

THE GALLIPOLI OPERATION AND BULGARIANS' ENTRY INTO THE WAR

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The situation, imposed according to the Bucharest Treaty of 1913 deprived Bulgaria from the victories after the Balkan War and a lot of Bulgarian nationals remained under foreign rule. Worse than in Turkish times, Bulgarian schools which had started in Turkey were closed. Bulgarians were named in Vardar Macedonia as Serbs, and in Aegean Macedonia as Hellenes. This evoked the discontent of the Bulgarians and hence the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) redirected its activities against the Serbian and Greek powers. IMRO pressed the Bulgarian Government to take a decision and solve the problems in the frames of the war. The summer of 1915 when both of the coalitions - the Central Powers and the Entente tried to attract Bulgaria on their sides, each one according to their chances, remained in the history of military diplomacy as “The Hot Bulgarian Summer” of 1915.

The war that had started in 1914 demonstrated soon afterwards that it would not end in the near future. Moreover, it became clear that the winner would be the one whose economic and material resources would overcome the other coalition. It turned to be a war of attrition. And at the beginning of 1915 Germany appeared to be like a surrounded fortress. Meanwhile, joining the Entente would mean insecurity on behalf of the promises and of the conditions proposed by it. The Entente proposed that Bulgaria obtain and occupy immediately the Midia- Enos line, while the main problem of Bulgaria was Macedonia. Serbia, meanwhile, was the main country allied with the Entente, and against which IMRO, as already said, was waging its

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war, and influencing the Bulgarian military policy. The Entente was making modest and cautious proposals to Bulgaria for territories in Macedonia but only on condition that Serbia and Greece would enlarge after the war. Meanwhile, in Belgrade and Athens they did not want even to hear about giving Bulgaria territories.

Here is worth mentioning that from the very beginning of the Serbian and Greek domination over Macedonia the Bulgarian revolutionaries continued their struggle against the new powers in alliance with the Turkish and Albanian population. While the Bulgarian Government was waging its diplomatic battles, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization had already concluded its war alliances, and already waged its war against Serbia, i.e. against the Entente. A month after the start of the Gallipoli battle, inspired in some way by the stubbornness of the Turkish Army, on the 20th of March 1915 the IMRO organized, under the control of the Austria-Hungary military intelligence services an action in an attempt to cut the connection between the Serbian army and the Entente. The target was the big bridge of the Vardar River across Udovo and Valandovo. The action was expected to be organized by a couple of Bulgarian chieftains, together with a Turkish band, headed by Husein Haki Bei. (At that time different Bulgarian chieftains cooperated with Turkish chieftains: Pavel Shatev, for example, cooperated with Fuad Bei, while Petar Chaulev did the same with Cholak Ibrahim Bei.) On March 20th about 400 Chetniks of the organization, 600 Bulgarian militia men and the Turkish detachment attacked three points: Valandovo, Pirava and Udovo. About 40 Bulgarian and Turkish Chetniks were killed in the battles, while almost 500 Serbians were captured. The Serbian powers thereupon started systematic terror over the Bulgarian and Turkish population. More than 6000 refugees came to Bulgaria.

In May the situation was even worse for the Entente. In France, the German troops tried iprit (mustard) poisoning gas for the first time in history. In the first days of May, the German High Command started the Gorlitsa operation and the Russian troops started to retreat. Meanwhile the Turkish troops fought bravely in defending the Gallipoli positions. The British Command came to the conclusion that it underestimated their combat qualities. The lack of success of

the Entente at the different fronts and especially at Gallipoli led to the first serious internal political crisis in an Entente country from the very beginning of the war. Churchill's deputy Lord Fisher resigned with a sign of negation and opposition to the Dardanelles operation.

To make difference with the Entente diplomacy, the Central Powers declared: "We are giving the contested zone of Macedonia and Morava district to Bulgaria". They were even talking about a common border of Bulgaria with Austria-Hungary. On June 6, 1915 Tarnowski and Michaelis presented to the Bulgarian Government a written declaration. In it was declared that for its neutrality Bulgaria would obtain the "contested" and the "non-contested" zone in Macedonia according to the boundaries in the Bulgarian-Serbian Treaty from March 13, 1912, which was not respected by Serbia during the Balkan War. They were guaranteed to Bulgaria, no matter should she occupy them before the end of the war, or not. The same document implied also benefits on behalf of the other neighbors: Austria-Hungary and Germany guaranteed to Bulgaria also a part of the territories possessed by Romania and Greece, according to the Bucharest Treaty of August 10, 1913 in case they participate in a war against the Central Powers.

Comparing the Austria-German note with the proposals of the Entente we cannot but make the conclusion that in all cases and in all obstacles, it used to be much more convenient for the Bulgarian national interests not only in the specific military political moment, but also in the near future. The Entente proposed participation in the war and a question mark before obtaining a portion of Macedonia; Austria-Hungary and Germany - neutrality and unconditional incorporating of the "contested" and "non-contested" zones. Of course - a basic condition for this should be the victory of the Central Powers, but the same used to be valid for the other side.

Well, as said above, the strategic situation did not seem so much in favor of the Entente. The attempt at Gallipoli was evidently unsuccessful: The connection between Germany and Turkey was preserved. Now the territory of Bulgaria was of a key importance for this connection. The Entente exercised last efforts to overcome the position of the Central Powers in Bulgaria. That was nevertheless, something impossible. The vast promises for Macedonia, informa-

tion about the great successes in the East and the Entente's territorial compensations did not satisfy the Bulgarian Government and the Court. Important in this respect used to be also the helpless English-French Corps at the Dardanelles, for whose unsuccessful activity Churchill would accuse Grey for not succeeding to attract Bulgaria. And - well, last, but not least - the always existing, but at this point well expressed, accompanied with an ambition, sympathies of the ruling parties and Ferdinand to the Central powers. Their long expected fruit was the Treaty of September 6, 1915.

In October 1915 Bulgaria declared war on Serbia. The opposition declared that it was posed before *fait accompli*, but in view of the national interests would support the Government. The natural national striving to repair the historical lack of justice of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, to support unification of the Bulgarian nation no matter the ways, the means, and the side, with such motives Bulgaria would join the war. Later on historians would in their own way and point of view would appreciate the categories "bourgeois' nationalism", and "national interests" in the Bulgarian policy during the summer of 1915. But the very fact that the Bulgarian soldier went to support his suppressed brothers outside the Bulgarian Fatherland, imposed the conclusions of availability of a "significant just element in the participation of Bulgaria in the war". In the frames of a Grand World War Bulgaria could not look for solving its national problem without military force. The reality of the war, as well as the diplomatic failures in 1913 used to be a convincing proof for that. The other questions were from another kind: Did the Supreme Command choose the right strategic moment for the start of war activities, and most important – why was the alliance which finally lost the war chosen? The answer of these questions should be sought later, but not in the conjuncture during the "Hot Bulgarian Summer" of 1915.