

Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin

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Abstract: This paper deals with the question of the driving forces of the religious, ecclesiastic, and political antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria in the context of the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, in combination with the national awakening and ethnic rivalries of the period. As a result, the study investigates the Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute, which involved the quest for an autonomous Bulgarian Church, the schism from the Patriarchate, and the antagonism for religious loyalties connected to ethnic identities after the pre-national era and the emergence of nationalism. Consequently, the paper examines the political and nationalistic aspects of Greek-Bulgarian antagonism, with a special focus on the politico-territorial disputes resulting from the San Stefano and Berlin Treaties. Lastly, the paper showcases the connection this antagonism had to the Macedonian Question regarding the cause of the never-ending turmoil in the Balkans, the powder keg of Europe.

Keywords: nationalism, Bulgarian Exarchate, church dispute, Treaty of San Stefano, Macedonian Question



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Introduction

This paper addresses the driving forces of the religious and political antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century in the context of the San Stefano and Berlin Treaties. A mostly continuous presentation of the ever-evolving and ever-increasing Greek-Bulgarian antagonism is found regarding the current state of the literature. Existing bibliographies on the topic of the national awakening of the Balkan states at the end of the 19th century in general and during and after the Great Eastern Crisis of 1878 in particular are quite voluminous and go to great lengths to describe and analyze the events of the respective period. In terms of the Greek-Bulgarian antagonism, however, most of the existing pieces of research tend to focus on a specific period of this rivalry and mainly cast light being on the origins of the Macedonian Question while addressing its previous phases under the umbrella of the national awakening of the Balkans as a whole. Conversely, this paper underlines the need to examine this topic as a continuum by making the necessary connections between religious/ecclesiastic competition and political, nationalistic, and ethnic rivalries.

The topic of Greek-Bulgarian relations starting from the 18th all the way to the 20th century constitutes a topic on which extensive literature exists, both primary and secondary. One crucial element that must be underlined in this respect is the care that a researcher should take when approaching the primary literature. More precisely, almost all secondary sources, mainly the more contemporary ones, highlight the often-conflicting presentations of events and their interpretation by primary sources of the Greek or of the Bulgarian side; in fact, some scholars refer to this phenomenon as “overlapping national histories” (Naxidou, 2015, p. 357). Of course, this does not mean no one should examine or take into consideration primary sources at all for a proper presentation, understanding, and interpretation of facts. On the contrary, what is crucial is that any paper focusing on this specific issue should, apart from using a variety of secondary sources, closely evaluate and juxtapose the primary ones being used, just as Daskalov and Tchavdar (2013) did in their account.

As far as the structure of the present paper is concerned, it will begin by examining the Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute, which is what the religious antagonism and struggle for religious loyalties between the two states from the mid- to late-19th century came to be called. Consequently, the paper will cast a light upon their political nationalistic

antagonism during the same period, with special focus on the political and territorial disputes resulting from the Congress and Treaty of Berlin (1978). Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of its findings and showcase the connection the 19th century antagonism has to the Macedonian Question as the cause of the never-ending turmoil in the Balkans, the powder keg of Europe.

Religious Antagonism: The Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute

Ottoman-Ruled Balkans: The Role of Religion in the Pre-National Era

In order to analyze the Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute, the stage must be set concerning the role of religion in the Ottoman-ruled Balkans from the late-18th to mid-19th centuries. This period has been efficiently characterized as the pre-national (or pre-nationalist) era in the Balkans. Detrez defined it as “...the period in history that started after the Ottoman conquest and ended with the penetration of nationalism as an ideology and a sentiment and with the beginning of the process of nation- and state-building” (Detrez, 2013, p. 13). Therefore, neither ethnicity nor national identity were the driving forces of that time’s reality in the Balkans, something that has been proven by the polysemantic use of ethnonyms in the region, among other things. Historical research shows that ethnonyms such as Greek, Bulgarian, and Turk had been used to denote various religious, class, status, or vocational identities, thus constituting pure ethnic identities that were non-existent or simply not crucial and that had mainly merged alongside religious identities (Detrez, 2016, pp. 28–29). In fact, the people themselves cared for nothing more than their common religious denomination, with “Well, we’re Christians – what do you mean Romaioi or Voulgaroi?” being the answer a Greek activist got when questioning peasants in Macedonia about their ethnicity (Mazower, 2000, p. 45).

The Ottoman Empire’s multi-ethnic character went hand-in-hand with a complex administrative structure encircling its non-Muslim subjects. This system, known as the *millet* [semi-autonomous non-Muslim community] system, placed less if not practically no emphasis on ethnicity or national identity. Instead, it focused almost entirely on religion, since each *millet* included these non-Muslim subjects of the Empire that belonged to the same religion, thus in practicality constituting a separate autonomous

religious community. The Greek Orthodox *millet*, also known as the *Rum millet*, constituted one of the largest, and it had its core in the Balkans (Glenny, 2000, pp. 71–72). As the name *millet* itself showcases, Greek dominance (in religion, education, language of everyday life and of transactions and trade, culture) over Balkan Christians was evident and its roots went all the way back to the Byzantine period (Mazower, 2000: 49). What is crucial, though, is that the spiritual, social, and educational aspects, as well as parts of the legal aspects, of the subjects' life within a certain *millet* were under the responsibility of each religious hierarchy (Mazower, 2000, p. 57). For the case of the *Rum millet*, this responsibility of the ruling authority over all Orthodox Christians fell onto the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchate itself had strived at least up to the mid-19th century to rule the *millet* without taking note of the subjects' ethnicity, focusing instead on the existence of a concrete Orthodox religious community as a whole, at least at the primary level, and thus on being a supranational institution (Detrez, 2016, pp. 27–28; Mazower, 2000, p. 74). Detrez even noted that the patriarchate sometimes encouraged services to be held in languages other than the generally prevailing Greek, also doing this for trade and administrative purposes in order to widen the scope of the liturgy's audience (Detrez, 2015, p. 61). The ethnonyms-related research has showcased both the Ottoman administrative structure *per se* and the mindset of the people themselves to therefore have contributed to and formed “a sense of belonging to a community defined by religion” (Mazower, 2000, pp. 46–47). Regarding the Greek-Bulgarian case during this period, Mazower pointed out that “the ethnic and linguistic differences between Greeks and Bulgarians mattered less than their shared belief in Orthodoxy” (pp. 46–47).

The indifference toward ethnic categories in the Balkans was about to change, thus defining the end of the pre-national era. This change would be stimulated by the birth of nationalism. In the case of Greece, which was the first formally independent state in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, the dominance of the Greek language and even culture in the *Rum millet* had after its independence come to be connected more closely with Greece proper instead of just with Christianity. In the case of the Bulgarians, this nationalistic shift would firstly take the form of an ecclesiastical nationalism that would clearly render religion as a marker of national and ethnic identity, with the focus given to the latter this time. The following section will turn to exactly this issue.

The Bulgarian Exarchate and the Schism with the Ecumenical Patriarchate

As early as the 1820s, the Bulgarian clergy had directed requests to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople for appointing Bulgarian rather than Greek bishops in Bulgarian churches (Dakin, 1989, p. 188; Pelekidou-Nystazopoulou, 1991, pp. 213–222). As early as the 1840s, they had made requests for the use of Bulgarian rather than Greek be used as the language in churches, for the ability of Slav clergy to move to higher ecclesiastical ranks, and for an end to favoritism toward Phanariots (Dakin, 1993, p. 13). All petitions were rejected by the Patriarchate. In 1839, the *Hatt-i serif* as a reform of the *millet* system gave rise to a campaign by the Bulgarian community in Constantinople for Bulgarian autonomy within the Orthodox church (Glenny, 2000, p. 114), while in 1848, the Sublime Porte granted the community the right to build their own church in Constantinople while still ecclesiastically subject to the Patriarchate (Roudometof, 2001, p. 55).

The 1856 Ottoman decree named *Hati-i-humayun* provided fertile ground for more Bulgarian demands for Bulgarian bishops and the use of the Bulgarian language, as it involved granting further rights to the Christian subjects of the Empire through another reform of the *millet* system. In fact, this decree promised equality for all subjects of the empire, no matter to which *millet* they belonged, thus implying that the religious self-regulation of each *millet* would be slightly affected (Glenny, 2000, p. 91). This time, though, the Bulgarian demands also included a petition to the Sublime Porte for the recognition of Bulgarians “as a separate people, different from the Rum *millet*” (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87). An element of astonishing importance lay hidden behind this request. Given the character of religious confessions as the organizing principle of each *millet*, the Sublime Porte’s recognition of Bulgarians as “a separate people” required church autonomy from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, something that the latter would not accept nor easily tolerate (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 188–189).

In addition, church independence within the *millet* system signified not only spiritual but also cultural and to a certain extent legal and administrative autonomy, as each ecclesiastical hierarchy “ruled” the respective *millet* (Vovchenko, 2012, p. 302). This point is where one of the causes of the Greek reaction to these demands can be detected. Greek cultural and religious dominance in the Rum (i.e., Greek Orthodox) *millet* had

shaped a Greek national identity, and after Greece's independence, enforced it as being inextricably attached to the "Greek Orthodox" element (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 194–200). Thus, any effort to question the Greek Orthodox element was, for the Greeks, aimed at the heart of their identity and undermined Greek dominance in culture and religion (Aarbakke, 2016, pp. 42–43; Daskalov, 2013, p. 200).

The question that arises in this respect pertains to the comparison between the Bulgarian demands for an autonomous church and the creation of the Greek autonomous church itself. The latter also did not have the approval of the Patriarchate, as its creation meant the weakening of the Patriarchate's position; however, the differentiating element was the fact that the Greek autocephalous church had been founded only after the creation of the independent Greek state in 1833 (Naxidou, 2015, p. 5). In this case, the Patriarchate had to come to terms with the fact that an independent state must have its own independent church. On the contrary, the Bulgarians did not yet have a state, but the logic behind both cases was the same: Church independence in one way or another went hand-in-hand with state independence, while in the case of Greece, the latter had preceded the former.

The other most crucial front, though, was the clash between the two nationalisms and irredentist demands *per se* regarding who would take the Ottomans' place after the liberation of these regions, especially in Macedonia and Thrace. What was inevitable in this front was the boost the appearance of Bulgarian nationalism gave to Greek nationalism, especially in the form of the "*Megali Idea*" [Great Idea] for the expansion of the Greek state (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 208–209). The term "entanglement," which Daskalov (2013, pp. 188–189) uses for the whole spectrum of Greek-Bulgarian rivalry, could not have been more carefully selected, as the interim connection of the religious, cultural, territorial, and political demands of each side can be seen not by themselves but only as a complicated whole.

This moment is where a remark on one more entanglement between Greek and Bulgarian nationalism must be made; namely, how the latter had come to be born with the help of the former. Greek cultural dominance in the *Rum millet* had translated into the Greek education being provided in Greek schools in the Greek language. These schools were where Balkan Enlightenment originated and where Bulgarians had been inspired by European Enlightenment, as well as by the Greek nationalism and patriotism that

had given birth to the Greek state and to a Greek church (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 162–188). That Bulgarians would want to adopt such narratives themselves and implement them to shape their own future was simply to be expected (Karpát, 1997, pp. 352–353). Thus, a transformation was made in the 1840s–1850s on behalf of the Bulgarians that went from assimilation and advanced Hellenization to the forming of a Bulgarian consciousness narrative that went together with a rejection of the dominant Greek culture and language (Mazower, 2000, pp. 71–75). This era would eventually be given many names, such as the “Bulgarian Enlightenment,” “Bulgarian awakening,” “Bulgarian Renaissance,” and “Bulgarian National Revival” (Wenshuang, 2014, pp. 14–16).

Therefore, the request hidden between the lines actually set the foundations of a Bulgarian state, a request that had already started thriving with the appearance of Bulgarian nationalism around the 1840s–1850s (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87). However, these nation-building aspirations firstly had to make use of ecclesiastical nationalism (i.e., the meaning of religion as a means of nationalism) in order to gradually break free from the “double yoke,” namely the Greek cultural and religious dominance that was included from the Patriarchate and the Ottoman occupation (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87). Interestingly, the term “dual yoke” is extensively used in the Bulgarian literature to denote the Greek dominance and the Turkish rule over Bulgarian Christians. Even though its exact origins as a phrase have not been identified, the most cited source in secondary literature is a novel by Vazov (1984). This had become the case, as religion could easily facilitate the creation of an ethnic narrative aimed at national unification precisely due to its ability to reach out to the masses, preserve and promote local traditions, and shape a sense of community built around religion but extended toward a national sentiment (Naxidou, 2015, p. 358). Therefore, underlining the non-dogmatic character of the conflict between the Bulgarians and the Patriarchate, and consequently the Greeks who would inevitably follow such demands, is deemed to be necessary. On the contrary, the conflict would gain a high political nature between competing nationalisms, which Dostoyevsky, 1917, p. 363) described as “a national conflict in clerical garb.”

After the stalemate during the Crimean War (1853–1856) and following the latest decree from the Sublime Porte, the Bulgarians steadily continued issuing demands both to the Sublime Porte and the Patriarchate. Their actions finally bore fruit in 1858–1859, when the Patriarchate finally authorized the use of Slavonic language in the churches of

some regions, such as but not limited to Andrianople and Philippopolis, and further appointed Ilarion Makariopolski, one of the prominent figures of the Bulgarian nationalist movement, bishop *in partibus*, meaning without a seat, of the new Bulgarian church in Constantinople that had been founded in 1848 (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87; Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 56). Moreover, a council with representatives of both sides, the Patriarchate and the Bulgarians, was convened from October 1858-February 1860 with the aim of hosting deliberations based on the Bulgarian demands. The Patriarchate once again rejected requests for “bishops being elected by the parishioners, bishops speaking the language of their parishioners, and their salaries being fixed” (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 87–88). The Patriarchate’s refusal led to what later came to be called the “Bulgarian Easter Action” on Easter Sunday 1860, when Bishop Ilarion of Makariopolis omitted the name of the Patriarch during the liturgy (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 87–88). Such an action meant that they no longer recognized the Patriarch as their spiritual leader, something that practically amounted to a unilateral proclamation of the Bulgarian church’s independence. The Patriarchate itself was quick to excommunicate Bishop Ilarion and his followers, thus triggering Bulgarian peasants’ expressions of solidarity with them, their refusal to pay ecclesiastical taxes to Greek Archbishops appointed in the Balkans, and further demands for autonomy from Bulgarians (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 132–133).

Amidst this tension, the Patriarchate proposed a reconciliation plan that “provided for a Bulgarian ecclesiastical territory extending from the Danube south to the Balkan Mountains” (Roudometof, 2002, p. 88). However, the Bulgarians rejected it due to their ecclesiastical territorial claims going way further to include Thrace and Macedonia. The persistence on such claims was inextricably attached to the fact that they were trying to shape the lines for a future Bulgarian state, all the while trying to take advantage of the Ottoman favoritism toward them due to the Ottoman-Greek rivalry resulting from the Cretan Struggle at that time (Dakin, 1989, p. 189). No solution was reached again, while the Sublime Porte proposed a scheme in 1868 that recognized Bulgarian church independence, including the right for Bulgarians to choose their own bishops (Dakin, 1993, p. 14). This Ottoman initiative was a characteristic example of the Sublime Porte’s strategy of “divide and conquer,” which involved creating tension between its non-Muslim subjects and weakening the influence of the Orthodox hierarchy with the view of strengthening the Ottoman administration’s grip on and authority over them (Glenny,

2000, p. 115). While the Patriarch considered this option, the Bulgarians “announced it as a *fait accompli*” (Dakin, 1993, p. 14). Eventually, the Porte issued decrees on February 28 and March 12, 1870 formally establishing the Bulgarian Church’s autonomy and separation from the Patriarchate through its Exarchate situated in Constantinople (Dakin, 1993, p. 14). Thus, Bulgarians had been officially recognized, while the territorial imprint of the Exarchate’s jurisdiction further fueled Bulgarian irredentism.

The decree establishing the Exarchate contained what Yosmaoğlu (2014, p. 58) characterized as two “time-bombs.” The first was the establishment of the Exarchate in Constantinople, even though Bulgaria was not a state yet and thus the expectation was for the head of the church to be in Balkan territory. The second and more crucial one was the decree’s provision in its infamous Article 10, which stated that the Exarchate could establish further dioceses in places where 2/3 or more of the population voted in its favor in organized plebiscites (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 199–200). Article 10’s nature as a “time-bomb” had to do with areas that had mixed populations, mostly Greeks and Bulgarians and especially in Macedonia and Thrace. These areas were where the dispute would take the form of the struggle for religious loyalties being translated into ethnic identities and the construction of “ethnic others,” a struggle whose main battlefields would be schools (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, pp. 49–52; Kedisou, 2005, pp. 83–90). An “education race” would resultantly commence between the Patriarchate’s Greek and the Exarchate’s Bulgarian schools, each using its respective language and promoting its respective culture and ecclesiastical hierarchy (Brooks, 2015, p. 27). Thus, the connection between ecclesiastical antagonism for religious loyalties and the territorial claims of both the Greek state and the Bulgarian state-in-the-making with regards to Macedonia and Thrace had now become visible (Glenny, 2000, p. 116).

Despite Ignatiev’s efforts as Russian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at reconciliation between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate, the Ecumenical Council declared the latter in 1872 as schismatic and its adherents as heretics (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 88–89). The Patriarchate justified the schism that would ultimately last until 1945 by accusing the Exarchate of “bringing *phyletismos* [tribalism] or ethnnonational divisions into the Church,” given that the Patriarchate itself ruled its subjects on the basis of their religion and not ethnicity (Vovchenko, 2012, p. 304). The Bulgarian view, though, was that the Patriarchate itself was ruling in an ethnic nationalism-influenced manner and was perceived as a “yoke” and promoter of “Hellinization,” rather than a mouthpiece

of the newly founded (in 1832) Greek state, and eventually as a promoter of the Greek nationalist agenda, especially in Macedonia and Thrace (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, pp. 53–55). For the Ottomans, the schism at the same time also sat well with their general divide-and-conquer policy among their Christian populations.

This mouthpiece view has persisted in the Bulgarian literature and certainly includes a grain of truth, especially regarding the end of the 19th century (e.g., exclusion of Slav clergy from higher positions, imposing Greek language in liturgies); however, this can in fact be contested when expressed in so absolute a manner. On the one hand, the Patriarchate's position toward Bulgarian Christians surely favored the Greek side after the creation of the Greek state and the independent Greek Church (1830s), while the creation of the autonomous Romanian Church (1865) also sharpened its will to maintain a stronger grip over its remaining subjects, especially the Bulgarians (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 152–153, 188–200, 205). On the other hand, though, one cannot argue that the Patriarchate had acted all along as a mouthpiece for Hellenization or Greek nationalism. This can be proved through its stance against the Greek struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire and the creation of a Greek state, which the Patriarchate had initially hampered, as a long time had passed until the relations between the Patriarchate and the new autonomous Greek Church normalized in 1850. After all, nationalism had weakened the Patriarchate's power step by step and consequently sharpened its response along the way (Mazower, 2000, p. 75). During the heated phases of the Church Dispute, the Patriarchate had additionally tried several times to appease the Bulgarians through its proposed schemes, even accepting limited church autonomy, while the Bulgarians were the ones who had rejected them in the name of their extensive nationalism-influenced territorial claims, as indicated above. When addressing the linguistic aspect, the use of Greek by the Patriarchate can be traced back to its nature as a scriptural language and not as an ethnic-colored choice. What is certain, though, is that at the end of the 19th century, especially after the schism, the Patriarchate was clearly being influenced by the Greek state and its interests, and its clergy would play a major role in the promotion of Greek nationalistic agendas in Macedonia and Thrace, including in the "education race" (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 152–153, 188–200). Even then, though, the Patriarchate did not align itself completely with the voice of the Greek state in all aspects of the issue, including the need to reconcile or not with the schismatic Exarchate (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 64).

Overall, the Church Dispute not only affected the relations between the Exarchate and the Patriarchate but also seriously severed Greek-Bulgarian relations, preparing the ground for the full-blown conflict that would follow in the early 20th century, the Macedonian Struggle (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 133–135). In fact, the education race (i.e., the creation of schools in Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia, and Thrace) and having the Patriarchate teach in Greek or the Exarchate teach in Bulgarian were the clearest indications of how religion and territorial demands had intertwined. Along with the creation of schools, each side had created a community responsible for it, certainly promoting a specific curriculum that suited the respective Greek or Bulgarian agenda (Mazarakis, 1981, pp. 7–13). Additionally, the Church Dispute had had a serious impact on Greek-Russian relations, as the latter had openly acted in favor of the Bulgarians mainly through Ambassador Ignatiev in Constantinople in the name of Pan-Slavism and their own interests. While this can be said to have somehow benefited Greek-Turkish relations, it did not manage to completely mend their relations, as both were standing opposite the Bulgarians after a certain point (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 133–135).

Political Antagonism

The Treaty of San Stefano: Great Bulgaria

The Great Eastern Crisis, as it later came to be called, lasted from 1875-1878. Its starting point was the July 1875 peasant uprising against the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The crisis immediately instigated the Great Powers' interest, especially that of Russia and Austria-Hungary, two powers that had already become entangled in their own struggle for power in the Balkans despite their union having resulted from the Three Emperors' League (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 133–135). The Great Powers of the Three Emperors' League had requested through the Andrassy Declaration of December 30, 1875, and the Memorandum of Berlin on May 13, 1876 that the Ottomans proceed with a reform program that included economic measures, as well as further measures granting representative rights to its subjects, but the Ottoman response was limited (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, pp. 148–149). Meanwhile, after a failed attempt in April 1876, the uprising spread to Bulgaria and was to have dire consequences resulting in a domino effect. The April Uprising of 1876 was violently crushed by the Ottomans, with the world mostly in Britain discussing the next day

about the “Bulgarian horrors” and “Bulgarian atrocities” the Ottomans had perpetrated in order to deal with the revolutionaries (pp. 150–151). The death toll is estimated to have been between 10,000 to 15,000, with numbers varying substantially in each source (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 21; Glenny, 2000, pp. 108–110). The only sure things are that the April Uprising had forwarded the nationalist agenda of the Bulgarians and that the uprising had also shown Bulgarian nationalism’s weakness in instigating its population to confront the Ottoman Empire, as Glenny (2000, pp. 108–110) underlined.

The events quickly led Serbia and Montenegro to declare war against the Ottoman Empire in June–July 1876 (Roucounas, 1976, p. 136). A conference of the six Great Powers was held in Constantinople between December 1876–January 1877; however, it did not bear fruit, as the Ottomans had rejected the plan the Powers (except for Russia, who had left the conference) had prepared, which included granting autonomy to Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Dakin, 1989, pp. 198–199). Consequently, after reaching a Russo-Austrian agreement for the latter’s neutral status in case of a Russo-Turkish war in exchange for territorial gains for both sides in March 1877, the Russians managed to get the rest of the Powers to sign the Treaty of London shortly after (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, p. 151). Its provisions referred to the Ottoman Empire’s responsibility to proceed with reforms and to protect its Christian subjects. However, the Ottomans rejected its implementation (p. 158). Thus, Russia declared war against the Ottoman Empire in April 1877, a war that would determine the future of the Eastern Question, including the future of the Balkans’ map (Hertselt, 1891, pp. vi–vii).

At this point, Greece needs to be mentioned during this crisis to be the only actor in the region that had not instantly joined either side of the belligerents, given the pressure mostly from Britain to remain neutral and its goal to be rewarded with territorial gains for its neutral stance after the war (Dakin, 1989, pp. 195–198). Thus, Greek territorial and nationalistic aims were only partly behind its decision. The only action on behalf of Greece was perpetrated mainly due to popular pressure: the infamous deployment of a battalion that only entered Ottoman territory four days after the signing of the armistice between Russia and the Ottomans. It thus had to immediately withdraw to Greek territory to avoid an Ottoman counteroffensive (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 140–141).

On February 20, 1878, an armistice was signed between the Russians and Ottomans, while on March 19, 1878 the Preliminary Treaty of Peace was signed in San Stefano

and for all intents and purposes had been imposed on the Ottomans, as they'd found themselves on the defeated side (Hertslet, 1981, pp. 1672–1694). For the purposes of this paper, focus will only be given to the Treaty's provisions regarding Bulgaria and the regions of Thessaly and Epirus, which in fact caused most of the turmoil that followed. The Treaty of San Stefano provided for the creation of a Bulgarian state as an "Autonomous Tributary Principality" with its own leader elected by a convention Prince and national militia; this principality came to be called "Great Bulgaria" and would include between 163,000–172,500 square kilometers (Seton-Watson, 2004, pp. 334–335; Batowski, 1978, p. 233). The borders of this state satisfied even the wildest nationalistic Bulgarian aims, thus creating an enormous and strong Balkan state (Hertslet, 1981, pp. 1672–1694). In fact, as per the Annex to Article VI of the Treaty's reference to Bulgaria, the borders of Bulgaria "were formed by the Danube in the north, the Rhodope Mountains in the south, the Black Sea coast in the east, and the Vardar and Morava valleys in the west" (Yosmaoglu, 2014, p. 23). The new state included the entire Macedonian territory and Western Thrace, excluding Thessaloniki and Chalkidiki; it even had access to the Aegean Sea near Kavala and the Gulf of Orfano (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 137–138). Generally, the Bulgarian state's frontiers were carved from the Danube to the Aegean Sea and from Lake Ohrida to the Black Sea, excluding Constantinople, Adrianople, and Thessaloniki.

The inclusion of Macedonia and Thrace within this Bulgarian super-state could never be accepted by Greece or Serbia. Based on the ethnographical composition and the so-called principle of ethnicity, these territories should have been given to Greece, Serbia, or a future Albania (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, p. 61; Heraclides, 2018, pp. 22–35). Both Greece, and Serbia had claims on the Macedonian territory and were not in favor of the existence of a Balkan super-state *per se*, especially one surrounding them (Dakin, 1989, pp. 205–206). As far as Greece was concerned, it was at that point fighting a propaganda war and an educational and religious race in Macedonia against Bulgaria and its Exarchate, as presented above. Generally, the inclusion in a Slavic state of regions where the Greek cultural and ethnic elements were the dominant one, such as in Kastoria, Kavala, and Serres, was not only unacceptable but also incomprehensible in terms of ethnological criteria (Divani, 2000, p. 132). Such a territorial arrangement had brought Greek and Bulgarian nationalistic aims directly in opposition to each other, thus initiating a period of even stronger political antagonism. Furthermore, the idea of Great

Bulgaria frightened the Greeks based on the aspect of Bulgaria having access to the Aegean Sea through the Macedonian territories and thus transforming into another naval power in the region. Considering the facts that Greece was dependent on maintaining her naval power and sea routes for trade, that Greece was already antagonizing the Turks at sea and would not bear to have to maintain balance with a third naval power, and that Greek-Bulgarian antagonism would by all means be transferred to the sea as well, Greek policy indicated that Bulgaria should remain landlocked. Therefore, the *Megali Idea*, Greek nationalism's main form of expression, was now in danger, because the full implementation of the San Stefano provisions meant that Macedonia would be forever lost, that Greece's northwards expansion and even the potential to expand all the way to Constantinople would remain an "idea," and that its naval power in the Aegean Sea would be questioned (Batowski, 1978, pp. 232–233).

Last but not least, Greece and Serbia were dissatisfied with the San Stefano Treaty for one more reason. According to the Article XV of the Treaty, an "Organic Law" similar to the one in force for Crete at that time would be created and enforced in the areas of Thessaly and Epirus that had remained under Ottoman rule (Hertslet, 1891, pp. 2685–2686). However, the issue was that the Ottomans had already proven many times, especially in Crete, their unwillingness to fully implement the Organic Law, thus basically rendering this provision of the Treaty a dead letter and further increasing Greek and Serbian agony for Greeks and Serbians residing in these regions (Batowski, 1978, pp. 232–233). In order to oppose the San Stefano regime, Greek governmental circles started considering the establishment of tighter relations with the Ottoman Empire, as Bulgaria was now their "common enemy," and later on with Britain and France in light of the Congress of Berlin, as will be shown in the next section (Fotiadou, 2017, p. 92).

Serbia and Greece's inability to achieve anything by themselves to alter the situation has been underlined, something that given their limited say in international affairs at that time is almost perfectly accurate. Luckily for them, however, the Treaty of San Stefano would never have been acceptable to the Great Powers of Britain and Austria-Hungary. Even the Russians themselves understood that Ambassador Ignatiev as the Russian Ambassador to Türkiye responsible for drafting the Treaty had almost crossed the Rubicon by misusing his authority and overrepresenting Pan-Slavist ideals (Dakin, 1989, pp. 205–206; Komsalova, 2005, pp. 29–39). After all, the Russians had visibly designed Bulgaria in the Treaty as a Russian satellite state; Russian troops would occupy Bulgaria

alongside other troops until the full implementation of the Treaty, and a Russian Commissary would supervise the implementation, with prominent Russians being chosen for high-rank positions (Woodward, 1920, pp. 12–14). Britain and Austria-Hungary, each for their own reasons, could never tolerate such a status quo characterized by a clear-cut Russian dominance in the southeastern part of the Mediterranean, not only because of the client state of Bulgaria and the two resultant Russian outlets to the Aegean, but also due to the extensive Russian territorial gains (i.e., Bessarabia, Dobruja, Ardahan, Kars, Batum, Bayazid; Shafer, 1989, pp. 42–43).

In general, the Treaty of San Stefano initiated yet another game of chess between the Great Powers within the context of the Eastern Question. They would once again favor or disfavor Balkan states and people based on who served their own interests better and not based on what served the Balkans' interests themselves or the prerequisites for peace in the region. The question then became whether an arrangement such as the Treaty of San Stefano that was indifferent to exactly these Balkan interests and to the geographical and ethnographical diversity of the Balkans had any chance to prosper or would simply exacerbate existing entanglements and antagonisms, as in the case of Greece and Bulgaria (Glenny, 2000, pp. 133–134). The overturning of the San Stefano Treaty's provisions through Great Power involvement would be achieved through the Congress of Berlin and the Treaty of Berlin that resulted from it. The next section will elaborate on its proceedings and outcome.

The Congress of Berlin (13 June – 13 July 1878): The Treaty of Berlin

Just three days after the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano, the Austrian Foreign Minister invited the Great Powers to attend a Congress in Berlin with the sole goal of revising the treaty (Rich, 1977, pp. 230–231). What was interesting about the Congress was the fact that the Great Powers had through a series of secret agreements practically already decided prior to it on how things would be regulated. In fact, Britain and Russia had signed a secret agreement on May 30, 1878, one comprised of three memoranda (Rich, 1977, pp. 230–231). The first memorandum concerned Bulgaria being divided into a northern part that extended to the Balkans and was ruled by a Prince and a southern part that did not reach the Aegean but had a large administrative autonomy

(Woodward, 1920, pp. 14–17). Additionally, the memorandum had a provision allowing the Powers, especially Britain and Russia, to have a say in the administrative reforms in Epirus, Thessaly, and other Christian provinces that would remain under Ottoman rule (Woodward, 1920, pp. 14–17). On June 4, 1878, Britain and Türkiye signed yet another secret agreement granting the administration and occupation of Cyprus to Britain in exchange for assurances to preserve the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity (Woodward, 1920, pp. 17–19). Last but not least, Britain and Austria also reached a secret agreement on June 6, 1878, through which Britain left the floor open for Austria to propose its desired plan for Bosnia (Woodward, 1920, pp. 19–22). Nevertheless, and in spite of these arrangements, anything could happen during the Congress.

The Congress began on the June 13 and ended on July 13, 1878, with the signing of the Treaty of Berlin. At this point, underlining that neither Greece, which had not participated in the war, nor Bulgaria, which as yet did not exist as a state, had participated in the Congress is imperative. However, the plenipotentiaries had agreed to accept the presentation of an exposé by a Greek representation, while the presence of the delegation would be accepted whenever a decision that directly concerned Greece was to be discussed and taken (Woodward, 1920, pp. 28–32). This way, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Diligiannis Theodoros, and the Ambassador of Greece to Berlin, Ravgavis Rizos Alexandros, read a preprepared statement during the 9th session of the Congress presenting Greek requests for Crete, Epirus, and Thessaly and then immediately left the chamber without taking part in the deliberations (Roucounas, 1976, p. 141). These territorial demands represented a shift of Greek policy from the *Megali Idea* to a smaller and more realistic idea. Regarding Bulgaria, its interests can be said to have been clearly represented by the Russians (Batowski, 1978, p. 234). On the contrary, the Greeks did not have clear backing from any specific Great Power, even though certain Powers, especially the British, made use of “the Greek card” to reach agreements that served their own interests (i.e., pushing back the Russian expansionist policy; Kofos, 1980, p. 46).

For the purposes of this paper, focus will only occur on the Berlin Treaty's provisions regarding Bulgaria and Greece. Literally half of the Congress's duration, as well as almost half of the Treaty's clauses referred to the Bulgarian question (Hertslet, 1981, pp. 2759–2799). San Stefano Bulgaria was divided into three parts: the “Autonomous Bulgarian Tributary to the Sultan Principality” with an elected Prince whose territory

was around a third of San Stefano Bulgaria, while it did not border the Aegean, it did extend among Serbia, the Danube, the Dobruja, and the Balkans; “Eastern Rumelia” (basically, Northern Thrace) was south of the Heamus Mons and under the complete authority of the Sultan, but with administrative autonomy, local militia, and a Christian Governor-General; and Macedonia would remain under Ottoman rule, contrary to the San Stefano provisions granting it to Bulgaria (Woodward, 1920, pp. 32–35). Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia would be occupied by 50,000 Russian troops for nine months after the signing of the Treaty, making Russian influence on Bulgaria once more visible (Woodward, 1920, pp. 32–35). Regarding Greece, the Treaty simply called upon the Ottomans to negotiate with the Greeks for the frontier in Thessaly and Epirus through Article XXIV and Protocol XIII (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 141–142). These provisions practically remained a dead letter, as the Ottomans kept stalling the deliberations. Only in 1881 when Thessaly and the region of Arta in Epirus were both given to Greece through the Treaties of Constantinople and the Great Powers’ involvement did Greece finally acquire a border with Macedonia (Dakin, 1989, pp. 209–212). This development strengthened Greek irredentism as it had made this seem even more achievable.

The Berlin Treaty has been said to have left all the involved parties aggrieved and to have set the basis for further turmoil in the Balkans. This statement generally depicts reality in one way or another, but not in any absolute manner (Dakin, 1989, pp. 209–212). On the one hand, even though Greece was disappointed by the provision for its borders with Türkiye, as well as by the denial to incorporate Crete into its territory, Macedonia and Northern Thrace not being granted to “Great Bulgaria” was a true relief (Dakin, 1989, pp. 27–28). The Megali Idea, which involved the Greek nationalist expansionary goals northwards, was still achievable but had to now be designed on a different basis (Kofos, 1980, pp. 48–49). Thus, in the years following the Treaty of Berlin, Greek policy shifted toward a more realistic approach; it removed the northern part of Macedonia from its expansionary agenda by casting light upon data referring to the Slavic roots of its population and territory (Kofos, 1980, pp. 48–49). Based on more concrete ethnological criteria, it thus now claimed the southern part of geographical Macedonia (i.e., the territories of King Philippos’s ancient Macedonian Kingdom). Furthermore, Greece proceeded with even stronger propaganda and religious, and educational antagonism against Bulgaria and the Exarchate in Macedonia while even providing military equipment to the Greeks of the region (Kofos, 1980, pp. 52–55).

On the other hand, Bulgaria was the one that lost the most in Berlin. San Stefano Bulgaria was now nothing more than a dream. For exactly this reason, the vision of Great Bulgaria encompassing the regions of Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia, and Thrace that had not been granted to Bulgaria in Berlin would constitute the core of Bulgarian nationalism after 1878 (Glenny, 2000, pp. 157–158). The first prominent expression of this stance would be Bulgaria's annexation of Eastern Rumelia in 1885 following the events that later came to be called The Crisis of 1885. The division of Bulgaria into Bulgaria proper and Eastern Rumelia was "a geographical and historical impossibility" that would not survive for very long after Berlin (Woodward, 1920, pp. 43–45). In fact, an uprising in 1885 in the form of a *coup d'état* by revolutionaries who were acting under the support of Bulgaria itself took place in Philippopolis, and the unification of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was announced to the world as a *fait accompli* (Lascaris, 1932, pp. 88–89). The Prince of Bulgaria was forced to accept this situation, as his only other choice was to abdicate (Dakin, 1993, pp. 28–30).

Greece and Serbia were only expected to oppose such a clear violation of the Treaty of Berlin that endangered both nations' aims with regards to Macedonia and that promoted a certain "pan-Bulgarianism" that threatened both countries (Heraclides, 2018, pp. 34–35). With particular regard to Greece, Bulgaria's incorporation of Eastern Rumelia was opposed due to fear of mistreatment of the thousands of Greeks living there, as the then Greek Prime Minister publicly stated. The Greek PM mentioned approximately 120,000 Greeks to be living there, but Konstantinova provided other data indicating the actual number to be around half of what the Greek side had presented. Of course, such data should be taken with a grain of salt due to the lack of any concrete documentation (Konstantinova, 2005, p. 55). Nevertheless, the fear of Bulgarian gains in Macedonia and the threat of a Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean should be considered of greater priority than concern over the ethnic minorities that would be left behind. After all, the first efforts toward a Balkan League would stumble upon exactly these concerns on behalf of Greece (Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52).

Moving on, both Serbia and Greece formally expressed their discontent, with Greece requesting the rest of Epirus's territory and Crete as a *quid pro quo* and declaring a general mobilization in September 1885 (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 214–215). After the Great Powers' decision to practically accept the *fait accompli* through the solution of the personal union of the two Bulgarias with the Prince of Bulgaria also being the

Governor-General of Eastern Rumelia, Serbia declared war against Bulgaria in November 1885. Greece continued being in a state of general mobilization, something unacceptable to the Great Powers as this was perceived as another threat to the Ottoman Empire, while a unified Bulgaria could serve as a more efficient bulwark for the former through means of Russia's intentions in the region (Washburn, 1921, pp. 444–445). Thus, the Great Powers appealed to the Greek government in December 1885 and again in January 1886, formally requesting it to disband its forces (Washburn, 1921, pp. 444–445). Despite the immense economic burden, Greece did not act accordingly; as a result, the Powers except for France imposed a naval blockade on Greece after their ultimatum in April 1886, one of many blockades that would occur over the years (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 214–215). Faced with this dire situation, Greece eventually disbanded its forces, and the blockade was lifted in June. Thus, Greece was not only left with a vast economic wound, but also with a territorial one due to Eastern Rumelia having been fully incorporated into Bulgaria, an international incorporeal wound caused by the blockade, and a regional incorporeal wound caused by the post-annexation of Eastern Rumelia's Bulgarianization efforts toward the Greeks of these territories (Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52). Of course, all these developments generally sharpened Greece's relations with Bulgaria, with Greece appealing regularly to the Great Powers to protect its compatriots in Bulgaria (Konstantinova, 2005, p. 58; Kofos, 1980, pp. 51–52).

Bulgaria itself had now gained a border with Macedonia, something that not only boosted "Pan-Bulgarianism," but also shocked the Greeks with regards to the struggle for loyalties in Macedonia and Thrace and to the uncertainty of their future in Eastern Rumelia (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 210–213; Konstantinova, 2005, p. 55). Thus, only after this crisis did the Greek efforts in Macedonia begin to realize the importance of strengthening not only the religious, cultural, and educational ties of the population in Macedonia to Greece, but also their sense of belonging to the same "*ethnos*" or "nation" (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 210–213). Bulgarians would also increase their religious and educational efforts in Macedonia in their struggle to win the loyalties of the population and prove their Bulgarian sentiment (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 89–95; Dakin, 1993, pp. 16–23). In fact, the Exarchate by the 1890s would gain an important lead against the Patriarchate in this region by securing the Sublime Porte's approvement of Bulgarian "*berats*" [charters] in Ohrid and Skopje (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 89–95; Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52). Interestingly, this also would happen after failed efforts toward lifting

the schism between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate due to the latter not accepting the former's demand to leave Constantinople and remain unable to establish Bulgarian *berats* in Macedonia (Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52). Therefore, the rivalry between the Greek and Bulgarian nationalist agendas had evolved through the Berlin Treaty, as a result of moving from a competition, one expressed especially in Macedonia between an existent state's expansionary vision (i.e., the *Megali Idea*) and a nation's will to create a state, to a struggle between two sovereign states for more territory, for the religious and ethnic loyalty of its population with the main battlefield being Macedonia, and for foreign support for their endeavors.

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to present and analyze the root causes of the religious and political antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century and to detect what it left behind. This antagonism initially took the shape of the Church Dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople (and consequently the Greek state) and the Bulgarian population within the *Rum millet* and the Bulgarian community in Constantinople. Ecclesiastic nationalism as expressed within this dispute was never a question of doctrine; instead, it was a highly political conflict of two nationalisms facing off. Bulgarians aimed at statehood, and Bulgarian nationalism first expressed itself through religious antagonism before expanding after the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate. The main battlefields of this part of the Greek-Bulgarian competition involved the areas with mixed populations, namely those with both Greeks and Bulgarians, as well as people with no clear ethnic identity or consciousness or with other ethnicities. The most prominent of these battlefields was Macedonia.

Soon after the establishment of the Exarchate, a propaganda war and an education and religion race commenced in these territories, with the aim of gaining confessions of loyalty for one side or the other so as to allow them to establish their grip on the population and thus on the territory. International developments fueled the dispute, such as the regulating Russo-Turkish treaty of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of San Stefano promising a Great Bulgaria that included Macedonia and Thrace. Through the Treaty of Berlin, the Great Powers were quick to act and revise the San Stefano regime, as it threatened their own interests, thus significantly reducing the danger for Greek nationalism and its expansionary aims northward. Nevertheless, political, territorial,

religious, and educational antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria was to grow even more after the Berlin Treaty. The *Megali Idea* and Pan-Bulgarianism would clash, with Macedonia being the frontline. As the sick man of Europe, the Ottoman Empire had administration of Macedonia in Berlin and due to seemingly be facing its final years, Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, and even Macedonians would all present overlapping claims for the Macedonian territory and its population. At some point in the mid to late 1880s, this whole situation would come to be called the Macedonian Question, a question holding the key for peace in the powder keg of Europe and having smartly been called “the unyielding philosopher’s stone of Balkan nationalism” (Glenny, 2000, p. 156). To conclude, this paper’s goal has been to present the Greek-Bulgarian antagonism in a continuum, with its aspects presented as a complex and entangled whole and making visible its nature as a prior phase to the Macedonian Struggle and the Balkan Wars.

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