

THE SITUATION OF BULGARIAN ARMED BANDS IN MACEDONIA BETWEEN AUTOCRACY AND CONSTITUTIONALISM ACCORDING TO BRITISH DOCUMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The nationalist movements during the nineteenth century accelerated the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Rebellions inspired by the nationalist ideology together with the newly-established states weakened the authority of the Ottoman in the Balkans. The regions under Ottoman rule experienced conflicts stemming from diverse ethnic groups. Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs, in particular, sought to implement territorial expansion plans in the Ottoman Balkans, shaped by national structures formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Within this context, the turbulent environment known as the ‘Macedonian Question’ emerged in the geographical area encompassing the provinces of Salonica, Monastir, and Kosovo. Macedonia became closely associated with violence due to the bloody conflicts initiated by armed bands established by local groups in the region. These bands, generally supported by the expansionist policies of the newly formed small Balkan nation-states in the region, engaged in clashes both among themselves and with law enforcement forces in Macedonia. While each of these armed bands constitutes a significant subject of study, this article focuses specifically on the situation of the Bulgarian armed bands. within addition to offering a general assessment, the focus will be on the transition from the pre-constitutional period, when violent conflict reached its peak, to the period which was associated with the promise of ‘freedom’ with the advent of the constitutional monarchy. The analysis mainly draws on reports prepared by British diplomatic and military representatives stationed in the region. These reports sometimes sent daily and at other intervals, provide required data for the study.

Keywords: Macedonia, Constitutional Monarchy, Internal Organisation, Union and Progress, Jane Sandanski.

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İNGİLİZ BELGELERİNE GÖRE İSTİBDÂT VE MEŞRUTİYET EKSENİNDE MAKEDONYA'DA BULGAR ÇETELERİNİN DURUMU

ÖZ

19. yüzyıl ile birlikte ortaya çıkan milliyetçi hareketlenmeler Osmanlı Devleti'nin yıkılışını hızlandıran etkiler meydana getirmiştir. Milliyetçi düşünce ile gelişen isyanlar ve bu isyanların neticesinde kurulan yeni devletler Osmanlıların Balkan topraklarındaki hâkimiyetini daraltmıştır. Osmanlı hâkimiyetinin mevcut olduğu bölgeler ise farklı etnik unsurların sebep olduğu çatışmalara sahne olmuştur. Rum, Bulgar ve Sırp 19. yüzyılın son çeyreğinde ve 20. yüzyılın başlarında meydana getirdikleri kendi millî yapılanmalarının da etkisi ile Osmanlı Balkanlarında yayılma planları gerçekleştirmek istemiştir. Bu manzara içerisinde “Makedonya Sorunu” olarak adlandırılan anarşi ortamı Selanik, Manastır ve Kosova vilayetlerini içine alan coğrafi alanın etrafında gelişmiştir. Makedonya'nın şiddet ile anılması ise bölgenin yerel unsurları tarafından kurulmuş olan çetelerin girişmiş olduğu kanlı çatışmalardır. Yeni küçük ulus devletlerin de bölgedeki yayılma planları doğrultusunda desteklenen bu çeteler, Makedonya'da hem kendi aralarında hem de bölgedeki kolluk kuvvetleri ile çatışmalara girmiştir. Bahsedilen çetelerin her biri ayrı bir çalışma konusu olmakla birlikte burada Bulgar çetelerinin durumuna odaklanılacaktır. Genel değerlendirmeler ile birlikte daha mikro düzeyde çatışmanın en yoğun yaşandığı meşrutiyet öncesi dönemden yani “İstibdat”dan, meşrutiyet ile birlikte ortaya çıkan “hürriyete” geçiş sürecine odaklanılacaktır. Çalışmada İngiliz diplomatik ve askeri temsilcilerinin bölgeden bazen günü gününe bazen de çeşitli zamanlarda iletmış oldukları raporlar ana kaynak olarak kullanılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Makedonya, Meşrutiyet, İç Örgüt, İttihat ve Terakki, Yane Sandanski.

Introduction

Following the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War, the transfer of Macedonia to the newly established ‘Greater Bulgaria’ under the Treaty of San Stefano was regarded as a significant reward for the Slavic populations that had supported the Bulgarian Exarchate. However, the subsequent revision of this treaty by the Treaty of Berlin caused great disappointment among the Bulgarians. After this change, the Bulgarians’ primary objective was to return to the borders established by the Treaty of Ayastefanos. During the 1880s, the Bulgarians adopted two different strategies emerged in pursuit of Bulgarian claims in Macedonia. The first involved the formation of a

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revolutionary movement and advocated armed uprising. The second was the Bulgarian Exarchate, which represented the evolutionary movement. Recognising the importance of education in the formation of a national consciousness, the Exarchate prioritised the establishment of schools and churches. In contrast, the revolutionary movement, composed of armed bands, launched a general uprising, acting on the belief that Macedonia could be annexed by Bulgaria. In this context, the annexation of the Province of Eastern Rumelia in 1885 constituted a significant development.¹ The diplomatic resolution of this annexation and its acceptance by the international community increased Bulgarian aspirations regarding Macedonia. Encouraged by this situation, Bulgarian armed bands, supported by the Bulgarian government, also came to believe that action in Macedonia should be taken as soon as possible. This urgency was because the Ottoman Empire could rapidly disintegrate, and Macedonia could be divided among neighbouring Balkan states.² In response to these developments and the potential new threats arising in Macedonia, the Bulgarians launched a major uprising aimed at securing Macedonia's annexation by Bulgaria.

There were two influential Bulgarian armed bands in Macedonia during this period. One of them was founded in Salonica on 23 October 1893 by some Bulgarian nationalists. Founded under the name 'Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation',³ the organisation defended Macedonia's autonomy. Socialist Bulgarian youths pursued a liberation movement against Ottoman rule, not against the Muslim population, without external intervention in Macedonian affairs. The armed band, which began to organise rapidly, would engage in armed actions with peasants and the petty bourgeoisie.⁴ The organisation demanded political autonomy by operating on the principle that stated 'Macedonia belongs to the Macedonians' and demanded political autonomy.⁵ However, as Hristo Tatarchev also stated, the

¹ Mahir Aydın, *Şarkî Rumeli Vilâyeti*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1992, p. 255-290.

² Fikret Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu*, (çev.) İhsan Catay, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, p. 118-119; Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu (1890-1918)*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, p. 40-41, 46.

³ It has also been called the 'internal organisation' because it was established within Macedonia. For discussions regarding the organisation's name, see: Adanır, *op.cit.*, p. 118-121.

⁴ İlhan Tekeli, "Makedonya İç Örgütü ve 1903 İlinden Ayaklanması", *Cumhuriyetin Harcı Birinci Kitap Köktenci Modernitenin Doğuşu*, (ed.) İlhan Tekeli, Selim Tekeli, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2003, p. 70-71.

⁵ Mümin İsov, "Makedonya Hareketi'nde Savaşa Giden Liderlik Mücadlesi: VMORO ile VMOK arasındaki İlişkilerin Boyutu (1896-1903)", *Balkan Tarihi Araştırmaları I*, (ed.) Bülent Akyay, Trakya Üniversitesi Yayınları, Edirne 2021, p. 225.

ultimate aim was understood to be the Bulgaria's annexation of the region.⁶ With this fundamental aim in mind, the Bulgarian revolutionaries initially sought to draw the attention of European states to the region. In pursuit of this approach, they launched the Ilinden Uprising on 20 July 1903. However, the failure of the uprising led to some changes within the organisation. In 1905, the organisation changed its name to the 'Internal Macedonian-Adrianople-Thracian Revolutionary Organisation',⁷ and the most significant internal divisions occurred in this period. The organisation divided into right and left-wing factions. The left-wing aimed to establish an organisation in Macedonia that was free from external interference and allow participation of local groups. Leading figures within this faction viewed Bulgaria and other states in the region as a threat. According to their vision, a socialist Balkan Federation should be established in Macedonia, free from external interference.⁸ On the contrary, the right wing of the organisation believed that the revolutionary movement could not continue its activities without Bulgaria's support. These ideological distinctions within the organisation resulted in conflicts. The assassination of figures representing the right wing on the orders of the left-wing leader Jane Sandanski caused changes in the power struggle in Macedonia, and strengthened the left faction. The right wing of the organisation, previously known as the Centralists, would now be called the Neo-Varhiovists; while the Centralists or Sandanists would represent the left wing.

The second Macedonian-Bulgarian organisation established for Macedonia was founded in Sofia in 1895 under the name 'High Macedonian Committee'. This organisation, which received close support and patronage from the Principality of Bulgaria, adopted the slogan 'Macedonia belongs to the Bulgarians' and advocated the annexation of Macedonia to Bulgaria.⁹ Known as the 'Varhiovists,' this organisation continued to exist until early 1903.¹⁰ Some of the disbanded Varhiovists joined the Internal Organisation,

⁶ Mûmin İsoy ve Ergün Hasanoğlu *Osmanlı Avrupası'nda Bölücülük Cereyanı - Makedonya Komitacılarının Anıları*, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul 2021, p. 170.

⁷ Throughout this study, the term 'Internal Organisation' will be used, which is frequently used in the sources along with the name of the organisation.

⁸ Mithat Aydın, "Osmanlı Makedonya'sında Slavist Bulgar Komita Faaliyetleri", *Belgi Dergisi*, Volume 2, Issue 18, Summer 2019, p. 1600.

⁹ Mahir Aydın, "Arşiv Belgeleriyle Makedonya'da Bulgar Çete Faaliyetleri", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları IX*, İstanbul 1989, p. 211.

¹⁰ İsoy ve Hasanoğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

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which remained active till then. This situation also influenced the divisions that occurred within the Internal Organisation.

The Internal Organisation, which continued to operate effectively in Macedonia, experienced a loss of power because of some reasons, explained in the study. This loss of power, which continued until the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy, would begin to change with the establishment of constitutional rule. This study, therefore, aims to examine the situation of the Bulgarian revolutionary groups and Bulgarian armed bands in Macedonia during the process of recovery that followed the collapse. In particular, it examines the internal divisions among Bulgarian armed bands, their conflicts with armed bands representing other ethnic groups and their confrontations with Ottoman security forces. These dynamics played an important role on the climate of violence in the region.

The research draws on the reports prepared by British diplomatic and military representatives. These data sources are analysed through content analysis and interpreted from a critical perspective. British reports, unlike the propaganda texts of the parties involved, were based on monthly and comparative statistical data. These data served not only as a statistical source for the period but were also considered as a diplomatic source that Britain could use to expand its reform programme in Macedonia. The desire to expand the reform programme in the region were grounded in the data presented in these reports. However, the general data contained in the relevant sources, also provide an opportunity to monitor the situation in Macedonia. In this context, based on the relevant sources, the situation of Bulgarian armed bands before and after the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy will be examined on a more micro scale, thereby aiming to contribute to the literature on the Macedonian Question.

1. The General Situation of Bulgarian Armed Bands in Macedonia

The Ilinden Uprising led to significant changes in Macedonia on behalf of the Bulgarians. Hilmi Pasha,¹¹ who had been appointed as a general inspector of the region prior to the uprising, stated that despite the destruction of a significant portion of the armed bands, new groups continued to

¹¹ For detailed information about Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, see: Mahir Aydın, "Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, TDV Yayınları, Volume 18, İstanbul 1998, p. 550-551.

emerge.¹² However, after the Ilinden Uprising, the deaths of many local leaders caused serious divisions within the armed bands, leading to a noticeable decline in their influence. The peasants withdrew their support for the armed bands; there were even incidents where armed band leaders were killed by peasants.¹³ Moreover, Bulgarian armed bands began to experience financial difficulties after the uprising and failed to gain support from the public. This situation made the armed bands more aggressive, leading them to harm their own members. For example, in September 1905, sixteen Bulgarians who were unable to provide financial support to the gangs due to poverty were killed by Bulgarian armed bands.¹⁴ This financial crisis also prevented Bulgarian armed bands from undertaking large-scale actions in 1906.¹⁵

Following the Ilinden Uprising, Bulgarian armed band leaders instructed their members at a meeting in Sofia to transfer villages affiliated with the Patriarchate to the Exarchate. Article 3 of the Mürzteg Programme further reinforced this development. This article stated that provincial borders would be redrawn according to the national structure.¹⁶ Consequently, the communities in Macedonia would endeavour to clear the regions they demanded from other groups. Acting on their orders, Bulgarian armed bands ensured that forty villages in southern Macedonia affiliated with the Patriarchate were transferred to the administration of the Exarchate. These developments led both Greek and Serbian groups to reorganise themselves to protect their compatriots in Macedonia against the Bulgarians. Thus, the Greek and Serbian armed band movements against the Bulgarians began to intensify.¹⁷ The resurgence of violence by Bulgarian groups after the uprising also angered the Ottoman authorities. To prevent this, a more tolerant approach was adopted towards the opposing groups.¹⁸ This attitude was even reflected in the treatment of prisoners.¹⁹ The fact that the Greek armed bands in Macedonia were not acting against Ottoman rule but against the Bulgarians,

¹² Hale Şıvgın, “Osmanlı Arşiv Belgeleriyle 1902-1912 Yıllarında Makedonya”, *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi*, Issue 43, September 2007, p. 83.

¹³ Adanır, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁴ NAUK, FO, 421/212, Inclosure 2 in No. 53, p. 138-139.

¹⁵ NAUK, FO, 421/222, No. 132, (8 Ağustos 1906), p. 140.

¹⁶ Kaya Bayraktar, *Makedonya Sorunu Bir Mali Kontrol Denemesi (1902-1909)*, Atıf Yayınları, Ankara 2020, p. 128.

¹⁷ Adanır, *op.cit.*, p. 216-242.

¹⁸ Adanır, *op.cit.*, p. 222; Hasip Saygılı, “Rumeli Müfettişliği (1902-1908) Makedonya’da Yunan Komitçileri ve Osmanlı Devleti”, *Güvenlik Stratejileri*, Issue 21, p. 151-164.

¹⁹ NAUK, FO, 421/242, Inclosure 2 in No 45, p. 57.

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who were attempting to destroy ‘Hellenism,’ also contributed to this development.²⁰

In the years following the Ilinden Uprising, financial difficulties and the growing strength of Greek and Serbian armed bands resulted in a significant loss of power for Bulgarian armed bands.²¹ Disagreements among these groups also contributed to this loss of power during this period. The split within ‘Internal Organisation’ in 1905 played a role in this situation. The divisions within the Internal Organisation led to a number of problems between the two groups. In late 1907, two prominent figures in the organization, Boris Sarafoff and Ivan Garvanoff, were murdered. Their killer was Panitza, an associate of Sandanski, who led the organization’s left wing. This assassination had severe consequences. Not only it caused further disagreements among the Bulgarians, but it also led to an increasing loss of power within the Internal Organization.²² With the increasing conflict among Bulgarian armed bands in Macedonia, small local Bulgarian armed bands began to act in their own interests throughout the province.²³ This division and internal disagreements within the organisation made the small local Bulgarian armed bands more aggressive. Acting in their own material interests, Bulgarian armed bands became the party causing the most harm to the Bulgarian population, and the number of murders they committed against their own people also began to rise. The reason for these murders, in the eyes of the armed bands, was the Bulgarian population’s ‘reluctance or indifference towards the national cause’.

Within this context, Bulgarian armed bands lost power in the region. By 1907, control in Serres had completely passed to Greek armed groups. The Bulgarians in the region became completely ineffective and had to withdraw. Despite losing political power in Macedonia throughout 1907, Bulgarian groups managed to stop the advance of Greek forces on the Monastir and Mariovo line. However, supremacy in the southern parts of these regions passed entirely to the Greek armed bands. Furthermore, the Bulgarians submitted to the Serbs in the north and were forced to withdraw from the north-west as a result of Albanian activities. Their conflicts with all parties in the region were significant in the Bulgarians’ losses. Their internal conflicts

²⁰ Adanır, *op.cit.*, p. 221-222.

²¹ Gül Tokay, *Makedonya Sorunu Jön Türk ihtilalinin Kökenleri (1903-1908)*, Afa Yayınları, İstanbul 1996, p. 54.

²² Adanır, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

²³ NAUK, FO, 421/240, Inclosure 5 in No 180, p. 209-211.

also played a role in this. As the region became complex and dangerous for both the Bulgarians and all other elements, there were also serious migrations. After 1903, approximately 60,000 peasants emigrated from the Monastir Province to United States, two-thirds of whom were Bulgarians.²⁴ This migration movement, which influenced by economic factors, is confirmed by Ottoman bureaucrats. According to them, Bulgarians constituted the largest group of migrants from Macedonia to America. At this point, it is also evident that under certain conditions, Bulgarians were not prevented from migrating to America via various countries.²⁵

By 1908, the erosion of Bulgarian supremacy in Macedonia became evident. Despite the conflicts continuing with full force in the province of Thessaloniki, Bulgarian forces had suffered serious losses there as well. In Salonica, murders were now being committed openly in public places.²⁶ The clashes also affected places of worship, and between March 1907 and March 1908, eleven Bulgarians were killed on Mount Athos.²⁷ In rural areas, the everyday life of the Bulgarian population began to be restricted by the living spaces provided to them by the Greeks. For example, in the village of Visocan, only a barn was left to the Bulgarian population for baptisms, weddings and funerals.²⁸ In Pravište, where the Greeks constituted the majority, a Bulgarian was killed in order to create an atmosphere of fear among the remaining Bulgarians, regardless of whether he had a political stance.²⁹ As a consequence of these developments, the living space available to Bulgarians in Macedonia became increasingly restricted. British Major Stephan reported that it had become impossible for Bulgarians to live in Cavalla and Pravishta. He further stated that the last Bulgarian living in Pravishta had been removed from the area under gendarmerie escort leaving no Bulgarians remained.³⁰ During this period, many Varhivist and Santralist leaders also surrendered to the Ottoman security forces.³¹

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Özer Özbozdağlı, "Makedonya Vilayetlerinden 1900-1908 Arası Amerika'ya Yapılan Göçler", *Tarih incelemeleri Dergisi*, Volume XXXV, Issue 2, 2020, p. 661, 665.

²⁶ NAUK, FO, 421/242, No 45/ Inclosure 1 in No 45, (Pera, 13 May 1908), p. 56.

²⁷ NAUK, FO, 421/241, Inclosure 2 in No 215, p. 230-234.

²⁸ NAUK, FO, 421/241, Inclosure in No 67, (Drama, 6 March 1908), p. 69.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68; NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure in No. 87, (Drama, 8 June 1908), p. 62-65.

³⁰ NAUK, FO, 421/242, Inclosure 1 in No 26, (Drama, 28 April 1908), p. 30-31.

³¹ NAUK, FO, 421/240, Inclosure 1 in No 184, (Salonica, 12 February 1908), p. 222; NAUK, FO, 421/241, Inclosure 1 in No 218, p. 240-241.

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Similar developments were observed in the Monastery and Kosovo regions. The activities of Bulgarian armed bands against non-Bulgarians became increasingly restricted.³² However, according to Lamp,³³ the British Consul General in Salonica during this period, Bulgarian armed bands were not engaging in major armed band activities because they were awaiting the outcome of the new reform proposal put forward by the British at the end of 1907.³⁴ Evidence supporting this situation can be seen in the renewed movements of Bulgarian armed bands in May and June 1908.³⁵ Italian Lieutenant Colonel Muricchio, stationed in the Ohrid region, argued that the restriction of Bulgarian activities resulted from the special surveillance of the police forces. He claimed that the Ottoman government had taken steps to eliminate the Bulgarian presence in the Monastir region, where clashes between Greeks and Bulgarians were intense. Lieutenant Colonel Muricchio's claim was based on the visit of the Governor of Monastir to the Ohrid region and the intensification of the crackdown against the Bulgarians. According to the Lieutenant Colonel, these measures even carried out on the orders of Hilmi Pasha. Although the Turkish forces' tolerant attitude towards the Greeks was well known, this and similar statements should also be accepted as propaganda claims. As British Lieutenant Colonel Bonham further noted that some foreign staff officers were preoccupied with politics and Turkish officials rather than their actual duty of improving the functioning of the gendarmerie.³⁶

Generally speaking, the activities of the Bulgarian bands came to a standstill for many reasons during the period between July and the new movement that the Young Turks were about to embark upon. With this development, they began to cede their positions in the areas where they had gained superiority in Macedonia to the Greeks. With the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, weapons would be surrendered, albeit for a short time, and calm would be restored under the new conditions that emerged. This

³² NAUK, *FO*, 421/241, Inclosure 1 in No 215, (Salonica, 14 April 1908), p. 230-234.

³³ Lamp served as Consul General in Salonica between 1907 and 1913; he also held diplomatic posts in regions such as Philippopolis, Edirne, Van, Mosul, Jeddah, Scutari, and Cetinje. In 1913, he served as the British commissioner on the international Control Commission in Albania. In 1915, he became head of the British Adriatic Mission. Lamp served at the British High Commission in Istanbul in 1920. After serving as Consul General in Izmir in 1921, he retired in 1922. See: <https://archives.ucl.ac.uk/CalmView/record/catalog/LAM>, (26.12.2025).

³⁴ NAUK, *FO*, 421/241, Inclosure 1-2 in No 215, p. 230-234.

³⁵ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in No. 184, (Salonica, 17 July 1908), p. 143.

³⁶ NAUK, *FO*, 421/240, Inclosure in No 12, (Drama, 29 Aralık 1907), p.17-18.

process would allow the Bulgarian bands to regroup, and they would once again become an effective element of conflict in Macedonia.

2. The Quantitative Dimension of Violent Incidents in Macedonia from Autocracy to Constitutionalism

Despite the reforms introduced in Macedonia through the Mürzteg reform programme, the situation in Macedonia continued to deteriorate. The intensity of the conflict between the armed bands has caused serious problems for public safety. In particular, as a result of the pressure exerted by the Bulgarians against their own ethnic elements, the Bulgarian people were suffering at the hands of armed bands claiming to be fighting on their behalf. This reality reflected in the statistics concerning political deaths in Macedonia in 1905. Despite the activities of officers belonging to the great powers in the reform regions during these years, there were numerous political deaths in Macedonia caused by armed bands or as a result of the army's pursuit of them. The number of these cases increased each year after 1905 until the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy. For example, the number of political deaths recorded in November 1906, rose from 73 to 189 in the same month of 1907. The same situation applies to December. Although the number decreased due to winter conditions, it doubled compared to the previous year, in December 1906 political deaths increased from 56 to 106 in the same month of 1907.³⁷

A closer analysis of developments throughout 1907 shows that the activities of the armed bands were restricted in January, February and March. This situation could be due to winter conditions limiting the armed bands' areas of operation. With the arrival of spring, however, both political deaths and armed band activity began to increase. The increase observed in June continued into July. However, the strict pursuit of armed bands by the Ottoman security forces in July had a significant impact on maintaining public order. The crackdown in July also limited armed bands' activities in August. Violence gained impetus again in October and November. In November 1907, the number of political deaths rose to 189.³⁸ In December, winter conditions once again led to a decline in the number of fatalities.³⁹ Overall, a total of 1,768 political deaths were recorded across three provinces throughout 1907.

³⁷ NAUK, *FO*, 421/240, Inclosure 5 in No 180, p. 209-211.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/240, Inclosure 1-2 in No 63, (Salonica, 16 January 1908), p. 75-79.

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Of these cases, 991 were Bulgarians, and 120 of the perpetrators were also Bulgarians. The fact that 320 Bulgarian deaths were attributed to Greek-forces. During the same year, 236 Bulgarian armed band members were neutralised by the Ottoman security forces. In contrast, 89 Greek, 88 Serbian and 4 Wallachian armed band members were killed by Ottoman soldiers. Although Bulgarians had begun to lose power, they were still responsible for 521 political murders throughout the year. In addition, the number of soldiers killed in clashes in three provinces throughout the year was 135 of whom 72 were killed by the Bulgarians.⁴⁰

In response to the operations after 1907, Bulgarian Foreign Ministry prepared a report detailing the pursuits of the Bulgarian bands and their losses during the last three months of the year. This report was sent to the diplomatic representatives of the major powers in the region.⁴¹ Thus, an attempt was made to create public opinion among the relevant states. The Salonica Consul General Lamb, who evaluated the report submitted by the Bulgarians, stated that it contained a great deal of misleading information. In his assessment of the report, Lamb revealed that the Bulgarians exaggerated certain events by explaining the same events in multiple ways. He further explained that some murders committed by Bulgarian armed bands were misleadingly reported as having been committed by Turkish armed bands, while omitting or distorting key details. For example, in the incident described in the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry's report, where soldiers allegedly assaulted the priest and cook at the St. Nicholas Monastery, the report failed to mention that Bulgarian armed bands escaped through the monastery's back door while the priest was distracting the soldiers by talking to them. He obscured that some of the individuals he portrayed as neutral, innocent villagers were members of Bulgarian armed bands. He also failed to mention that Ivan Nicoloff, who was allegedly beaten by soldiers, had an arrest warrant issued against him for numerous crimes, including murder. It has been revealed that much of the information in the report, which was examined in its entirety by Consul General Lamb in Salonica, is misleading.⁴² A similar situation is found in the report published in the 'Bulletin d'Orient' magazine. The report contains statistics on crimes committed by Bulgarians against Greeks in the Serres Sanjak in the second half of 1907. This report was also examined by Erskine,

⁴⁰ NAUK, FO, 421/240, Inclosure 5 in No 180, p. 211.

⁴¹ NAUK, FO, 421/240, Inclosure 1 in No 34, p. 36.

⁴² NAUK, FO, 421/241, Inclosure 1 in No 37, p. 38-40.

the British Consul Assistant in Serres, and it was determined that many of the alleged crimes were misleading.⁴³

Despite the existence of certain steps taken to mislead and manipulate public perception as being victims, British representatives stationed in Macedonia regularly reported on events in the region in their monthly reports. These reports are considered more reliable as they were prepared through comparisons with statistics from the Ottoman police forces. According to the general data in these reports, violence in Macedonia continued to increase with each passing period. However, the declaration of a constitutional monarchy towards the end of July 1908 significantly reduced the number of political deaths. Despite this, it can be seen that violent incidents continued to increase until the end of July. It can be seen that political deaths, which ranged between 110 and 120 in January, February and March, began to increase in April and May.⁴⁴ Seasonal conditions also had an impact on this situation. In May 1908, 144 political deaths were recorded⁴⁵ Followed by an increase to 198 in June.⁴⁶ Despite the restoration of calm following the declaration of the constitutional monarchy on 23 July, the number of murders in the three provinces of Macedonia was 187.⁴⁷ However, only 9 of these murders took place after the declaration of the constitutional monarchy. Following 23 July, political crime records declined sharply, partly due to the effect of some executions carried out as a warning. According to Consul General Lamb in Salonica, the Young Turks killed 18 people and wounded 10 others during the revolution.⁴⁸ By the end of July 1908, a total of 982 political deaths had been recorded in the three provinces of Macedonia. Once again, the majority of the victims were Bulgarians. Of the 593 political deaths suffered by Bulgarians, the perpetrators were Bulgarians in 62 cases.⁴⁹ This demonstrates

⁴³ NAUK, *FO*, 421/242, nclosure 1-2 in No 140, (Salanico, 8 June 1908), p. 191-193.

⁴⁴ NAUK, *FO*, 421/240, Inclosure 2 in No 184, p. 225-226; NAUK, *FO*, 421/241, Inclosure 1-2 in No 218, p. 237-241; NAUK, *FO*, 421/241, Inclosure 2 in No 215, p. 230-234.

⁴⁵ NAUK, *FO*, 421/242, Inclosure 2 in No 166, p. 224-229; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 3 in No. 43, p. 25.

⁴⁶ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 2 in No. 229, p. 164-169.

⁴⁷ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 1-7 in No. 393, p. 330-340.

⁴⁸ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, No. 22, (Salonica, 20 August 1908), p. 12-13.

⁴⁹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/240, Inclosure 2 in No 184, p. 223-226; NAUK, *FO*, 421/241, Inclosure 1-2 in No 218, p. 237-241; NAUK, *FO*, 421/241, Inclosure 2 in No 215, p. 230-234; NAUK, *FO*, 421/242, Inclosure 1 in No 59, p. 69; NAUK, *FO*, 421/242, Inclosure 1-2 in No 166, p. 223-229; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 3 in No. 43, p. 25; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 2 in No. 229, p. 164-169; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 1-7 in No. 393, p. 330-340.

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that the intensity of the Bulgarians' internal conflicts persisted until the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy.

With the declaration of the constitutional monarchy and the effects of the order established thereafter, no political deaths were recorded in August. The British Consul-General in Skopje reported no crimes in August except for three cases of theft. Consul Heathcote reported four deaths in the Monastir region, but none of these were political murders. In Salonica, there were no serious developments apart from certain political incidents among the Bulgarians themselves.⁵⁰ Apart from a few such incidents, no significant events were reported in August.⁵¹ Nevertheless, according to British Staff Officer Lieutenant Colonel Bonham, peace between the Greeks and Bulgarians remained highly unlikely. In his view, Macedonia was not a place seeking peace under Ottoman rule. All parties were acting in pursuit of their own national structures, seeking to incorporate Macedonia into their own countries. Furthermore, the disputes caused by the churches also the prospect of lasting peace even more distant.

Despite tensions and unrest in Macedonia reaching fever pitch following the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, there was no significant increase in political deaths.⁵² Until late 1908, tensions between all sides in Macedonia suggested a rapid return to the old internal conflicts. Each side spread the other as aggressive while presenting itself as the victim, yet this period continued without conflict. However, throughout 1909, political murders remained well below the levels recorded before the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy. The renewed intensification of conflicts would occur with the enactment of the associations law and the developments that followed. By the end of 1909, the average number of political deaths, which had been between 20 and 30, rose to 48 in October due to the impact of the law.⁵³ Accordingly, the environment of public order that the constitutional

⁵⁰ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 1-2 in No 120, (Salonica, 12 September 1908), p. 108-110.

⁵¹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure No 182, (Drama, 19 September 1908), p. 134.

⁵² NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure in No 652, p. 475; NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 1-2 in No 9, p. 9-10; NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 1 in No 339; NAUK, *FO*, 421/249, Inclosure 1-2 in No 428, p. 348-349.

⁵³ For details on the political murders of 1909, see: NAUK, *FO*, 421/250, Inclosure 1-2 in No 17, p. 18-21; NAUK, *FO*, 421/250, Inclosure 2 in No 286, p. 278-280; NAUK, *FO*, 421/250, Inclosure 2 in No 810, p. 550-552; NAUK, *FO*, 421/251, Inclosure 2 in No 105, p. 117-119; NAUK, *FO*, 421/251, Inclosure 2 in No 185, p. 195-196; NAUK, *FO*, 421/252, Inclosure 2 in No 217, p. 213-214; NAUK, *FO*, 421/252, Inclosure 2 in No 63, p. 72-74; NAUK, *FO*,

monarchy sought to protect was short-lived and could not be sustained. This was because the issue was not a problem caused by Turkish rule but rather a consequence of disagreements among local elements.

3. The Attitude of Bulgarian Armed Bands Towards the Declaration of Constitutional Monarchy

The Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*), which was active in the Ottoman Empire in declaring a constitution and establishing a constitutional government, invited the Bulgarian Internal Organisation to its second congress held in Paris at the end of 1907. The right wing of the Bulgarian organisation refused this invitation and did not attend the congress because it had no common ground with the Committee of Union and Progress. The right wing of the Internal Organisation wanted to make Macedonia part of Bulgaria, but the Committee of Union and Progress wanted the liberation of the state. By contrast, the Serres group, representing the left wing of the organisation, decided to meet with the Committee of Union and Progress in the spring of 1908.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the talks with the left wing would take place after the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy. However, in a report sent on 17 July, the British Consul in Monastir, Heathcote, stated that the Bulgarians had decided to support the new process initiated by the Committee of Union and Progress movement. This decision, taken by the left wing of the Internal Organisation, was based on the condition that no foreign intervention would be allowed and with the belief that it could ensure peace in the region.⁵⁵ While the left wing of the Organisation supported the Committee of Union and Progress' demand for a constitutional monarchy on 23 July. The British Consul General in Sofia, Buchanan, reported that the right wing had been instructed to refrain from supporting the society's activities in Sofia and to maintain their wait-and-see attitude. Furthermore, the Bulgarian government provided an official assurance that it would not take advantage of the situation in which the Ottoman Empire found itself.⁵⁶

421/253, Inclosure 2 in No 145, p. 159-160; NAUK, FO, 421/253, Inclosure 2 in No 226, p. 262-263; NAUK, FO, 421/254, Inclosure 2 in No 84, p. 81-83.

⁵⁴ Mehmet Hacısalıhoğlu, "İttihadcılar ve Makedonya İhtilal Komiteleri: İttihat ve Terakki Hükümetinin Başlaması Kadar İlişkiler, Pazarlıklar ve Sonuçları", *Tarih Dergisi*, Issue 38, 2003, p. 110-111.

⁵⁵ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure in No 185, (Monastir, 17 July 1908), p. 141.

⁵⁶ NAUK, FO, 421/243, No. 121, (Sophia, 23 July 1908), p. 104.

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On 22 July, the day the declaration of the constitutional monarchy was expected, the general atmosphere in Macedonia was controlled by unionist officers, and demonstrations accompanied by slogans such as ‘Long live our nation’ being chanted.⁵⁷ Under the command of Ruşeni Bey, 100 soldiers and 20 officers arrived in Drama and organised a parade. At around 2 o’clock in the afternoon, speeches were delivered calling for a transition to constitutional order and for the people to support the new movement. According to Lieutenant Colonel Bonham, “*One thing is certain, that if there are many officers of the calibre of Rushen Bey engaged in this movement it will go far. He is the true type of the revolutionary, a leader of men, eloquent, feverishly energetic, blind to any difficulties there may be in the way of the cause which is his existence*”.⁵⁸ Thanks to the efforts of Ruşeni Bey and other Unionist officers, order was restored in Macedonia, and the announcement of the constitution was eagerly awaited. After learning the aims of the revolutionary leaders, British Major Bonham sent Major Nye and Captain Stephen to the homes of the anxious residents of Drama. To reassure them that their lives were safe.⁵⁹ Although these actions do not necessarily indicate that the local British officers supported the Committee of Union and Progress movement, they do demonstrate that they took certain steps regarding public order.

Similar events took place in Salonica on 23 July, with speeches given by civilian and military figures, including Turks, Jews, Greeks and Bulgarians.⁶⁰ On the morning of 24 July, Hilmi Pasha read a declaration to the public at the government residence in Salonica, announcing that the 1876 Constitution had been restored, in front of a large crowd.⁶¹ With the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, Turkish newspapers announced the re-establishment of press freedom and called for all classes in the country to celebrate together, regardless of religion or origin.⁶² This unity was interpreted as an indication renewed order of the region. The Consul General in Salonica, Lamb, stated that order had been commendably preserved with

⁵⁷ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure in No 227, (Serres, 23 July 1908), p. 159-160.

⁵⁸ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in 230, (Drama, 23 July 1908), p. 183.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 181-184.

⁶⁰ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in 235, (Salonica, 23 July 1908), p. 193.

⁶¹ NAUK, FO, 421/243, No. 138, (Salonica, 24 July 1908), p. 114; Aykut Kansu, 1908 *Devrimi*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, p. 136. For further information on the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy, see also: İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, “1908 Yılında İkinci Meşrutiyetin Ne Suretle İlân Edildiğine Dair Vesikalar”, *Belleten*, Volume 20, Issue 77, January 1956, p. 103-174.

⁶² NAUK, FO, 421/243, No. 146, (Constantinople, 25 July 1908), p. 118.

the re-proclamation of the constitution. He also expressed the belief in the efforts of the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress to reconcile and unite different nations could succeed. In his correspondence with Edward Grey further noted that the Committee of Union and Progress was determined to realise its claim that it could suppress the armed bands.⁶³

With the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, it was expected that the Bulgarian bands, which had previously declared their support for the Committee of Union and Progress, would lay down their weapons. According to British Major Bonham the Bulgarians remained loyal to the movement.⁶⁴ Similarly, Consul General Lamb in Salonica stated that Bulgarian committees had suspended their activities but that the Greek side remained indecisive.⁶⁵ The current impact of the movement on the bands became visible after 28 July. Bulgarian armed band leaders began surrendering their weapons to the Ottoman security forces. During these ceremonies, slogans for the welfare of the country were chanted, but the usual slogan 'Long live the Sultan!' was not heard. Bulgarians, including both wings of the Bulgarian 'Internal Organisation', were generally satisfied with the new process. Greek armed bands were more cautious than the Bulgarians in supporting the new regime. This was because local leaders and the Athens Committee were inclined to continue operations. However, after discussing the matter, the armed bands consisting of Greeks and Cretans who did not really want to lay down their arms withdrew towards the borders.⁶⁶ While others declared that they would disarm publicly.⁶⁷

As with the surrender process of the bands, it was the Bulgarians who took the most serious and swift action in response to the call for elections made by the Committee of Union and Progress. This was because they were in the most difficult position in the region. The call for elections was responded with a memorandum prepared by Dr Pantcheff, and believed to represent the views of the Internal Organisation. This document conveyed a number of demands, such as a confederation based on nationality and the equality of religious communities. It also emphasized that the Bulgarian armed bands had not definitively and permanently laid down their weapons. They declared that if their demands were not met, they were prepared to take

⁶³ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 153, (Salonica, 26 July 1908), p. 121.

⁶⁴ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 3 in 230, (Drama, 25 July 1908), p. 185.

⁶⁵ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in 274, (Salonica, 26 July 1908), p. 227.

⁶⁶ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No. 274, (Therapia, 4 August 1908), p. 225-226.

⁶⁷ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 3 in No. 308, (Monastir, 1 August 1908), p. 266-267.

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up arms and resume the struggle.⁶⁸ In a report sent to the Ministry of the Interior, General Inspector Hilmi Pasha reported that although the Bulgarian armed bands had ceased their activities, they had not laid down their arms.⁶⁹ A second memorandum, prepared by Sandanski, together with Todor Panitza and Pavel Deliradev, was more detailed. This document addressed a wide range of issues such as the structure of the parliament, elections, local autonomy, individual freedoms, the abolition of religious privileges, industrial enterprises, land, taxation, the army, education, state enterprises, political amnesty, and the absence of foreign experts in the country.⁷⁰ The approach to points such as autonomy and the abolition of all special and religious privileges expressed in both memoranda is common. It is certain that the demand for autonomy will produce results that conflict with the steps taken by the Committee of Union and Progress in line with its Ottomanist ideology.

During this period as Bulgarian armed bands began to lay down their arms and adopt a legitimate structure, they established the ‘Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs’. Although this organisation, founded by the right wing of the Internal Organisation, began its activities as a legitimate structure, its real aim was the annexation of Macedonia by Bulgaria.⁷¹ Supported by the Bulgarian government, the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs began preparations to hold a congress in Salonica. Local congresses were also held to prepare a programme for selecting and presenting delegates to this congress. Thirty-five members, representing nine of the organisation’s eleven regions, attended the local congress held in Monastır on 9-10 September. The Prespa and Kastoria regions did not send delegates due to local disagreements.⁷² This situation demonstrates that there are also factions and various opinions within the right wing of the Internal Organisation. Despite existing disagreements, the congress of the Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs, which had replaced the local branches of the Internal Organisation, began its sessions in Salonica on 20 September. Sixty-six delegates attended at the congress on 20 September, and this number later rose to eighty-four. The

⁶⁸ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 2-3 in No 31, (Salonica, 17 August 1908), p. 27-29; NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 4 in No.109, p. 98-99.

⁶⁹ Zafer Koylu, “Makedonya’da Çetelerin Meşrutiyet Kulüplerine Dönüşmesi”, *Belleten*, Volume 81, Issue 291, 2017, p. 576.

⁷⁰ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 4 in No 31, p. 29.

⁷¹ Zafer Koylu, “Makedonya’da Çetelerin Meşrutiyet Kulüplerine Dönüşmesi”, *Belleten*, Volume 81, Issue 291, 2017, p. 576-577.

⁷² NAUK, FO, 421/244, nclosure 2 in No 502, (Monastır, 16 September 1908), p. 370.

declaration adopted by the congress was forwarded to the Committee of Union and Progress administration. The declaration touched upon many issues, including elections and changes to the administrative system to taxes and religious and national privileges. The declaration contained certain articles, articles 7 and 8, that were particularly highlighted by Consul General Lamp and were thought to provoke a reaction from the Committee of Union and Progress. Article 7 demanded broad judicial authority and self-governance in each district, with its own police force, municipal and public education autonomy. Article 8 proposed that the official language of each district should be determined according to the population in that region.⁷³ These articles were expressed in the context of the freedom that emerged with the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy, but they were also conditions already demanded by Bulgarian armed bands. It was expected that annexation would be on the agenda in the new processes that would develop once these conditions were met.

Following the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, local armed bands belonging to the Internal Organisation became a legitimate structure, but they did not abandon their goal of annexing Macedonia to Bulgaria. During this period, the left wing, which included the Sandanists, laid down their arms but refused to join the constitutional clubs. Sandanski continued to insist on the establishment of a federal structure in Macedonia. Selanik Consul Lamp interpreted the fact that both wings of the Internal Organisation had issued statements containing similar demands during this period as a sign that a union might be possible.⁷⁴ In practice, however, such an alliance never materialised. Even though negotiations took place between the two groups, the two factions remained divided. The left wing continued to accuse the right wing of acting in the interests of Bulgaria. Sandanski had already secured the advantages of the support it had provided to the Committee of Union and Progress during the declaration of the constitutional monarchy by guaranteeing its dominance in the Serres and Drama regions. These areas became the scene of new disputes between the Internal Organisation and Sandanski. In fact, the murders committed here led to new disagreements emerging after the declaration of the constitutional monarchy. With the dominance he established, Sandanski prevented members of the rival faction from operating there and used his close associate Panitza for these

⁷³ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 3-4 in No 499, (Salonica, 30 September 1908), p. 362.

⁷⁴ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 2-3 in No.109, (Salonica, 31 August 1908), p. 97-98.

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matters. He also acted with the threat of taking up arms and returning to the mountains to obtain the support of the Committee of Union and Progress.⁷⁵

4. Bulgarian Armed Bands Members Who Surrendered

With the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, the cessation of bandit activities led to a brief period of security and peace in Macedonia. This atmosphere was summed up by a Greek living in the region, who stated, 'In one week, the Turks achieved more than the great powers and foreign officers had managed to do in four years'.⁷⁶ Despite the presence of European powers in the region under the Mürzteg programme, armed band activities continued until the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy. While the idea of forming mobile forces to end armed band activities was being discussed prior to the Constitutional Monarchy, the establishment of an environment of trust with the Constitutional Monarchy would lead to a retreat from this demand. British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey stated that he believed order would be established in Macedonia through the determination of the Ottoman government. Therefore, it was considered unnecessary to pursue further actions concerning the Macedonian question as long as efforts to maintain peace continued. However, this would be the result of consultations with other powers.⁷⁷ In a telegram sent to Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador in France, Grey requested that the French government inform the Ottoman government that any representation regarding mobile units was currently inappropriate.⁷⁸ The same situation was shared with Italy, which expressed agreement with Britain and requested that the appropriate time be awaited.⁷⁹ A similar notification was also communicated to the Austrian government.⁸⁰ As a result, the great powers reached a joint decision not to take any new steps regarding the mobile units that had been brought to the agenda before the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy. This decision was influenced not only by the establishment of constitutional rule to ensure public order, but also by the Committee of Union and Progress's reluctance to accept the presence of foreign officers.

⁷⁵ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 5 in No.109, (Salonica, 3 September 1908), p. 99-100.

⁷⁶ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in 268, (Drama, 28 July 1908), p. 216-217.

⁷⁷ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 172, (Foreign Office, 27 July 1908), p. 135.

⁷⁸ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 194, (Foreign Office, 29 July 1908), p. 149.

⁷⁹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 200, (Rome, 30 July 1908), p. 151.

⁸⁰ NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 201, (Vienna, 30 July 1908), p. 151.

Following the call made by the Committee of Union and Progress after 23 July, the members of the Bulgarian armed bands were among the first to begin laying down their arms. This process turned into a political spectacle by the Bulgarian armed bands. The disarmament processes of Sandanski, leader of the left wing of the Bulgarian organisation responsible for the deaths of many Turkish soldiers, and Todor Panitza, an important figure close to him, were examples of this situation. At a reception held in Pürsiçan, near Drama, on 26 July, a crowd of between two and three thousand people gathered, including the city's dignitaries.⁸¹ The Mutasarrıf, who was present at the reception, embraced these individuals, who had previously clashed with the soldiers, as if they were his brothers, expressing his joy. Furthermore, in his speech at this reception, the Mutasarrıf referred to Sandanski and Panitza as heroes.⁸² Sandanski later used expressions criticising the Sultan in a speech he delivered.⁸³ However, he also pointed to European powers as the main actors responsible for the country's predicament. Officers associated with the Committee of Union and Progress wanted European powers to witness these disarmament processes, so they issued official invitations. Lieutenant Colonel Bonham was also invited to attend the planned ceremony for Sandanski and Panitza's disarmament. Bonham was hesitant to accept this invitation due to the presence of Sandanski and Panitza. He was uncomfortable with their presence and did not want to meet them. Nevertheless, in order not to give the impression that British officers were opposed to the Committee of Union and Progress, he agreed to attend in uniform with his officers. However, he accepted on the condition that he would not be expected to establish a personal relationship with Sandanski or Panitza, and this condition was taken into account. Although Lieutenant Colonel Bonham considered the Committee of Union and Progress's achievement in securing the surrender and disbandment of the Greek and Bulgarian armed bands to be a significant success⁸⁴, he did not consider it very likely that a lasting peace could be established between these two groups.⁸⁵

At various times, Bulgarian armed band members who had mostly declared their support for the Committee of Union and Progress began to lay down their arms in many regions of Macedonia. During this process, armed

⁸¹ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 2-3 in 268, (Drama, 28 July 1908), p. 217; NAUK, FO, 421/243, No 193, (Salonica, 29 July 1908), p. 149.

⁸² NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 2 in 268, p. 217.

⁸³ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 3 in 268, p. 217.

⁸⁴ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 2-3 in 268, (Drama, 28 July 1908), p. 217.

⁸⁵ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure No 182, (Drama, 19 September 1908), p. 134.

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band members operating not only in three provinces of Macedonia but also in the Kırklareli and Edirne regions also laid down their arms. Below is a list of Bulgarian armed band members who disarmed based on the records and the information currently available.

Table 1: Bulgarian Armed Band leaders who laid down their arms

Bulgarian – Centralist			Bulgarian - Varhivist
Sandanski	Deliratchev	Tchernopeyeff	Giorgi from Padesh
Panitza	Iconomov	Kantartcheff	Sande Giorgi
Arnandoff	Dinka	Ligor	Voivoda Bozhe
Petraki	Apostol	Yerassim Oghinoff	Mita (Blagoevgrad)
Itchkoff	Mitche	Dimitri Bovadjieff	Skrizhovski
Cristo Todori	Daskal Taska	Stoyan	Damo
Yovan Gortsho	Grapoff	Christo	Bojik
Mitsho	Gheorghi Gazereff	Cola Stano	
Alexis Ikomonoff	Stefan	Nicola	
Mitho Aleko	Athanas Mikhal	Mite (Demir Hisar)	
Petre Chuchkoff	Daskal Stoyo Hadjieff	Atanas Yorghii	
Stoyan	Ednas	Spiro Dame	
Giorgi Gronef	Christo Zazof	Petre Arso	
Vassil	Jevdar Stefan Aivan	Petre Aleksander	
Milan Nikola	Anton Arsich	Boyanoff	
Youvanoff	Efrem Kucho		

Kaynak: NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 2-3 in No 274, p. 228; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 181, p. 141; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 203, p. 151; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No 354, p. 298-299; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in No 354, p. 299-300; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, Inclosure 2 in No 308, p. 265-266; NAUK, *FO*, 421/243, No. 308, p. 264; NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 6 in No 502, p. 372; NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, No 31, p. 26.

The surrender of weapons by Bulgarian armed band leaders, the majority of whom were Centralists, began on 26 July and continued until mid-August. Bulgarian armed bands responded to the call made by the Committee of Union and Progress and quickly began to lay down their arms. According

to data compiled by Harry H. Lamb, British Consul General in Salonica, a total of 105 armed band leaders in Macedonia laid down their arms. Of these armed bands, 54 were Bulgarian, 32 were Turkish/Albanian, 16 were Greek, and 3 were Serbian leaders. It was also stated that between 600 and 700 armed band members, along with the 105 leaders mentioned, also surrendered their arms.⁸⁶ It should be particularly noted here that the armed bands consisted of teams of ten to twelve people organised into small groups. During their operations, they were able to reach much larger groups, including villagers. For example, the Bulgarian armed band leader Apostol arrived at the disarmament ceremony accompanied by nearly 200 people. Since the majority of them were villagers, they returned to their villages after the ceremony to lay down their arms.⁸⁷ The situation was the same for the approximately 225 Bulgarian armed band members who arrived in Monastır on 31 July. The majority of these individuals, who were called upon when needed, returned to their villages after their leaders laid down their arms.⁸⁸

According to British representatives, the most significant development in the process was the committees' surrender and laying down of arms. However, no mention was made of those who supported the movement but were not very keen on laying down their arms. The Bulgarian Internal Organisation had already stated that they would not surrender their weapons at this point. According to Lieutenant Colonel Bonham, the reason for not raising objections to the non-surrender of weapons was that these weapons could be used against the Sultan when necessary, rather than against the Ottomans.⁸⁹

5. The Internal Conflicts of Bulgarian Bands and the Events that Occurred After the Declaration of Constitutional Monarchy

Before the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, Greek armed bands were treated with greater tolerance, but after 23 July, the situation was completely reversed. The support given by the Bulgarians to the Young Turk movement was reciprocated, and Sandanski, representing the left wing, managed to obtain certain privileges. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, it was mostly the Bulgarians who disrupted public order in the initial

⁸⁶ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in No. 308, (Salonica, 8 August 1908), p. 264-265; NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 2 in 274, (Salonica, 31 July 1908), p. 228.

⁸⁷ NAUK, FO, 421/243, No. 308, (Salonica, 11 August 1908), p. 264.

⁸⁸ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 3 in No. 308, (Monastır, 1 August 1908), p. 266-267.

⁸⁹ NAUK, FO, 421/243, Inclosure 1 in 307, (Drama, 8 August 1908), p. 261.

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stages. The Greeks did not engage in any significant acts of disorder. However, according to Major Bonham, the lenient treatment of the Bulgarians stemmed from the deep hostility that many Turks felt toward the Greeks. In the eyes of the Turks, the Bulgarians were considered a group with whom an agreement could be reached; whereas Greeks were perceived as different, untrustworthy making a real agreement impossible.⁹⁰ Consequently, influenced by these views on the Greeks, a process of treating the Bulgarians more leniently began with the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sandanski, as the representative of the Bulgarian left wing, found himself on the side that was treated with greater leniency in this situation.

After the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, it is evident that Sandanski and his team were able to operate more freely with the support they received from the Committee of Union and Progress. This situation is also reflected in the reports of British Consul Lamp. According to him, the Committee of Union and Progress attaches great importance to Sandanski. However, this importance was not related to his personal qualities or the strength of his followers, but rather to the security that was desired in Macedonia.⁹¹ Similarly, there was tolerance towards Todor Panitza, a Bulgarian armed band leader who was one of Sandanski's close associates. British Major Bonham asked Enver Bey, who had come to Drama for the investigation into the murders committed against the Varhovists, whether this person was trustworthy. Enver Bey replied, 'He is not a very trustworthy man, but he cannot live without us; therefore, he will not cause any harm.' Both Panitza and Sandanski, with the support they received from the Committee of Union and Progress, established a protective zone for themselves in the north of the Serres and Drama sanjaks. Within this region, they not only prevented the Varhovists from taking action, but also committed murders against Varhovist sympathisers.⁹²

After the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, it was once again the Bulgarian armed bands that disrupted the peace that had been established. Sandanski and his associates, who had sided with the Committee of Union and Progress and quickly surrendered their weapons, were treated with leniency. On 15 September, Sandanski's followers killed three Varhovist

⁹⁰ NAUK, FO, 421/245, Inclosure 2 in No 223, (Drama, 5 November 1908), p. 228-229.

⁹¹ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 5 in No.109, (Salonica, 3 September 1908), p. 99-100; NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 2 in No 120, p. 110.

⁹² NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 1 in No. 93, (Drama, 7 September 1908), p. 72-73.

Bulgarians. The Committee of Union and Progress, which attached particular importance to restoring peace in Macedonia, sent Enver Bey to the region to investigate the event and prevent the incident from escalating.⁹³ The investigation revealed that the incident occurred when individuals who claimed Sandanski's actions were contrary to Bulgaria's interests chanted the slogan 'Death to Sandanski's partisans.' Following this development, young people supporting Sandanski killed three Varhivist Bulgarians named Sterio Shifat, Constantin Shifat, and Christo Bazias.⁹⁴ According to the report prepared as a result of the investigation, although it was stated that Panitza had no influence in this incident, British representatives believed that it was carried out on the orders of Panitza, sent by Sandanski. In fact, although the Young Turks were aware of this, attempts were made to cover up the incident.⁹⁵ After the investigation, Enver Bey, who met with Lieutenant Colonel Bonham in Drama, stated that this was a private dispute and would not be repeated. Simon Radeff, editor of the Bulgarian newspaper *Večernja Posta*, who was gathering information about the incident, also obtained permission to visit the area. In his investigation, Simon Radeff claimed that the victims were killed on Panitza's orders because they refused to pay money to the armed band. Radeff also claimed in the information he gave to Lieutenant Colonel Bonham that he was harassed by members of the Committee of Union and Progress and even threatened with death.⁹⁶ M. Semenoff, who arrived in the region following the murder, also witnessed Panitza's influence in the area and the Committee of Union and Progress's support for it. Semenoff was directly threatened by Panitza, who declared, 'I will not allow any member of your armed band (referring to the Varhovsits) in my region. Bulgaria is our greatest enemy,' and subjected him to threats. Panitza even threatened everyone upon learning of Semenoff's planned visit to the region, attempting to prevent any meeting with him. Bonham's comment on this incident, as recounted by Semenoff, was that Panitza deserved to be hanged, but that it was not yet time for the British government to exert pressure to ensure this.⁹⁷ This murder had two different consequences. First, it demonstrated greater tolerance towards Sandanski and his team. Second, it revealed the determination of the Committee of Union and Progress to avoid any major conflict that would disrupt public order until the

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 1-2 in No 120, p. 108-110; NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 8 in No 502, p. 374.

⁹⁵ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 3 in No 137, (Salonica, 17 September 1908), p. 118C.

⁹⁶ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 1 in No. 93, p. 72-73.

⁹⁷ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 2 in No. 93, (Drama, 8 September 1908), p. 74-76.

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parliament opened. Nevertheless, disagreements between the two groups continued. An attempt was made to assassinate Jargui Marco, who had joined the Varhovists on Panitza's orders, but it was unsuccessful.⁹⁸ On 18 October, twelve people were injured in incidents between Sandanski supporters and Varhovists over a series of clashes.⁹⁹

Despite all the steps taken by the Committee of Union and Progress to restore calm in Macedonia, incidents continued to occur. However, Bulgarian armed band members generally played the leading role in these incidents. Armed band leaders who had been released from prison under a general amnesty also engaged in activities that disrupted public order. Individuals such as Andon Miche even attacked the gendarmerie. In Kosovo, Bulgarian armed band leader Yovan Tchavdar was arrested while inciting villagers to revolt. Another Bulgarian who interfered in the election process through illegal means was also arrested.¹⁰⁰ Thus, efforts were made to ensure the security of the elections, and measures continued to be taken throughout Macedonia to maintain public order.

Despite the measures taken, it was not possible to prevent disputes among the Bulgarians themselves. On 8 October, was another violent attack occurred on Sandanski, the leader of the left wing. The effects of Bulgaria's independence are also at play in this development. Sandanski and his six companions were sitting in a café called Boşnak Han opposite the Ottoman bank when they became involved in a dispute with Varhovists led by Zapranoŧ.¹⁰¹ The argument centred on Bulgaria's independence and Sandanski's role in the assassination of Sarafov. During the argument, Varhovist Tané Nicoloff, who was with Zabranoff, fired his pistol, wounding Sandanski in the left shoulder blade. Mitche and Tantcheff, who were next to Sandanski, were shot and killed.¹⁰² It has been claimed that the real assassins in this incident were the former armed band leaders Tsané Nicoloff and Capitan Danoff.¹⁰³

Although no major incidents occurred, tensions between the Varhovists and the Centralists persisted. Although there has been no conflict

⁹⁸ NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 4 (D) in No 275, (Serres, 4 October 1908), p. 268.

⁹⁹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 3 in No 275, p. 265.

¹⁰⁰ NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 6 in No 275, p. 270.

¹⁰¹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 9 in No 502, (Salonica, 8 October 1908), p. 374-375.

¹⁰² NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 2 in No 275, p. 264-265.

¹⁰³ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure 9 in No 502, p. 374-375.

between other elements, the public's anxiety about the possibility of conflict breaking out at any moment persisted. While the Greeks were concerned about the security of the elections, Panitza, who represented a section of the Bulgarians, began to express dissatisfaction with the results achieved under the constitutional regime. Panitza stated that the Bulgarians had not gained anything from the constitution, that they would wait a little longer, but if they still did not gain anything, they would once again "take to the mountains".¹⁰⁴ However, the new developments arising from the ambassador crisis, namely Bulgaria's declaration of independence, led to the pursuit of certain political interests in the Sandanski area. Sandanski tried to persuade the Committee of Union and Progress leadership to nominate people close to him as candidates in the parliamentary elections. He even tried to replace candidates associated with the Bulgarian Constitutional Club. Along with these efforts, they ensured that Hristo Dalchef was nominated as a candidate instead of Todor Paskaloff.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, with the support of the Unionists, they secured the election of Dimitri Vlahof, a socialist teacher in Salonica.¹⁰⁶ In the overall outcome of the elections, two candidates supported by the Constitutional Monarchy clubs were elected alongside two deputies from Sandanski.¹⁰⁷

Bulgaria's declaration of independence provided Sandanski with a short-term advantage and enabled two deputies who supported him to enter parliament. However, Bulgaria's independence also sparked a wave of unrest among Bulgarians in Macedonia. The Bulgarians welcomed this development. Furthermore, rumours circulated that 50-60 Bulgarian officers had secretly entered the region in Macedonia and were preparing for a major uprising. British representatives in the region also believed that such an uprising could develop in light of the new developments following the declaration of independence.¹⁰⁸ By October, allegations began to surface that the Bulgarians had secretly started to arm themselves. Although public order was maintained during this period, dissatisfaction was widespread among Greeks, Bulgarians, and Turks alike.¹⁰⁹ Influenced by this discontent and the impact of Bulgaria's independence, the Bulgarians also began to arm

¹⁰⁴ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 1 in No 499, (Drama, 3 October 1908), p. 362.

¹⁰⁵ Ayşe Eryaman, "Selanik Vilayeti'nde 1908 Genel Seçimleri", *History Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 3, September 2017, p. 52.

¹⁰⁶ NAUK, FO, 421/245, Inclosure 1 in No 223, (Salonica, 9 November 1908), p. 228.

¹⁰⁷ Hacısalıhoğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

¹⁰⁸ NAUK, FO, 421/244, Inclosure 9 in No 502, p. 374-375.

¹⁰⁹ NAUK, FO, 421/245, Inclosure 5 in No 275, p. 269.

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themselves.¹¹⁰ It was stated that in the event of a conflict between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, these armed groups would engage in activities against the Ottomans.¹¹¹ Although there was no intelligence regarding the distribution of weapons, the situation in Yanina was also not favourable. Despite all the efforts of the Committee of Union and Progress, incidents of robbery and banditry continued to increase.¹¹²

These developments also affected the Sandanski supporters. They, too, began to arm themselves. In particular, Sandanski supporters living in villages in the northwestern part of the Drama district acquired Mannlicher rifles, bayonets and a full range of field equipment. During this period, the villagers would gather at night in a village just outside the Drama border and begin training with their new weapons.¹¹³ Although there were reports that Sandanski supporters had also begun to arm themselves, after Bulgaria gained independence, the activity of the Varhovist Bulgarians in Macedonia increased. The Sandanski group, however, began to lose power. According to Bimbashi D. Stephen, who was sent by Lieutenant Colonel Bonham to gather information for Pressochan, Panitza was no longer supported in the village of Visocan, which he used as his headquarters. Most of the villagers had gone over to the Varhovists, and Panitza had lost all credibility in the eyes of the Bulgarians there.¹¹⁴ Once again, in some areas of the Serres district, as well as in Drama and Pürsiçan, the influence of Sandanski and his team began to wane. After the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, only one of the nine villages where they had established absolute control remained loyal to Sandanski and his team. The Varhovists continued to increase their influence in all regions.¹¹⁵ Under these circumstances, the people grew tired of constantly being asked for financial contributions without receiving anything in return.¹¹⁶ It was thought that Panitza, in particular, would begin to take active measures against the loss of this support, as he earned his living from armed band activities.¹¹⁷ However, with the Varhovists becoming more active after Bulgaria's independence, Panitza's life was also in danger.¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁰ NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure 6 in No 275, p. 270.

¹¹¹ NAUK, *FO*, 421/244, Inclosure in No 653, (Adrianople, 20 October 1908), p. 473.

¹¹² NAUK, *FO*, 421/249, Inclosure 3 in No 70, p. 101-102.

¹¹³ NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure in No 81, (Drama, 27 December 1908), p. 92.

¹¹⁴ NAUK, *FO*, 421/249, Inclosure 1 in No 138, (Drama, 23 December 1908), p. 168-169.

¹¹⁵ NAUK, *FO*, 421/245, Inclosure in No 498, (Drama, 8 December 1908), p. 495-496.

¹¹⁶ NAUK, *FO*, 421/249, Inclosure 1 in No 70, (Salonica, 26 December 1908), p. 98-99.

¹¹⁷ NAUK, *FO*, 421/249, Inclosure 1 in No 138, p. 168-169.

¹¹⁸ NAUK, *FO*, 421/249, Inclosure 1 in No 70, p. 98-99.

Varhovists continued to expand their sphere of influence against the Centralists day by day, while also continuing to arm themselves, particularly with Mannlicher-brand weapons from Bulgaria.¹¹⁹ Under these circumstances, intelligence began to be gathered about a series of attack plans by the increasingly powerful Varhovist Bulgarians. The Varhovist Bulgarians planned to attack tunnels and culverts on the railway lines.¹²⁰ In response to this intelligence, the Ottoman government reinforced the 3rd Army by sending reinforcements.¹²¹

While the ongoing disputes and regional power struggles between Sandanski and the Varhovists continued, the Committee of Union and Progress also expressed dissatisfaction with some of Sandanski's activities. The Unionists began to declare their discontent, believing that Sandanski's speech in Menlik was inflammatory. However, this situation would not last long, as Sandanski would once again strengthen his dominance in the Serres region. During the 31 March incident, Sandanski responded to the call of the Committee of Union and Progress and became one of the volunteers at the forefront of the army of volunteers with approximately 1,000 men. The Varhovist Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs declared their support after the success of the army of action. Their expectation was that the new process would lead to a Bulgarian-Turkish war or the failure of the Unionists. However, as their expectations did not materialise, they were forced to declare their support. Sandanski, who had supported the process from the very beginning, would continue to reap the rewards of his support. Along with the spa operating privilege in the Menlik region, many of his supporters obtained civil service rights. Sandanski's dominance in the Serres region was re-established and continued until the Balkan Wars. During these years, he not only prevented the Varhovists from entering his region but also ensured that his region was exempted from the Committee of Union and Progress's disarmament efforts. This was a result of the confidence that he would not take part in any action against the government. However, Sandanski's stance changed before the Balkan Wars. Encouraged by promises of amnesty from the Bulgarian government, Sandanski decided to support the Balkan alliance.¹²² Thus, the 16,000-strong irregular volunteer corps, known as the Edirne-Macedonia Volunteers, included members from both wings of the

¹¹⁹ NAUK, FO, 421/245, Inclosure in No 498, (Drama, 8 December 1908), p. 495-496.

¹²⁰ NAUK, FO, 421/245, Inclosure 1 in No 7, (Drama, 23 October 1908), p. 6-7.

¹²¹ NAUK, FO, 421/245, Inclosure 2 in No 7, (Drama, 22 October 1908), p. 7-8.

¹²² Hacısalihoglu, *op.cit.*, p. 292-300, 316-317, 331, 410.

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Bulgarian population, supported the Bulgarian army.¹²³ Sandanski continuously supported the Bulgarian government throughout the war and was later appointed to a number of positions by the government during the Second Balkan War. In 1915, however, he was assassinated by the Varhovists. Many figures known as Sandanski supporters, who were also important names on the left wing, were killed by the Varhovists between 1922 and 1925.¹²⁴

Conclusion

The rise of nationalism in the 19th century weakened the authority of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and transformed Macedonia into an arena of ethnic and political conflict. The Bulgarian movement in Macedonia developed around two main centres: The Internal Organisation and the Supreme Macedonian Committee. The failure following the 1903 Ilinden Uprising led to a significant loss of power, funding difficulties and internal divisions among the Bulgarian bands. In particular, the internal divisions within the organisation resulted in a large part of its energy being expended on internal conflicts. The bloody confrontations between Bulgarian bands, both with Greek and Serbian bands and among themselves, caused great harm to the Bulgarian civilian population in the region and led to a wave of migration. The proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy in 1908 created a brief interval in the anarchic environment in Macedonia. The left wing, led by Sandanski, who established contact with the Committee of Union and Progress, supported the new regime in the hope of a federation free from external intervention. In this context, Sandanski and his followers played a leading role in the process of disarming the armed bands. In contrast, the right wing took a more distant approach to the process, finding the idea of Ottomanism incompatible with its own annexation goals. In the climate of freedom brought about by the constitutional monarchy, although the armed bands were organised under legal structures such as the 'Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs', the failure to completely surrender their weapons and the continuation of demands for autonomy and local administration also revealed that the Bulgarian movement had not abandoned its ultimate goals. Consequently, the instability in Macedonia should be regarded as a result of

¹²³ Fatma Rodoplu Yıldırım - Bülent Yıldırım, "Bulgar Milliyetçiliği", *Milliyetçiliğin Coğrafyaları II*, (ed.) Yusuf Ziya Bölükbaşı, Gazi Kitapevi, Ankara 2020, p. 33.

¹²⁴ Hacısalihoglu, *op.cit.*, p. 410-412.

the goals of local actors and the competition that formed around these goals, rather than Ottoman administration. Although the constitutional monarchy provided temporarily reduced violence, it ultimately failed to eliminate conflict in the region stemmed from the fact that local elements did not abandon the aforementioned goals.

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