

THE RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL PROPAGANDA OF THE BALKAN STATES IN "MACEDONIA" (1878-1912)

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Abstract

After 1878, the fate of Macedonia was the predominant issue in the Bulgarian political life. This was an issue that could raise the people and unite the political parties. Skopje's historiography accuses the Bulgarian Exarchate that, except its ecclesiastical, educational and cultural activities it was also hiding political motives. The Greek policy towards Macedonia originated from the "*Megali Idea*". The influence of Greece in Macedonia through the Patriarchate was incomparable until the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate. The ever-growing number of Orthodox believers passing under the Exarchate jurisdiction led to Patriarchate ecclesiastical policy modification. Serbia was in the weakest position of the three countries interested. In fact, their initial task was to convince the Great Powers that they really had a just claim to Macedonia. Serbian propaganda in Macedonia used a variety of methods. As a result of continuous efforts and support from Romania, the Vlachs also opened their own schools and gained certain ecclesiastical rights.

Keywords: historical claims, political rivalry, religious organization, educational system, propaganda

Introduction

Many history scholars, just as the ordinary people, view history only through their national positions, denying the successes of the others. The obvious lack of two-sided recognition is a significant factor to the instability in the Balkans. Due to numerous events in the Balkans, the increased interest of the Great Powers and the difficult political and economic situation of the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c., the activities of the religious and educational propaganda have not been given sufficient space in the history studies so far. The results of a half of century filled by religious and educational conflicts, the propaganda with historical, linguistic and ethnographic motives, were reflected in the contradictory statistics of the protagonists, just as in those of experts, unbiased to some degree.

Description of research methods

Relevant literature in Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian and Bulgarian was selected during the preparation of the paper. Due to the nature of the paper, the three main research methods used are: analysis, descriptive method and comparative method. Throughout the analysis of documents and reports that include data of interest, we were very cautious, since some statistical data were not verified and could give an inaccurate image.

The strategy of the Balkan countries in Macedonia (the term "Macedonia" in this article is used as a geographical notion) was very clear: Macedonian Christians to gain national identity through religion and education, to convert to Bulgarians, Serbs or Greeks, depending on the inclusion in ecclesiastical and school organization (D. Peri (2002): 30).

The Bulgarian propaganda

The Bulgarians got disappointed by the Berlin Treaty provisions and considered that the only right resolution of the Bulgarian issue was that of St. Stefan (G. Castelan (1997): 342).

After 1878, the fate of Macedonia was the predominant issue in the Bulgarian political life. This was an issue that could raise the people and unite the political parties (Ch&B. Jelawich (s.a): 158).

The struggle to achieve this goal would shape the upcoming history of the country. The equation exarchist = Bulgarian became the basis of the Bulgarian policy towards Macedonia (G. Castelan (1997): 373).

There was some success achieved even through the talks with the High Porte. In 1897, the Sultan issued two decrees for two new dioceses to be set under the jurisdiction of the Exarchate (Ch & B. Jelawich (s.a): 181).

Krste Misirkov commanded the Slavs of Macedonia that, *“it is about time to convince ourselves that the bad demon for Macedonia is no one else but Bulgaria, and this is why we should separate and differentiate our interests from the Bulgarian ones as soon as we can”* (Krste P. Misirkov (1980): 100).

Skopje’s historiography accused the Bulgarian Exarchate that, except its ecclesiastical, educational and cultural activities, it was also hiding political motives.

The Bulgarian Exarchate was also accused of applying an assimilating policy during the educational activities in Macedonia, imposing the Bulgarian literary language and Bulgarian history to the students, which influenced on instilling the Bulgarian spirit (A. Trajanovski (1980): 45).

In 1896, there were 843 exarchate (Bulgarian) schools, 1300 teachers and 32,000 students throughout Macedonia, while at the beginning of the 20th century, there were over 1,000 schools in Macedonia. (G. Castelan (1997): 373; J. Ivanov (1915): 91).

In the 1902/1903 school year, the Bulgarian Exarchate had 958 schools, 1621 teachers and 46,128 students (*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари (National liberation movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians) 1878-1944*, III (1997): 88).

The Ilinden Uprising caused incalculable damages to the educational activity of the Bulgarian Exarchate. Most of the teachers in the exarchate (Bulgarian) schools were imprisoned and on internal exile, while the school buildings were damaged and destroyed. Within two or three years, the educational activity of the Bulgarian Exarchate nearly reached the level it had had earlier. During the 1906/07 school year, the Bulgarian Exarchate had 940 schools, 1620 teachers and 43,174 students. The exarchate school curriculum in Macedonia was the same as the one taught in Bulgaria. One of the main issues the Bulgarian Exarchate faced with and put much effort on, was the issue of providing teaching staff, with pedagogical qualifications (*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари (National liberation movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians) 1878-1944*, III (1997): 89-90).

The state of the Bulgarian educational activity in Macedonia and Thrace improved significantly after the Young Turk revolution. During the 1908/09 school year, there were a total of 1,255 schools, 2080 teachers and 76,000 students in Macedonia and Thrace, while in 1909/1910, there were 1,378 schools with a total of 2215 teachers, of whom 581 were female teachers, and 80,593 students, of whom 26,519 were girls. In the 1911/12 school year, the Bulgarian Exarchate in Macedonia and Thrace counted 1,373 schools, of which 13 were gymnasiums and vocational high schools, 87 progymnasiums and 1,273 primary schools, with a total of 78,854 students and 2,266 teachers (*Национално освободително движење*

на македонските и тракииските бугари (*National liberation movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians*) 1878-1944, III (1997): 91-95; J. Ivanov (1915): 92).

The Greek propaganda

The Greek policy towards Macedonia originated from the “*Megali Idea*”. In 1860, the Greek parliament decided that the relevant ministries, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, should take adequate measures to increase the Greek propaganda in Macedonia. The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trikoupis, drafted a plan for the partition of Macedonia in 1866, which is known as the “*minimal program*” and was supported by all subsequent Greek governments (R. Poplazarov (1970): 55- 59).

The influence of Greece in Macedonia through the Patriarchate was incomparable until the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870. The establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate was a real stroke, especially after the Exarchate’s control over Ohrid and Skopje dioceses, in which 90% of patriarchate Orthodox passed under the Bulgarian Exarchate jurisdiction (Ch & B. Jelawich (s.a): 193-194; I. Galchev (1994): 15).

In 1877 there were 256 Greek schools in Macedonia with 10,968 students, while in 1896 there were 907 schools with 53,633 students. After 1881, the number of schools and cultural associations of Greek propaganda increased significantly in Macedonia (R. Poplazarov (1970): 60-62).

The ever-growing number of Orthodox believers passing under the Exarchate jurisdiction led to the Patriarchate ecclesiastical policy modification; this new policy got fully applied after the election of Joachim III as patriarch (*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари (National liberation movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians) 1878-1944, III* (1997): 153-154).

According to Greek statistics, in 1895 there were about 1,400 Greek schools in Macedonia, where 80,000 students were taught, nearly the same number of Greek schools was kept until 1900, the year in which there were about 1,375 Greek schools in Macedonia, with about 78,000 students (L. Stavrijanos (2005): 496). After the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, the Greek government signed a series of agreements and conventions with the Sublime Porte, by which Greek propaganda gained numerous privileges and facilitations (R. Poplazarov (1970): 68-69). After the Ilinden Uprising, taking advantage of the difficult position of the Bulgarians, the Greek propaganda through Andarte armed units threatened the local population to abandon the Exarchate and return to the Patriarchate. After the Young Turk revolution, even despite the increase in Greek propaganda activity in Macedonia, certain circles were not satisfied (*МАКЕДОНИЈА- Сборник на документи и материали (MACEDONIA - Collection of documents and materials)* (1978): 551-554)

The Serbian propaganda

Serbia was in the weakest position of the three countries interested. In fact, their initial task was to convince the Great Powers that they really had a just claim to Macedonia. In 1865, the Serbian writer Milos Milojevic announced the idea that Macedonia was a Serbian land. The defeat of the 1885 war pushed Serbia to start a new war with Bulgaria over Macedonia, this war was previously only on paper (Ch & B. Jelawich (s. a): 194; I. Galchev (1994): 18; Krste P. Misirkov (1980): 123).

In 1885, the “*Society of St. Sava*” took over the establishment of Serbian schools in Macedonia to oppose the “*Society of Cyril and Methodius*” (G. Castelan (1997): 374).

Until the 90s of the 19th c., the Serbs established over 100 schools, where 5,000 students were taught (L. Stavrijanos (2005): 496).

The expansion of Serbian schools disturbed the other rival propagandas, first of all the Bulgarian one, since they reduced the number of students studying in Bulgarian schools, thus the number of students attending Bulgarian schools in Prilep and the surrounding area during the 1897-1903 period had declined from 1013 to 752 students. Serbian schools were opened even in those places where Serbs were a minority, so a school was opened in Veles for only 10 Serb households and 5 teachers were employed. At the beginning of 1900, there were 217 schools, with 9,179 students under the administration of the Serbian propaganda in Macedonia (I. Galchev (1994): 20-21).

Regarding the churches, the progress was more difficult. It was only in 1897 when Firmilian Drazic was appointed the administrator of the diocese in Skopje; he received the title of bishop five years later. Serbian educational propaganda achieved significant success in Porece, Veles, Skopje, Kicevo, Kumanovo, etc (M. Pandeovski (1968): 67).

At the beginning of the 20th century the Serbian propaganda in Macedonia was in a very difficult situation, as a result of the lack of domestic stability in Serbia. Since 1904, Serbian propaganda leaders have felt the need for an economic-social war with their opponents in Macedonia (Г. Тодоровски (1987): 59-64).

The Serbian propaganda in Macedonia used a variety of methods. In June 1904 the Serbian General Consul in Skopje, Ristic, joined by the head of the Institute of Geography in Belgrade, Jovan Cvijic, started an excursion within the area of Veles, Stip, Kratovo and Kocani, they were engaged in finding Serbian traces in this region (*Извештаи од 1903-1904 година на австриските претставници во Македонија* (Reports from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia) (1955): 212-213).

The Vlach Propaganda

The geographical distance excluded any territorial claims, but beginning from the desire to reserve some rights on Ottoman heritage, the Romanians began to show interest in the Aromanian (Vlach) population. As a result of constant efforts and support from Romania, the Vlachs also opened their own schools and gained certain ecclesiastical rights. The founder of the Romanian propaganda in the Ottoman Empire was Apostle Margaritis. During the period from 1868 to 1903, he was the general inspector of Romanian schools and other propaganda institutions (G. Castelan (1997): 374; *Извештаи од 1903-1904 година на австриските претставници во Македонија* (Reports from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia) (1955): 186-193).

Certain Romanian propaganda activists insisted that their activities should focus on educational activities, thus Bucharest financed “*Romanian schools*” and even sent teachers for this purpose. In 1880, an Aromanian (Vlach) gymnasium was opened in Bitola, while in 1895 a Vlach trade school was opened in Thessaloniki. In 1903, the Vlachs had 94 schools, with over 5,000 students in Macedonia. The educational activity was closely supervised and assisted by Romania, through its diplomatic representatives in Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Bitola. Even after 1903, the Vlachs fostered good relations with the Bulgarians, although most of the Vlachs remained loyal to the Patriarchate (*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944* (National liberation movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians 1878-1944), III (1997): 176).

On May 23, 1905, Sultan Abdulhamid II accepted the Vlachs as a separate nationality in the Ottoman Empire by a decree (firman). They gained the right to schools and hold the Mass in Vlach language. On June 14, 1909, representatives of the Vlach municipalities in an assembly

in Bitola demanded that the Patriarchate recognizes their right to an independent church. When the Young Turks approved the law on disputed churches in Macedonia 1919, the Vlachs managed to regain 13 churches and appoint 24 bishops for the same (Zh. Popov (2004): 240).

During the period of 1908-1912, the Romanian propaganda in Macedonia faced great economic difficulties, therefore its activity was significantly reduced. In 1907/1908, the Vlachs in Macedonia had 64 schools, where 240 teachers were employed, teaching 5,548 students. Regarding 1908/1909, Bulgarian sources calculated that there were 43 Vlach schools in Macedonia, with 2,908 students. For the 1911/1912 school year, the Romanian and Russian consuls in Bitola calculated 56 Vlach schools operating, where 2,074 students were taught (Zh. Popov (2004): 234-235).

Conclusion

As for the religious institutions, the Bulgarian Exarchate had the largest network of schools in Macedonia. Supported by the Bulgarian state after 1878, the Exarchate started a new dynamic of implementing educational propaganda. The greatest inhibitor of the school and educational plan of the Bulgarian Exarchate was the Greek Patriarchate. Regardless of the fact that it was the oldest propaganda with its activity, the Patriarchate began to lose its influence by the end of the 70s of the 19th c. The expansion of Serbian religious and educational propaganda in Macedonia began after 1885, and its infiltration was influenced by the ecclesiastical municipalities, especially in the northern and central part of Macedonia. The ecclesiastical and educational influence the neighboring countries propaganda sought to impose was partially successful, due to the resistance of the native Slavic population.

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