

THE ILINDEN UPRISING

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Abstract

The Bulgarian propaganda was aiming at gaining the fondness of the European opinion and justify its interests in the “*Macedonian issue*”. When rallies, resolutions and propaganda in the media did not yield the anticipated results, armed provocations through revolutionary bands ensued. As for the historiography of Skopje, the Ilinden Uprising represents the greatest event in the history of the Macedonian people and was a result of the continuous revolutionary fight lead by VMORO. The consuls of Great Powers labeled the Ilinden Uprising as Bulgarian, which was in line with the stand of Serbian and Greek propaganda, while the Albanian people generally had a negative stand.

Keywords: Ilinden Uprising, Bulgarian propaganda, Macedonian issue, Albanian stand

Introduction

After 1902, Bulgarian agents dominated the VMORO Central Committee. In the last three days of April 1903, a group of young people committed a series of attacks in Thessaloniki. The number of victims during these attacks and victims that were as a result of it, is disputable. The attackers were quite young, most of them were students in the Exarchate gymnasium in Thessaloniki. After the Thessaloniki attacks, substantial dissatisfaction prevailed in Macedonia, caused by the presence of the Ottoman army, the revolutionary units and the difficult economic situation.

Description of research methods

The historiographies of Balkan states involved in the Ilinden Uprising provided contradictory interpretations, while the Albanian historiography has not provided any critical stand, therefore the selection of relevant and general literature was quite difficult. Due to the nature of the paper, three main research methods were used: analysis, comparison and descriptive method.

The truth related to Ilinden Uprising remains an open question. Historians of different nationalities of the region used it to ascribe characteristics and goals to different participating communities [M. Glenny (2007): 204].

As for the historiography of Skopje, the Ilinden Uprising (1903) is one of the greatest events in Macedonian history. The fact that it ended unsuccessfully does not diminish its importance at all [Ј. Лапе (1969): 204; К. Битоски (1973): 7-13].

The Russian and Austro-Hungarian diplomats in Istanbul were also aware of the expected outburst of the uprising in Macedonia. They informed their governments about this. Moreover, the preparations for an uprising were not a secret even for the Serbian diplomats. The news was known for the Ottoman and Bulgarian diplomats, even for the Exarch Iosif himself [А. Трајановски (1980): 46-47].

The stand of the official Sofia regarding the uprising in Macedonia

On February 5, 1903, the minister of foreign affairs Danev sent a telegram to the Bulgarian trade agents asking them to influence the responsible factors to hinder the outburst of the uprising in Macedonia [К. Битоски (1977): 311-314], he made a similar request to the Bulgarian exarch to put efforts in obstructing the uprising [А. Трајановски (1980): 47].

The Bulgarian government continuously accentuated that the resolution of the Macedonian issue was not in the hands of Bulgaria, which is a small country and should commit to peace, but it should follow carefully everything that occurs in Macedonia, however, in the spring of 1903, he formulated the foreign policy in line with the czar, stating that *“the essence of our foreign policy is the annexation of Macedonia”* [М. Пандевски (1996): 129; К. Битоски (1977): 317-320], perhaps due to the fact that on the verge of the outbreak of the Ilinden Uprising, Ferdinand’s authority was weaker than ever before [С. Павловиќ (2005): 263].

The news that numerous Ottoman forces were concentrated on the Bulgarian border served as an alarming sign in Sofia. The Bulgarian government, through a note sent to all the Great Powers, on June 29, 1903, required that they pressure the High Gate to halt the concentration of the army in the border area and to implement the reforms [К. Битоски (1977): 331-332].

The decision for the uprising

Taking advantage of the arrest and absence of most members of the VMORO Central Committee, at the Thessaloniki Congress held in January 1903, Ivan Garvanov, in his capacity as Central Committee chairman, convinced the present delegates regarding the outbreak of the anti-Ottoman armed uprising [Д. Константинов (1984): 103].

Most of the delegates who were signatories of the January Congress protocol were illegitimate, as they were not elected and authorized [*Кратка историја на Бугарија* (1955): 221], the strong opposition to the decision by Goce Delchev and Gjorce Petrov did not yield any results. In the revolutionary district of Bitola, which was more organized and more armed, the idea of a forthcoming uprising found a relatively suitable ground [К. Битоски (1973): 9].

The Smilevo Congress took place from May 2nd-7th 1903, while Goce Delchev was assassinated on May 4 [Х. Пољански (1985): 163], where Dame Gruev spoke in favor of the uprising and was elected Chief of Military Staff, thus many historians and participants in the

event accuse him of being “*guilty*” of the Smilevo Congress decisions [Д. Константинов (1984): 108-112].

The Ilinden Uprising failed to be prevented due to three reasons: The Thessaloniki decision regarding the outburst of the uprising was a *fait accompli*; several leaders lead by Dame Gruev and under the influence of Boris Sarafov began working to accelerate the uprising outburst; the great dissatisfaction of the population caused by the ever-increasing vandalism and the difficult economic situation in the vilayet of Bitola [А. Митрев (1969): 16].

The outburst of the uprising

On the night of August 2, about 900 insurrectionists entered the city of Krushevo, at that moment there were only 50 Ottoman soldiers in the city garrison. The insurrectionists, after burning government buildings and tearing down telegraph lines, took up their positions over the city. Many fiefdoms belonging to Muslim landlords were burned down since the first day. The fear among the population in general, and the Muslim population in particular, was great [МАКЕДОНИЈА- Сборник на документи и материали (1978): 464-465].

The consuls of Great Powers labeled the Ilinden Uprising as Bulgarian and highlighted that it was generously accepted by the Christian population everywhere [Извештаи од 1903-1904 година на австриските претставници во Македонија (1955): 64-65], villages with Muslim population were the target of pressure and attack for the gangs and insurrectionists [Н. Purellku (2009): 221].

Conclusion

The Ilinden Uprising is the main event supporting the aspirations of Macedonia for statehood and nationhood. The foreign propaganda in Macedonia, particularly the Bulgarian, used the opportunity to present all episodes of this uprising in the European newspapers, including the murders, the burnt villages to the extreme poverty of the Christian population. The day of the beginning of the uprising was a secret for the Ottoman government, and this was very important for the initial success of the insurrectionists. The Ilinden Uprising failed since the insurrectionists did not get any support and were left alone in the fight with the Ottoman army. Most of the Albanian people had a negative stance towards the Ilinden Uprising.

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