



## Change and Continuity in the Ottoman–Turkish Image in Bulgarian History Textbooks from the Fall of Communism to Bulgaria’s EU Accession

*Komünizmin Çöküşünden Bulgaristan’ın AB Üyeliğine Kadar Bulgar Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı–Türk İmajında Değişim ve Süreklilik*

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### Abstract


This article analyzes the image of the Ottoman–Turkish past in Bulgarian history textbooks from the fall of communism until the early years of Bulgaria’s accession to the European Union. Drawing on textbook research and image analysis, this study compares pre- and post-1990 textbooks and shows that, although explicitly harsh terminology such as “slavery” has decreased, the dominant representation of the Ottomans remains largely negative. Ottoman expansion is consistently framed as invasion and occupation, while Ottoman rule is portrayed as a period of oppression, religious discrimination, forced Islamization, and cultural stagnation for Bulgarians. Particular emphasis is placed on the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–78 and the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, which are presented as wars of liberation and national unification, reinforcing a narrative of Bulgarian victimhood and heroism. Overall, the study argues that analyzed textbooks continue to reproduce long-standing nationalist stereotypes, shaping a persistently negative Ottoman/Turkish image in Bulgarian historical consciousness.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire, Bulgarian history textbooks, national identity, Balkan Wars, image of the Other.

### Öz

Bu makale, Komünist sistemin yıkılışından başlayarak Bulgaristan’ın Avrupa Birliği’ne katılımının sonrasındaki ilk yıllara kadar kullanılan Bulgar tarih ders kitaplarında Osmanlı–Türk geçmişinin nasıl temsil edildiğini incelemektedir. Ders kitabı ve imaj incelemesi yöntemine göre 1990 öncesi ve sonrası ders kitaplarının karşılaştırılması yoluyla, “kölelik” gibi açıkça sert terimlerin kullanımının azaldığı görülmekle birlikte, Osmanlılara ilişkin baskın temsilin büyük ölçüde olumsuz kalmaya devam ettiği ortaya konulmaktadır. Osmanlı yayılması tutarlı biçimde istila ve işgal olarak çerçeveselenecek; Osmanlı yönetimi ise Bulgarlar açısından baskı, dinî ayrımcılık, zorla İslamlaştırma ve kültürel durgunluk dönemi olarak betimlenmektedir. 1877–78 Osmanlı–Rus Savaşı’na ve 1912–13 Balkan Savaşları’na vurgu yapılmakta; bu savaşlar kurtuluş ve ulusal birleşme mücadeleleri olarak sunulmaktadır. Genel olarak çalışma, incelenen ders kitaplarının uzun süredir var olan milliyetçi stereotipleri yeniden ürettiğini ve Bulgar tarihsel bilincinde kalıcı biçimde olumsuz bir Osmanlı/Türk imgesini şekillendirdiğini savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Bulgar tarih ders kitapları, ulusal kimlik, Balkan Savaşları, Öteki imgesi.

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## Introduction

This study seeks to analyze the representation of the Ottoman–Turkish presence in Bulgarian history textbooks published until 2009 by the Ministry of Education, approved publishing houses, and used in middle and high schools. The limitation of the textbooks to the period from the 1990s to the first years following Bulgaria’s accession to the EU in 2007 is based on the assumption that the effects of EU membership can be traced in textbooks published between 2007 and 2009. Especially when examining pre-1990 textbooks compared with those used after Bulgaria joined the European Union, the differences are evident.

Bulgaria, which remained under Ottoman rule for approximately five centuries, occupies an important place in Ottoman history. The Bulgarian language, which contains many shared words, reflects the long coexistence of the Turkish and Bulgarian peoples and the development of numerous common cultural elements in shared spaces. However, two societies that had lived in close proximity for centuries came to confront one another as nation-states emerged. In this process, historiography and history textbooks played a crucial role in shaping narratives of alterity and demonization. At the same time, political developments and regime changes in Bulgaria (1878-1908 principality, 1908-1944/45 kingdom, 1945-1990 communist regime, since 1990/91 parliamentary democracy) significantly influenced the narratives presented in history textbooks.

Our study of Bulgarian history textbooks used after 1990/91 clearly shows that those before and after 1990 differ markedly. Following the collapse of the Zhivkov regime in 1990, one of the first debates concerned history textbooks. A history textbook (*Zapiski po Istoriya na Bălgariya 681-1878*) prepared in 1992 and intended to be used in schools until new books were written, caused major controversy in the country, especially drawing reactions from teachers and parents. The main reason for these reactions was that the Ottoman/Turkish period was not defined as “slavery/captivity” and that certain extremely negative concepts were not used.<sup>1</sup> In subsequent years, new textbooks were written, and instead of a single standardized textbook, books published by multiple publishing houses and approved by the ministry began to be used.

First of all, when we examine the history textbooks in Bulgaria, we see that they are generally prepared collectively by university history professors. Single-author history textbooks have not yet been published in Bulgaria. It is evident that publishing houses that produce textbooks generally publish works aligned with the Bulgarian national policy. Because the members of the committees within the Ministry of Education approving textbooks traditionally hold nationalist views. Leading publishing houses collaborating with the Bulgarian Ministry of Education include ET “ARTIDEA”, IK “ANIBUS” OOD, and SD “VT-KOMS” Publishing House “SLOVO” in Sofia. Among these, textbooks published by “Prosveta-Sofia” AD are the most widely used in schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Petar Angelov, Tsvetana Georgieva, Georgi Bakalov & Dimitar Tsanev, *Zapiski po Istoriya na Bălgariya 681-1878* (Sofia: SD Bulvest-2000, 1992).

History education in Bulgaria begins in the first grade of primary school. In the textbook titled *Roden Kray / Place of Birth / Homeland*, topics similar to those covered in Hayat Bilgisi (Life Studies) courses in Türkiye are also included, including history and geography. In the second grade, the textbook *Okolen Svyat / The Surrounding World* covers history alongside other subjects. In the third and fourth grades, students use the textbook *Čovekāt i Obšttestvoto / Human and Society*. From grades five through twelve, history education is taught through the textbook *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya / History and Civilization*. In addition to textbooks, “school notebooks” are used as workbooks starting from the first grade. Atlases and maps are also used as supplementary materials.

As products of official historiography, history textbooks are used by political authorities to create “national consciousness” or a national identity among younger generations. Textbooks are among the most fundamental tools used to create historical awareness, define the nation’s “true” and “historical” values, and highlight the characteristics that distinguish the nation from others. Numerous studies have been conducted, particularly on textbooks and the image of the “other”.<sup>2</sup> Textbook research treats history textbooks as key instruments in constructing national identity and collective memory. It compares curricula and textbooks across countries and periods, examines portrayals of specific groups, and supplements textual analysis to assess how stereotypes are transmitted to students.<sup>3</sup>

This paper draws on imagology (image studies), an approach that analyzes how nations construct representations of the “self” (auto-image) and the “other” (hetero-image) in textual and visual sources. Drawing on French, American, and German traditions, imagology focuses not on the factual accuracy of historical events but on how they are narrated and framed. It identifies explicit and implicit stereotypes, clichés, and metaphors in textbooks and analyzes how language, discourse, and visual materials (such as images, maps, and illustrations) shape collective perceptions.<sup>4</sup> Special attention is given to generalizations, the extension of temporary traits to entire nations, and

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, M. Isov, *Nay različniyat Säsed. Obrazāt na osmansite (turtsite) i Osmanskata imperiya (Turtsiya) v bälgarskite učebnitsi po istoriya prez vtorata polovina na XX vek* (Sofia: IMIR, 2005); A. Berktaş, and H. C. Tuncer, (ed.). *Tarih Eğitimi ve Tarihte “Öteki” Sorunu* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998); S. Özbaran, *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları, 1994 Buca Sempozyumu* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995); Z. A. Kızılyaprak (ed.), *Tarih Yazımında Yeni Yaklaşımlar: Küreselleşme ve Yerelleşme* (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2000); M. Neuburger, “Bulgaro – Turkish Encounters and The Re-Imaging of the Bulgarian Nation (1878-1995)”, *East European Quarterly*, 31, No: 1, (March 1997): 1-20; N. Danova, V. Dimova & M. Kalitsin (eds.), *Predstavata za “drugiya” na Balkanite* (Sofia: Akademično Izdatelstvo “Marin Drinov”, 1995); Sadık Hacı, “Yabancılar İçin Bulgarca Ders Kitaplarında Olumsuz Türk İmgesi”, *Biruni Health and Education Sciences Journal (BHESJ)*, 5/2 (2022 Fall): 43-59.

<sup>3</sup> Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, 2nd ed., (Paris, Braunschweig: UNESCO & Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research, 2010), <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001171/117188e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Höpken (ed.), *Oil on fire? Textbooks, ethnic stereotypes and violence in South-Eastern Europe / Öl ins Feuer? Schulbücher, ethnische Stereotypen und Gewalt in Südosteuropa*, (Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1996).

fictionalized elements presented as reality. The method explores the ideological and socio-political contexts in which such representations emerge and change.<sup>5</sup>

Before addressing the issue of image, it is necessary to discuss the primary sources of this study, namely the history textbooks, the publishing houses, and history education in Bulgaria.

### **1. From Ottoman Rule to National Statehood: The Representation of Bulgarian History in Bulgarian Textbooks**

As is known, the territory of present-day Bulgaria became part of the Ottoman lands in the fourteenth century. However, following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 and the Treaty of San Stefano signed on 3 March 1878, Bulgaria reached an extensive geographical size. For the first time, the “Greater Bulgarian State” envisioned by Bulgarian nationalists was established, and to this day, 3 March is celebrated as one of Bulgaria’s most important national holidays (*Den na Osvoboždenie / Day of Liberation*). However, due to changing political conditions, some of the territories gained were returned under the Treaty of Berlin. This development represented a major blow to the “Bulgarian nationalist idea”. In 1878, plans were made for the establishment of a new state based on “ethnic Bulgarian borders”, which appeared on European maps for the first time. As stated in Bulgarian textbooks, while the Bulgarian state established by the Treaty of San Stefano had an area of 170,000 square kilometers, this was reduced to 63,752 square kilometers under the Treaty of Berlin.

According to the textbooks, Bulgaria’s geographical position at the center of the Balkans was significant for its foreign policy. Bulgaria’s emergence as a state with the widest borders and the largest population in the Balkans aligned neither with the interests of the Great Powers nor with the desires of other Balkan states. Bulgaria’s development was viewed with concern by its neighbors.

The textbooks state that Bulgaria sought to distance itself somewhat from Russia due to Russia’s stance at the Berlin Treaty. Although Prince Alexander von Battenberg came to power in 1879 as the nephew of the Russian Emperor, Russian intervention was curtailed for a time, especially after the Liberal government took office. The unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia in 1885<sup>6</sup> was an important issue for Bulgarians, yet Russia again did not offer support. With the arrival of Prince Ferdinand in 1887, the influence of Austria and Britain began to be felt in Bulgaria. It would not be coincidental that Bulgaria later sided with Austria during World War I.

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<sup>5</sup> For methodology of image studies, see, among others: Joep Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method”, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, Eds. Manfred Beller, Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 17-33; William L. Chew III, “What’s in a National Stereotype? An Introduction to Imagology at the Threshold of the 21st Century”, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, Vol. 6, No. 3-4 (2006): 179-187; Serhat Ulağlı, *İmgebilim “Öteki”nin Bilimine Giriş* (Ankara: Sinemis Yayınları, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> B. Gavrilov, A. Pantev & A. Kertin, *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya za 9. Klas (Zadälžitelna Podgotovka)* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2006), 187.

In the textbooks, Bulgaria's full independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1908 is interpreted as a break from the backwardness of the East and a turn toward the path of "modernization" or "modern Europe".<sup>7</sup>

According to the textbooks, Bulgaria's sole objective in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 was to unite the Bulgarians living in Macedonia and incorporate these territories into the country. However, this plan failed, and taking all national interests into account, Bulgaria entered World War I.

## 2. The Representation of Ottoman Conquests in History Textbooks

In Bulgarian history textbooks, the first information about the Ottomans appears in the fourth-grade textbook. Under the heading "The Bulgarian Middle Ages and Awakening", the Ottoman/Turkish conquests from the Balkans into Europe are presented as invasions/occupations. It is stated that "with the Ottoman invasion, by the end of the fourteenth century, the Balkan peoples were cut off from the free European world".<sup>8</sup> In the fifth-grade textbook, under the heading "The Ottoman Invasion and the Destruction of Medieval Bulgaria", it is stated that the Ottoman Turkish invasion began in the second half of the fourteenth century, at a time when the Balkan peoples were weak and experiencing difficult periods. In the same section, information is also given about the Ottoman religion, Islam, and the Prophet Muhammad. It is stated that Islam was seen as the "true religion" and that the Ottomans regarded Christians as unbelievers (infidels).<sup>9</sup> In the textbooks, Balkan countries in the medieval period are described as fragmented and weakened, and it is stated that Bulgaria and the surrounding Orthodox states were conquered by the Ottoman Turks.<sup>10</sup>

Ottoman wars are referred to as "raids for plunder". It is emphasized that looting/raiding campaigns intensified particularly during periods of conquest. According to the textbooks, Ottoman administrators realized that the Balkan states lacked the strength to resist them and also recognized the natural wealth of Balkan lands and the industriousness of their populations. It is stated that plundering raids turned into wars for territory (*voyna za teritoriya*), and that major cities such as the fortress of Edirne, Plovdiv, Yambol, and Aydos began to be conquered. Tsar Ivan Alexander signed an agreement with Murad I (1362–1389) to halt the invasion and plundering, but the efforts proved futile. After the victory at the Battle of Chernomen (Çirmen) in 1371, Ottoman armies carried out sudden raids into Thrace, and it is stated that the invaders believed their success came from God's power and declared the invasion a "holy war". It is also noted that in 1371, the Bulgarian struggle for independence began, that Tsar Ivan Shishman ratified the treaty signed by his father, and that Bulgaria thus became an Ottoman vassal.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Gavrilov et al., 2006, 186-189.

<sup>8</sup> S. Stoyanova & L. Maneva, *Čovekät i Obšttestvoto za četvärti klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> P. Angelov, Ts. Georgieva & M. Radeva, *Istoriya i Tsvilizatsiya za 5. Klas* (Sofia: Prozorets, 2006), 72.

<sup>10</sup> Stoyanova & Maneva, 2009, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Angelov et al., 2006, 72.

In the section describing Ottoman conquests, excerpts from historical sources are included in the margins. One of these is a passage taken from an unnamed fifteenth-century Ottoman chronicle, concerning the conquest of Yambol:

*“The ruler of Yambol resisted and opposed [the Turks]. However, since spring had passed and there was a severe drought in the city, everything burned. In the besieged places, people became ill, and water and food supplies spoiled. For this reason, the city was forced to surrender. The Muslim (Orthodox-believing) soldiers obtained large amounts of clothing and booty. They also brought back from the looted regions of Samokov and Ihtiman slaves as beautiful as the sun”.*

Immediately below this excerpt are questions designed to reinforce students' knowledge:

What is the document about? How did the besieged Bulgarians behave? Why did the city surrender? Identify the words that show the invaders' behavior.

Another detail discussed concerns the killing of Murad I at the Battle of Kosovo. According to the textbook, following this event, Bayezid I (1389-1402) launched offensives against Balkan territories. It states that in the spring of 1393, the Ottomans besieged the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo, and on 17 June, despite the heroism of the Bulgarian defenders, the city fell. According to the account, the invaders destroyed palaces, looted churches and monasteries, and killed many of the city's inhabitants. The Bulgarian Patriarch Evtimiy was exiled, and two years later, by Bayezid's order, the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Shishman was killed.

The Battle of Nicopolis is presented as the end of the Bulgarian state. It is stated that in 1396, Bayezid entered the city of Vidin after the Battle of Nicopolis, captured the last Bulgarian Tsar, and seized his lands, thus erasing the Bulgarian state from the map.

Below these narratives, two summary texts stand out:

*“From the second half of the fourteenth century, Bulgarians fought for 30 years (tri desetiletie) against the Ottoman invaders for their independence. By the end of the century, the medieval Bulgarian state was definitively subdued. However, Bulgarians continued to live for centuries on the lands they had possessed”.*

Under the heading “The Legacy to Bulgaria”, it is emphasized that the Ottoman invaders left deep traces in the memories of many generations of Bulgarians.<sup>12</sup>

Although the presentation of Ottoman conquests in textbooks used after 2007 contains softer language than in older textbooks, the Ottoman conquests are ultimately still described as occupation and invasion.

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<sup>12</sup> Angelov et al., 2006, 73.

### 3. Depictions of the Status of Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire

When Ottoman rule is described in the textbooks, it is stated that various peoples lived within the empire and that most of them worked for the happiness of their “new rulers/masters”. In this way, a message of “enslavement” is conveyed. In relation to Bulgaria, it is emphasized that after the Ottoman conquest of the Balkan lands, Bulgarian unity was destroyed, the concept of statehood disappeared, and the existing state aristocracy was either killed or deported to distant lands. It is also stated that the Bulgarian Patriarchate (the Tárnovo Patriarchate) was closed and that all Orthodox Christians were subordinated to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul. Textbooks hold that Bulgarians, fearing Ottoman oppression, abandoned cities and established villages in mountainous regions. In this way, the message is given that the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans was detrimental to Bulgarian development.

One expression used in the textbooks is “under the rule of the Sultan”. Accordingly, Bulgarians became subjects of the Ottoman Empire and were forced to live according to imperial laws for many generations. They did not abandon their lands in order to support their families and care for their children, but relied solely on their own industriousness and the fertility of the land. It is stated that Bulgarians paid many taxes, which were spent on the imperial army and the “splendid palace of the Sultan”. One of the important topics addressed in the textbooks is religion. Like all non-Muslim communities, Bulgarians did not enjoy equal rights, but they were able to practice their religion.<sup>13</sup> It is stated that Muslims and Christians lived together in cities and villages, that everyone observed the traditions of their own community, that imperial laws granted privileges to Muslims, and that Christians were expected to be modest and obedient.<sup>14</sup> Another textbook emphasizes that because Bulgarians were considered Christian/infidel, their clothing had to be far more modest and plain than that of Muslims. Bulgarians are described as being seen as “second-class” subjects, experiencing forced marriages of their daughters, fear, and humiliation—in short, discrimination against the Bulgarian nation. It is emphasized that prohibitions such as Christians carrying weapons, riding horses in front of Muslims, wearing certain colors of clothing, ringing bells, and carrying food in the streets during Ramadan caused Christian subjects to live lives filled with suffering.

In the “historical source” section of the textbook, the following paragraph from the sixteenth-century hagiography written by St. George the New of Sofia is presented:

*“The Muslims gathered much wood to light a fire and began to flatter George, promising him many gifts. But he said: I have told you once or twice that I will not renounce my religion, even if you inflict thousands of torments upon me. Why do you summon me and treat me as ignorant and foolish? Nothing can separate me from my love of Christ”.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Angelov et al., 2006, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Angelov et al., 2006, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Angelov et al., 2006, 92.

This narrative in the textbooks creates the perception that Ottoman rule was oppressive and cruel for Bulgarians and that Bulgarians were forcibly converted to Islam.

In the eighth-grade history textbook, one of the important topics is the claim that children trained for the Janissary corps were forcibly taken by the Ottomans from Christian families. The devshirme system in the Ottoman Empire is described as a “blood tax” (*Krāven danāk*). According to this, until the end of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans collected the healthiest, strongest, and most handsome youths, thereby hindering the development of the Bulgarian nation.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. The Representation of the Bulgarian Wars of Independence

Another prominent topic in the textbooks concerns Bulgaria’s wars against the Ottomans (the wars of independence) and the stereotypes used to narrate these events. The nineteenth century is regarded as the “Century of Liberation Revolutions” for Bulgarians. It is stated that during the April Uprising of 20 April 1876, 30,000 people were killed by the Ottoman army, and 200 villages were burned. In particular, an image of the church associated with the event known in Bulgarian history as the “Batak Massacre” is included.

The 4th-grade history textbook by Stoyanova and Manova emphasizes that the suppression of the Bulgarian uprising resonated widely in the Western press and that the “suffering” of the Bulgarians became known throughout the world. It is also emphasized that famous writers, intellectuals, and politicians pressured European states to intervene in the issue.

In the textbook, it is stated that the American journalist MacGahan traveled through burned villages to publicize the “Batak Massacre” in Europe and published reports on the atrocities suffered by innocent women, children, and the elderly. Here, Bulgarians are depicted as a community oppressed, suppressed, and massacred by the Ottomans. The narrative of the “Batak Massacre” plays a major role in shaping the image of the Turks. In this context, Turks are accused of committing a kind of “genocide” against Bulgarians. Within this framework, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 is described for Bulgarians as a “War of Liberation”. In this war, Russian soldiers are portrayed as “liberators”, and it is known that a mausoleum was built in Pleven in their memory.<sup>17</sup>

#### 5. The Balkan Wars: “Wars of National Unity.”

The Balkan Wars hold a very important place for both the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. From the Ottoman perspective, the Balkan Wars can be regarded as a disaster that resulted in massive territorial and population losses. In addition, Muslims living in

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<sup>16</sup> V. Guzelev, R. Gavrilova, I. Stoyanov, M. Lalkov, L. Ognyanov & M. Radeva, *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya za 11. Klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2008), 94.

<sup>17</sup> Stoyanova and Maneva, 2009, 62.

the Balkan territories were forced into migration due to the treatment they suffered at the hands of Balkan armies during the war.<sup>18</sup>

Bulgaria, which had been established with extensive territories granted by the Treaty of San Stefano after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, was reduced and divided into three parts by the Treaty of Berlin. Although it later annexed Eastern Rumelia in 1885, it failed to regain the San Stefano borders.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, some Bulgarian textbooks refer to the decisions of the Berlin Congress that followed San Stefano Bulgaria as “mutilated freedom”. From its establishment onward, Bulgaria regarded the San Stefano borders as its natural borders and pursued policies accordingly. It is also stated that nearly two million Bulgarians living in Macedonia received the decisions of the Treaty of Berlin with “pain and dissatisfaction”.<sup>20</sup>

According to the textbooks, Bulgaria entered the Balkan Wars with a desire for “revenge” over the sudden loss of territories gained at San Stefano under the Treaty of Berlin. In both Bulgarian historiography and history textbooks, there is a dominant image that the lands referred to as Macedonia were part of the Bulgarian “homeland” and that entering the war to seize them was legitimate. Especially within the framework of alliances with other Balkan states, there is an idea that Bulgaria “deserved” more territory in the event of war due to the prominence of the Bulgarian population. However, it is also emphasized that because some details of the prewar agreements were not fully reflected in the texts, the postwar verbal promises to Bulgaria were not fulfilled, and Bulgaria was wronged.<sup>21</sup> In the following chapter, I examine how and why Bulgarians participated in the Balkan Wars, what occurred during the wars, and how the postwar period is evaluated in contemporary history textbooks.

In contemporary history textbooks, information about the Balkan Wars appears in grades 4, 6, 9, 11, and 12. The first information is given in the fourth grade, mainly under the heading “Turbulent Decades” (*Burni Desetiletija*), within the context of Bulgaria in the mid-twentieth century, covering the Balkan Wars and World War I.

The sixth-grade textbook provides more information, but the Balkan Wars and World War I are grouped under a single heading and defined as the “Wars of National Unification (1912-1918)”. Here, the most striking point is that information about the First Balkan War is more detailed and extensive than that about the Second Balkan War. The books also include maps showing state borders before the war and the changes introduced by the 1913 Treaties of London and Bucharest. In addition, images of political and military figures of the period are included. The biography of Ivan Geshov, who served as prime minister during the Balkan War period, is provided, as is the life of Radko Dimitrov, who served as a general in the Third Bulgarian Army at Kırklareli and

<sup>18</sup> A. Halaçođlu, *Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (1912-1913)* (Ankara: TTK, 1994); J. McCarthy, *Ölüm ve Sürgün*, Turkish translation by Bilge Umar, (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitapevi, 1995), 144-199.

<sup>19</sup> M. Aydın, *Şarki Rumeli Vilayeti* (Ankara: TTK, 1992), 11-17.

<sup>20</sup> R. Gavrilova, M. Radeva & E. Kalinova, *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya za 6. Klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2007), 88.

<sup>21</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 90.

Lüleburgaz. One photograph taken by the Bulgarian army during the capture of Edirne is particularly noteworthy. It is emphasized that the fortress, captured on 13 March 1913, was considered a “turning point of military power” and was taken despite the defense of 70,000 Ottoman soldiers. The sixth-grade textbook also includes a detailed chronology of the Balkan War and questions directed at students.<sup>22</sup>

In the ninth-grade textbook, under the heading “Two Wars and Their Diplomatic Consequences”, the Balkan Wars are discussed in a more interpretive manner. It is stated that the Bulgarian army achieved “extraordinary military successes”, neutralized the Ottomans, and advanced close to Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire is frequently referred to as “Turtsiya” (Turkey/Türkiye) (a common practice in Bulgarian historiography), and it is written that after the First Balkan War, the Ottomans lost their political and geographical position in the eyes of European states. From the Bulgarian perspective, the war is emphasized as a continuation of the “Bulgarian National Liberation Movement”. It is also claimed that the unexpected successes of the Balkan Alliance states and their desire for greater territorial gains contributed to tensions. When the Second Balkan War (referred to as the “Inter-Allied War”) began, it is stated that Serbia and Greece took advantage of a mistake made by Tsar Ferdinand in the secret agreements. This erroneous choice is described as Bulgaria’s “first national catastrophe”. In the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria fought “upright” alone against all states (including Romania and the Ottoman Empire) and, after being defeated, paid the full price according to the Treaty of Bucharest of 28 July 1913. Emphasis is placed on the perception of the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man”, no longer influential in European politics, and on the efforts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, within the framework of German diplomacy, to draw Bulgaria to its side.<sup>23</sup>

The Balkan Wars are discussed in greatest detail in the eleventh-grade textbook. Under the heading “Bulgaria During the Balkan War”, subheadings include “Balkan Alliances”, “Victories of the Army and Diplomatic Difficulties”, “The Ottoman Empire on Its Knees”, “The Disintegration of the Balkan Alliance”, and “An Undefeated Army, a Lost War”.<sup>24</sup>

In the twelfth-grade textbook, various texts related to the Balkan Wars are presented. The most important of these are the “Carnegie Reports”, and information is provided about the founder of the foundation that published them. It is stated that these reports are the most important sources on the Balkan Wars, that they demonstrate the Bulgarian character of Macedonia’s population, and that they discredit rumors of “Bulgarian atrocities”.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to what is stated in the textbook, the Carnegie Reports are

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<sup>22</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 90–93.

<sup>23</sup> Gavrilov et al., 2006, 196.

<sup>24</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 232–237.

<sup>25</sup> A. Kertin & M. Yovevska, *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya za 12. Klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2007), 162.

regarded as among the most important sources documenting massacres committed by the Bulgarian army and bands against Muslims during the war.<sup>26</sup>

In Bulgarian history textbooks, when examining the reasons for entering the Balkan Wars, it is emphasized that the European powers that had supported the preservation of Ottoman integrity under the Treaty of Berlin were now divided into different military and political blocs. These powers are said to have sought alliances among the newly established Balkan states.

The textbooks emphasize that with the Ilinden Uprising of 1903 and Bulgaria's declaration of independence in 1908, a military inclination came to the forefront of Bulgarian foreign policy for the "solution of the national question". In March 1911, it is stated that Tsar Ferdinand, together with the newly appointed Ivan Geshov, emphasized friendship with Russia and facilitated rapprochement in Bulgarian-Serbian relations. According to this view, this rapprochement laid the groundwork for the formation of an anti-Turkish Balkan alliance. It is also stated that in St. Petersburg, and even in London and Paris, there were concerns that a war breaking out in southeastern Europe could trigger a world war. Meanwhile, initial initiatives for a Balkan alliance were taking place in Sofia and Belgrade. Tsar Ferdinand hastily replaced Prime Minister Malinov with Geshov, who was backed by St. Petersburg, thereby securing Russian backing.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Ferdinand, together with Geshov, amended Article 17 of the Tarnovo Constitution, which he had previously been reluctant to follow. Under this article, the Tsar and the government could conclude secret agreements without submitting them to parliamentary approval. The textbooks emphasize that this allowed the Tsar and the government to make entirely arbitrary decisions before the war. It is stated that Prime Minister Geshov attempted to unite all Balkan Christian states and mobilize them against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>28</sup>

The textbooks note that Bulgaria concluded separate agreements with both Serbia and Greece, but that from the outset, Greece declared it would not recognize the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement if the war were won. Accordingly, in a possible war against the Ottoman Empire, Greece would contribute 120,000 soldiers compared to Bulgaria's 300,000, while Montenegro would join the alliance only verbally.

The textbooks present an image of Bulgaria being left isolated and in a weak position within the Balkan alliance before the war. The alliance is emphasized as a temporary, non-permanent international arrangement, incapable of resolving national territorial disputes in Southeastern Europe/the Balkans.

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<sup>26</sup> N. Ersoy-Hacısalihođlu, "Bulgaria's Policy toward Muslims during the Balkan Wars", *War and Nationalism, The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications*, Eds. H. Yavuz & I. Blumi (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2013), 361-370.

<sup>27</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 90; Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 232.

<sup>28</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 232.

The Young Turk Revolution is briefly mentioned in the lead-up to the Balkan Wars. It is stated that with the proclamation of liberty, the Bulgarian revolutionary organization became a legal political party. However, it is argued that the Young Turks did not keep their promises, leading to the claim that “there was no alternative but to fight Türkiye to achieve national unity”.<sup>29</sup>

It is stated that the outbreak of the Balkan War and the Bulgarian armed forces' entry into the war for “national unification” were welcomed by the Bulgarian nation with great patriotism and enthusiasm. It is emphasized that the Ottoman army suffered heavy losses at the very beginning of the war and that Kırklareli surrendered without a fight. Ottoman troops positioned along the Pınarhisar-Karaağaç-Lüleburgaz defensive line are said to have been neutralized by the Bulgarian army. The textbook also mentions that the Ottoman commander handed over the keys of Thessaloniki to the Greeks. While an image of the Ottoman Empire, surrounded on all sides, is presented, it is emphasized that on 29 October the Ottomans accepted Bulgaria's terms in a “helpless and desperate state”. However, it is stated that Ferdinand acted with the idea of “entering Istanbul in triumph”, which ultimately turned the results against Bulgaria. History textbooks note that Bulgarian diplomacy faced serious problems and that, during the peace talks that began in London, European states were concerned about the war's further spread. It is also stated that Bulgarian delegates who held talks in Bucharest, Vienna, and Berlin before the London negotiations failed to meet expectations.<sup>30</sup>

According to the textbook, when the delegates of the Balkan states demanded all Ottoman territories in Europe, the Ottoman government reacted strongly and abruptly suspended negotiations. With the Young Turk coup (the Raid on the Sublime Porte, January 1913), it became clear that Edirne would not be relinquished.<sup>31</sup>

In textbooks that describe in great detail the battle for Edirne and the Edirne Fortress, the heroism of the Bulgarian army is emphasized, and a quotation from the *Daily Telegraph* stands out: “Bulgarian generals have written a new page in military history. Never before has anyone dared and succeeded so boldly in such an enterprise”.<sup>32</sup> In recent Bulgarian media publications, although this conflict is called a Balkan war, it is also described as a European war and an “unprecedented war”. It is claimed that participants came from all over the world, including Europeans, Bulgarians living abroad, and even Turks from Bulgaria.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 232; see also M. Hacısalihoglu, “II. Meşrutiyetin Balkan Ülkelerinde Algılanması ve Jön Türk İmajı”, *100. Yılında II. Meşrutiyet; Gelenek ve Değişim Ekseninde Türk Modernleşmesi Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildiriler*, Eds. Z. Kurşun et al., (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009), 549-556.

<sup>30</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 232-234.

<sup>31</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 234.

<sup>32</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 234.

<sup>33</sup> S. Roşkev, “Pogotovkata ot Balkanska Voyna”, Last updated on 08.09.2012, [http://bnt.bg/bg/news/view/84211/100\\_godini\\_ot\\_balkanskata\\_vojna](http://bnt.bg/bg/news/view/84211/100_godini_ot_balkanskata_vojna)

It is stated that in the Balkan War, Bulgarians officially committed themselves to the independence of Bulgarians in Macedonia and Thrace. Regarding the Balkan Alliance states, it is stated that occupation units prepared the occupied territories for Serbian or Greek civilian administration. These states also pursued disarmament policies against the bands they had previously supported and for which they had expressed gratitude. The Ottoman army is generally depicted as “on its knees”, neutralized and devastated in the Thrace region.<sup>34</sup>

## 6. Representation of Developments After the Balkan War

The eleventh-grade textbook states that “a backward feudal empire that ruled most of the European territories was destroyed thanks to the Balkan War”. It is argued that the war had a radical significance and that European territories formerly under Turkish rule were now recognized as free and governed by democratic principles. The Treaty of London marked a step toward resolving the Balkans' national problems. In Bulgarian historical memory, the Balkan War has remained a national epic. It is defined as an attempt to conclude the “liberation struggle” that Bulgarians had pursued since the beginning of their distinctive “National Revival” period.<sup>35</sup>

The textbooks largely emphasize that, influenced by victory, Bulgaria proved weak in diplomacy. It is claimed that Bulgarian propaganda abroad was insufficient compared to that of Greece and Serbia. Representatives of the Central Powers in Sofia organized groups and encouraged protests around the palace. The slogan of these groups was: “Either everything, or nothing”.<sup>36</sup>

It is stated that other Balkan states failed to find a fair solution to the “Balkan national knot”, and that the situation became even more complicated with the intervention of European powers. It is claimed that Serbia and Greece did not adhere to their agreements with Bulgaria on the division of Macedonia after the Balkan War and that they violated them by disregarding Bulgarian national interests.<sup>37</sup>

It is stated that after the First Balkan War, anti-Bulgarian propaganda began in Serbian and Greek newspapers, which viewed Bulgaria’s demands as excessive. Due to assimilation policies initiated by the governments in Belgrade and Athens, the mobilization of Macedonian Bulgarians allegedly led Bulgaria’s 1.5-million-strong army to launch the Second Balkan War against Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro.<sup>38</sup>

The outbreak of this war was later described in Bulgarian historiography as a mistake - referred to in the textbook as the “Day of Criminal Madness/Folly”. It is emphasized that during the Second Balkan War, the attitudes of European powers toward

<sup>34</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 234.

<sup>35</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 234.

<sup>36</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 236.

<sup>37</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 236-237.

<sup>38</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 236.

Bulgaria changed, with Britain, France, and Germany supporting the other Balkan alliance states, while Russia's policy was hesitant and inconsistent.

The textbooks emphasize that diplomatically isolated Bulgaria experienced its "first national catastrophe and failure" with the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest after the Second Balkan War. In addition to major territorial losses, it is stated that Bulgaria suffered 66,000 dead and 100,000 wounded. It is also written that Bulgaria suffered severe economic damage, amounting to a loss of 2 billion leva.

According to the textbooks, after the Balkan Wars, Bulgaria granted freedom of religion, language, and nationality to all ethnic groups in the territories it acquired, while the Serbian and Greek governments pursued policies of permanent occupation and denationalization.<sup>39</sup>

According to the 11th-grade textbook, Bulgarians in regions under Greek rule launched uprisings that were suppressed by military force. Pressures on the Bulgarian population in Vardar Macedonia were even harsher: thousands of Bulgarians were imprisoned, and all forms of spiritual expression of Bulgarian identity were persecuted. In Southern Dobruja (Romania), the Romanian administration dismantled Bulgarian education and the church, confiscated much of the Bulgarian peasants' land, and distributed it to Romanian officials and colonists. A severe refugee problem emerged in Bulgaria, as 250,000 Bulgarian refugees from Macedonia, Thrace, and Southern Dobruja sought refuge in the country. The Balkan national question and the Bulgarian question became a heavy burden on European international relations. The Treaty of Bucharest left Bulgaria in an unfavorable position vis-à-vis its neighbors, as fulfilling Bulgarian national territorial claims ran counter to the interests of other Balkan states.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, the Balkan Wars are presented in Bulgarian history textbooks as one of the most important periods in Bulgarian history and as a continuation of the "Bulgarian wars of liberation". Macedonia and Edirne are portrayed as parts of the Bulgarian homeland, and the fate of these lands is described as the "Bulgarian national question". The Ottoman Empire is depicted as a "backward" state whose rule over European territories was illegitimate. Bulgaria is shown as acting to incorporate lands it considered its own, yet despite military victories, the problem remained unresolved. After the war, an image is drawn of the Balkan alliance states treating Bulgaria unjustly and unfairly. In both the First and Second Balkan Wars, a dominant narrative suggests that Bulgaria failed to conduct effective diplomacy in the eyes of European powers. It is emphasized that Bulgaria was "victimized", having failed to obtain the lands it deserved despite the losses it suffered in the wars, particularly stressing that Serbia should have transferred the territories it acquired in Macedonia to Bulgaria.

In the perception of "us" during the Balkan Wars, two sides stand out. One consists of Tsar Ferdinand and the Geshov government, who are portrayed as having made

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<sup>39</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 238.

<sup>40</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 238.

mistakes and bearing internal responsibility for the Bulgarian disaster. On the other hand, the Bulgarian army is depicted as “heroic”, “brave”, and “victorious”.

The “Others” (the enemy) are primarily “Türkiye” (i.e., the Ottoman Empire), as well as Serbia, Greece, and Romania, which are portrayed as having treated Bulgaria unfairly. In addition, the great powers Britain, France, Germany, and, to some extent, Russia are also othered for failing to support Bulgaria.

Despite the postwar treaties, the territorial settlements did not fully satisfy either the Balkan states or the European powers. This situation is presented as one of the causes of World War I.

## 7. Depictions of World War I in History Textbooks

In the analyzed textbooks, World War I is taught in grades 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 12. In Bulgarian history textbooks, we first see World War I mentioned in the 4th-grade “Human and Society” textbook. This topic is briefly addressed under the title “Turbulent Decades”, focusing on Bulgaria’s participation in three wars in the twentieth century (the Balkan Wars and World War I). Presented on a single page and written in simple language, the narrative emphasizes that, in World War I, Bulgaria once again sided with the defeated powers and that these wars exacted a heavy price from Bulgarian society. It is stated that there were thousands of deaths, agriculture was nearly destroyed, and hunger, poverty, and unemployment prevailed. In the postwar period, it is written that various political identities disrupted Bulgarian democracy and that political parties attempted to seize power through coups. It is also stated that violations of freedom of thought and human rights occurred. In addition, it is mentioned that immediately after the war, Tsar Ferdinand, seen as responsible for this disaster, abdicated the throne, handed it over to his son Boris III, and left the country.<sup>41</sup>

In the 6th-grade textbook, the section on World War I is titled “The Political Development of Bulgaria from Liberation to the Mid-Twentieth Century”.<sup>42</sup> In the 9th-grade textbook, under the broad heading “Towards the Great War (1870–1918)”, topics such as “World Economy”, “Industrial Revolution”, “States and Societies”, “Crises and Diplomacy, Europe on the Road to War”, and finally “World War I (1914–1918)” are discussed. The material consists of a two-page text accompanied by images.<sup>43</sup> In the 10th-grade textbook, the section title is “The World from the End of World War I to the End of World War II”, which examines political and social changes in all European states, as well as Russia, the Balkan states, and countries such as Japan, from Versailles to World War II.<sup>44</sup> In the 11th-grade textbooks, under the heading “Modern and Contemporary Times”, the topics “Bulgaria in World War I” and “The Postwar Crisis in

<sup>41</sup> Stoyanova & Maneva, 2009, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 92–93.

<sup>43</sup> B. Gavrilov, A. Pantev & A. Kertin, *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya za 9. Klas (Zadälžitelna Podgotovka)* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> G. Markov, R. Kuševa & B. Marinkov, *Istoriya i Tsivilizatsiya za 10. Klas* (Sofia: Prosveta 2008).

Bulgaria” stand out.<sup>45</sup> In the 12th-grade textbook, under the heading “The Age of Extremes”, topics such as “The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy, “New States—New Minorities”, and “Nationalism and the National Question after World War I” are covered.

When examining the causes of the war in Bulgarian history textbooks, the changing system in Europe is emphasized. In particular, changes in the European economy in the mid- and late nineteenth century and the need to acquire new territories are highlighted. In line with this thinking, the emergence of imperialism and colonialism is noted. It is also stated that during this period of change in Europe, a new and powerful state, the United States, emerged.<sup>46</sup>

In the 9th-grade textbook, there is also a British-origin cartoon depicting competition in Europe in 1914. The title of the cartoon is “Beware! Dogs Bite”. Images symbolizing the United States, Europe, the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire are included. Through this cartoon, World War I is described as a war among European countries attacking one another. Immediately afterward, a map illustrates European imperialism through maritime trade. Thus, one of the most important causes of World War I is highlighted as the colonial policies of European states. However, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 is presented as the Europeans’ destiny. After the ultimatum issued following this event was not fulfilled, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.

The textbook quotes a statement by an American journalist and writer (Ambrose Bierce): “The weapon is most often a tool for clearly defining the borders of states.” It is stated that the situation of the Bulgarians in the Balkan Wars was similar to what is expressed in this statement.<sup>47</sup>

The 6th-grade textbook provides somewhat more detailed information on why Bulgaria entered the war. The title of the section covering the First and Second Balkan Wars and World War I is “Wars of National Unity (1912-1918): The Price of the Ideal”. As the title suggests, the reason Bulgarians entered the wars after gaining independence in 1908 is explained by their perception of certain regions as their “national lands”. In particular, given that the majority of Bulgarians lived in the Macedonia region, it was desired that these territories be incorporated into Bulgaria.<sup>48</sup>

In the subheadings covering the period between 1912 and 1918, the sides participating in World War I are listed. Bulgaria entered the Balkan Wars by uniting with other Balkan states to seize territories from the Ottoman Empire. This was achieved in the First Balkan War, but the Second Balkan War produced results for Bulgaria that were almost tantamount to a “National Catastrophe”. The main issue, however, with the outbreak of World War I was which side Bulgaria should join.

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<sup>45</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Gavrilov et al., 2006, 174.

<sup>47</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 238.

<sup>48</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 90.

Earlier textbooks note that both the Entente and the Central Powers attempted to draw Bulgaria into their respective camps. Bulgaria's central geographic position in the Balkans and its strong army prompted both blocs to make various offers. Subsequently, a secret treaty was concluded between Bulgaria and Germany, and the textbook provides some of its articles.

According to the textbooks, after the defeat in the Second Balkan War, there was a prevailing belief that Bulgaria would face a "Second Catastrophe" if it entered World War I. This is reflected in the heading "The Road to a Second National Disaster (1914–1918)". However, there were also those who did not share this view. It is noted that Bulgarians did not want to enter World War I, and that Ferdinand even declared, "We are folding our flags for better times". Nevertheless, it is emphasized that the government of Vasil Radoslavov sought support from Germany and Austria-Hungary. In particular, the idea of taking "revenge" in the Second Balkan War against former allies such as Serbia and other Balkan countries came to the forefront. In line with this thinking, the ruling Vasil Radoslavov concluded a secret agreement with Germany on 6 September 1915. Thus, according to the chronology presented in the textbook, Bulgaria's official entry into the war took place in October 1915.

According to textbooks, after the disasters experienced in the Balkan Wars, the Bulgarian people absolutely did not want the state to enter another war. The opposition Agrarian Party (BZNS-Bulgarian Agrarian National Union) and its founder, Aleksandar Stamboliyski, shared this view. Because of his opposition to the war, Stamboliyski was later tried and imprisoned.<sup>49</sup> The textbook also includes a conversation between Stamboliyski and Ferdinand in September 1915, in which Stamboliyski warned that the war would bring no benefit to the Bulgarian people or the state:

*"In my eyes... and in the eyes of the entire Bulgarian people—who are no longer a mere crowd—the government's undertaking of such an action would be nothing but an adventure. This would push both the nation and the state, as well as the dynasty, into an abyss".*

Several points stand out here. In particular, the topics of World War I in textbooks are presented together with the First and Second Balkan Wars. A chronology of the wars between 1912 and 1918 is provided. The numerical data concerning the army generally reflect the combined figures of all three wars. It is stated that a total of 1.5 million men from Bulgaria participated in these wars, of whom 156,000 died, 275,000 were wounded, and 150,000 died from various diseases. It is also written that the expenditures for these wars exceeded 5 billion leva.<sup>50</sup>

The textbooks contain detailed information on the course of the war. As a result of political developments between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, first Russia and then Germany, Britain, and France entered the war. A striking metaphor used in the textbooks,

<sup>49</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 92.

especially for the first year of the war, is that the warring countries “entered Europe’s sticky mud regions”. The phrase “the end of this war could not be seen” conveys uncertainty.<sup>51</sup>

There is also brief information about the British attempt to seize the Straits and their arrival at Gallipoli. In the depiction of the Ottoman army, an image of a “strong” force is conveyed.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, a positive image of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria’s ally, is presented. It is stated that Bulgaria’s participation in the war led to Serbia’s defeat. Overall, the portrayal of the Central Powers does not create a negative image, and it emphasizes that Germany’s “great diplomacy” played a decisive role in Bulgaria’s entry into the war on the Central Powers’ side. Germany’s advance and occupation of Poland under Russian rule, as well as the Bulgarian army’s struggle in Dobruja in 1916, are described in laudatory terms.<sup>53</sup>

In particular, the entry of Bulgarian armies into Macedonia under Serbian control (Pirin Macedonia) is described as being warmly welcomed by Macedonian Bulgarians. Accordingly, Bulgarian forces were greeted in the region known as “Vardar Macedonia” with the traditional offering of “bread and salt”. Through this depiction, Bulgaria’s entry into the war for Macedonia is presented as a legitimate and justified action.

## 8. Portrayals of Developments in the Aftermath of World War I

Texts concerning postwar developments are found mainly in the 10th-grade textbook. Many judgments about European countries can be identified here. France, in particular, is heavily criticized. The French are said to have divided the participants in the war into two groups: winners and losers. The Paris Peace Treaties, prepared as if the winners were determining the fate of the losers, are criticized by Bulgarians.

The Treaty of Neuilly, concluded with Bulgaria, is portrayed as unjust and is referred to as the “Second National Catastrophe”. Under this treaty, Bulgaria lost 11,000 square kilometers of territory: Southern Dobruja to Romania; Strumica, Tsaribrod, Bosilegrad, and some villages to Serbia; and certain areas in Western Thrace, which the Ottomans had left to Bulgaria, to Greece. Bulgaria was condemned to pay heavy war reparations (around one quarter of its national wealth). The Bulgarian army was reduced, and arms production was prohibited, among other measures.

*“Despite its harsh conditions, Bulgaria accepted the fulfillment of its obligations in good faith, hoping for a peaceful revision of this treaty in the future”.*<sup>54</sup>

In this way, the textbook also legitimizes Bulgaria’s status as a revisionist state.

In conclusion, Bulgarian textbooks evaluate World War I as a war of imperialist powers. However, Bulgaria’s participation in the war is presented as “legitimate”,

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<sup>51</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 198.

<sup>52</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 198.

<sup>53</sup> Gavrilova et al., 2007, 200.

<sup>54</sup> Gyuzelev et al., 2008, 244.

because Macedonia, considered Bulgarian land, had been lost to Serbia and Greece in the Second Balkan War, and Bulgaria sought to reclaim these territories as part of the Bulgarian homeland. The joyful reception of the Bulgarian army in Macedonia is also presented as evidence of this.

Bulgaria's defeat in the war and the new territorial losses imposed by the Treaty of Neuilly are shown as the "Second Great Catastrophe" in Bulgarian history. In this way, an image is conveyed that Bulgarians were the principal "victims" of the war.

The countries most often "othered" in the war are the Balkan states Serbia, Greece, and Romania. Among the European powers, France in particular is portrayed negatively due to the unjust treaty imposed on Bulgaria.

### 9. The Image of the Republic of Türkiye in Bulgarian History Textbooks

The textbooks also address Ottoman monuments, which are among the important contemporary topics of debate. Many works of Ottoman architecture from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries have been preserved, and today the Bulgarian and Turkish governments jointly carry out their restoration.<sup>55</sup>

In the 12th-grade history textbook, topics related to Türkiye include the Greek occupation after World War I, Mustafa Kemal's life, his efforts to modernize the newly established republic, and the adoption of the Surname Law, all of which are briefly mentioned.

One of the most important issues concerning Turks in history textbooks related to the communist period is the forced name-change policy and the compulsory migration of 1989. This topic is addressed in only three lines. According to this account, more than 300,000 "Bulgarian Turks"<sup>56</sup> migrated in 1989 due to forced name changes. In evaluating this issue, the statement is made that "the communist regime lost the trust of society and tarnished Bulgaria in the eyes of the world".<sup>57</sup>

Even though it is brief, the inclusion of this topic in history textbooks indicates a critical view of practices during Bulgaria's socialist period and shows that the forced name-change policy is regarded as a mistake.

<sup>55</sup> Stoyanova & Maneva, 2009, 64.

<sup>56</sup> In Bulgaria, the term "Bulgarian Turks" is deliberately used by Bulgarian historians to refer to the Turkish population. However, this designation is not welcomed by the Turks in Bulgaria. For more details, see: Mehmet Hacısalihođlu, "'89 Göçü' İle İlgili Tarih Yazımı ve Kamuoyu Algıları", *89 Göçü. Bulgaristan'da 1984-89 Azınlık Politikaları ve Türkiye'ye Zorunlu Göç* (Istanbul: BALKAR & BALMED, 2012), 36-38.

<sup>57</sup> Stoyanova & Maneva, 2009, 74.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Bulgarian history textbooks published from the 1990s to 2009 continue to construct a predominantly negative image of the Ottoman-Turkish past, despite significant political, institutional, and educational changes since 1990. Although the collapse of the socialist regime and Bulgaria's integration into European structures in 2007 created expectations for a more pluralistic historiography, the core narrative patterns regarding the Ottoman period have remained largely continuous. The analysis indicates that while the tone of textbooks has become more restrained, the fundamental interpretive framework remains largely unchanged.

In conclusion, the image of the Ottoman/Turks in Bulgarian history textbooks is generally negative. Terms such as "captivity", exploitation, and massacre, which were frequently used in history textbooks during the socialist period, appear far less often in the textbooks after Bulgaria's accession to the EU. However, the narratives still convey similar stereotypes. Ottoman conquests are still described as occupation and invasion; Ottoman rule is depicted as suffering and oppression; and Turks are portrayed as perpetrators of massacres. The reduction in harsh language does not mean that the overall perception in the textbooks has completely changed. This image continues to be reinforced by history textbooks and by history teachers shaped by nationalist thinking inherited from the socialist period.

Key historical episodes, such as the Ottoman conquest of Bulgarian lands, the April Uprising of 1876, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, and especially the Balkan Wars, are consistently framed as stages in a long national struggle for liberation and unification. These narratives emphasize Bulgarian heroism, sacrifice, and victimhood, while depicting the Ottoman Empire as a backward and illegitimate ruler of European territories. The Balkan Wars, in particular, are portrayed as a national epic in which military success was undermined by diplomatic injustice, further reinforcing a sense of historical grievance toward both neighboring Balkan states and the great powers.

Ultimately, the persistence of a negative image of the Ottomans/Turks suggests that meaningful change requires more than linguistic moderation. A genuine transformation would necessitate a critical reassessment of nationalist historiographical traditions, greater use of multiperspectival approaches, and an educational focus on shared histories alongside conflict. Without such changes, Bulgarian history textbooks are likely to continue reproducing one-dimensional representations that limit critical historical understanding and mutual empathy in the Balkans.

**Etik Beyanı**

Bu alıřmanın, zgn bir alıřma olduđunu; alıřmanın hazırlık, veri toplama, analiz ve bilgilerin sunumu olmak zere tm ařamalarından bilimsel etik ilke ve kurallarına uygun davrandıđımı; bu alıřma kapsamında elde edilmeyen tm veri ve bilgiler iin kaynak gsterdiđimi ve bu kaynaklara kaynakada yer verdiđimi; kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir deđiřiklik yapmadıđımı, alıřmanın Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)' in tm řartlarını ve kořullarını kabul ederek etik grev ve sorumluluklara riayet ettiđimi beyan ederim. Herhangi bir zamanda, alıřmayla ilgili yaptıđım bu beyana aykırı bir durumun saptanması durumunda, ortaya ıkacak tm ahlaki ve hukuki sonulara razı olduđumu bildiririm.

**Declaration**

I declare that this study is original; that I have acted by the principles and rules of scientific ethics at all stages of the study, including preparation, data collection, analysis, and presentation of information; that I have cited sources for all data and information not obtained within the scope of this study and included these sources in the bibliography; that I have not made any changes in the data used, and that I comply with ethical duties and responsibilities by accepting all the terms and conditions of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). I hereby declare that if a situation contrary to my statement regarding the study is detected, I agree to all moral and legal consequences that may arise.

The article is based on my TBİTAK Project report on Bulgarian history textbooks [TBİTAK 1001 Project No. 110K571]

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