

UDC 930.85(4-12)

ISSN 0350-7653

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS  
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

# BALCANICA

## XLIV

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

Editor

DUŠAN T. BATAKOVIĆ

Director of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

Editorial Board

FRANCIS CONTE (Paris), DJORDJE S. KOSTIĆ, LJUBOMIR MAKSIMOVIĆ,  
DANICA POPOVIĆ, GABRIELLA SCHUBERT (Jena), BILJANA SIKIMIĆ,  
ANTHONY-EMIL TACHIAOS (Thessaloniki), NIKOLA TASIĆ,  
SVETLANA M. TOLSTAJA (Moscow)

BELGRADE

2013



## **Bulgarian Crimes against Civilians in Occupied Serbia during the First World War**

**Abstract:** Since sufferings of civilian populations during the First World War in Europe, especially war crimes perpetrated against civilians, have – unlike the political and military history of the Great War – only recently become an object of scholarly interest, there still are considerable gaps in our knowledge, the Balkans being a salient example. Therefore, suggesting a methodology that involves a comparative approach, the use of all available sources, cooperation among scholars from different countries and attention to the historical background, the paper seeks to open some questions and start filling lacunae in our knowledge of the war crimes perpetrated against Serb civilians as part of the policy of Bulgarization in the portions of Serbia under Bulgarian military occupation.

**Keywords:** Balkan Wars, First World War, Serbia, Bulgarization policy, crimes against Serbian civilians

### *Crimes against civilian populations in the First World War*

The political and military history of the First World War is very well known; however, today, nearly a century later, the history of civilian populations in Europe, especially those under military occupation, and their sufferings still lacks a thorough investigation. For about seventy years, stereotypes like “trench war”, the “Sarajevo murder”, the battle of Verdun, and many others, tended to predominate in all studies dealing with the Great War; for a long time, even the generally accepted “Total War” theory virtually neglected war crimes perpetrated against civilians. This situation has begun to change about twenty years ago owing to the effort of a few European scholars whose focus on new important issues has given us a chance to observe the Great War from other perspectives. It is now clear beyond doubt that such crimes, along with the policy of extermination and deportation (and, in general, with every war strategy in which civilians were chosen as a target), were frequent during the First World War.

The main credit for this change of view should no doubt be given to scholars working for the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Peronne, France. Annette Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Philippe Nivet and others wrote books about the situation in the occupied territories of France that ought to be considered as fundamental reading for all historians concerned with the study of the condition of civilians in the First World War in

Europe;<sup>1</sup> at the same time, some non-French authors, such as Alan Kramer, John Horne, Peter Liddle, Hugh Cecil and others, have focused their studies on Belgium.<sup>2</sup> In this case too, their work is something of a basic grammar for us, not only because they have been the first to study civilians under occupations in a profound manner, but also because their method can be used in our work as well. Paul Gatrell, Ian Whitehead and others focus their attention on Russia and central-eastern Europe,<sup>3</sup> and there generally are many publications in main European languages,<sup>4</sup> as well as many publications on the Armenian genocide.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the Balkans is concerned, however, there still is a regrettably large lacuna. Very few studies focus on Serbia, Greece and Montenegro (and Romania too), except for some recent ones, among which the most relevant are Bruna Bianchi's studies about Serbia.<sup>6</sup> These publications are

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the main works are Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre. Humanitaire et culture de guerre, populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris: Noësis, 1998); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'Enfant de l'ennemi* (Paris: Aubier Collection historique, 1995); Philippe Nivet, *Les réfugiés français de la Grande Guerre (1914–1920)* (Paris: Economica, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Cecil & Peter Liddle, eds., *Facing Armageddon. The First World War Experienced*, 2 ed. (London: Pen & Sword, 2003); John Horne & Alan Kramer, *German atrocities 1914: A history of denial* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2001); L. Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium. The Untold Story of World War I* (New York – London: New York University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Peter Liddle, John Bourne & Ian Whitehead, eds., *The Great World War 1914–1945*, vol. 1: *Lightning Strikes Twice* (London: Harper Collins, 2000); V. G. Liulevicius, *Kriegsland im Osten. Eroberung, Kolonisierung und Militärberrschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> A very important volume is Bruna Bianchi, ed., *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella Grande Guerra* (Milan: Unicopli, 2006). For an exhaustive bibliography on crimes during WWI, see Oswald Überegger, “Le atrocità nella prima guerra mondiale. Saggio storico-bibliografico e bibliografia scelta”, *DEP* 7 (2007), 232–259 ([www.unive.it/dep](http://www.unive.it/dep)).

<sup>5</sup> The question of Armenian genocide being a very complicated one, the reader is referred to the site [www.armenian-genocide.org](http://www.armenian-genocide.org).

<sup>6</sup> Among the main works are “Crimini di guerra e crimini contro l'umanità. Le stragi sul fronte orientale e balcanico”, in Giovanna Procacci, Marc Silver & Lorenzo Bertucelli, eds., *Le stragi rimosse. Storia, memoria pubblica, scritture* (Milan: Unicopli, 2008), 19–39; “La violenza contro la popolazione civile serba negli scritti di Rodolphe Archibald Reiss 1914–1924”, in Giulia Albanese, ed., *L'intellettuale militante. Scritti per Mario Isnenghi* (Portogruaro: Nuova Dimensione, 2008), 179–197; “Les violations des conventions internationales en Serbie de la part de l'armée austro-hongroise et bulgare 1914–1918”, in

extremely important, but it must be said that the scholars only used sources written in languages they can understand.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this is not the only reason why this question is still so little known in Europe. In fact, no history of crimes against civilians perpetrated on the soil of the Kingdom of Serbia has crossed the borders of today's Serbia ever before; it should be noted here that there seems to be among Serbian historians, unlike their colleagues in Italy or France, a reluctance or unwillingness to go deeper into such questions, still less to "export" them and facilitate comparative approaches or suggestions from non-Serbian historians. Relevant publications by those who can understand Serbian are still predominant, and there does not seem to be much communication with foreign colleagues.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, there is still a lot of work to be done in Serbia as well. Among studies about civilian suffering in the Great War in Serbia, the Austro-Hungarian occupation has always been in the centre of attention of Serbian authors, mostly because of the greater availability of source material.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, there is a critical lack of information about the role played

---

Frédéric Rousseau & Burghart Schmidt, eds., *Les Dérapages de la guerre. Du XVI siècle à nos jours* (Hamburg: DOBU Verlag, 2009), 172–186; "Gli stupri di massa in Serbia durante la Prima guerra mondiale", in Marcello Flores, ed., *Stupri di guerra. La violenza di massa contro le donne nel Novecento* (Milan: Angeli, 2010), 43–60; "Le torture inflitte ai civili nella Serbia occupata", in Lauso Zagato & Simona Pinton, eds., *La tortura nel nuovo millennio. La reazione del diritto* (Padua: CEDAM, 2010), 131–150. See also Charles Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Mieczysław B. Biskupski, *Ideology, Politics and Diplomacy in East Central Europe* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), esp. the chapter "Strategy, Politics, and Suffering: The Wartime Relief of Belgium, Serbia, and Poland, 1914–1918", 31–57; Frédéric Le Moal, *La Serbie: du martyre à la victoire* (Paris: 14-18 Editions, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. *Rapport de la Commission interalliée sur les violations des Conventions de la Haye et le Droit International en général, commises de 1915–1918 par les Bulgares en Serbie occupée. Documents* (Paris 1919); the works of Rodolphe Archibald Reiss; Dragolioub Yovanovitch, *Les effets économiques et sociaux de la guerre en Serbie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928); etc.

<sup>8</sup> One of the rare exceptions is Andrej Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1984), published in English twenty-three years after its first Serbian edition: *Serbia's Great War, 1914–1918* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Among the main studies on Austro-Hungarian occupation are Božica Mladenović, *Grad u austrougarskoj okupacionoj zoni u Srbiji od 1916. do 1918. godine* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2000), and her *Porodica u Srbiji u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 2005); as well as the collections of papers from several conferences: *Srbija 1916. godine, Zbornik radova* no. 5 (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1987); *Srbija 1917. godine, Zbornik radova* no. 6 (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1988); *Srbija 1918. godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države, Zbornik radova* no. 7 (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1989).

by the other occupying force, Bulgaria;<sup>10</sup> in this case, studies are focused on the Toplica Uprising (Toplički ustanak), an insurrection of Serbian people in 1917, and its consequences, while more exhaustive publications on the general situation are mostly lacking.<sup>11</sup>

What is the reason for this? This is not an easy question to answer, especially if we know that there are a lot of sources for the Bulgarian occupation to work with. First of all, the monumental documentation of the Inter-Allied Commission, of which its report is but a small part. It includes reports, victims' testimonies and a large amount of original Bulgarian material produced by both the military and civilian Bulgarian administrations of the occupied territories of Serbia. This documentation is entirely preserved in the fonds of the Archives of Serbia in Belgrade titled Arhiva institucija pod bugarskom okupacijom (The Archive of Institutions under Bulgarian Occupation), and while it is officially inaccessible today, we cannot argue that it was so in the past.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, a consistent part of it (copies and original Bulgarian documents) is preserved and accessible in the Archives of Yugoslavia: Fonds Ministarstvo inostranih poslova Kraljevine SHS, Direkcija za ugovore (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS), Office of Agreements). Primary sources can also be found in other collections in both archives; in the Archives of Serbia: Ministarstvo inostranih dela, Političko odeljenje (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Political Department); in the Archives of Yugoslavia: Delegacija Kraljevine SHS na Konferenciji mira (Delegation of the Kingdom of SCS at the Peace Conference), Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova (Ministry of the Interior), Ministarstvo vera (Ministry for Religious Affairs) and in many

---

<sup>10</sup> Even though Germans were present in the occupied Kingdom of Serbia, we cannot consider them as an occupying force in the true sense of the word.

<sup>11</sup> On the Toplica Uprising: Miliivoje Perović, *Toplički ustanak* (Belgrade: Vojno delo, 1959); Andrej Mitrović, *Toplički ustanak. Mesto u srpskoj istoriji* (Belgrade: SANU, 1993); Božica Mladenović, *Žena u Topličkom ustanku* (Belgrade: Socijalna misao, 1996). Among the studies on Bulgarian occupation: Vladimir Stojančević, *Srbija i srpski narod za vreme rata i okupacije 1914–1918* (Leskovac: Biblioteka Narodnog muzeja u Leskovcu, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> I personally tried a few times to obtain access to the fonds, but to no avail. Some authors used this documentation in the past: Sevdelin Andrejević, "Ekonomska pljačka Srbije za vreme bugarske okupacije", in *Srbija 1918. godine*, 19–34; Božica Mladenović, "Odštetni zahtevi Srbije prema Bugarskoj", in *Srbija na kraju Prvog svetskog rata, Zbornik radova* no. 8 (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1989), 101–104; A. Turović & N. Ivanović, *Leskovac i leskovački kraj 1915–1918* (Leskovac: Istorijski arhiv, 2006); Sladjana Bojković & Miloje Pršić, *Stradanje srpskog naroda u Srbiji 1914–1918* (Belgrade: Istorijski muzej Srbije, 2000), a collection of documents from Serbian archives which brings 19 documents from this fonds.

others. Moreover, important documents are also likely to be found in local archives, such as those of the cities of Niš or Požarevac, but we did not have the opportunity to verify this assumption.

Literature is also an important resource, and it is available in major Serbian libraries, such as the National Library of Serbia and the University Library in Belgrade, and the Matica Srpska Library in Novi Sad. What we have in mind here are not only some wartime and post-war publications, which are among the main sources for Serbian historians today,<sup>13</sup> but also the republished Bulgarian works relating to the same period, such as Prime Minister Radoslavov's diary (years 1914–1915), reports submitted by the official scientific expedition in 1916 whose mission was to find corroborating evidence for the alleged Bulgarian nature of the Morava region and Macedonia, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Finally, an extremely important source that is sadly still underexploited is the vast amount of information available online: scientific works, documents and books in digital format (especially those from the war and post-war periods that cannot be found in libraries).<sup>15</sup>

There is also the material generated by the Bulgarian military and civil authorities which is preserved in the Bulgarian archives, in Sofia and in Veliko Tŭrnovo. This material is undoubtedly the most important, but it seems it is still unavailable. This cannot be an excuse for not studying the Bulgarian occupation and crimes, of course, because we should first use what we do have at our disposal – and, as mentioned before, the quantity of available information is not at all insignificant. First of all, we have to look at it from the standpoint of approach and methodology; namely, even if Bulgarian documents were available, we probably would not be able to understand and use them properly without first analyzing the materials of the Inter-Allied Commission, Archibald Reiss's inquiries and other reports, and also without learning about the crimes committed in other parts of Europe or, in other words, about the work and methodology of other European historians. Nor can the rejection by Bulgarian historiography of Bulgaria's

---

<sup>13</sup> Sreten Dinić, *Bugarska zverstva u vranjskom okrugu* (Belgrade: Narod, 1921); Jovan Hadži Vasiljević, *Bugarska zverstva u Vranju i okolini (1915–1918)* (Novi Sad: Kulturno-privredno društvo Vranjalica, 1922); Stevan Maksimović, *Uspomene iz okupacije nemačke, austrijske i bugarske 1914–1918* (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1919); Dragiša Lapčević, *Okupacija* (Belgrade: Tucović, 1923); etc.

<sup>14</sup> Vasil Radoslavov, *Dnevni belezhki 1914–1916* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski”, 1993); Petŭr Khr. Petrov, ed., *Nauchna ekspeditsia v Makedonia i Pomoravieto 1916* (Sofia: Voennoizdatelski kompleks “Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets” and Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski”, 1993); Dimitŭr Minchev, *Voenno-revolucionnata deĭnost na Petŭr Dŭrvingov 1898–1918* (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> See e.g.: [www.firstworldwar.com](http://www.firstworldwar.com), [www.anamnesis.info](http://www.anamnesis.info), [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

responsibility for the war crimes committed in the First World War be accepted as an excuse; when it comes to invasions, occupations and crimes committed by “our own country”, denial or at least revisionism is not a new phenomenon; unfortunately, it appears that we can consider it as being “accepted” or “normal practice” in about every European national historiography. Exceptions are very rare indeed.

Leaving these considerations aside, this short paper will try to give a picture of the main elements of Bulgarian crimes against civilians perpetrated in the Kingdom of Serbia during the First World War, suggesting a different approach to the one used so far. We hope that this small contribution will be considered as a point of departure for opening new fields of discussion and study; we also hope that it could provide an opportunity for Serbian and other European historians to begin to build together a way to future research.

*The significance of Bulgarian policy against civilians during the First World War*

When we speak about crimes against civilians, we first have to try to define what that means. At the outbreak of the First World War, international law was not adequately equipped to cope with what was about to happen. The Peace Conferences held at The Hague in 1899 and 1907 brought about a codification of the customs and laws of war, but they only vaguely referred to civilians.<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, there clearly was an appalling lack of sanctions in Article 3 of the Convention of 1907: “A belligerent party which violates the provisions of the said Regulation shall, if the case demands, be liable to pay compensation. It shall be responsible for all acts committed by persons forming part of its armed forces.” However, even if the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Bulgaria had signed the convention, it would not have had importance in the relations between European states. So when the First World War broke out there were practically no firm regulations that could hope to prevent potential crimes; and the extermination, mass rape, torture and destruction that took place in Belgium, northern France and Serbia in 1914 demonstrated the meaning of it. In 1914, but in 1915 as well, virtually every government published a “coloured” book denouncing

---

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Art. 25 of the Convention of 1907: “The attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended is prohibited”; Art. 28: “The pillage of a town or place, even when taken by assault, is prohibited”; Art. 46: “Family honour and rights, the lives of persons, and private property, as well as religious convictions and practice, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated”; Art. 47: “Pillage is formally forbidden”, etc.

enemy crimes,<sup>17</sup> but in the context of war it did not produce any change in international warfare.

On 24 May 1915, for the first time in history, the members of the Entente coalition condemned the Ottoman policy of extermination against the Armenians by defining it as a “crime against humanity”, and placed the responsibility on the Ottoman government;<sup>18</sup> but there were no other consequences. It was only at the end of the war that the victorious states began to work on new legislation in order to define crimes never seen before and to punish those responsible for them. At the Peace Conference in Paris, the Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties was instituted. On 29 March 1919, after intensive work, it presented the first report, codifying thirty-two classes of crimes against the laws of war and humanity, including massacres, rapes, deportations and internments, tortures and deliberate starvation, forced labour and systematic terrorism.<sup>19</sup> It was supposed to be the legal basis to start from in prosecuting those responsible, who had already been individually identified by the inter-allied and national commissions. Nothing was done, however, and in the treaties with Central powers and their allies the question was practically ignored, delegating jurisdiction over war criminals to their respective national courts. The result was that out of 20,000 German individuals listed by all victorious nations, only seventeen were tried and only ten of these were sentenced to prison from six months to five years maximum; in Austria, out of 484 individuals, only two were tried and both were acquitted; in Turkey not a single person was punished for the Armenian genocide.<sup>20</sup> None of the 500 individuals from Bulgaria that the Kingdom of Serbia (the post-war Kingdom of SCS) held responsible for the crimes committed against its civilians during the war was sentenced.

This allowed the Bulgarians to hold on to the stance of denying any crimes – expressed during the Peace Conference<sup>21</sup> – and, in the long run,

---

<sup>17</sup> *Deuxième livre gris belge* (Paris–Nancy: Librairie militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916); *Deuxième livre bleu serbe* (Paris–Nancy: Librairie militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916); *Livre jaune français* (Paris–Nancy: Librairie militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916), etc.

<sup>18</sup> Bruna Bianchi, *I civili: vittime innocenti o bersagli legittimi?*, in Bianchi, ed., *La violenza contro la popolazione civile*, 73; Vahkan Dadrian, *Storia del genocidio armeno. Conflitti nazionali dai Balcani al Caucaso* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003), 245.

<sup>19</sup> Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia; hereafter AJ], Delegation of the Kingdom of SCS to the Peace Conference in Paris (336), 62, doc. 7760, *Rapport présenté à la Conférence des préliminaires de paix par la Commission des responsabilités des auteurs de la guerre et sanctions*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Bianchi, ed., *La violenza contro la popolazione civile*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> *Statement by the Bulgarian Peace Delegation on Alleged Bulgarian Atrocities in Serbia*, 1919 (www.firstworldwar.com).



prevented every possibility of investigation into, discussion about or admission of criminal politics during the First World War; no evidence remained in public memory or made its way into historiography; the crimes were simply forgotten. Previous statements of Bulgarian authorities – which seemed to admit the responsibility of some Bulgarian officers (not of the government, or the army), after which three of them were arrested and the other two executed – could be dismissed without consequences.<sup>22</sup>

For this reason, when talking about the Bulgarian crimes in the Kingdom of Serbia between 1915 and 1918, we have to begin from the findings of the Inter-Allied Commission's inquiry and the Commission of Responsibilities' classification of the Bulgarian crimes into thirty-two violations, because this is the most important and reliable definition of crimes.

We have to focus on two elements. In its conclusions, the Report submitted by the Inter-Allied Commission stated: "We can affirm that there is not a single article of the Convention of The Hague or principle of international law that the Bulgarians did not violate";<sup>23</sup> while the Commission of Responsibilities affirmed: "The war has been conducted by the Central Empires and their allies, Turkey and Bulgaria, with barbarian and illegitimate methods, in violation of the laws and customs of war and elementary principles of humanity."<sup>24</sup> In this second case, it is evident that Serbian (and Greek) civilians figured as those who had suffered like no other excluding the Armenians; Bulgarian authorities were responsible for at least eighteen types of violation of the laws of war against Serbian civilians, who were victims of the worst of the codified crimes. In some cases, as

---

<sup>22</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 89, 302–303, Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Teodorov's response to General Chrétien, 27 December 1918, saying that the Bulgarian government had set up a commission to enquire into Serbian allegations of crimes perpetrated against Serbian priests, and that five perpetrators had already been identified: Maj. Ilkov, Lt Popov and Lt Simeonov had been arrested, while Col. Kalkandzhiev and Lt Yurkov were already dead. See also *Statement by the Bulgarian Peace Delegation*, according to which: "The principal offenders, such as Major Ilkoff, Colonel Kalkandijeff, who are mentioned by the Commission of Enquiry, Colonel Airanoff, Colonel Popoff and others responsible for the crimes perpetrated, are already in the hands of justice which will soon pronounce on the misdeeds which are imputed to them. Major Kultchin [...] has been sentenced to death and executed in Sophia." And finally, AJ, 336-23-1264, Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Serbian Delegation in Paris, 9/22 April 1919, said that Captain Samardzhiev, commander of the Gorne Pancharevo camp, had initially been sentenced to death and then to fifteen years in prison.

<sup>23</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, 34.

<sup>24</sup> *Rapport présenté à la Conférence*, 15.

in that of “attempts at denationalization of the population”, they figured as the only victims and the Bulgarians as the only perpetrators.<sup>25</sup>

Starting from these elements we can grasp the importance of the question of Bulgarian crimes in the Kingdom of Serbia during the First World War: a historical moment in which civilians, mostly Serbs, were the target of the occupying forces not only as a result of war operations, but also because of a political plan of Bulgarian authorities.

*The Balkan Wars: crimes against civilians*

Before analyzing what happened in 1915–1918 we should try to understand what lay at the roots of these events; in this sense, we cannot begin to discuss Bulgarian crimes against civilians in the Kingdom of Serbia without considering the historical events that preceded them. And to understand it, it is crucial to take into consideration the sufferings of civilians during the Balkan Wars, not only Serbian, but also Turkish, Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Slavic population of Macedonia.<sup>26</sup>

The Balkan Wars of 1912 (between Balkan states and the Ottoman Empire) and especially of 1913 (between Balkan states) were a clash between Balkan states never seen before and, even if it was not the first time that they fought against each other, this conflict may be said to have been a major turning point in their relations: because it was for the first time that nationalism, the ideology of which had come from western Europe not much earlier, carried by single political classes, became the fundamental generator of aggression and destruction.

The First Balkan War broke out in October 1912 and after a few months the Ottoman Empire was driven out of the Balkan Peninsula; the allied Balkan states (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro) expanded their territories and won a new status not only regionally, but also on a European scale. However, the change was more complicated, more drastic and went far beyond political borders.

The demise of Ottoman power meant the collapse of not only the political (institutional) or military system, but also of the existing social and economic structures. It was a collapse of the whole region: and as the armies of the Balkan allies marched into new territories, especially Vardar Macedonia, they were not everywhere acclaimed as “liberators”.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>26</sup> We do not use here the term “Macedonian” in a national and ethnic sense because of as yet unfirm national consciousness of the Slavic population of Macedonia in that period.

While the political elites in Belgrade, Sofia and Athens saw it as liberation from the Ottoman yoke, for the ethnic Turkish and generally Muslim population it meant violence, looting and massacre.<sup>27</sup>

According to varying reliable sources, Bulgarian regular troops and comitadjis, armed bands of the pro-Bulgarian revolutionary organization in Macedonia (IMRO), drove out Turks of the Tikveš region and destroyed Turkish villages around Kavala, Serres and Drama;<sup>28</sup> Serbian regular troops and chetnik units burned down Albanian villages between Kumanovo and Skopje;<sup>29</sup> and Greek regular troops and bands of andartes, did the same around Thessaloniki.<sup>30</sup>

Civilian suffering was particularly great during the sieges of the towns where Ottoman garrisons were still resisting. Diseases, starvation and bombardments caused the death of thousands of people in Adrianople, Scutari (Shkoder) and Ioannina, and once the Christian troops entered the towns civilians were often victims of pillaging and violence.<sup>31</sup>

Muslim civilians were without doubt the main victim of these Christian armies: there was, of course, resentment and revenge of local Christian population for the crimes committed by Turks during the suppression of Gorna Dzhumaia (1902) and Ilinden (1903) uprisings. It seemed, however, that regular armies wanted to drive the Turkish population out of the region: this was the conclusion drawn by the members of the Carnegie Commission, an independent committee investigating the causes of the war and the conduct of the belligerent parties, but also by other foreign observers, such as Leon Trotsky, correspondent for the *Kyevskaia Mysl* at the time, who described, from the second-hand information he obtained from his hotel in

---

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914), 71–72 and 76.

<sup>28</sup> Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia; hereafter AS], Ministarstvo inostranih dela, Političko odeljenje [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Section; hereafter MID-PO], 1913, XVIII/262, confid. no. 20, Consulate of the Kingdom of Serbia in Salonika to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10/23 April 1913.

<sup>29</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913* (New York–Sydney: Anchor Foundation, 1980), 267.

<sup>30</sup> *Report of the International Commission*, 72.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 113–114 and 326. On the siege of Scutari see also Gino Berri, *L'assedio di Scutari. Sei mesi dentro la città accerchiata. Diario di un corrispondente di guerra* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1913); Mary Edith Durham, *The struggle for Scutari (Turk, Slav and Albanian)* (London: E. Arnold, 1914).

Belgrade, what the Bulgarians and Serbs allegedly did as “systematic extermination of the Muslim population in villages, towns, and districts”.<sup>32</sup>

A result of the war atrocities, but also of the new situation where Muslims no longer had the position of dominance in Balkan communities, was an exodus to the Ottoman Empire which involved probably hundreds of thousands of civilians. Two years after the war, Serbian authorities recorded that, between October 1912 and March 1914, 289,807 Muslims (not counting children under the age of six) passed through Salonika on their way to Turkey.<sup>33</sup>

While the migrations of Muslims were still going on, the Christians in Macedonia and Thrace became new victims of the extreme nationalisms of the allied states that had defeated the Ottoman power. This took place in June 1913, when Bulgaria made a desperate attempt to annex the territories that Serbia had liberated a year before.

In the Second Balkan War (1913), conflict between Serbian and Greek policies on one side and Bulgarian on the other exploded in the worst way. Propaganda campaigns whose aim was to demonstrate that the population of Macedonia were either ethnic Serbs or Greeks or Bulgarians, and which had already had some conflicting moments in the recent past – the establishing of the Bulgarian Exarchate (1870), the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin (1878), but also rivalries through the construction of churches and schools in Macedonia, and through paramilitary formations such as Serbian chetniks, Bulgarian comitadjis and Greek andartes – now turned into a war with the intention of eliminating the enemy and nationalizing occupied territories. Aegean Macedonia was the main theatre of the Bulgarian-Greek clash; in Doxato, Bulgarians were responsible for massacres of Greeks, while Bulgarians were victims near Serres.<sup>34</sup>

Civilians were targeted and they took part in the conflict probably to defend themselves or to take revenge. It was not merely an “atavistic hate”, but the policy of the belligerent parties. This was also the conclusion of the Carnegie Commission which, relying on Bulgarian sources, recorded the destruction of 160 Bulgarian villages and 16,000 homes in the area between Kilkis (Kukush) and the Bulgarian border, an “ethnic cleansing” of Bulgarians and a quick (and traumatic) colonization by the Greeks driven out of other parts of Macedonia.<sup>35</sup> Bulgarian civilians were a target of the Ottoman

---

<sup>32</sup> Trotsky, *Balkan Wars*, 286.

<sup>33</sup> AS, MID-PO, 1914, confid. no. 58, doc. 0587, Consulate of the Kingdom of Serbia in Salonika to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 March/12 April 1914.

<sup>34</sup> *Report of the International Commission*, 79 and 82–83 (on the Doxato massacre); and 89–92 (on the Serres massacre).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 103–106.

recapture of Thrace; it was estimated that in just a few days of July 1913, 46,000 Bulgarians fled the region before the ravaging Ottoman army.<sup>36</sup>

Crimes were perpetrated in Vardar Macedonia as well. The Muslims who had left the region because of Bulgarian atrocities now returned with the Serbian regular army and paramilitary units (bashi-bazouks). Their target was the Bulgarian and pro-Bulgarian population (“Exarchists”) of Kratovo and its environs, Radoviš and the Tikveš region. According to the not always reliable Report of the International Commission of the Carnegie Foundation, Serbian authorities not only knew what was going on, but were directly responsible for it;<sup>37</sup> as a result, thousands of civilians left their homes and fled to Bulgaria.

Crimes against civilians were committed not only in Macedonia and Thrace, but in Eastern Serbia, too. It was the regular Bulgarian army that was responsible for the destruction, looting and killing in Knjaževac and the surrounding villages. The International Commission which investigated these crimes recorded a large number of rapes and, for the first time in history, paid particular attention to this kind of violence – rape was no longer seen as a “normal” attendant of every war but as a systematic cruelty against women<sup>38</sup> or, in other words, as a crime. The French journalist Henry Barby said that what he had seen in Eastern Serbia was more horrifying than what the Bulgarians did in Macedonia, and it seemed that the goal of General Kutinchev’s army was to ravage and pillage the region, like “Tatar hordes”.<sup>39</sup>

Crimes did not stop after the Bulgarian retreat. According to the International Commission, it was now Serbian troops which, entering Bulgaria, devastated many villages around Vidin and Belogradchik, burning homes and killing civilians.<sup>40</sup>

During the Second Balkan War, which ended in Bulgarian defeat, violent crimes were committed on all fronts from Adrianople to Salonika, Eastern Macedonia and Eastern Serbia; it all happened in one month, which is how long the war lasted, in a way that made experts of the Carn-

<sup>36</sup> B. Ratković, M. Djurišić & S. Skoko, *Srbija i Crna Gora u Balkanskim ratovima 1912–1913* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1972), 315–316.

<sup>37</sup> *Report of the International Commission*, 145–146 and 368–372; Henry Barby, *Bregalnica* (Belgrade: Štamparija Savić i komp., 1914), 103 [transl. from French: *Bregalnitsa* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1914)]; Z. Todorovski & Zh. Buzhashka, eds., *K. P. Misirkov, Dnevnik 5. VII – 30. VIII 1913 g.* (Skopje: Državen arhiv na Republika Makedonija & Sofia: “Arkhivi”, 2008), 60.

<sup>38</sup> *Report of the International Commission*, 137; Barby, *Bregalnica*, 156–158.

<sup>39</sup> Barby, *Bregalnica*, 155.

<sup>40</sup> *Report of the International Commission*, 136–139.

egie Commission, dependent on local sources and interpretations, mostly Bulgarian, think that “ethnic cleansing” had been planned and organized before the war.

The Treaty of Bucharest signed on 10 August 1913 caused Bulgaria’s frustration not only because it did not gain Serbian Macedonia but because it lost the territory it had gained in the First Balkan War: it had to cede Aegean Macedonia to Greece, Vardar Macedonia to Serbia, eastern Thrace to the Ottoman Empire, and southern Dobruja, Bulgarian since the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, to Romania.

Results of those treaties had not only political or economic aspects; it should be noted that probably the most significant aspect of the Treaty of Bucharest (and the Treaty of London with the Ottoman Empire signed on 29 September 1913) was that in most cases it confirmed territorial gains, purportedly obtained by ethnic cleansing of entire regions, and consolidated nationalist politics that the Balkan states pursued since the victory over the Ottomans in order to nationalize newly-annexed territories. First objectives of the Greek and Serbian nationalizing process were the Bulgarian Church and schools in Macedonia, which were the most important institutions keeping portions of the Christian inhabitants of Macedonia strictly tied to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Exarchate) had been created by a Sultan’s decree of 1870 and, along with the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, was the main Christian ecclesiastical institution in Macedonia. The Exarchate had autonomy and the right to appoint bishops in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Thrace and Southern Serbia (until 1878), using its powers to pursue the Bulgarization of the non-Bulgarian Slavic population.

During the nationalizing process after the 1913 war, according to the information supplied to the International Commission from Bulgarian sources, teachers were forced to declare themselves as Serbian (or Greek) or were arrested; comitadjis, who often enjoyed heroic reputation among the Bulgarian civilian population, were also arrested and treated like bandits and vagabonds; members of the Bulgarian clergy were forced to leave or to accept the Serbian Church, and sometimes they were beaten by Serbian soldiers.<sup>41</sup> The Serbian secret organization Black Hand (Crna ruka) was alleged to resort to kidnapping or killing representatives of Bulgarian intelligentsia and those showing pro-Bulgarian sentiments in public.<sup>42</sup>

In this way people were forced to accept Serbian religious and cultural authorities, they could no longer enjoy the rights equal to those of the inhabitants of pre-war Serbia and their regions were under direct military

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 51–52 and 165–168.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 169–170.

control and not under civilian administration. The law on annexation issued by King Peter of Serbia in late December 1913 confirmed this situation – as had been the case in previously acquired territories in Serbia: that new territories were not immediately integrated as equal in rights to the other regions of pre-war Serbia, but were given a special status, governed by special laws and marked by a slow implementation of the constitution.<sup>43</sup>

Discontent among Christian civilian population, especially in the Bitolj (Monastir) area, grew fast, and shortly before the First World War Serbian authorities registered the danger of potential unrest. The situation was described by the Ministry of War itself:

[...] People of Debar, Ohrid and Bitolj are embittered because the Serbian State does not allow them to have their schools in Bulgarian language or their church and priests; others are still more embittered and they say that Serbs have introduced a worse regime than the Turkish was, forcing them to become Serbs, to build streets and to labour.<sup>44</sup>

#### *Between the Balkan Wars and the invasion of Serbia in 1915*

This critical situation in the new region became drastically complicated with the outbreak of the First World War. The burden of war had to be carried by men of pre-1912 Serbia, because non-Serbian recruits from Serbian Macedonia, Old Serbia (Kosovo and the former Sandjak of Novi Bazar) were not reliable enough or willing to fight in the name of King Peter, while the authorities became more suspicious, confronted with potential disorder in the Albanian-inhabited and, especially, pro-Bulgarian areas of the New Territories (Nove Oblasti). And while in the event of localized revolts in Kosovo and in Western Macedonia, where Albanian population formed an absolute majority, Austria-Hungary would interfere in order to compel Serbia to send troops, causing the weakening of the front at the same time, the situation among the Bulgarian and pro-Bulgarian elements in Serbian Macedonia was far more dangerous because of their number and their determination to reject Serbian authorities and to join Bulgaria. Belgrade did not only fear potential revolts, but also guerrilla (comitadji) incursions from Bulgaria and especially an intervention of the Bulgarian army, which would be fatal for the outcome of the war. And this was not merely a possibility, because both Belgrade and Sofia were aware that the “Macedonian question” was still open. In 1913 all major Bulgarian authorities had

<sup>43</sup> Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine [Records of the National Assembly Proceedings], 14/12/1913, 506–512.

<sup>44</sup> AS, MID-PO, 1914, confid. no. 1039, doc. 0610, Ministry of War to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7/20 June 1914.

already openly announced a new war against Serbia: King Ferdinand, who addressed his troops and told them to “fly the flag for happier days”, Prime Minister Radoslavov, who addressed diplomats in Sofia saying that revenge was Bulgaria’s long-term objective,<sup>45</sup> and General Savov, who admitted that Bulgaria had to prepare itself to take revenge on Serbia and Greece.<sup>46</sup>

And once the Great War broke out, the revenge was only a matter of time. Bulgaria maintained neutrality until the summer of 1915, but both the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance endeavoured to sway the Radoslavov government to join the war on their side; in all negotiations conducted by Radoslavov, Serbian Macedonia featured as the *sine qua non* for Bulgaria’s entry into the war. In order to justify it, in late 1914 and during 1915 the Bulgarian press focused on the situation of the “Bulgarian brothers in Macedonia” under Serbian rule, reported on every case of mass desertion of Macedonians from the Serbian army and described alleged atrocities that Serbian authorities were committing against civilians in all parts of Macedonia. The scale, frequency and types of the crimes described in this propaganda press campaign created the impression that the non-Serbian civilian population in Macedonia were really in danger of being exterminated unless Bulgaria intervened to save them. The intention of such intensive propaganda was to win over Bulgarian public opinion which otherwise would not have been ready for another war, especially considering the fact that the legacy of the Balkan Wars was not only a moral and national defeat, but hundreds of thousands of human lives, economic disaster and starvation.

As reported by the Serbian consul in Sofia, by the middle of December 1914 and the beginning of February 1915, at least eighteen such articles appeared in Bulgarian newspapers,<sup>47</sup> alleging of massacres of Macedonian conscripts in the Serbian army, destructions, mass rapes and ethnic cleansings.<sup>48</sup> Gory details soon became more interesting than general accounts, especially when they involved children, priests and women, or any kind of torture;<sup>49</sup> lists of missing or killed civilians were often published too, as well

---

<sup>45</sup> Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918. A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 425.

<sup>46</sup> Barby, *Bregalnica*, 194.

<sup>47</sup> AS, MID-PO, 1915, X/213, list of articles in the Bulgarian press.

<sup>48</sup> AS, MID-PO, 1915, X/242, Kambana, 22 December 1914/4 January 1915; X/255, Utro, 25 December 1914/7 January 1915; X/245, Dnevnik, 13/26 January 1915.

<sup>49</sup> AS, MID-PO, 1915, X/275, Narodni prava, no. 59, 14/27 March 1915; X/279, Narodni prava, no. 62, 18/31 March 1915; Dnevnik, 18/31 March 1915.



as stories of alleged massacres in all parts of Macedonia: Skopje, Bitola, Prilep, Ohrid, Veles, Štip, Radoviš and so on.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time Bulgarian comitadjis undertook new actions to cut off communications between Serbia and the port of Salonika, the Serbian army's most important supply line. The crucial action took place on 3 April 1915, when about one thousand well-armed comitadjis from the town of Strumica in Bulgaria attacked the Valandovo railway station in order to cut the railway and telegraph lines: many of about 200 Serbian soldiers killed died in combat, but many were murdered after they surrendered; the comitadjis tortured them to death or burned them alive, according to the report of an international commission composed of medical personnel of allied sanitary missions in Macedonia set up in the days following the attack.<sup>51</sup>

This incident made it plain to the Serbian government that its Macedonian border with Bulgaria required more attention, but a mass transfer of troops from the zone of battle with Austria-Hungary was impossible despite a temporary quiet on the front: in the event of a Bulgarian attack, Serbia would not be able to defend herself.

At the end of the summer this possibility became reality. According to the agreement between Bulgaria and the Central Powers signed on 6 September, in return for joining the immediate attack on Serbia, Bulgaria was to gain the whole of Serbian Macedonia but also – as Radoslavov insisted – eastern and southern Serbia, in addition to territories in Dobruja, Aegean Macedonia and eastern Thrace lost after the defeat of 1913 (in the event that Romania and Greece should join the Entente). On 6 October German and Austro-Hungarian troops under the command of German General Von Mackensen launched invasion from the north, and five days later Bulgarian troops crossed the border into Serbia, while King Ferdi-

---

<sup>50</sup> AS, MID-PO, 1915, X/291, Narodni prava, no. 63, 19 March/1 April 1915; X/319, Narodni Prava, n. 64, 20 March/2 April 1915; X/323, Volja, no. 645, 21 March/3 April 1915; X/337, Utro, no. 1497, 29 March/11 April 1915; X/347, Narodni prava, 29 March/11 April 1915; X/362, Utro, no. 1500, 1/14 April 1915; X/374, Narodni prava, no. 73, 3/16 April 1915; X/411, Narodni Prava, no. 77, 7/20 April 1915; etc.

<sup>51</sup> On the attack see AS, MID-PO, 1915, XV/159, Prefect of Tikveš to Ministry of Interior, 21 March/2 April 1915; AS, MID-PO, 1915, XV/199, Police Inspectorate in Bitola to Ministry of Interior, 29 March/11 April 1915; AS, MID-PO, 1915, XV/188, confid. no. 11973, Commander Djordjević and Major Blažarić to Ministry of War, 26 March/8 April 1915; XIII/376, confid. no. 3906, Ministry of War to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 March/5 April 1915. On the International Commission see AS, MID-PO, 1915, XIII/742 and 743, *Proces verbal d'enquete medicale sur les incidents de Strumica*.

mand's speech encouraged his soldiers to free their brothers in Macedonia from the Serbian regime and enslavement.<sup>52</sup>

This time the Serbian army, fighting on two fronts against superior enemy forces, was not able to resist on its own, and the government and High Command ordered its withdrawal towards the Adriatic across Albania. During this terrible march over the snow-laden mountains – known as the “Serbian Golgotha” – more than a hundred thousand soldiers lost their lives to harsh winter, starvation, disease and attacks by hostile Albanian tribes; while more than four million civilians found themselves under enemy occupation.

*Bulgarian crimes in occupied Serbia during the First World War: the beginning*

In less than one month enemy armies took control over the entire Kingdom of Serbia. As set by the agreement of 6 September, Bulgaria gained the whole of Macedonia and Eastern and Southern Serbia, from the river Danube on the north to the region of Kosovo in the south, establishing a new border with Austria-Hungary that ran along the river Morava to the village of Stalać and then between the Južna (South) and Zapadna (West) Morava rivers, the region of Skopska Crna Gora and Šar Planina mountain. Austro-Hungary took the rest of Serbia, while Germany only established a number of check-points to control the railway and other communications with the port of Salonika.

Bulgaria soon divided her new territories in two administrative entities, each administered by a military commander: the “Military Inspection Area of Macedonia”, whose commandant was General Petrov, and the “Military Inspection Area of Morava” (including Eastern and Southern Serbia), where the first commandant was General Kutinchev (the same who had led the Bulgarian invasion of Eastern Serbia in 1913).

In Serbian Macedonia they settled without evident problems or hostilities; nevertheless this did not prevent them from committing crimes against Serbian prisoners of war and civilians. The key to understanding what happened there at the end of 1915, when Bulgaria finally fulfilled her territorial ambitions concerning that region, should be sought in the symbiosis between Bulgarian authorities (political and military) and the IMRO with its comitadjis.

Colonel Aleksandar Protogerov, commander of the 3rd Brigade of the 11th “Macedonia” Division, together with his comrade Todor Aleksandrov, took control of the region of Štip in Eastern Macedonia. At the

---

<sup>52</sup> See the speech delivered by King Ferdinand on 11 October 1915, in Radoslavov, *Dnevni belezhki*, 168–169; in Serbian language in Bojković & Pršić, 207.

end of October he ordered extermination of 120 wounded and sick Serbian prisoners of war from the town hospital: they were killed in a village near Stip by both units of 11th Division and comitadjis under the command of vojvoda Ivan Yanev Bŭrlev.<sup>53</sup>

Similar killings took place in other parts of Macedonia, such as the village of Resan, where Bulgarian regular troops massacred 28; the town of Kruševo, where comitadjis cut throat to 13, or Topolčani near Bitola, where regular units slaughtered 30 Serbian soldiers;<sup>54</sup> and in Kosovo, for example near Priština, where Bulgarian cavalry troops killed 500 Serbian prisoners, or on the banks of the Drim, where 195 were killed and their bodies thrown into the river.<sup>55</sup> Crimes were committed in many other places.

It was a war, someone might say; and, remembering the experience from the Balkan Wars, we may claim that what Bulgarian regular troops and comitadjis did to Serbian prisoners was probably an act of revenge or something “normal” in times of war. But some important factors tell us that the reality was not that simple: first of all, the Bulgarian soldiers interrogated by the Swiss criminologist R. A. Reiss admitted that they had received specific orders from their superior officers to kill Serbian prisoners,<sup>56</sup> and – this may be crucial – not only soldiers but also civilians were the target of massacres. Here we can clearly see that at the moment of invasion the intention to eradicate every aspect of Serbian influence in the region, primarily by killing the Serbian and pro-Serbian elements, had already existed as a precise plan in the Bulgarian army and comitadji bands.

Regular troops took control of the region, but comitadjis were appointed mayors and prefects, and they retained control of the whole police structure.<sup>57</sup> Every major town was controlled by a comitadji leader

---

<sup>53</sup> *Rapport*, vol. II, docs. 135–143, 266–284 and 286–303; AJ, MIP-DU, 334-20, testimonies of Sadedin Kerimović and Dr. A. de Mendoza.

<sup>54</sup> On the Resan massacre see *Rapport*, vol. II, doc. 151, 307; AJ, MIP-DU, 334-19, no number, police report on the murder of a Serbian soldier in Resan, 3/12/1918; on Kruševo and Topolčani, see Vojni arhiv Srbije [Military Archives of Serbia; hereafter VA], p. 6, k. 609, 35/3, cable on the testimony of Stanoje Stanojević, and VA, p. 3a, f. 3, 11/1.

<sup>55</sup> R. A. Reiss, *Zverstva Bugara i Austro-Nemaca. Bugarska zverstva u toku rata* (Thessaloniki: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1916), reproduced in Sladjana Bojković & Miloje Pršić, *O zločinima Austrougara-Bugara-Nemaca u Srbiji 1914–1918: izabrani radovi* (Belgrade: Istorijski muzej Srbije, 1997); R. A. Reiss, *Les infractions aux lois et conventions de la guerre commises par les ennemis de la Serbie depuis la retraite serbe de 1915* (Paris: Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1918), 197–210.

<sup>56</sup> Reiss, *Les infractions*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 172–174.

(voyvoda),<sup>58</sup> whose power became absolute and legitimized through a new administrative system in Macedonia; they operated strictly in order to eliminate Serbian presence in their territories. It was not a difficult task, because in the towns – like in most of Serbian Macedonia – the Slavic population was not entirely Serbian or pro-Serbian, and this meant that comitadjis in the towns had to eliminate the Serbian administrative structure – if still there, because most officials had withdrawn with the army to Albania or to Greece – composed predominantly of Serbs from pre-Balkan wars Serbia who had the duty to pursue and oversee the Serbianization of the region (teachers, priests, officials, etc.) – and all elements who collaborated with them.

For the same reason destructions and mass murders took place in many villages where the population was Serbian or loyal to Serbian authorities,<sup>59</sup> concentrated in the area between Veles, Prilep and Brod (region of Poreče). The destructions looked like punitive expeditions against previously defined targets, where Bulgarian regular troops and comitadjis arrived with the clear intention (and probably orders or, if not, at least freedom of action) to destroy and kill.

On 14 November Bulgarian units of the 7th “Rila” Division and Turks of the village of Crnilište entered the villages of Dolgovac and Kostinci near Prilep. Together they pillaged houses and slaughtered people who were still inside or who tried to escape, including children and women, at least more than 70 of them;<sup>60</sup> then they gathered the remaining 200 Serb civilians in the place called “Samakovo” and slaughtered them with no mercy, “rushing with their bloody knives from person to person”.<sup>61</sup> The same happened in the village of Bogomila near Veles, where all Serb inhabitants were massacred and their homes destroyed; women were raped and tortured before they were killed.<sup>62</sup> Massacres were committed in many other places in that Macedonian area, as R. A. Reiss reported from one of his sources:

In the village of Bogomil they killed 95 persons, of whom just 20 were men and the others were children and women; [...] in the village of Go-stirachna 65 persons, of whom 10 men and the rest women and children;

---

<sup>58</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>60</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334-19, testimony of Vaska Petrović (partially published in *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 296, 189-190); AJ, MIP-DU, 334-19, testimony of Nane Serafimović (partially published in *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 306, 196-197); AJ, MIP-DU, 334-19, testimony of Petar Mijailović (partially published in *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 354, 256).

<sup>61</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334-19, testimony of Stojanka Stojkov.

<sup>62</sup> *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 349, 253; and doc. 358, 258; AJ, Legation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to France, Paris-Vichy (388)-8-50, 51 and 52.

in Strovie 80 persons, of whom only 15 were men [...]; in Dolgavatz 280 persons, of whom 20 men older than 50 years and all the rest women and children; in Kostentzi 60 persons, of whom only 8 men; in Brod [...], on the 12th/25th of December 1915, 105 persons were killed [...] and the day later other 100 on the way to Dobrech; in Stounje, 18 persons.<sup>63</sup>

It was calculated that in the early period of occupation more than 2,000 Serb civilians were killed by Bulgarian regular troops and comitadjis in the area between Veles, Prilep and Brod alone, and that tens of Serb-inhabited villages were razed to the ground;<sup>64</sup> but many other civilians shared the same fate, especially in the towns, which were the target of the “cleansing” of the Serbian element by the comitadjis.

However, murder was not the only method of ethnic cleansing that the Bulgarians used in Serbian Macedonia. Not all Serbian notables were killed, especially in the towns where they accounted for a significant part of the community: they were sent to concentration camps in pre-war Bulgaria. It seems that at first there were no camps intended for civilians only, but that they were interned together with prisoners of war; but the fact that deportations began as early as the end of 1915 (one of the first trains left the Skopje railway station on 1 January 1916) suggests that the idea of deportation of civilians had been conceived before Bulgaria’s entry into the war and that its implementation started as soon as the Bulgarians organized their administration in the region.<sup>65</sup> We can also notice that deportations became massive as early as January 1916: on 24 January a convoy of 500 civilians from the districts of Prilep,<sup>66</sup> Veles and Brod arrived in Sofia, while at the same time all teachers, priests, officials and all suspicious persons from pre-Balkan wars Serbia who lived in Eastern Macedonia were deported and considered prisoners of war on the order issued by the Ministry of War.<sup>67</sup>

Compared to the systematic terror that the Bulgarian army was spreading in Eastern and Southern Serbia, that is to say in the other administrative unit created by Bulgaria (the Military Inspection Area “Morava”), the crimes happening in Serbian Macedonia were more of a local character. There were some fundamental differences between the situations in Mace-

<sup>63</sup> Reiss, *Les infractions*, 20–21.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 13, 29–30.

<sup>66</sup> Mileta Novakovitch, *L’occupation austro-bulgare en Serbie* (Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault, 1918), 43–44; AJ, MIP-DU, 334–20, testimony of Mihailo Ugrinović; Ljubomir Jovanović, 26–27; Victore Kuhne, *Les Bulgares peints par eux-mêmes. Documents et commentaires* (Lausanne and Paris: Librairie Payot & Cie, 1917), 294; *Deuxième livre serbe*, annexe 14, 24.

<sup>67</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 62, 266.

donia and Morava at the moment of invasion, and Bulgarian authorities were certainly aware of them. At the time, Macedonia was inhabited by various ethnic groups, including non-Slavic Albanians, Vlachs, Greeks, Jews, Roma and Turks; however, the two main groups of the Slavic population were Serbs and Bulgarians, followed by a third Slavic element with fluctuating national consciousness, though in many cases, especially in eastern parts of Serbian Macedonia, people felt themselves closer to Bulgarian than to Serbian culture, religion and language. This was not the case in Morava, where most people felt themselves as Serbs and whose men were fighting against Bulgaria. There were no *comitadji* bands in Morava, nor was there a significant recent past that could justify any ethnic claim by the Bulgarian side. Morava was a part of the Kingdom of Serbia, and for this reason it was the object of a cruel policy whose aim was to transform this region into a part of the Kingdom of Bulgaria; in Morava, attempts at Bulgarization can be noticed much better and more clearly than in Macedonia. At the same time we can notice planning behind this process or, in other words, the responsibility of the Bulgarian government and King Ferdinand, as well as the army, for the extermination of the Serbian nation and culture in that region.

Before the invasion of Morava, Colonel Popov, chief of staff of the 6th "Bdin" Division, distributed to the officers a confidential statement containing the order to kill, once the division arrived in Serbia, all persons that might have an influence on the common people: first of all priests, teachers, professors and officials.<sup>68</sup> Before the Bulgarian attack, in some places (e.g. Vranje) pro-Bulgarian elements had prepared lists of the most prominent local Serbs,<sup>69</sup> and as soon as Bulgarian troops entered the region their intelligence recorded all potential enemies, such as journalists, members of agricultural organizations, members of political parties, elected officials, etc.<sup>70</sup>

Actions took place immediately. On 20 November 1915 all teachers, priests and officials of the city of Niš (the seat of the Military Inspection Area) were summoned by the commander of the city Azmanov in order to be given the papers allowing free movement, but they were all arrested. Four days later they were sent, together with some prisoners of war, on foot to Sofia; at the same time 21 priests were killed in the village of Kremenica near Pirot.<sup>71</sup>

On 14 December General Kutinchev, chief of the Military Inspection Area "Morava", confirmed the already issued order that all former soldiers

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. doc. 6, 16.

<sup>69</sup> Hadži-Vasiljević, *Bugarska zverstva*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Perović, *Toplički ustanak*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Rapport*, vol. II, doc. 166, 340.

of the Serbian army between 18 and 50 years of age, all Serb officers, teachers, clergymen, journalists, former members of Serbian Parliament, former military officials and, in general, all suspicious persons from the whole region should be deported to Old Bulgaria.<sup>72</sup>

And just like in Macedonia, this plan, too, suggests that it had already been decided before the war what was to be done with civilians or, in other words, that it had been planned to kill or deport all representatives of Serbian national spirit and to replace them with Bulgarian supporters in order to pave the way for the Bulgarianization of the region.

Mass deportations started from all major towns of Morava: for example, it is known that, after Niš, on 11 December, 300 Serbian men from Vranje were imprisoned in Plovdiv,<sup>73</sup> while the rest of the male inhabitants of this town belonging to the categories specified in Kutinchev's order were deported in late December.<sup>74</sup> Civilians were transported to Bulgaria by rail or, more often, on foot. In most cases they all had to pass through the town of Surdulica, near Vranje, before crossing the border into pre-war Bulgaria. And not even this was without a reason: from November 1915 to spring 1916, when the deportation of notables from Morava ended, Surdulica was the scene of the worst crimes in the Kingdom of Serbia since the beginning of the war.

A special commission composed of Colonel Kalkadzhiev, Major Ilkov, Second Lieutenant Yurukov and Sergeant Vitanov, all of the 42nd Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Division "Sofia", and Second Lieutenant Simonov and Sergeant Erchikov of the 5th Place Regiment,<sup>75</sup> was set up in the town with the sole duty to select prisoners and decide which from the deported groups should be executed immediately. Mass executions of Serbs were committed in a nearby place called "Duboka Dolina" and the victims were buried in mass graves; we do not know much about how the commission decided who should be executed, but thanks to Reiss and other researches we know that by the end of April 1916 about 2,000–3,000 civilians had been killed in that place.<sup>76</sup> For this reason Surdulica was nicknamed the "slaughterhouse of Serbs".<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Perović, *Toplički ustanak*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 30, report of R. A. Reiss, "La ville de Vrania", 75.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 76; Hadži-Vasiljević, *Bugarska zverstva*, 54–59.

<sup>75</sup> *Rapport*, vol. II, doc. 115, 75–76; AJ, 334–13, the same document in Serbian in Hadži-Vasiljević, *Bugarska zverstva*, 72. The author gives two more names: Dr Peyev and Lt Minchev.

<sup>76</sup> R. A. Reiss, *Surdulica*, in Bojković & Pršić, *O zločinima*, 103.

<sup>77</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 41, account of W. Drayton, "Report on Bulgarian atrocities in Serbia", 192.

At the end of the war the Inter-allied Commission in Serbia affirmed that the nature of those murders was clearly political, because the Bulgarians had wanted to eliminate the Serbian elite in order to deprive the common people of their leadership;<sup>78</sup> and at the same time to carry out the process of Bulgarization, erasing any evidence of Serbian culture in Macedonia and, especially, in the Morava region.

The forced introduction of the Bulgarian church and clergy was the first step in building a new Bulgarian culture instead of Serbian, because ecclesiastic institutions were centres spreading national spirit; in Balkan societies they were more powerful than any other cultural or educational institution, especially considering that in countries like Serbia more than eighty percent of the population were illiterate and lived in the countryside often without contact with any other culture except the one promoted by the church.

Serbian language was forbidden everywhere, schoolteachers were brought from Bulgaria, Serbian books were taken from libraries, schools and private collections, and publicly destroyed<sup>79</sup> (but the most important of them were sent to Bulgaria, along with sacred icons and treasures looted from Serbian monasteries and churches).<sup>80</sup> It was the other face of Bulgarization, which we can observe through a document sent by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education to all authorities in Morava and Macedonia on 26 February 1916:

[...] Especially in the field of Bulgarian education there is much work to be done, because essentially all the material and moral culture we will construct in the new regions, we will establish it through reading and through Bulgarian culture, with Bulgarian language and books [...]. Ministry of Education is already taking the necessary measures to gradually open elementary schools wherever possible; then, when the need arises, high schools, both normal and specialized, will be opened. The schools will however be attended only by children and young people, so our adult brothers and new fellow citizens who did not receive any education in Bulgarian schools, they will stay away from books if we do not provide them access to Bulgarian culture. For this reason, at the Ministry of Education a Spe-

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>79</sup> AJ, 334-20, no number, *Komisiji za izvidjaj zloupotreba srpskih zarobljenika i interniranih gradjana u Bugarskoj*; AJ, 388-8-56 and 57, confid. no. 2098, Inter-allied Commission to Serbian Delegation in Paris; AJ, MIP-DU, 334-16, without number, account of Bulgarian atrocities in Dojran, 1; the same account in *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 270, 152-155; AJ, MIP-DU, 334-11, testimony of Dimitrije Radivojević.

<sup>80</sup> Victor Kuhne, *Les Bulgares peints par eux-mêmes*, 300-301; see also accounts by the Bulgarian ethnographers expedition to Macedonia published in Petrov, ed., *Nauchna ekspeditsia*, 285-326.



cial Committee on Education has been established which has the duty to supply the new regions with Bulgarian books [...]. In communicating the above, the Ministry hopes you all will be happy to collaborate in this work, taking care to find in your city (or village) a building for local intelligentsia to gather so that it should become the centre of Bulgarian education. This centre should be called “public reading room”, and it will be under the control of a local committee [...].<sup>81</sup>

The difficult living conditions imposed by the Bulgarian regime were made worse by the extremely violent and corrupt military and civilian structures. All Reiss's inquiries – but also all other inquiries, including the Inter-allied Commission's report – describe everyday violence perpetrated by Bulgarians to extort money, goods and food from civilians without any reason whatsoever. In some places, such as the town of Vranje, military authorities became absolute despots and their actions caused the reaction of the prefect who wrote two letters of protest: on 15 February 1916 to Kutinchev<sup>82</sup> and on 5 April to the Interior Ministry.<sup>83</sup> In Sofia too, members of the Parliament (Sobranie) attacked Radoslavov's policy in Morava and Macedonia: the Socialist leader Blagoev protested against violence and corruption in these regions at the session of the Sobranie held on 26 January 1916, and similar accusations were later launched by the Democratic leader Malinov.<sup>84</sup>

People lived in miserable conditions both in Morava and in Macedonia. By that time, there already were a large number of former Serbian soldiers who were hiding from the Bulgarian army in the mountains, some of them organized into chetnik units fighting against the occupying force. Bulgarians did not seem to realize how dangerous these two factors could be, especially if an opportunity would arise for them to join forces against the enemy. This happened in early February 1917, after General Kutinchev distributed to the population of Morava the Supreme Command's mobilization orders for all men between 18 and 45 years of age. Recruitment commissions went from town to town, but most men managed to escape and join those who were already in the mountains, while Serbian women publicly protested against the Bulgarians. Enough was enough: in the night between 21 and 22 February Serbian chetniks led by vojvoda Kosta Vojinović raised

<sup>81</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334-22, n. 3377, Bulgarian Ministry of Education to presidents of “three-member commissions” in the new regions and occupied territories (and for information and request of assistance to His Eminence Metropolitan and Archbishops, to Prefects, Commandants and Sub-Prefects), 26/02/1916.

<sup>82</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 30, Reiss, “La ville de Vrania”, 81–85.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* doc. 32, account of R. A. Reiss, “Sourdolitza”, 97–98.

<sup>84</sup> Stojančević, *Srbija i srpski narod*, chap. “Nacionalno-politički i međunarodni položaj Srbije u 1916. godini”, 38; Perović, *Toplički ustanak*, 37–38; Kuhne, *Les Bulgares peints par eux-mêmes*, 274.

a rebellion against the Bulgarian occupying forces and attacked garrisons in the region of Toplica. Within a few days they liberated Kuršumlija, Prokuplje, Lebane and many other towns and villages. Bulgarian troops were not able to defeat them, and General Kutinchev was replaced. In early March Colonel Protogerov became the new (temporary) chief of the Morava Area. The Supreme Command chose him because of his experience in guerrilla warfare and his activity in the pro-Bulgarian IMRO organization: for Protogerov, born in Macedonia (Ohrid), the Serbs were the worst enemy and he was ready to fight them in every possible way. When appointing Protogerov, the Bulgarian Supreme Command knew that the repression would be brutal, and this probably was its intention, too. The IMRO leader organized the repression after receiving the full power to do so. On 10 March he issued an order to the chetniks to surrender within five days, or otherwise they would be sentenced under the new law passed by the Sobranie just a few days before:<sup>85</sup> they would be executed, their homes burnt down and their families deported.<sup>86</sup> None of the Serbian insurgents wanted to give up fighting, and this order gave Protogerov and his army the opportunity to destroy the entire Morava. It took Protogerov fifteen days to defeat the chetniks, and his army would leave a trail of death and destruction wherever it passed: civilians became target of repression, tens of villages were destroyed, thousands of inhabitants killed, everything was pillaged and a mass rape crime took place.<sup>87</sup> Crimes continued even after the chetniks were defeated: in late April (probably), Protogerov was replaced by another temporary chief, Colonel Tasev, while Lieutenant Colonel Dürvingov, chosen by Protogerov, was assigned as his chief of staff. More destruction took place, especially in July and August, when Dürvingov and Tasev organized counter-units with the duty to track and destroy the still active chetnik groups; the units were composed of IMRO comitadjis sent from Macedonia, and they not only abused the freedom of action they had been given but continued the destruction and extermination of Serbian villages and civilians started by Protogerov. They acted in perfect symbiosis with the Bulgarian government, whose aim was to quell the rebellion and resume the process of Bulgarization in the region, but they were not just executors of Bulgarian policy; like Protogerov, they had freedom of action too, and they used it to eradicate the very existence of Serbs in the zones under Bulgarian occupation.

---

<sup>85</sup> Ljubomir Jovanović, *Pobuna u Toplici i Jablanici: govor u Narodnoj Skupštini 12. aprila 1918. godine na Krfu* (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1918), 34–36.

<sup>86</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334-20, Kum naselenieto ot Moravskata voenno-inspekcionna oblast, 10/03/1917; also in French in AJ, 336-2 and in *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 66, 269–270.

<sup>87</sup> See *Rapport*, Ljubomir Jovanović, R. A. Reiss, etc.

The result of Protogerov's and Tasev-Dürvingov's repression was the worst ever seen. In the region that was the centre of the uprising more than sixty Serbian villages were completely destroyed,<sup>88</sup> but the same happened in many other regions outside Toplica. About 20,000 civilians were killed and more than 80,000 were deported to pre-war Bulgaria<sup>89</sup> (women and children, but also recruited men sent to forced labour); apart from this, it was impossible to count every individual act of violence, especially rapes, because of their frequency. The Austro-Hungarian consul in Niš reported that Bulgarians burnt down all villages in the areas where the Toplica revolt took place.<sup>90</sup>

Through the city of Sofia often passed convoys of hundreds of civilians heading for unknown destinations, for concentration camps; the conditions they were held in were often inhuman,<sup>91</sup> and, just as in 1915 and 1916, many civilians had to walk all the way to their destinations. The existing camps for prisoners of war in Bulgaria could not receive so many people even if used to full capacity (which they had already been), so Bulgarian authorities built other camps only for civilians. As far as we know, there were from 1916 to the end of the war at least twenty active concentration camps for Serbian civilians in pre-war Bulgaria; in many of them conditions were so terrible that deaths were a daily occurrence. The Inter-allied Commission recorded numerous testimonies about the life in concentration camps and horrible treatment they received; it did not interview only Serbian survivors (militaries and civilians), but also Italian, British and French prisoners of war who witnessed what was going on.<sup>92</sup>

Among the large number of testimonies given to the Inter-allied Commission or to others, those about the camp at Sliven are the ones that have to be considered carefully. The camp was built in 1915 for prisoners

---

<sup>88</sup> Jovanović, *Pobuna u Toplici*, 63.

<sup>89</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 35, account of R. A. Reiss "Ville de Prokouplie et environs", 117.

<sup>90</sup> Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu*, 369.

<sup>91</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 52, 241–242, and vol. III, doc. 246; AJ, 336–23–212: Podaci o ratnim zločinima Bugara u Srbiji, 8.

<sup>92</sup> On the camp of Khaskovo see *Rapport*, vol. II, doc. 98, 24–25; on Plovdiv: AJ, MIP-DU, 334–22, testimony of Serbian Captain Okolitchani; *Rapport*, doc. 92, 7; Kenneth Steuer, *Pursuit of an "Unparalleled opportunity", The American YMCA and Prisoner of War Diplomacy among the Central Power Nations during World War I (1914–1923)* (www.gutenberg-e.org/steuer), chap. 10, 5; on Gornje Paničarevo: *Rapport*, vol. II, doc. 95, 15; on Shumen: *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 287, 182–184; and vol. III, doc. 224. See also Isidor Djuković, "Izveštavanje delegata srpske Vrhovne komande iz Bugarske (oktobar – decembar 1918)", *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 1–2 (2002), 69–89.

of war, but when civilians started to arrive in 1916, it became a “punitive camp”.<sup>93</sup>

When Greece joined the Entente in July 1917, Greek prisoners of war and civilians from Thrace were interned in this camp and received the same treatment as the Serbs did;<sup>94</sup> at the same time thousands of Serbs were brought from the Morava region, so the camp became too small to receive them all. For this reason, a “lesser camp” with 28 barracks offering the most inhumane conditions one could imagine was built: there were slits but no windows, and internees had neither beds nor hay or blankets to cover themselves with. Out of 80–100 persons packed together in each of these barracks only 20 or fewer survived.<sup>95</sup> They received 300 to 800 grams of black bread per day and some kind of soup two or three times a week, and some meat on Sundays; they were so hungry that they ate grass or stole cattle hay.<sup>96</sup> The so-called hospital was a far cry from the real one and in such a poor condition that many internees were dying.

The number of deaths caused by starvation, epidemics, winter cold exposure and violence was extremely high: it was recorded that between August and December 1917 alone there were 2,709 deaths, of which 1,490 due to starvation.<sup>97</sup> At the end of the war it was calculated that 4,142 Serbs, both prisoners of war and civilians, died in the camp, while about 2,000 died performing hard labour outside the camp.<sup>98</sup>

At the end of the war the Inter-allied Commission summed up the question of internment of civilians. Speaking about the Serbian internees, it stated:

The conditions in which the internees in the camps lived were so bad that one could think that their extermination was the main goal. Barracks were terrible: in some camps a part of internees lived without any shelter, in the open air. Those who had found a place in the barracks, sheds or tents, slept on a shelf or on the bare ground. Barracks were often very poorly built and leaked water. In the main camps they were crowded and even though the barracks could accommodate 20, as many as 100 persons lived inside; internees were kept without clothes, underwear and shoes [...]. No disinfection took place, and there were no toilets [...] virtually all internees

---

<sup>93</sup> Account of Mihailo Jovanović, 15/11/1918, published in Bojković & Pršić, *Stradanje*, 311 (the original in AS, Fonds “Arhiva institucija pod bugarskom okupacijom”, box 2).

<sup>94</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334-16, testimony of Todor Hristodulo; in French in *Rapport*, vol. III, doc. 229, 68–69.

<sup>95</sup> Account of Mihailo Jovanović, 318 and 323.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 321; AJ, MIP-DU, 334-20, testimony of Djordje Božinović.

<sup>97</sup> Account of Mihailo Jovanović, 321.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 325.

were infested with pests. Daily food ration in the main camps consisted of 200–600 grams of bread, a soup without meat and with a bit of peppers. There was no sanitation, except in rare cases [...]. Internees were forced to the worst hard labour [...]. Murders were not rare because those who went out of their barracks to satisfy a physiological need during the night could be shot or beaten to death with rifle butts by guards. [...] The number of deaths in concentration camps because of privations, epidemics and tortures is very high. According to what we know, of 100,000 internees only 50,000 returned home. In general, all those who did return are in very poor health.<sup>99</sup>

The forced Bulgarization of Macedonia and the Morava region, as well as violence and other types of crimes against civilians, continued until the end of the Great War, but were not as severe as in the period from 1915 to 1917.

Official politics continued to consider these regions as definitively annexed to Bulgaria, and the methods used from the beginning of occupation, especially in the Morava region, were not only confirmed but also codified. Indicative in this sense is an order issued on 29 May 1918 by General Nerezov, head of the Morava Area from November 1917;<sup>100</sup> its political content suggests that he received it from his superiors. The methods of Bulgarization, such as the exclusive use of Bulgarian, Bulgarian schools and ecclesiastical institutions, were reaffirmed, and the violence of this process explicitly formulated: “To implement Bulgarization in this region it is necessary to destroy all myths, pillars and all elements of Serbdom and it is necessary that on their ruins should only remain the Bulgarian ones.” The population was divided into categories, first of all national: all Serbs (except those coming from Šumadija, the region on the other side of the Morava river) were considered as Bulgarians who had forgotten their origins – which official politics had been affirming from the beginning of the war – but there were many “Serbophiles” among them; Vlachs were not considered as enemies; Jews were seen as “politically amorphous”; Greeks as “dangerous enemies”; Turks and Roma, being present in small numbers, as “politically useless”. After national categorization, a social one followed, because each of these categories of people required a different method of Bulgarization to be implemented; men, children, the elderly and, above all, women were described in this way:

It has been indisputably established that most fanatic and violent chauvinists are always women. They are the vital centre of the Serbian spirit and

<sup>99</sup> *Rapport*, vol. I, 19–21.

<sup>100</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334-22, Zapoved po Moravskata Oblastna Voenna Inspektsia n. 13, 29/05/1918; in Serbian in Bojković & Pršić, *Stradanje*; in French in *Rapport*, vol. I, doc. 83, 284–298.

the most important agents of the secret Serbian organization. Women are the main couriers of secret correspondence; they are the ideologists of the organization, the main agitators, they are the most astute supporters and aiders.

Bulgarization went on and other orders were issued, such as those, for example, introducing Bulgarian holidays with instructions for civilians how to celebrate them.<sup>101</sup> But a few months later the Bulgarians lost the war and their crimes became known across Europe.

### *Conclusions*

Considering the Inter-allied Commission's report and the thirty-two violations of the laws of war codified in Paris, we have chosen here to present some aspects we perceive as crucial with regards to the question of large-scale crimes committed against civilians in the Kingdom of Serbia by the Bulgarians during the First World War. There are many other questions we could not consider for various reasons. One of these, often presented in Serbian publications as a crime against civilians, we chose not to discuss because we are not sure it can be considered a crime in the strict sense of the word: starvation; as a matter of fact, while it was not listed as one of the violations committed by the Bulgarians in the Kingdom of Serbia, it was in the case of Greece.

We know that lack of food was a big problem for civilians; they had to hand over a huge part of their produce to Bulgarian authorities; we also know that the situation lasted until the end of the war, so it can be said that food shortage became "the chief attribute of Bulgarian rule".<sup>102</sup> The people in the Morava region and Macedonia endured starvation to a much greater extent in 1918 than before, but the whole of Bulgaria also had to face a more terrifying internal enemy than the Entente's guns: famine. The situation was desperate everywhere.

It is clear that this is a complicated issue that requires deeper research, especially because the starvation in the Morava region and Macedonia should be looked at in comparison to the starvation in Bulgaria and its causes, first of all the "allied depredation",<sup>103</sup> the German need for any avail-

---

<sup>101</sup> AJ, MIP-DU, 334.22, n. 39318, Chief of Staff of Morava to all commandants, military and civil offices of the Area, 30/05/1918.

<sup>102</sup> Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 457.

<sup>103</sup> The expression used by Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 456.

able supply in order to cope with the British blockade of Germany which was killing tens of thousands of civilians in the Empire.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, a large available documentation suggests that the Bulgarians tried to introduce an organized system of requisition in the occupied regions of Morava and Macedonia,<sup>105</sup> but corruption and German exploitation posed an insurmountable obstacle.<sup>106</sup>

Likewise, some other questions cannot be addressed because they can be considered as crimes but not as a part of the official Bulgarianization process. These crimes may not have been specifically ordered by Bulgarian political and military authorities but were tolerated: extortion, rape, looting, and other forms of brutal violence against the civilian population. The issues addressed in this paper likewise need further research and discussion, such as the importance of studying the internment of Serbian civilians in Bulgaria within the more general question of civilian deportations during the First World War.

We still need to open many questions about what happened. We have, for example, to look at the crimes in Serbia and Macedonia in a comparative way, first of all considering other territories under Bulgarian occupation. In Eastern Macedonia, the Bulgarians systematically and intentionally let Greeks die of starvation, causing about 10,000 civilian deaths, and deported about 70,000 civilians from the region to concentration camps in pre-war Bulgaria, many of whom died because of the inhumane conditions.<sup>107</sup> And we know that in Dobruja they “strengthened efforts to eliminate every as-

---

<sup>104</sup> On the blockade of Germany see P. Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger. The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915–1919* (Athens, Ohio and London: Ohio University Press, 1985); Bruna Bianchi, “L’arma della fame. Il blocco navale e le sue conseguenze sui civili (1915–1919)”, *DEP* 13/14 (2010), 1–33 ([www.unive.it/dep/](http://www.unive.it/dep/)); A. B. Downes, “Targeting Civilians in War: the Starvation Blockades of World War I”, presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 28–31 August 2003 ([www.allacademic.com/meta/p65599\\_hindex.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p65599_hindex.html)); N. P. Howard, “The Social and Political Consequences of the Allied Food Blockade of Germany, 1918–1919”, *German History* 11/2 (1993), 161–188.

<sup>105</sup> See e.g. AJ, MIP-DU, 334-22, order no. 109 of the Military Intendancy of Morava: *Dopūlnitelni ukazaniia po izzemvaneto na zūrrentite khрани*, 9/08/1918; order no. 110, *Dopūlnitelni ukazaniia po izzemvaneto na trevniia furazha*, 10/08/1918.

<sup>106</sup> See e.g. AJ, MIP-DU, 334-22, order no. 222 of the Chief of Military Inspection Area Morava, 28/08/1918, and order no. 49, 29/08/1918; VA, p. 3, k. 178, f. 1, docs. 49 and 50, testimonies of deserters from the Bulgarian army.

<sup>107</sup> *Rapport présenté à la Conférence des préliminaires de paix*, 33 and 36.

pect of former Romanian domination with such care that today we could refer to it as a real ethnic cleansing".<sup>108</sup>

All the questions raised above need further research and discussion. As we sought to explain here, it will be necessary to apply a methodology that involves a comparative approach inside the international dimension of the question of Bulgarian crimes against Serbian and non-Bulgarian population in the occupied Kingdom of Serbia, the use of available sources, cooperation between scholars of different countries and, of course, attention to the historical background.

UDC 94(497)"1914/1918"  
341.322.5/.6:341.485](497.2)(=163.1)

### Bibliography and sources

- Andrejević, Sevdelin. "Ekonomska pljačka Srbije za vreme bugarske okupacije". In *Srbija 1918. godine (Zbornik radova no. 7)*, 19–34. Belgrade: Istorijski institut.
- Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane. *L'Enfant de l'ennemi*. Paris: Aubier Collection historique, 1995.
- Barby, Henry. *Bregalnitsa*. Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1914.
- Basciani, Alberto. *Un conflitto balcanico. La contesa fra Bulgaria e Romania in Dobrugia del Sud 1918–1940*. Cosenza: Periferia, 2001.
- Becker, Annette. *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre. Humanitaire et culture de guerre, populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre*. Paris: Noësis, 1998.
- Berri, Gino. *L'assedio di Scutari. Sei mesi dentro la città accerchiata. Diario di un corrispondente di guerra*. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1913.
- Bianchi, Bruna, ed. *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella Grande Guerra*. Milan: Unicopli, 2006.
- "Crimini di guerra e crimini contro l'umanità. Le stragi sul fronte orientale e balcanico". In Giovanna Procacci, Marc Silver and Lorenzo Bertuccelli, eds. *Le stragi rimosse. Storia, memoria pubblica, scritture*, 19–39. Milan: Unicopli, 2008.
- "La violenza contro la popolazione civile serba negli scritti di Rodolphe Archibald Reiss 1914–1924". In Giulia Albanese, ed. *L'intellettuale militante. Scritti per Mario Isnenghi*, 179–197. Portogruaro: Nuova Dimensione, 2008.
- "Les violations des conventions internationales en Serbie de la part de l'armée austro-hongroise et bulgare 1914–1918". In Frédéric Rousseau and Burghart Schmidt, eds. *Les Dérapages de la guerre. Du XVI siècle à nos jours*, 172–186. Hamburg: DOBU Verlag, 2009.
- "Gli stupri di massa in Serbia durante la Prima guerra mondiale". In Marcello Flores, ed. *Stupri di guerra. La violenza di massa contro le donne nel Novecento*, 43–60. Milan: Angeli, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Alberto Basciani, *Un conflitto balcanico. La contesa fra Bulgaria e Romania in Dobrugia del Sud 1918–1940* (Cosenza: Periferia, 2001), 29.



- “Le torture inflitte ai civili nella Serbia occupata”. In Lauso Zagato and Simona Pinton, eds. *La tortura nel nuovo millennio. La reazione del diritto*, 131–150. Padua: CEDAM, 2010.
- “L’arma della fame. Il blocco navale e le sue conseguenze sui civili (1915–1919)”. DEP 13/14 (2010), 1–33 ([www.unive.it/dep](http://www.unive.it/dep)).
- Biskupski, Mięczystav B. *Ideology, Politics and Diplomacy in East Central Europe*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003.
- Bojković, Sladjana and Miloje Pršić. *O zločinima Austrougara–Bugara–Nemaca u Srbiji 1914–1918: izabrani radovi*. Belgrade: Istorijski muzej Srbije, 1997.
- *Stradanje srpskog naroda u Srbiji 1914–1918*. Belgrade: Istorijski muzej Srbije, 2000.
- Cecil, Hugh and Peter Liddle, eds. *Facing Armageddon. The First World War Experienced*. 2nd ed. London: Pen & Sword, 2003.
- Crampton, Richard. *Bulgaria 1878–1918. A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Dadrian, Vahkan. *Storia del genocidio armeno. Conflitti nazionali dai Balcani al Caucaso*. Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003.
- Deuxième livre bleu serbe*. Paris and Nancy: Librairie militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916.
- Deuxième livre gris belge*. Paris and Nancy: Librairie militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916.
- Dinić, Sreten. *Bugarska zverstva u vranjskom okrugu*. Belgrade: Narod, 1921.
- Djuković, Isidor. “Izveštavanje delegata srpske Vrhovne komande iz Bugarske (oktobar – decembar 1918)”. *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 1-2 (2002), 69–89.
- Durham, Mary Edith. *The struggle for Scutari (Turk, Slav and Albanian)*. London: E. Arnold, 1914.
- Downes, A. B. “Targeting Civilians in War: the Starvation Blockades of World War I”. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 28–31 August 2003 ([www.allacademic.com/meta/p65599\\_hindex.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p65599_hindex.html)).
- Fryer, Charles. *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Gatrell, Paul. *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Hadži Vasiljević, Jovan. *Bugarska zverstva u Vranju i okolini (1915–1918)*. Novi Sad: Kulturno-privredno društvo Vranjalica, 1922.
- Horne, John and Alan Kramer. *German atrocities 1914: A history of denial*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Howard, N. P. “The Social and Political Consequences of the Allied Food Blockade of Germany, 1918–1919”. *German History* 11/2 (1993), 161–188.
- Jovanović, Ljubomir. *Pobuna u Toplici i Jablanici, govor u Narodnoj Skupštini 12. aprila 1918. godine na Krfu*. Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1918.
- Kuhne, Victore. *Les Bulgares peints par eux-même. Documents et commentaires*. Lausanne and Paris: Librairie Payot & Cie, 1917.
- Lapčević, Dragiša. *Okupacija*. Belgrade: Tucović, 1923.
- Liddle, Peter, John Bourne and Ian Whitehead, eds. *The Great World War 1914–1945*. Vol. 1 *Lightning Strikes Twice*. London: Harper Collins, 2000.

- Liulevicius, V. G. *Kriegsland im Osten. Eroberung, Kolonisierung und Militärbherrschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002.
- Livre jaune français*. Paris and Nancy: Librairie militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916.
- Lohr, Eric. *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Maksimović, Stevan. *Uspomene iz okupacije nemačke, austrijske i bugarske 1914–1918*. Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1919.
- Minchev, Dimităr. *Voennorevolutsionnata deinost na Petur Dürvingov 1898–1918*. Sofia: Voeno izdatelstvo, 1990.
- Misirkov, K. P. *Dnevnik 5. VII–30. VIII 1913 g.*, eds. Z. Todorovski and Zh. Buzhashka. Skopje: Drzaven arhiv na Republika Makedonija & Sofia: Dürzhavna agentsia “Arkhivi”, 2008.
- Mitrović, Andrej. *Toplički ustanak. Mesto u srpskoj istoriji*. Belgrade: SANU, 1993.
- *Serbia’s Great War, 1914–1918*. London: Hurst & Company, 2007. Translated from Serbian: *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu*. Belgrade: Spska književna zadruga, 1984.
- Mladenović, Božica. “Odštetni zahtevi Srbije prema Bugarskoj”. In *Srbija na kraju Prvog svetskog rata (Zbornik radova no. 8)*, 101–104. Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1990.
- *Žena u Topličkom ustanku*. Belgrade: Socijalna misao, 1996.
- *Grad u austrougarskoj okupacionoj zoni u Srbiji od 1916. do 1918. godine*. Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2000.
- *Porodica u Srbiji u Prvom svetskom ratu*. Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 2005.
- Moal, Frédéric Le. *La Serbie: du martyre à la victoire*. Paris: 14-18 Editions, 2008.
- Nivet, Philippe. *Les réfugiés français de la Grande Guerre (1914–1920)*. Paris: Economica, 2004.
- Novakovitch, Mileta. *L’occupation austro-bulgare en Serbie*. Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault, 1918.
- Perović, Milivoje. *Toplički ustanak*. Belgrade: Vojno delo, 1959.
- Petrov, Petur Khr. ed. *Nauchna ekspeditsia v Makedonia i Pomoravieto 1916*. Sofia: Voenoizdatelski kompleks “Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets” and Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski”, 1993.
- Radoslavov, Vasil. *Dnevni belezhki 1914–1916*. Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski”, 1993.
- Rapport de la Commission interalliée sur les violations des Conventions de la Haye et le Droit International en général, commises de 1915–1918 par les Bulgares en Serbie occupée. Documents*. Paris 1919.
- Rapport présenté à la Conférence des préliminaires de paix par la Commission des responsabilités des auteurs de la guerre et sanctions*. Paris 1919.
- Ratković, B., M. Djurišić and S. Skoko. *Srbija i Crna Gora u Balkanskim ratovima 1912–1913*. Belgrade: BIGZ, 1972.
- Reiss, R. A. *Zverstva Bugara i Austro-Nemaca. Bugarska zverstva u toku rata*. Thessaloniki: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1916.
- *Les infractions aux lois et conventions de la guerre commises par les ennemis de la Serbie depuis la retraite serbe de 1915*. Paris: Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1918.

- Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914.
- Srbija 1916. godine* (Zbornik radova no. 5). Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1987.
- Srbija 1917. godine* (Zbornik radova no. 6). Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1988.
- Srbija 1918. godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države* (Zbornik radova no. 7). Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1989.
- Steuer, Kenneth. *Pursuit of an "Unparalleled opportunity". The American YMCA and Prisoner of War Diplomacy among the Central Power Nations during World War I (1914–1923)*. (www.gutenberg-e.org/steuer)
- Stojančević, Vladimir. *Srbija i srpski narod za vreme rata i okupacije 1914–1918*. Leskovac: Biblioteka Narodnog muzeja u Leskovcu, 1988.
- Trotsky, Leon. *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913*. New York and Sydney: Anchor Foundation, 1980.
- Turović, A. and N. Ivanović. *Leskovac i leskovački kraj 1915–1918*. Leskovac: Istorijski arhiv, 2006.
- Überegger, Oswald. "Le atrocità nella prima guerra mondiale. Saggio storico-bibliografico e bibliografia scelta". DEP 7 (2007), 232–259 (www.unive.it/dep).
- Vincent, P. *The Politics of Hunger. The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915–1919*. Athens, Ohio and London: Ohio University Press, 1985.
- Yovanovitch, Dragolioub. *Les effets économiques et sociaux de la guerre en Serbie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928.
- Zuckerman, L. *The Rape of Belgium. The Untold Story of World War I*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2004.
- Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia], Belgrade
- Fonds no. 334: Ministarstvo inostranih poslova [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Direkcija za ugovore [Office of Agreements]
  - Fonds no. 336: Delegacija Kraljevine SHS na Konferenciji mira u Parizu [Delegation of the Kingdom of SCS to the Peace Conference in Paris]
  - Fonds no. 388: Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Francuskoj, Pariz Viši [Legation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to France, Paris Vichy]
- Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia], Belgrade
- Fonds: Ministarstvo inostranih dela, Političko odeljenje [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Department]
- Biblioteka Narodne Skupštine [National Assembly Library], Belgrade
- Stenografske beleške Narodne Skupštine [Records of the National Assembly Proceedings]
- Vojni arhiv Srbije [Military Archives of Serbia], Belgrade
- Subfonds nos. 3, 3a and 6
- www.firstworldwar.com, www.anamnesis.info, www.archive.org.