autonomy from the agenda and accepted reformism and democratization within the Ottoman political system. This tendency was manifested most strongly among the group around Hristo Chernopeev. This group declared as its main goal achieving unity between the different nationalities “in the name of the interests of the whole Empire.” Considering that the demand for autonomy left to the isolation of the Bulgarians these activists saw their main goal in the stabilization of the new regime.

The right wing had been skeptical towards the Young Turks from the very beginning. They were not interested in cooperating neither with them nor with other reformist forces.

This group insisted on its independence and traditional goals for the priority of solving the national questions based on broad regional self-government.

After the turn in Young Turks' policy in the second half of 1909 both wings resumed armed activities. Many of the leftists were disappointed with autonomous principle in general. When IMARO was restored in 1911 it adopted a new strategy and tactics. Although autonomy was still the officially proclaimed goal the revolutionaries no longer believed it can be achieved through an uprising, foreign or domestic reforms. They embarked on a terror campaign to provoke a war and achieved it.

This thesis should be viewed as an attempt to overcome the teleological interpretations of nationalism characteristic of Balkan national histories. The history of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization even with respect to its intellectual elite was a much more complicated phenomenon than the homogenous narrative of "national liberation struggles" usually assumes. Many IMARO activists had very different ideas about the future of Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace and that the national option was only one among many, which means it was by no ways inevitable.

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