

THE INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE 1876 APRIL UPRISING WITHIN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Abstract: *The importance of the 1876 April uprising lies not in its unique nature or scope but in the international repercussions that it incited. The rebellion itself was ill-prepared, ill executed and utterly unsuccessful. It ended in defeat. Nonetheless, the defeat was a success, in the sense that it provided the avenue by which Great Powers intervention could occur. The Ottoman Empire was the only Muslim great power. It was also the only Muslim state to rule over a vast Christian population, a great number of which resided in Rumelia. Throughout the nineteenth century the Great Powers - Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Russia and the latecomers, Germany and Italy - engaged in a full-fledged struggle to win the hearts and minds of the Balkan Christians, and thus draw them into their own sphere of influence. The Bulgarian revolt became an important step in a chain of events that would eventually result in the creation of a new state, Bulgaria. It could be argued that the April uprising in 1876 led directly to the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, which would change the map of Europe and create a new balance of power in which Germany would play a leading role.*

Keywords: *1878 April Uprising, Bulgaria, Great Powers, Ottoman Empires*

OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞU'NDA 1876 NİSAN AYAKLANMASININ ULUSLARARASI YANSIMALARI

Öz: *1876 Nisan'ındaki isyanının önemi sadece onun kendine mahsus niteliğinde ya da etki alanında değil aynı zamanda teşvik edilen uluslararası etkilerinden kaynaklanmaktadır. İsyân kötü hazırlanmış,*

kötü uygulanmış ve tamamen başarısızdır. Yenilgiyle sonuçlanmıştır. Buna rağmen, yenilgi Büyük Güçlerin müdahalesine bir yol sağlaması bakımından bir başarıdır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Müslüman olan tek büyük güçtü. Rumeli'de ikamet eden geniş bir Hristiyan nüfusu yöneten tek Müslüman devletti. 19. Yüzyıl boyunca, Büyük Güçler olan Avusturya-Macaristan, Büyük Britanya, Fransa, Rusya ve sonradan gelen Almanya ve İtalya, Balkan Hristiyanlarının kalplerini ve akıllarını kazanmak için tam kapsamlı bir mücadele yürütmüştür ve böylece onları kendi etki alanlarına çekmişlerdir. Bulgar isyanı, Bulgaristan'ın bir devlet olarak ortaya çıkmasına sebep olan olaylar zinciri içerisinde önemli bir yere sahiptir. Denenebilir ki, 1876 isyanı, Avrupa'nın haritasını değiştiren ve Almanya'nın lider pozisyonunda olduğu yeni bir güçler dengesi yaratan 1877-78 Osmanlı Rus çıkması sebep olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1878 İsyanı, Bulgaristan, Büyük Güçler, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu

The importance of the 1876 April uprising lies not in its unique nature or scope, but in the international repercussions that it incited. The rebellion itself was ill prepared, ill executed and utterly unsuccessful. It ended in defeat. Nonetheless, the defeat was a success in the sense that it provided the avenue by which Great Powers intervention could occur. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Rumelia, or the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire (Rumeli in Turkish), attracted increasing attention from the Great Powers. During this time, the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire (Rumelia) became a major battleground for the interests of the European powers.

The Ottoman Empire was the only Muslim great power. It was also the only Muslim state to rule over a vast Christian population, a great number of which resided in Rumelia. Therefore Great Powers - Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Russia and the latecomers, Germany and Italy - engaged in a full-fledged struggle to win the hearts and minds of the Balkan Christians, and thus draw them into their own sphere of influence. The diplomatic maneuvers of the European powers aggravated the upsurge of national sentiments already prevailing among the Christian subjects of the Sultan. In the spring of 1877 this upsurge exploded into a bloody war, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78.

It could be argued that the April uprising in 1876 led directly to the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 which would change the map of Europe and create a new balance of power and as such requires a thorough examination. If it hadn't been made the centerpiece of the British opposition leader William E. Gladstone's campaign to discredit Benjamin Disraeli's government, it would have gone down in history as yet another unsuccessful local revolt led by a small number of Russian educated Bulgarian revolutionaries.

However this is not what happened. This sporadic and ill prepared revolt became an important step in a chain of events that would eventually result in the creation of a new state, Bulgaria. The chain of events that would lead to Bulgarian autonomy and eventually independence started in the summer of 1875 with a revolt in an obscure village in Herzegovina. This unremarkable event marked the beginning of a crisis which quickly spread throughout the entire Balkan peninsula. Although it was judged at the outset to be merely "an internal Ottoman affair," the Herzegovina revolt developed into a full-blown military conflict which involved three of the Balkan states and Russia in war with the Ottoman Empire.

The revolt in Herzegovina spread to Bulgarian villages in the spring of 1876.¹ Had it not led to the Russo-Ottoman War in 1877, “this rebellion would have remained an unmitigated disaster.”² Its leaders had been either captured earlier or killed in battle during. Therefore, the “climatic point of the Bulgarian Renaissance found the Bulgarian people without an overall leader — and without a united leadership.”³ In the aftermath of the uprising, the revolutionary leaders were “either dead, in jail, in hiding, in desperate flight, or in disrepute” among the Bulgarian people.⁴

For one thing, the rebellion inflamed foreign public. The person who decided to capitalize on the harshness of Ottoman repression – or as he styled it, the “Bulgarian Horrors” – was the leader of the opposition Liberal party and the member of the British House of Commons, William Ewart Gladstone. More importantly however this rebellion and the way it was put down gave Russia a pretext to launch a war on the Ottoman Empire in order to save its fellow Orthodox Christian and Slavic brethren from a savage Oriental “yoke.”

1. THE UPRISING STARTS

There was a genuine national revival movement in Bulgaria in 1870s that was directly related to the gradual social transformation of Bulgarian life and to the emancipation of the Bulgarian Church from the authority of the Greek Patriarch. In short, it recognized the Bulgarians as a separate religious group which was the first step towards aspirations to be recognized as a separate national group as well. The new religious arrangement provided a ready organizational structure around which the national movement could rally.⁵ This gave an immense impetus to the awakening national feeling of the Bulgarian people. The intelligentsia however was not unified on methods or ultimate goals; rather, it was divided between revolutionaries and

1 The first news started arriving in the beginning of May 1876, 7 May 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 469, Doc. 242, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Part I, Vol.II, Series B, eds. K. Bourne and D.C. Watt, University Publication of America, 1984-, 197-197.

2 Thomas A. Meininger, *The Formation of Nationalist Bulgarian Intelligentsia, 1835-1878*, New York: Garland Pub., 1987, 388.

3 Ibid., 389.

4 Ibid.

5 See, T. A. Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, 1864-1872: A Study in Personal Diplomacy*, Madison, 1970.

Turkophiles. The revolutionaries advocated a nation-wide armed rebellion which would lead to independence, while the Turkophile group favored working with the Porte for more rights and broad autonomy.⁶ Economic crises aroused tensions in the Balkans periodically, but in general, “the peasant mass of the Bulgarian people refrained from rebellion. Furthermore, no true Bulgarian revolutionary tradition existed.”⁷

In April 1876, the unrest spread to Bulgarian villages. Although the Ottoman government possessed intelligence that the Bulgarians were getting ready to revolt, it did not take any precautionary measures to prevent it. After the ill-conceived rebellion of the previous year, and due to Russian insistence that the presence of large numbers of troops would agitate the Bulgarians, there were virtually no regular troops stationed in the vilayet of Edirne (Adrianople.) Thus, when a rebellion broke out in the spring of 1876, the government was caught off-guard.⁸

The Russian consul in Filibe, Nayden Gerov, a native Bulgarian in Russian service, had been lobbying the local population and supplying young locals with arms and ammunitions. However, the rebellion was sporadic, ill-organized, inefficient and not very popular. It broke out prematurely. In the village of Otlak and in some other villages in outskirts of Pazardjik, insurgents started killing Muslims and setting their houses on fire.⁹ They also set fire to the houses of those Bulgarians who refused to join them.¹⁰ A small party of regular soldiers was sent from Filibe to protect the Muslims but they were obstructed and outnumbered by the insurgents, so they returned to Filibe.¹¹ The insurgents then started indiscriminately killing Muslims.¹² They set the train station of Belva on fire with many people still inside it, and killed

6 Meininger, *The Formation of a Nationalist...*, 351-392.

7 Ibid. The closest model to such tradition were the *khayduti* (bandits, from the Turkish, *haydut*) who were organized in sporadic bands, *cheti*, to plunder and maraud, but whose acts and leaders, *voevodi*, were subsequently greatly idealized in order to fit the images and plans of modern political nationalism.

8 24 May 1876, White to Elliot, Doc 304, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 227.

9 6 May 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Adrianople, Doc. 244, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 197-198.

10 Ibid., 198.

11 Mahmut Celaleddin Pasha, *Mirat-i Hakkikat*, 3 vols., ed. İsmet Miroğlu, Istanbul: Tercuman, 1979, 125-132.

12 Also 12 May 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Adrianople, Doc. 283, Inclosure in Doc. 282, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 216-217.

the chief of the village of Avrat-alan and his entire family.¹³ In the span of several days, twenty- five villages in the kazas of Filibe and Pazarcik went up in flames and many lives were lost.¹⁴ The British Vice-Consul in Burgaz (Bourgas), Brophy reported that the insurrection would not be confined to Filibe, that the plans of the insurgents involved six more centers located mostly in the Balkan mountain chain (Stara Planina) and that in each of these six localities depots of arms, ammunition, and provisions were hidden.¹⁵

Filibe's Chief Aziz Pasha immediately asked the Porte to send at least one battalion of soldiers to the affected area, but the request was initially denied.¹⁶ The Russian Embassy advised the Porte to not blow the matter out of proportions and refrain from sending troops.¹⁷ Killing and looting continued. Finally, receiving news of many similar occurrences from Filibe and Pazarcik, the Porte relented. Derviş Pasha, the Serasker, was removed for incompetence. Adil Pasha who replaced him, immediately send five to six battalions of regular troops to Edirne which, after severe fighting, were able to chase the rebels into the mountains. The Council of Ministers was reshuffled too. These events set the stage for Abdülaziz's ouster and brought the spotlight onto Bulgaria.¹⁸

Some wealthy villages in the Rhodope mountains — Koprivshitsa, Panagurishte and Batak — also revolted in poorly coordinated disturbances which can hardly be called a revolution.¹⁹ No risings took place anywhere else in Bulgarian-populated lands. The Bulgarians reportedly believed that they missed the moment to take advantage of the situation when the Ottoman troops were tied up in Herzegovina and

13 Celalleddin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, 125-132. British sources corroborate the story in general, 9 May 1876, Consul Reade to Elliot, Rustchuk, Doc. 269, Inclosure in Doc. 268, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 208. Also 12 May 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Adrianople, Doc. 283, Inclosure in Doc. 282, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 216-217.

14 Celalleddin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, 125-132. The insurgents reportedly mutilated the corpse of the chief's daughter, cutting off her vagina and wearing it as a bracelet. 128. Also 12 May 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Adrianople, Doc. 283, Inclosure in Doc. 282, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 216-217.

15 13 May 1876, Brophy to Elliot, Bourgas, Doc. 286, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 218.

16 Celalleddin Paşa testified that he personally investigated the matter and found it to be true. Celalleddin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, 129.

17 19 June 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 644, Doc. 353, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 260.

18 Celalleddin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, 130-134.

19 See reports from Consul Reade to Elliot, 16 May 1876, 20 May 1876, 22 May 1876, Doc. 291, Doc. 292, Doc. 293, Doc. 294, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 221-223.

that now it was too late to hope for success.²⁰ In Bulgarian historiography, the April uprising is portrayed as “the culmination point of the national revolution which was carried under the banner “Freedom or Death.” Bulgarian historians also claim that the entire Bulgarian “nation” rose to break the chains of enslavement. They further argue that the only reason it did not flare up in some regions was the fact that there were inadequate preparations or the Ottoman military machine prevented it.²¹ However, regular troops were not even present in Bulgaria in substantial numbers. The Ottoman government did not have adequate regular troops at its disposal.²² The troops were tied up fighting rebels in Herzegovina and Bosnia. Irregular troops, known as *başıbozüks*, were made up of volunteers from the local Muslim population.

2. THE EVENTS IN BATAK

The “Bulgarian Horrors” gained notoriety after the events that took place in Batak on 24 April 1876. Batak, a small town on the northern edge of the Rhodope range, is today hailed in Bulgaria as one of the most sacred places in Bulgarian national memory. It is synonymous with suffering, grief, and heroism in the struggle for national independence.²³ It had been the focus of Gladstone’s campaign in the summer of 1876, during which he attacked the Ottoman Empire, the “Turks,” and their “cruel” methods of rule. He had long been waiting for a reason to launch a campaign to discredit his rival Disraeli and the events in Bulgaria in the spring of 1876 provided the springboard for such a discrediting campaign. The Ottoman government was accused for failing to effectively protect its Christian subject and being the sole reason for the humanitarian catastrophe in which Batak played the leading role. As recent research has shown, however, the events in Batak were much more complicated.²⁴

20 20 May 1876, Reade to Elliot, Doc. 294, Inclosure in Doc. 293, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 223.

21 See for example the collection of memoirs published to commemorate the centennial of the April uprising *April 1876, Spomeni* (Memoirs), ed. Iono Mitev, Sofia, 1987, 5-7.

22 For example, 20 May 1876, Reade to Elliot, Doc. 294, Inclosure in Doc. 293, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 223.

23 The church in Batak where the massacre occurred has been turned into a national monument to which, until recently, every school kid, this author included, had to go on a school trip to see its bloodstained walls to be reminded of the cruelty of the Ottomans.

24 See Tetsuya Sahara, “Two Different Images,” *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz with Peter Sluglett, Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, Utah Series in Middle Eastern Studies, 2011, 479-510.

Batak, the largest Christian village in the northern Rhodope mountains, was a small hamlet in a predominantly Muslim region. Muslims living in the surrounding villages were called Pomaks, Muslims whose mother tongue is a Bulgarian dialect. Some also claim that the Pomaks share ancestral roots with their Christian neighbors. Therefore, despite having a different religion, most of the population in the Batak area spoke the same Bulgarian tongue.²⁵

The uprising in Batak started in the night of 21 April 1876. Its main organizer was Petar Goranov, an influential person among the Christians and connected to the revolutionary network of the radical nationalists in Romania.²⁶ Under his direction the villagers had begun to organize and arm by buying arms and munitions, in some cases even from their Muslim neighbors. They openly exchanged livestock for guns. Soon, Batak was turned into a “military camp” with about 2,000 well-trained fighters, 500 flintlock rifles, 380 pistols, 6 revolvers, 8 repeaters, 150 *yatagans* (swords), and even several cannons.²⁷ Both Stoianov and Goranov, the two main Bulgarian sources, tell almost the same story about the reasons of the rising.²⁸ Several villagers who had visited the nearby town thought they had heard rumors of a general uprising. Goranov took this news for granted and decided to take action.

The next day, the entire village convened and priests performed religious rituals praying for victory. Goranov recounted that rebels were instructed to disarm local Muslims and attack the few Muslim guards. At that time the rebels numbered about 1,100 soldiers, and were organized into two battalions. These battalions were divided into platoons and companies, plus perhaps as many as 50 cavalymen.²⁹ With this organized force the rebels began attacking and indiscriminately killing many Muslims.³⁰ When the news of the uprising reached the government, reserves were immediately mobilized

25 Tetsuya Sahara, “Two Different Images,” *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, 481.

26 Sahara, 480.

27 These numbers should be reliable since they were provided by the son of the main leader Petar Goranov, Angel Goranov (Boicho) in his memoir *V stanieto i klaneto v Batak: Istoricheski ocherk*, 23.

28 Sahara, 484.

29 Goranov, 38.

30 Ismail Bey, in his *Memoirs*, describes these killings in great length and detail. For Batak see 21-24, 33-35. Ismail Bey, *Memoire sur les evenements du sandjak de Philippopoli*, Constantiople: Typographie et lithographie centrales, 1877, 12. Also in BOA, HR. SYS. 292/1.

31 Goranov, 41-42.

and rifles and ammunitions distributed to the local population. When two unarmed policemen went to investigate the matter, they were told that “the Bulgarians of Batak took up arms to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the Sultan and that they were ready to fight to the last drop of their blood.”³¹ The unarmed policemen were then shot dead, which transformed the local violence into an open challenge to the Ottoman state.

For the next several days, things remained calm due to ongoing peace talks. In the original plan, Batak was to become a center for the surrounding villages, but due to the premature outbreak of the uprising, no other villages joined. Batak was to fight alone. In the meantime about two hundred Pomaks gathered in the outskirts of Batak. On April 30, other Pomak irregulars (*başıbozüks*) from the area under the command of the police chief, Ahmed Ağa Barutinli, arrived on the scene.³² All sources agree that the rebels were surrounded and outnumbered by the Muslims, but still they refused to surrender. The first battle began after the Bulgarian side opened fire. However, Stoianov and Goranov disagree on the outcome of the first battle, the former claiming victory and the later admitting defeat.³³ That night, Goranov with several hundred of his followers abandoned the village escaping to the mountains. Another part of the rebels led by Trendafilov decided to stay, thinking it was better to defend themselves inside the village. In any event, the chief instigator of the uprising was the first to abandon Batak to its fate. This flight made the village even more vulnerable, offering little resistance.³⁴

Then, on 1 May, another fight took place. The Muslims experienced heavy casualties and were running low on food. The concern for food and “the strong feeling of revenge for the lost soldiers may account for the extent of the atrocities that followed,”³⁵ as well as subsequent looting. The massacres began after Ahmed Ağa proposed a ceasefire on the condition of Bulgarian disarmament.³⁶ The condition was accepted. When it was completed however, the *başıbozüks* started to massacre and plunder. Some Bulgarians fled to the mountains, but most took shelter in the village school and church. In despair, they tried to

32 Sahara, 487.

33 Ibid., 486-489.

34 Ibid., 490-91.

35 Ibid., 492.

36 Ibid.

organize some resistance, but to no avail. With the Pomak Ahmed Ağa Barutanli lies the responsibility for the ensuing massacre.³⁷

Killing and plundering continued for several days.³⁸ The Muslim perpetrators slew large numbers of Christians, including many women and children. They burnt houses and buildings, in some cases with people inside them. When the Muslim perpetrators were done, Batak was turned into rubble.³⁹ It is clear from the Bulgarian sources that the people of Batak started an uprising in which they killed innocent unarmed Muslims, but were then abandoned by their leader and many young soldiers.⁴⁰ In return, there followed the indiscriminate massacre of unarmed villagers. The humanitarian side of it is heartbreaking and tragic. Politically, this episode led to extended diplomatic maneuvering by all the interested powers, culminating in the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman War the following year.

3. FIRST NEWS OF ATROCITIES

The news of the April uprising and its aftermath was very slow to reach the Ottoman as well as the European capitals. For a long while, only rumors were heard of what had happened in the Rhodope mountains, but the news was ambiguous.⁴¹ One place the rumors circulated widely was Robert College, an American missionary school, which had a big number of Bulgarian students. These students heard reports about the events from their relatives and passed it on to one of the teachers, Albert Long. Albert Long had been a missionary in Bulgaria for seven years and was very partial to the Bulgarian cause.⁴² He received several letters from Bulgarians alerting him to the events, which he brought to the attention of his superior, George Washburn, the President of Robert College. Shocked by what they read, Long and Washburn brought the

37 Kemal H. Karpat, *The Turks of Bulgaria: the history, culture and political fate of a minority*, Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 1990, 192.

38 Sahara, 493.

39 Goranov, 94-97, Stojanov, Sahara, 492-493.

40 Sahara, 494.

41 Consul White writes about the remoteness of the region and the difficulty on obtaining information. White to Elliot, Doc. 304, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 227. On 8 June 1876 Elliot wrote to Derby that "the Bulgarian insurrection appears to be unquestionably put down, although, I regret to say, with cruelty, and in some places, with brutality." Elliot to Derby, No. 604, Doc. 336, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 247.

42 Sahara, 494.

letters to the British ambassador, Henry Elliot, asking him to use his influence on the behalf of the Bulgarians. Elliot did not think that the letters were credible enough to require official communication to his government.⁴³

Disheartened, Long and Washburn brought the letters to Edwin Pears, a British barrister who had arrived in Istanbul several years earlier and who worked as an amateur correspondent to the London's *Daily News*. Pears wrote an article entitled "Moslem Atrocities in Bulgaria," which was published on 23 June 1876.⁴⁴ According to Pears, "Orders had gone out from the Turkish authorities to the Moslem villagers to kill their Christian neighbors."⁴⁵ Pears also listed the name of thirty-seven villages which had allegedly been destroyed, and claimed that thousands of innocent Christian villagers had been "indiscriminately slaughtered."⁴⁶ The news immediately created a sensation in London, prompting two members of the Parliament to inquire with the Cabinet about their validity.⁴⁷

Although Pears was accused of inaccurately reporting events, he published a second article in the *Daily News* on 30 July, increasing the number of the villages to sixty. Elliot believed that Pears received his information from two Bulgarians, relatives of one of the presumed ringleader of the revolt in Filibe, and that "information from such a source can only be regarded as untrustworthy."⁴⁸ As Pears himself admits, his account was based on letters, rumors, and reports furnished by American missionaries.⁴⁹ Forty years later, in his memoirs, Pears continued to express the belief that while "there was no revolt in

43 The events that took place were recounted in the report to the Secretary of State, A. Fish, Maynard to Fish, Constantinople, November 21, 1876 in Senate, Executive Document, No. 21 (1876-77), Serial No.1719, reproduced in David Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1939, 401-404.

44 The full text "The Assassinations at Constantinople. Moslem Atrocities in Bulgaria" is also given in Doc. 359, Inclosure in Doc. 358, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 263-266.

45 Edwin Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople: The Recollection of Sir Edwin Pears, 1873-1915*, 14. Also "The Assassinations at Constantinople. Moslem Atrocities in Bulgaria," Doc. 359, Inclosure in Doc. 358, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 265.

46 "The Assassinations at Constantinople. Moslem Atrocities in Bulgaria," Doc. 359, Inclosure in Doc. 358, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 263-264. Also Pears, 15.

47 Sahara, 494-95.

48 25 August 1876, Lumley to Derby, No. 88, Doc. 442, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 325.

49 Edwin Pears, *Turkey and Its People*, 17. Also, 25 August 1876, Limley to Derby, No. 88, Doc. 442, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 325.

Bulgaria . . . there had been considerable expression of discontent. The idea of the Turks was to crush out the spirit of the Bulgarian people, and thus prevent revolt.”⁵⁰ This allegation is very surprising especially in light of the fact that Zakhari Stoianov’s collection which claims otherwise had been already published in English.⁵¹

Pears’ account, however, had set the tone for the subsequent press coverage in England. In the English press, the events were presented as unprovoked attacks by fanatical Muslims on their unsuspecting, peaceful, and unoffending Christian fellows. Worse, the Ottoman government was said to have encouraged these attacks and to have failed to punish the guilty parties.⁵² Despite such press accounts, Elliot wrote that “all this was entirely untrue . . . , for it was the Christians who had been the first aggressors, treacherously massacring unsuspecting Turkish *zaptiehs* and burning many Mahometan villages.”⁵³

Indeed, Elliot attributed direct responsibility for what happened to Russia by claiming that the Russian government had encouraged the insurrection — giving “almost official assistance” to the insurrection in Herzegovina and Bosnia. In the winter of 1875-76, thought Elliot, Russian agents “directed by the Slav committees of Moscow and Odessa, which were in close alliance with General Ignatiev, were busy in organizing a rising in Bulgaria.”⁵⁴

According to Elliot, the first news started coming to Istanbul around 4 May.⁵⁵ For some time, he reported they “heard of nothing but the excesses that were being committed by armed bands of Christian Bulgarians.”⁵⁶ Austrian consular agents in Edirne (Adrianople) and Filibe (Philippopolis) reported that at least five Muslim villages were burnt by the insurgents. Eye-witness accounts kept coming from the

50 Pears, *Turkey and Its People*, 17.

51 Zachary Stoyanoff, *Pages from the Autobiography of a Bulgarian Insurgent*; Sahara, 496.

52 For a detailed digest of the British press see Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors*.

53 Elliot, 256. Also 6 July 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 716, Doc. 373, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 269. Also see reports from British consuls, Reade and Dupuis, 19 July 1876, Reade to Elliot, Doc 397, 22 July 1876, Baring to Elliot, Doc. 402, 27 July 1876, Baring to Elliot, Doc. 301, 20 July 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Doc 416, 7 August 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Doc. 433, 19 August 1876, Dupuis to Derby, Doc 441, 25 August 1876, Lumley to Derby, Doc. 442, etc. *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 281-325.

54 *Ibid.*, 257.

55 4 May 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 194, Doc. 230, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 191.

56 Elliot, 257.

British consular agents as well. According to these reports, at least twenty small villages in addition to Otlaköy and Belova were burned, and outrages against both peaceful Bulgarians and Muslims were being widely committed.⁵⁷ In Belova, for example, Muslim guards were hacked into pieces.⁵⁸ Afterwards, well-armed rebels entered the village “led by priests, declaring, with crucifixes in hand, that that was the way to exterminate Islam.”⁵⁹ The consul in Rusçuk also reported that a Circassian village had been burnt by the insurgents and that he was afraid that the Circassians might take the matters in their own hands and retaliate.⁶⁰

The British ambassador sent several letters home alerting Derby to the activities of the insurgents and to the activities of the local authorities in arming of *başıbozüks* and other volunteers.⁶¹ Elliot claimed to have protested against the use of irregulars and urged the Porte to dispatch regular troops on the scene. Elliot was supported by ambassador of Austria-Hungary, Count Zichy, even though Zichy usually sided with the Russians.⁶² The advice that prevailed, however, was that of the Russian Ambassador, who had a great deal of influence over the Grand Vizier, Mahmud Nedim Pasha. Ignatiev, as he had done in the outbreak of the insurrection in Herzegovina and Bosnia, declared that these were minor disturbances which the Porte should not turn into major events by sending troops.⁶³

Elliot also claimed that, due to the remoteness of the region, reliable details of the news did not reach the capital until mid-June, almost six weeks after the “April uprising.”⁶⁴ Later, he even alleged that a telegram

57 7 May 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 469, Doc. 242; 9 May 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 473, Doc. 243, 6 May 1876, Doc. 244, Inclosure in Doc. 243, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 196-199.

58 12 May 1876, Dupuis to Elliot, Adrianople, Doc. 283, Inclosure in Doc. 282, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 216-217.

59 Elliot, 259.

60 9 May 1876, Reade to Elliot, Rustchuk, Doc. 269, Inclosure in Doc. 268, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 208-209.

61 See his published letters of May 28, June 8 and June 19. 8 June Elliot to Derby, No. 603, Doc. 335, confidential and 8 June 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 604, Doc. 336, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 246-247; 19 June 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 644, Doc. 353, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 260-261. Also see 26 May 1876, Reade to Elliot, Rustchuk, Doc. 330, 30 May 1876, Reade to Elliot, Rustchuk, No. 7, Doc. 331, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 242-243.

62 Elliot, 258.

63 Elliot, 257-258.

64 24 May 1876, White to Elliot, Doc. 304, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 227.

sent by the vice-consul in Edirne had been withheld from him so that he was unjustly accused of withholding and concealing crucial information.⁶⁵ Elliot acknowledged that the withheld letter revealed for the first time that Bulgarian men, women, and children had been slaughtered on an unprecedented scale. He also dwelled on the fact that, as deplorable and extensive these horrors were, there were nevertheless accompanied by systematically fabricated stories⁶⁶ which were published anonymously in the newspapers and which were accepted without question in England. “Those who ventured to say that they were untrue or that these reports were exaggerated were denounced to public execration as sympathizing with the ill-doers.”⁶⁷ He remarked that in Istanbul at the time, it “was next to impossible to ascertain what was true and what was false; for, while on the one side the Turkish denials were not to be trusted, the assertions made on the others were quite as little veracious.”⁶⁸ He said that, not trusting Ottoman enquiries, he had several of the stories personally investigated and that they proved untrue. Nevertheless, instructed by Derby, Elliot sent Mr. Walter Baring, a Second Secretary of the British Embassy, to investigate the matter on the spot.⁶⁹

4. THE BARING REPORT

Baring started his investigation on 19 July 1876. He took a long time to complete the report, but when it was finally published on 1 September 1876, Baring’s report found the number of the actual victims was to have amounted to about a tenth of that given in the English newspapers.⁷⁰ Even that number was subsequently found to have been

65 Elliot, 260. Consul White writes about the remoteness of the region and the difficulty on obtaining information. White to Elliot, Doc. 304, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 227. On 8 June 1876 Elliot wrote to Derby that “the Bulgarian insurrection appears to be unquestionably put down, although, I regret to say, with cruelty, and in some places, with brutality.” Elliot to Derby, No. 604, Doc. 336, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 247.

66 19 June 1876, Elliot to Derby, No. 644, Doc. 353, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 260. Elliot suggests that “many of the revolting details ... are either purely imaginary, or at least, grossly exaggerated.”

67 Elliot, 261.

68 Ibid.

69 Elliot, 266.

70 Baring’s report was completed on 1 September 1876 and can be found in Doc. 451, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 331-356. Newspapers such as *The London Daily News* articles on 22 August 1876; *Popolo Romano* news of 25 August 1876, No. 235.

inflated after hundreds of those he had counted among the slain returned to their villages.⁷¹ Derby noted wryly that “it seems that dead Bulgarians are every day coming to life: having escaped and hidden themselves during the massacres, and returned to their villages now that all is quiet again.”⁷² The actual number of those killed during the April uprising might never be determined with certainty. Baring noted that during his investigation the number of those killed had been estimated to be anywhere between 200,000 to 1,830, the former a calculation by Bulgarians, the later official Ottoman estimate.⁷³ The number of the dead Bulgarians (Christians) had been estimated to be as high as 30,000 by the Bulgarian historians and around 10,000 to 12,000 by others. Baring thought that those who “talk about 25,000 or 30,000 lives lost draw their information almost entirely from their own fertile brains.”⁷⁴ Baring estimates the number of people perished in the district of Filib to be 12,000.⁷⁵ The number of those killed in Batak alone ranges from 1,000 to 8,000 depending on the source.⁷⁶ Baring, by assigning ten people to each house, estimated the number of killed in Batak to be 5,000.⁷⁷ Ismail Bey’s statistics give the number of the population of Batak before the rising as 1552 males and 1937 females, after the massacre 788 males, 1110 females, which made the number of those dead or disappeared 766 males and 827 females. He also gave the number of people presumed dead who have subsequently returned to their homes as of September 1876 as 135 males and 112 females.⁷⁸

71 Elliot, 266.

72 8 May 1877, *The diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826-93) between 1878 and 1893: a selection*, ed. John Vincent, Oxford: Leopard’s Head Press, 2003, from now on *Derby Diaries*, 399.

73 Baring’s report, 1 September 1876 and can be found in Doc. 451, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 337.

74 *Ibid.*, 339

75 *Ibid.*

76 Eugene Schuyler’s numbers are 15,000 total with 5,000 in Batak in Schuyler’s Preliminary Report published with Januarius MacGahan in a letter to the *London Daily News* of 22 August 1876. Bulgarian historians list this number even higher as 8,000 in Nikolay Haytov, *Vreme za razhv’rliane na kam’ni*, Izdatelstvo Christo Botev, 1994, 64. Ottoman archival sources and the historians who ground their work in the Ottoman archives estimate the number of Batak victims to be around 1,400. See below, also Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, 6th ed., 2008, 60; Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 69.

77 Baring’s report, 1 September 1876 and can be found in Doc. 451, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 337.

78 Ismail Bey, *Memoire sur les evenements du sandjak de Philippopoli*, Constantinople: Typographie et lithographie centrales, 1877, tables on pp. 41-42.

The Baring report did confirm that in many villages massacres and brutality took place on a scale that nobody in Istanbul had previously credited. This part of the report was consequently made the focal point of every newspaper article and every meeting held in England.⁷⁹ But there was another part to the report that did not receive much attention in England. That part stated that “a conspiracy on a very large scale had been hatching for many months.”⁸⁰ Mahmud Pasha had been warned of it, but due to Ignatiev’s influence, he had taken no action to avert it. According to the report, if Mahmud Pasha had sent regular troops on time, the excesses could have prevented.⁸¹ The Baring report also found that the insurrection was planned by Russian agents such as Vankov and Benkovski who succeeded in persuading the peasants that Russian armies would come to support them and enable them to exterminate the Ottomans.⁸² In March 1876, the Bulgarian revolutionary committee in Bucharest, sent twenty new emissaries into Rumelia to agitate the Bulgarians to rise against the Ottoman government.⁸³ The date of the rebellion was initially fixed for 1 May but was then postponed for 13 May.⁸⁴ The plan of action was: to destroy as much of the railroad as possible; to burn Edirne, Filibe, Sofia, Tatar Pazarcik, Tehtiman, Isladi and number of villages; to attack villages and kill all Muslims who resisted and take their property. Benkovski reportedly told the peasants to burn their houses as they would afterwards be rebuilt of marble and that a large Russian army was ready to cross the Balkans and that about 13,000 men from Batak and the neighbouring towns were coming to their aid.⁸⁵ Baring had been subsequently attacked by the press, i.e. *Daily*

79 Elliot, 267. Ottoman archival documents also discuss such meetings and the agitation the alleged atrocities in Bulgaria produced in England. For example see 21 September 1876 Musurus to Safvet, London, BOA, HR.SYS. No 291/6, No. 6266/285 and 21 September 1876 Musurus to Safvet, London, BOA, HR.SYS. No 291/6, No. 6268/287. Also see Safvet’s reply to very tactfully treat the matter and seek for intelligent ways to rectify public opinion in England, 12 October 1876 Safvet to Musurus, BOA, HR.SYS. No 291/6, No. 45198/170.

80 Elliot, 267.

81 Baring’s report, 1 September 1876 and can be found in Doc. 451, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 333.

82 Baring’s report, 1 September 1876 and can be found in Doc. 451, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 331-333. Also Elliot, 267. These statements are supported by the writings of the Bulgarian revolutionaries as well, see the works of Stoianov, Botev etc. Also see the collection of articles published on the occasion of the centennial of the April uprising, *Aprilskoto v’stanie i iztochnata kriza 1875-1878* ed. N. Todorov and S. Damianov, Sofia: BAN, 1977 especially by N. Todorov, “Aprilskoto v’stanie i negovoto miasto v Iztochnata kriza (1875-1878)”, 9-24 and by D. Doinov, “Starozagorskoto v’stanie i s’bitiata na Balkanite prez 1875,” 25-44.

83 Baring’s report, 1 September 1876 and can be found in Doc. 451, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol.II, 333.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

News, for traveling with a large retinue of Ottoman officials which intimidated Bulgarians. He also did not speak Bulgarian and did not take a Bulgarian guide with him.⁸⁶ Baring replied that all accusations were false that he was only accompanied by two or three *zaptie* (Ottoman policeman), but so were British and American investigators Schuyler and McGahan. And while he did not speak Bulgarian but neither did Schuyler and McGahan. He acknowledged that he did not take a Bulgarian with him, but asked, “are Bulgarians the only people in the world who speak the truth?”⁸⁷ The Ottoman government found the Baring report to exaggerate the number of the victims. Aleko Pasha urged Safvet Pasha to send him the results of Sadullah Bey’s investigation as soon as possible so that he could more effectively refute the exaggerations published in the European press.⁸⁸

5. MACGAHAN AND SCHUYLER INVESTIGATE

Simultaneously, the English *Daily News* began investigating the events in Bulgaria. The *Daily News* dispatched Januarius MacGahan, an Irish-American journalist, on a fact-mission to Istanbul to investigate Pears’ allegations. MacGahan had been trying for a while to find a way to cover the events in Bulgaria.⁸⁹ He had approached the *Herald* and the *Times* of London, but failed due to “his reputation for sensational proclivities.”⁹⁰ Richard Millman, an American historian and author of *The Bulgarian Massacres Reconsidered*, classified MacGahan as “a famous pro-Russian propagandist and one of the earliest examples of “yellow journalism”... He had been a correspondent in Russia and became a favorite in the tsar’s court. He married a lady from an old Russian family in 1872.”⁹¹

At the same time the United States charged the diplomat Eugene

86 5 September 1876, Baring to Elliot, Doc. 457, Inclosure in Doc. 455, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 375.

87 *Ibid.*, 376.

88 28 November 1876, Aleko Pasha to Safvet Pasha, Vienna, BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri), HR. SYS. 291/4, No. 7145/795. The Porte had several people investigate the insurgence, Edib Efendi, Ismail Bey, Şakir Bey and the most expansive of it, Sadullah Bey’s commission.

89 5 September 1876, Baring to Elliot, Doc. 456, Inclosure in Doc. 455, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 374.

90 Dale Walker, *Januarius MacGahan: The Life and Campaigns of an American War Correspondent*, 170.

91 Richard Millman, “The Bulgarian Massacre Reconsidered,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (April 1980): 228.

Schuyler with investigating the Bulgarian uprising. Schuyler had served in St. Petersburg and had just been appointed consul-general to the American legation in Istanbul.⁹² Schuyler was a self-proclaimed “Slavophile” and seems to have been influenced by Russian claims that Christians had no rights under Ottoman rule. Schuyler asked to be sent to Bulgaria so that he could “bring back irrefragably proved facts which will show to the civilized world what sort of a Government is this of England’s protégé in the East.”⁹³ Schuyler also “made no attempt to conceal his violent antipathy for everything Turkish and openly expressed the hope that the Ottoman Empire would shortly fall into pieces.”⁹⁴

Schuyler and MacGahan went to Bulgaria together. They were also accompanied by an employee of the Russian embassy, Prince Tseretelev, and a Bulgarian from Robert College who served as a guide and interpreter. Tseretelev was acting in the name of Naiden Gerov, the Russian Vice-consul in Filibe, who was “generally accredited with having had a considerable share in getting up the late insurrection, and he [was] even said to have visited some of the villages and there incited the people to revolt.”⁹⁵ When the group reached Bulgaria they carefully avoided any contact with the Muslim population. Schuyler justified this avoidance because he feared that Muslim authorities would prevent him “from having free access to the Bulgarians.”⁹⁶ As a result, his account was based solely on Bulgarian sources. Batak, which had already become symbol of Muslim atrocities, was one of the first villages to be visited. They reached it by the beginning of August and were received with open arms.⁹⁷

Batak had no place to accommodate them, which meant that the party could stay for only few hours to investigate. They did so in haste and rushed to “escape from the fearful sight and equally terrible stench.”⁹⁸ This hurrying led them to rely almost exclusively on the testimony of survivors and to make elementary mistakes in counting the number of the houses. They estimated that there had been 900 houses in the village

92 Eugene Schuyler, *Selected Essays with a Memoir by Evelyn Schuyler Schaeffer*, 62.

93 Ibid.

94 5 September 1876, Baring to Elliot, Doc. 456, Inclosure in Doc. 455, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 374.

95 Ibid.

96 Schuyler, 65.

97 Sahara, 497.

98 Schuyler, 71.

and assigned ten people to each house – estimating that the original population of the village was 9,000 people.⁹⁹ Modern Bulgarian historians, however, estimate the number of the houses to have been at most 500 and the population at no more than 4,000.¹⁰⁰ Schuyler's report estimated that at least 5,000 persons perished in Batak.¹⁰¹ Afterwards, MacGahan claimed that, "There was a weak attempt at an insurrection in three or four villages, but none whatever in Batak, and it does not appear that a single Turk was killed there."¹⁰² MacGahan nonetheless published several letters in *Daily News* in which he graphically described the scenes of the massacre and insisted that the Turks were envious of the rich and prosperous village of Batak. His letters greatly agitated the English public. Schuyler's report, written in a similar tone, gave them credibility because it was coming from the consul general of supposedly impartial country, the USA. Schuyler wrote that after careful investigation he was "unable to find that the Bulgarians committed any outrages or atrocities, or any acts that deserve that name."¹⁰³ Moreover, Schuler claimed that "No Turkish women or children were killed in cold blood. No Mussulman women were violated. No Mussulmans were tortured. No purely Turkish village was attacked or burnt."¹⁰⁴ According to Millman, "Schuyler and MacGahan, hating the Ottomans, found ample evidence in their tour for such feeling, and in their reports justified their prejudices and contempt by describing the enormity of what they had heard and observed."¹⁰⁵

Schuyler's conduct aggrieved the Ottoman authorities and they officially protested to the American authorities.¹⁰⁶ The Ottoman government objected to Schuyler's activities on the grounds that he had openly proclaimed himself against the Ottoman government and acted

99 Sahara, 498.

100 Sahara, 498. In May 2007 a public conference was scheduled by Martina Baleva, a Bulgarian historian, and Ulf Brunnbauer to present their research on the Batak massacre. Bulgarian media reported that the historians were trying to deny the massacre which led to a substantial controversy. On 3 April 2011 the victims at Batak were canonized as saints by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, an event that has not happened in over a century.

101 Report by Mr. Schuyler on the Bulgarian Atrocities, 10 August 1876, Philippopoli, Doc. 452, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 359.

102 MacGahan, *The Turkish Atrocities*, 25.

103 Report by Mr. Schuyler on the Bulgarian Atrocities, 10 August 1876, Philippopoli, Doc. 452, Inclosure in Doc. 450, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 360.

104 Ibid.

105 Millman, "The Bulgarian Massacre Reconsidered," 229.

106 in particular see Aristarchi to Fish, Washington, January 30, 1876 published in Department of State Archives, "Turkey, Notes," Vol. III., reproduced in Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors*, 409-410.

as correspondent of various newspapers.¹⁰⁷ The US State Department was very unhappy with the situation, claiming they were not informed of Schuyler's controversial actions. As a result, the State Department was obliged to obtain its information "from fragmentary publications in European journals."¹⁰⁸ The government of the United States formally reprimanded Schuyler for "departure from diplomatic propriety and breach of official conduct."¹⁰⁹ Fish, the Secretary of State, disapproved Schuyler's "improprieties" that cost the good will of the Ottoman Empire and expressed hope that they would not be repeated.¹¹⁰ For his part, President Hayes of the United States hesitated "to recall Mr. Schuyler at this time solely for fear that doing so might be misinterpreted in Europe as indicating a want of sympathy in behalf of those who are represented by Mr. Schuyler as suffering at the hands of the Turks."¹¹¹

6. CANON HENRY LIDDON AND MALCOLM MCCOLL WEIGH IN

Another incident that exacerbated the anti-Ottoman and anti-Cabinet campaign in England was prompted by Canon Henry Liddon, canon of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and Professor of Holy Scripture at Oxford University, and Mr. Malcolm McColl. Liddon and McColl claimed that while aboard a riverboat they had seen a man impaled on a stake in front of an Ottoman guard's house. They claimed other stakes were nearby, ready for use. However, nobody else on the steamer could corroborate the story.¹¹² Their accusations were met with derision by even the most vehement adversaries of the Ottomans: "for they well knew that for very many years there had been no such thing as an execution by impalement."¹¹³

Gladstone, however, was not deterred. He pronounced that the question

107 Ibid.

108 Draft No.99, Fish to Maynard, January 26, 1877, and Fish to Schuyler, January 26, 1877, Department of State Archives, "Turkey, Instructions," Vol. VIII. reproduced in Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors*, 410-412.

109 See Documents Concerning the Activities of Eugene Schuyler, Senate, Executive Documents, No. 24 (1876-77), Serial No. 1719, reproduced in Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors*, 401-404.

110 Draft No. 102, Fish to Maynard, February 1, 1877, Ibid., Harris, 412-413.

111 Ibid.

112 Elliot, 264.

113 Ibid.

of whether Mr. Liddon and Mr. McColl were mistaken or not was irrelevant and that the ridicule with that had greeted their claim “only showed the gross ignorance of those who ought to know better.” As he insisted, “impalement *is* a thing familiarly practiced in Turkey and it *is* one of the venerated institutions of the country.”¹¹⁴ The English public easily believed such accusations. Elliot, for his part, was denounced in the press as a collaborator and Ottoman sympathizer and asked to be dismissed from his post.¹¹⁵ Liddon also joined in by suggesting that Sir Henry Elliot be replaced “by a diplomat of human rather than of Turkish sympathies.”¹¹⁶ This campaign seems to have greatly offended Elliot, for he went to great lengths in his memoirs to refute these allegations. As he claimed: “our Government and the Embassy did everything that could be done, both for the protection of the Bulgarians and to obtain punishment of those who had maltreated them” which can be “seen plainly enough in the published official correspondence.”¹¹⁷

7. GLADSTONE SEIZES THE DAY

The sensational news of MacGahan and Schuyler agitated the public opinion in England.¹¹⁸ At that time Gladstone found the opportune moment to launch a political campaign against Disraeli’s government by publishing a pamphlet entitled *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*.¹¹⁹ In this pamphlet he presented a story identical to that of Pears, MacGahan and Schuyler. He claimed that Ottoman rule was brutal and barbaric and the Bulgarians had every reason to rebel. The “Turks,” however, took advantage of this modest protest to satisfy their thirst for blood. In short, Gladstone argued that the “Turks” were liars in claiming that the Bulgarian started the uprising by killing many innocent villagers, both Muslim and Christian, while presenting himself as impartial, conscientious, humanitarian, and therefore “trustworthy.”¹²⁰ Gladstone spoke of the outrages “much as if they had taken place in British territory

114 *Ibid.*, 265.

115 *Daily News*, 5 September 1876, article by Mr. Freeman

116 Elliot, 271.

117 Elliot, 271-72.

118 8 July 1876, *Derby Diaries*, 308. According to Derby, “The English papers are beginning to take sides: *Pall Mall*, *Telegraph*, *Standard*, *Morning Post*, and *Saturday Review* more or less pro-Ottoman, or rather anti-Russian; *Daily News* violent for the insurgents, *Spectator* the same, *Times* inclining in the same direction, but more moderately.”

119 William Ewart Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, London, 1876.

120 Sahara, 502.

and as though we alone were responsible for the impunity of the perpetrators.”¹²¹ The British press and Gladstone presented the events solely as Muslim aggression.¹²²

MacGahan and Schuyler had portrayed the Ottoman government as absolutely unreliable. They believed and propagated the story that the massacre was organized and ordered by the authorities, and even if it wasn't, they claimed the government could not have done anything effective to prevent it because the country was in “a state of complete anarchy.”¹²³ Therefore the only possible way to restore order and dispense justice was “a foreign intervention.”¹²⁴ Schuyler even drew up a plan for setting a commission for the protection of the people — see to the hanging of the leader of the perpetrators, disarm the Muslim population, make the Ottoman government rebuild the villages, and compensate the people for their losses under international monitoring.¹²⁵

Gladstone entirely agreed. He even took this plan a step further by righteously suggesting that not only the perpetrators, but the entire Ottoman state be punished.¹²⁶ He set aside plans for common action by European governments, proposing instead that England should send a fleet to Ottoman waters to be positioned in such a way that its force “be most promptly and efficiently applied on Turkish soil for the defense of innocent lives, and to prevent repetition of those recent scenes.”¹²⁷ This so-called humanitarian mission, however, had another goal: to rid Bulgaria of all Ottoman presence by letting “the Turks now carry away their abuses in the only possible manner, namely by carrying off themselves. Their Zaptiehs and their Mudirs, their Bimbashis and their Yuzbachis, their Kaymakams and their Pashas shall clear out from the province they have desolated and profaned.”¹²⁸ After the Ottomans had left, Bulgaria was to become a British protectorate, which was “the only

121 Elliot, 256.

122 On the British campaign, and “the awakening” of public opinion in Britain, see David Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1939 which is very partial and relies solely on British sources, especially articles in the press. However, the book offers a good digest of the British press and political speeches.

123 MacGahan, 74.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors*, 12.

127 Ibid., 43.

128 Ibid., 61-62.

reparation we can make... to the civilization which has been affronted and shamed...[and] to the moral sense of mankind at large.”¹²⁹

This “humanitarian mission” would take precedence over international law. As Gladstone framed it: “Now there are states of affairs, in which human sympathy refuses to be confined by the rules... of international law.”¹³⁰ The Bulgarian events destroyed any good will towards the Ottoman Empire.¹³¹ The Great Powers did not believe the Ottoman line of reasoning that Bulgarians had committed mass killing of Muslims too. Europe started to assume that it was impossible for Christians and Muslims to co-exist. The blackening campaign in the British press succeeded in agitating the public opinion to such a degree that Britain became, even more than Russia, a champion of the Bulgarian cause. Sir Henry Elliot wrote in his memoirs:

*Nothing occurring in a foreign country within my recollection ever caused in England a sensation at all to be compared with that produced by the Turkish excesses in Bulgaria in the spring of 1876; but, horrible as they were, the excitement about them, as about anything not directly affecting our own country, would soon have passed away if the leader of the Opposition had not found in them an opportunity to make political capital against Lord Beaconsfield's Government, and, by a reckless distortion of facts, to rouse all the generous instincts of the nation not only against Turkey but against our own government, which was represented as scarcely less guilty.*¹³²

The Queen, too, objected to the employment of *başıbozüks*, on account of the cruelties they committed. To this, Derby replied that this was regrettable, but “if we don't fight for the Turks we can hardly tell them how they are to fight their own battles.”¹³³

Derby sent a telegram to Elliot notifying him that “the events in Bulgaria have destroyed entirely the sympathy felt in England for

129 Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors*, 62.

130 *Ibid.*, 47.

131 See the correspondence between Safvet Pasha and the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/4, 291/5, 291/6, 291/7 in general and the report of Karatodori of 26 September 1876 to Safvet, BOA HR.SYS. 291/4. No. 481/190 in particular. Also Safvet comments on it and proposes ways to remedy it in 12 September 1876 Safvet to Musurus, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/6, No. 45198/170.

132 Elliot, 255.

133 9 July 1876, *Derby Diaries*, 308.

Turkey: so much so, that if Russia were to take part openly with the Servians, and declare war, it would be practically impossible for us to interfere.”¹³⁴ He continued: “The change is certainly remarkable: meetings are being held daily in the provinces ... the hope is expressed that we will have nothing more to do with the Turks, except to help in turning them out of Europe.”¹³⁵ In Derby’s opinion, the rising excitement could be attributed to several factors: it happened during the unfortunate time of the year, in the summer when “there is nothing else to write or talk about;”¹³⁶ the losers of the Ottoman bankruptcy contributed “to swell the cry;”¹³⁷ and the Liberals had seized the opportunity to damage the Cabinet and build up capital for the next election. Disraeli believed that although the Bulgarian business increased the difficulties, it might also nonetheless help pave the way for a solution. It could give England a reason to modify its position vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire in making it tenable to ask for securities towards the non-Muslims.¹³⁸

Gladstone’s brochure created a severe reaction in the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte expressed profound grief at the violent language and passionate hostility of the former Premier Minister of England against the Muslims in general and the Turks in particular. Musurus, the Ottoman ambassador to England, expressed his hope that Gladstone’s demagogical attitude would be condemned by all sensible men in England. Musurus wrote that he already started a counter-campaign in the press to defend the Ottoman Empire and succeeded in publishing two brochures and several articles in the *Morning Post* accompanied by a number of letters either anonymous or carrying the signatures of respectable individuals. He said he needed to work further on increasing the number of favorable articles published in England. He concluded his report by writing that this was “all and all, an epidemic, which after running its course, would calm down and give way to the good sensibilities natural to the English people.”¹³⁹ Similar meetings were held in Italy as well.¹⁴⁰

134 29 August 1876, *Derby Diaries*, 321.

135 2 September 1876, *Derby Diaries*, 323.

136 3 September 1876 and 6 September 1876, *Derby Diaries*, 323-324.

137 *Ibid.*, 323-324.

138 *Ibid.*

139 14 September 1876, Musurus to Safvet, BOA, HR.SYS. No 291/6, No. 6252/271. For further information on Musurus’ effort and use of *Morning Post* see 7 September 1876, Musurus to Safvet, BOA, HR.SYS. No 291/6, No. 6247/266.

140 For further information on the meetings and agitation in Rome see report from 8 September 1876, Essad to Safvet, Rome, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/6, No. 9457/230, 15 September 1876, Essad to Safvet, Rome, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/6, No. 9461/233.

8. THE PORTE RESPONDS

The Porte sincerely regretted the bloody repression,¹⁴¹ and tried to implement a policy of damage control in the Press at home and abroad.¹⁴² The Sublime Porte designated Sadullah Bey, the former Minister of Commerce, to preside over a special commission called the Philippopolis Commission whose task was to investigate the events in the region of Philippopolis and Pazarcik.¹⁴³ The commission included Muslim and non-Muslim members (Greek, Bulgarian and Armenian.)¹⁴⁴ The work and the findings of this commission were widely publicized in the European capitals by the Ottoman ambassadors.¹⁴⁵ Ali Suavi, a prominent Young Turk, replied to Gladstone's campaign by publishing "Letters by Ali Suavi Efendi," in *Diplomatic Review* in October 1876.¹⁴⁶ The Porte also initiated its own investigation in the matter by dispatching Edib Efendi as extraordinary commissioner to Edirne (Adrianople) and several other officials including Sadullah Bey to Filibe (Philippolis) and the surrounding region. Edib Efendi produced a report in which he laid out the outbreak of the revolt and the terrain of the fighting: twenty eight villages were burned, four Muslim, six mixed, eighteen Bulgarian. Severe fighting occurred in five villages and *başıbozüks* were used in two, Batak and Prasadán.¹⁴⁷ The insurgents burned about twenty-four villages, the *başıbozüks* set Batak on fire, and regular troops burned Braçkova and Otluk. Of the 5,656 total houses, 2,670 were burned.¹⁴⁸ Because the Bulgarians had buried most of their valuables in the ground, the looting consisted of household items and animals.¹⁴⁹ The affected number of the Muslim population was

141 23 December 1876, Safvet to Musurus, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/3, No. 45592/199.

142 See the correspondence between Safvet Pasha and the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/4, 291/5, 291/6, 291/7.

143 16 September 1876, Safvet Pasha to the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 44951/140.

144 Ibid.

145 See the correspondence between Safvet Pasha and the Ottoman representatives abroad pertaining to the Philippopolis Commission in HR. SYS. 291/5 which contains 44 documents. For example, on 4 January 1877, Safvet Pasha sent a circular letter to the Ottoman representatives abroad to ask them to publicize Sadullah Bey's report.

146 *Diplomatic Review*, 24 October 1876, 270-76.

147 Edib Efendi, *Traduction du rapport presente par S. Exc. Edib Efendi Commissaire Extraordinaire sur e'enquete ordonnee par la Sublime Porte dans le Vilayet d'Andrinople*, Constantinople: Typographie et lithographie centrales, 1876, 7. (12 pages long.) A copy kept in BOA, HR. SYS. 291/1, 7.

148 Ibid.

149 Ismail Bey, *Memoir*, 15.; Celaledin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, Istanbul: Tercuman, 1979, 200-204

estimated at about four thousand and the Christian at about seven thousand. The casualties in Batak were reported at 1,441.¹⁵⁰ The report was officially submitted to the British authorities.¹⁵¹

However, the Bulgarian leaders did everything to disprove the report and discredit the Ottoman investigation. Elliot declared the report unreliable and sought to end Edib Efendi's investigation. Sadullah Bey also produced a report. In the Philippopoli and Bazarcik region, there were 9575 houses total in 54 villages. Of these 5,308 have been burned. So far (as of mid-November 1876) 1593 houses have been reconstructed, and 1014 were under construction.¹⁵² The findings of the Commission of Philippopolis were published in the newspaper *la Turquie* and upon the Porte's request also republished in major European newspapers (*Morning Post*, *Gazetta d'Italia*, *Levant Herald*,¹⁵³ etc.)¹⁵⁴ The numbers vary: for example in internal correspondence the number of reconstructed houses were reported as 957 and those under construction as 810, depending on the number of villages and the district, sometimes Philippopoli district is counted alone, sometimes together with Tatar Pazarcik (Bazardjik.) However they are the same in the final version of the report kept in the Ottoman archives.¹⁵⁵ In any event, under European pressure, the Ottomans were rebuilding the destroyed villages and providing the victims with shelter, food, clothing and money.¹⁵⁶ The Ottoman government sent 18,000 British Pounds to the commission in Bulgaria to be spent on alleviation efforts.¹⁵⁷

However, this report was also found unreliable. Prior to its publication, there were rumors widely circulating in the European capitals (Paris

150 Edib Efendi, *Traduction du rapport presente par S. Exc. Edib Efendi Commissaire Extraordinaire sur e'enquete ordonnee par la Sublime Porte dans le Vilayet d'Andrinople*, Constantinople: Typographie et lithographie centrales, 1876, 8-9.

151 Mahmud Celaledin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, Istanbul: Tercuman, 1979, 200-204. Celaledin Paşa who has seen and read the report cites the numbers taken from the report in his memoirs

152 Rapporto di S. E. Saadoullah Bey a Sua Alteza il Gran-Visir, *Gazetta d'Italia*, 16 January 1877, copy of the article in BOA, HR. SYS 291/5

153 see correspondence between Safvet and the Ottoman rerepresentatives in BOA HR. SYS. 291/5

154 4 January 1877, Safvet to the Ottoman representatives, circular letter, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/4, No. 46,005/3 with an annex.

155 13 December 1876, Turkhan to Safvet, Berlin, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/5, No. 4787/316 also 23 December 1876, Safvet Paşa to the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 45610/195. See copy of the official report in BOA, HR. SYS. 292/1.

156 23 December 1876, Safvet Paşa to the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 45610/195

157 25 September 1876, Safvet to the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 45030/147

and London in particular) that Sadullah Bey, the President of the Ottoman commission and other members were lodging at the home of Hasan Pasha who was accused of being one of the perpetrators of the massacre and that this act compromised the impartiality of the commission.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, an article in the Times published on 18 October 1876 further challenged the impartiality and the judgement of the Commission by alleging that Sadullah Bey had been a guest of Ahmed Ağa since his arrival in Philippopolis.¹⁵⁹ Safvet Pasha immediately refuted these allegations by stating that the assertion of Sadullah Bey being Ahmed Ağa's guest was "totally inaccurate"¹⁶⁰ and that Sadullah Bey lodged with some of his other colleagues at the house of certain Said effendi, a small vendor.¹⁶¹ Sadik and Musurus were instructed to transmit this information to Duc Decazes and Lord Derby.¹⁶²

Sadullah's report was made a pivotal point in the Porte's campaign to refute the exaggerations of the Baring report as well as allegations of cruelty and barbarity on the part of the Ottomans circulating in the European press.¹⁶³ To this end, the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered a special note to the British Ambassador, Elliot, explaining in detail the activities and findings of the Philippopolis Commission. The note gave reassurances of impartiality and at the same time guaranteed independence of judgement.¹⁶⁴ In order to allegedly maintain such impartiality and sound judgement, the commission was composed of two Muslims, Sadullah and Salim and four non-Muslims, Yovancho, Kiadis, Abro, Pertev.¹⁶⁵ Ismail Bey compiled a brochure based on the investigation of the Sublime Porte and the interrogation of those arrested during and after the uprising. This account was subsequently published as a monograph under the title *Memoire sur les evenements*

158 Sadik Pasha reported from Paris on 12 October 1876, Sadik to Safvet, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/5, No. 11369/293.

159 10 October 1876, Musurus to Safvet, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 6320/339.

160 16 November 1876, Safvet to Musurus, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 45525/194.

161 16 November 1876, Safvet to Musurus, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 45525/194, also 29 October 1876, Safvet to Sadik, BOA, HR.SYS. 291/5, No. 45293/197.

162 Ibid.

163 28 November 1876, Aleko to Safvet, Vienna, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/5, No. 7145/735.

164 22 November 1876, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/5, No. 45581/56.

165 20 October 1876, Safvet to the representatives of the Sublime Porte, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/5, No. 44972/143. These are the signatures on the official report of the commission a copy of which is kept in the archives BOA, HR.SYS 292/1.

du dandjak de Philippopoli. The number of Muslims massacred at Avrat-Alan alone according to this account was 71.¹⁶⁶

The Ottoman authorities also arrested and tried the perpetrators. Elliot successfully called for the Governor of Edirne (Adrianople), Akif Pasha, to be arrested and insisted that all Muslim perpetrators be punished as soon as possible. At the same time, he insisted that the Bulgarian perpetrators who were tried and found guilty by the Ottoman authorities be pardoned and immediately released. Such calls found traction, and upon Murad V's accession to the throne, a general amnesty was proclaimed under which many Herzegovinian and Bulgarian insurgents were pardoned and set free.¹⁶⁷

The Ottoman position on the Bulgarian uprising can be summed up in the line of argumentation Odian Efendi gave to Lord Derby. In a meeting with Derby, Odian Efendi, Midhat Pasha's special envoy to England and Britain in the winter of 1877-78, called attention to the point of the European program concerning the amnesty. Odian Efendi argued that in order to reestablish proper order and maintain peace, it was necessary that the amnesty be general, i. e. that it apply to both Christian and Muslim leaders. Lord Derby, who up to this point, seemed to principally agree with Odian Efendi, changed his mind "at one stroke" and said that amnesty for the perpetrators of the massacres would cause more harm than good in Europe and that he never gave such an advice.¹⁶⁸

Odian Efendi then addressed the question of the massacres in spite of the absence of Ismail Bey's account (which he asked for on numerous occasions.)¹⁶⁹ He told Lord Derby that the acts were not justifiable by any means, but that the Ottoman government could provide a full

166 Ismail Bey, *Memoire sur les evenements du sandjak de Philippopoli*, Constantiople: Typographie et lithographie centrales, 1877, 12. Also in BOA, HR. SYS. 292/1.

167 Mahmud Celaledin Paşa, *Mirat-i Hakikat*, 200-201. For numerical information see the note sent by the Ottoman MFA to the British Ambassador on 22 November 1876, BOA, HR. SYS. 291/5, No. 45581/56. For example in Edirne (Adrianople) 32 individuals were deferred to the Temyiz (acquittal) tribunal. Of these 19 were acquitted and set free, 9 were being tried as assassins (murderers) as accused by the families of their victims, 2 were already condemned and their sentences carried out, and 2 others identified as insitgators and insurgent chiefs were held at Philippopolis. In Pazardcik (Bazardjik) the number of those detained did not exceed 7 and there were all accused of murder. The note ended by assuring the British Ambassador that all of those who were still in prison were guilty of crimes, that among those there were no innocent prisoners.

168 30 January 1877, Odian Efendi to the Grand Vizier, London, BOA, HR.SYS 1288/1.

169 Ibid.

explanation. He argued that what one called a massacre could also be seen as a terrible repression. Odian Efendi said that he did not know if there weren't more terrible repressions in other countries, but, in any case, all repressions are inevitably terrible. He said that Ottoman troops shot at women and children because the women and children barricaded themselves in houses from whence their men were shooting at Ottoman troops.¹⁷⁰

Seeing the effect his explanation had produced on Lord Derby, Odian Efendi returned to the question of the general amnesty.¹⁷¹ Lord Derby insisted on his point of view Odian Efendi insisted on his government's point of view. Lord Derby told him that he could not give him official advice to which Odian Efendi replied that he knew that Lord Derby could not provide any official counsel. Odian Efendi seemed to have been offended by the manner Derby treated him. Odian Efendi told him of the awkward position in which Midhat Pasha found himself and asked Lord Derby, as a good friend to Midhat Pasha, to provide counsel on how the Porte should proceed to address the events surrounding the massacre. Derby agreed on the awkward situation and on the importance of the question and advised Midhat Pasha to grant amnesty to the majority of those responsible for the massacres, be they Christian or Muslim, and arrest only the perpetrators of the murders. That is to say, to pronounce a general amnesty, but to exempt some Christian and some Muslim chiefs.¹⁷²

9. THE PORTE LOSES HOPE

The Porte was coming to painful realization that it was completely isolated in Europe. Reports coming from its representatives abroad were not very hopeful. In May 1876, reports from secret agents in the United Principalities (of Wallachia and Moldavia) alerted the Ottoman authorities to the preparations of Bulgarian armed bands to cross the Danube at Giurgevo and start another insurrection in Ottoman territory.¹⁷³ Romanian Prince Ion Ghika had to personally write to the Sublime Porte to give reassurances that the Romanian authorities were doing everything in their power to prevent such an occurrence and thus

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 30 January 1877, Odian Efendi to the Grand Vizier, London, BOA, HR.SYS 1288/1.

173 16/28 May 1876, Edib to Rashid, Braila, BOA, HR.SYS 291/7, No. 87/13. Also see 14 June 1876, Rachid to Ghika, BOA, HR.SYS 291/7, No. 43967.

avoid provocations of repressive measures by the Ottomans.¹⁷⁴ News kept coming of other agitations among Bulgarians. In October 1876, the Porte came in possession of a correspondence between the Bulgarian Committee in Ortaköy and the Slavophile Committee of Rome which revealed plans for an insurrection in Istanbul.¹⁷⁵

Meanwhile, on 2 July 1876, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire, aggravating the political crisis in Istanbul.¹⁷⁶ This immediately alarmed the Austrian authorities, who feared a powerful Slavic state that would not rest until it reached the sea. Greece, too, tried to take advantage of the situation. The king of Greece told Derby that he wanted Thessaly and Epirus and said that his people would be discontented if they got nothing for their good conduct. Derby tried to explain to him that Thessaly and Epirus were not his to give.¹⁷⁷ Romania presented a long list of demands to the Porte as well.¹⁷⁸

Gorchakov used these events to sent a dispatch to the Sublime Porte in which he held the Ottoman government responsible for the situation. The dispatch produced a very troubling impression on the Porte.¹⁷⁹ In a circular letter to all European governments, Safvet Pasha replied by arguing that the Chancellor felt the need to justify the armament and mobilization of the Russian army.¹⁸⁰ He further argued that if the Ottoman administration had been as incorrigible as Russia had led everyone to believe, then the Empire would have found itself in a state of permanent insurrection. Instead, in the twenty-five years since the Treaty of Paris, there had been only an insignificant number of minor insurrections whose motives could be attributed to Russian intervention in the Balkans.¹⁸¹ Despite these efforts, it appeared that the Ottoman Empire was left to deal with Russia alone. Such, at least, was the Ottoman perception of the international situation on the eve of the conference.

174 6/18 June 1876, General Ghika to Safvet, Constantinople, BOA, HR.SYS 291/7, No. 113.

175 27 October 1876, Essad to Safvet, Rome, BOA, HR.SYS 291/6, (no number given.)

176 2 July 1876, Monson to Derby, Ragusa, Doc. 361, and 2 July 1876, White to Derby, Belgrade, Doc. 363, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 266.

177 17 July 1876, *Derby Diaries*, 310.

178 These demands can be found in Memorandum respecting Romanian grievances compiled by E. Hertslet is published in Doc. 398, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Vol. II, 282-290.

179 as evident in 30 November 1876, Safvet Pasha to the representatives of the Sublime Porte, circular letter, BOA, HR. SYS. 1292/2, No. 45695/197.

180 Ibid.

181 Ibid.

The ill-fated Constantinople Conference (Tersane Konferansı) was held in Istanbul from December 1876 to January 1877 in the hope of avoiding war. This hope proved to be illusory. The Ottoman Empire reluctantly agreed to host an international conference in its own capital by the European powers, to which it was not invited, and to add insult to injury, during which its fate was to be determined by outside actors. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire was expected to obediently implement everything that conference participants deemed appropriate or else. During the conference European powers were dangling the threat of war to extract concessions from the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman governing elite felt that no independent state could agree to such concessions without surrendering its honor and sovereignty. So, they refused to. They decided to at least fight for their territory and sovereignty.

Nonetheless, Russia carried out an unprovoked attack on the Ottoman Empire. Russian and Balkan historians have ever since tried to come up with a plausible reason for war, but the only justification they keep putting forward is the claim that all “peaceful” methods have been exhausted and the only remaining path to alleviate Christian “suffering” was war.

10. CONCLUSION

The Bulgarian events played a pivotal role in such justifications. The way in which the putting down of the April uprising was perceived destroyed any good will towards the Ottoman Empire. The Great Powers did not believe the Ottoman line of reasoning that Bulgarians had committed mass killing of Muslims too. Europe started to assume that it was impossible for Christians and Muslims to co-exist. The blackening campaign in the British press succeeded in agitating the public opinion to such a degree that Britain became, even more than Russia, a champion of the Bulgarian cause.

The Ottoman Empire found itself diplomatically isolated in the crisis of 1875-1877. Its long-time supporter, Britain, abandoned the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the war, making it abundantly clear that it would not back the Ottoman Empire in any way if further military conflict arose. With this reassurance, Russia was given a free hand to attack its neighbor. The Ottoman Empire fought isolated and alone. It soon lost the war and with it most of its European territories and Christian subjects.

Most importantly the Bulgarian events validated a long-suspected “formula” for success for getting independence for the Ottoman Christians. First, minorities under Ottoman rule needed to secure the support of a Great Power (in most cases Russia). They then needed to organize an uprising with the expectation that it would be put down by the Ottoman authorities. The leaders of the uprising could then claim that their people had suffered brutal slayings by the barbarous Muslims, giving them the moral capital to urge the Christian world (i.e. the Great Powers) to intervene and rescue their Christian brothers from the Ottoman “yoke.” The Greeks, the Serbians, the Montenegrins, the Romanians and the Bulgarians successfully implemented this “formula.” After seeing the success of the Bulgarian uprising, the last major Christian group left under Ottoman rule after 1877, the Armenian minority, tried to emulate the Bulgarian example in the unfortunate events in 1895-96 and then again in 1915. In fact there had been a close cooperation between Bulgarian and Armenian committee leaders after the 1876 uprising.¹⁸² However, this time the Great Powers did not come through for the Armenians. The Ottoman government was determined to prevent a re-occurrence of the Bulgarian example. All of this culminated in the tragic events of 1915, the legacies of which still continue today.¹⁸³ A century later, the Armenian issue is still at the front and center of the world political agenda even though the Ottoman Empire is long gone.

182 See Bülent Yıldırım, *Bulgaristan'daki Ermeni Komitelerinin Osmanlı Devleti Aleyhine Faaliyetleri (1890-1918)*, İstanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014.

183 See Alev Kılıç, “1915 Olayları ve Türk-Ermeni Uyuşmazlığı,” *100 Yılında Birinci Dünya Savaşı*, ed. Ümit Özdağ, Ankara: Kripto Kitaplar, 2014, 349-358; Ronald G Suny, Fatma M. Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark, *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012.

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