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**Empire and Nation in the City: Christians, Muslims and Jews in
Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Ruse, 1864-1885**

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by

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Dedication

To my parents, Zeliha and Vakkas, and all those from the village of Azezi.

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**Empire and Nation in the City: Christians, Muslims and Jews in Ottoman
and Post-Ottoman Ruse, 1864-1885**

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My dissertation explores how people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds experienced the transition from Ottoman rule to Bulgarian nation state in the city of Ruse, in present-day northern Bulgaria. It examines the transformative effects of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms (1864-1876), the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, the Russian provisional government and the early years of a Bulgarian national government. It argues Bulgarian nationalism was not a uniform and deterministic ideology but was rather a complex and contested phenomenon that left room for multiple loyalties and self-definitions. Through various reform programs, the Ottoman Empire also put together its own alternative to Bulgarian nationalism—secular Ottomanism—, which was progressive and open to different perspectives and integrated Bulgarian Christians into the Ottoman political system. After Ottoman withdrawal, the transfer of power to Bulgarian Christians and the marginalization and disenfranchisement of Muslims was not drastic or immediate, but rather a gradual process. Residents of Ruse’s diverse urban environment responded to these political changes through a complex interplay of urban dynamics, political and religious loyalties, and self-interest, rather than inflexible nationalist or imperial ideology.

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Introduction

On June 1, 1879, the first Bulgarian governor of the city of Ruse delivered a speech to local government officials of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. After nearly five hundred years of Ottoman rule and a short-lived Russian provisional government, Bulgaria was now independent. The governor, Ivan Ivanov, stressed the importance of building friendship and cooperation in all ethnic communities while recovering from the war:

Gentlemen, you need to forget everything that has happened so far. From now on, treat each other like brothers because wherever there is no love and cooperation, everything will fail, and wherever they are present everything will go toward progress. Just as there cannot be any good outcomes in a private family in which there is no love and cooperation, so it is in a society and a country. If we want everything to go well and to have a good future we all need to unanimously reach out to each other in cooperation and love and forget everything that has already passed.¹

Ivanov's speech was delivered in Bulgarian but simultaneously translated into Turkish to reach the multi-lingual audience assembled at the event. His motivation seems to have been to appease the multi-ethnic population of the city and, at least in the short term, to bridge the gap between diverse ethnic and religious identities in the new Bulgarian principality.

¹ *Slavianin*, Issue 7, June 2, 1879, 55.

² For instance, see Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States* (Seattle

Bulgarian independence resulted from a confluence of Russian invasion and international diplomacy rather than a successful revolutionary movement.² Bulgarian revolutionaries attempted a series of revolts in the 1860s and 1870s, but all failed to elicit popular support and were easily crushed by the Ottoman forces.³ Through the so-called *Tanzimat* (Re-organization) reforms, the Ottoman Empire itself put together a viable alternative to Bulgarian nationalism and attempted to better integrate Christian Bulgarians into the Ottoman political system.⁴ The Russian invasion, however, interrupted this process, and the Treaty of San Stefano, which ended the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, created Bulgaria as an autonomous principality under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire.

My dissertation investigates the history of the city of Ruse (Rusçuk in Turkish) in order to explore how people of various backgrounds experienced the transition from Ottoman rule to the Bulgarian nation-state in an ethnically diverse urban environment. Specifically, my project focuses on the changing relationships between Bulgarian Christians, Muslims, and to a lesser extent Jews within the multiple spheres of contact of Ruse, where the cooperative efforts of the three faiths were as common as their conflicts. It argues that Ruse became a hotbed of Ottomanist politics and modernization of the *Tanzimat*. Bulgarian nationalism also had an important presence in the city, but the political integration and economic growth created by the Ottoman reforms, as well as

² For instance, see Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977), and Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918: A History* (New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1983).

³ Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short Story* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 94.

⁴ Milen Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside: Midhat Pasha and the Vilayet of Danube, 1864-1868" (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 2006), 435-6.

Ottoman surveillance, limited nationalist activity. Bulgarians were politically fragmented between different loyalties. Many, commercial elites in particular, made decisions based on how the realization of those ideologies impacted their lives, rather than with inflexible nationalist or imperial sentiment. Protecting self-interest often required cooperation with ruling elites and/or other ethno-religious communities, as opposed to the adoption of any exclusive group identity. The intimate nature of urban interactions and existing cooperation between different ethnic or religious communities worked against nationalism. Residents of Ruse responded to political changes through a complex interplay of loyalties, urban dynamics and self-interests. These multifaceted and often competing motivations, and not purely nationalistic principles, shaped their interactions with each regime and with each other.

After 1864, the Ottoman reforms made revolutionary changes in the provincial administration, establishing a provincial parliament, and administrative, judicial, and municipal councils in Ruse, made up of elected and appointed members. This representative system was extraordinary for two reasons: it marked the first elections in Ottoman history, and the number of elected representatives was equally divided between Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, Bulgarian Christians had their voice heard by the government and provided their input in the decisions made on local affairs. By offering mutually beneficial projects, this and other Ottoman reforms integrated many Bulgarian Christians into the Ottoman political system.

During the Ottoman reform period, Ruse also received some of the first railroads, telegraph lines, extended paved roads and new bridges, a steam navigation company, an

agricultural bank, a model farm, and secular industrial schools, most of which did not exist even in the empire's capital. Significantly, these investments contributed to a large segment of the emerging Bulgarian commercial elites' support of Ottoman reforms. Many Bulgarians, both urban and rural, had increasingly co-invested in the modernization projects and, by extension, the longevity of the empire. When Russia invaded the Ottoman Empire in 1877, the Danube province had already attained a level of material prosperity that other core provinces of the empire had not.

In the 1860s and 1870s, Bulgarians did experience some freedom of cultural and literary expression, however, the Bulgarian cultural revival did not necessarily incorporate a separatist nationalist agenda. At the time of so-called Russian liberation, ethno-religious communities lived side by side on good terms without major conflict. When the war broke out in 1877, many Bulgarians had doubts about the advantages a new political system would bring them and remained neutral if not loyal to the Ottoman Empire. Under Russian rule, Bulgarians generally enjoyed the privileges and opportunities that Russians offered, but they also often contested political appointments, new taxes, and Russian interference in their church.

In looking at the general outlines of this transitional period, the case of Ruse indicates that the transfer of power to Bulgarian Christians after Ottoman withdrawal was rather a gradual process. Individuals largely responded to the new political system the way they had to the Ottoman reforms. Many of the Ottoman institutions remained intact, with minor changes, and the collaboration between Bulgarian Christian and Muslim elites in Ruse continued.

The City of Ruse from Empire to the Nation-State

Biographies of cities open a window through which the larger panorama of historical contexts can be revealed. This kind of study can be especially illuminating in the case of Central and Eastern European cities, many of which underwent spectacular population growth, commercialization, and massive urban renewal throughout the nineteenth century.⁵ With the development of urban modernity and the emergence of what Robert Nemes calls a “nationally-minded urbanism,” cities experienced dramatic social and cultural transformations.⁶ Although scholars have extensively studied major Ottoman cities in Southeastern Europe, like Istanbul, Salonika, and Sarajevo, smaller provincial cities within the empire have failed to draw similar attention.⁷

My study of Ruse is the first comprehensive English-language examination of a nineteenth-century Bulgarian city. In particular, this project provides a much-needed addition to the exceedingly sparse English-language scholarship on Bulgarian urban history, which has been largely limited to translations of Bulgarian language studies.⁸ Urban studies on Ruse depict the city as a site of pluralism and an example of peaceful

⁵ See Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (De-Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); John Czaplicka, *Lviv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Cathleen Giustino, *Tearing Down Prague's Jewish Town* (New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2003); Patricia Herlihy, *Odessa: A History, 1794-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siècles Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

⁶ Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, 168.

⁷ For instance, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1450-1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), and Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: A Biography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

⁸ Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City 1400-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983) and Raina Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cranbury, NJ: Susquehanna University Press, 1999).

coexistence under Ottoman rule.⁹ However, they do not discuss the transition to the Bulgarian nation-state, limiting the scope of their studies up to the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8. My goal is to trace continuity and change between the Ottoman Empire and the Bulgarian nation-state, and examine changing inter-ethnic relations in a discrete urban environment.

Historians have long debated what a nation is and how nation-states were established. My study stands with the “modernist” school of thought, which has demonstrated that nations are socially and culturally constructed, and emerged in their modern form only in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ I also agree with Tara Zahra’s criticism that “nations may be modern, but nationalization did not unfold through an organic and inevitable process of modernization.”¹¹ She has challenged the category of “nation” altogether, dismissing the notion that “All modern men, women and children are card-carrying members of distinct national communities.”¹² She argues that individuals did not necessarily belong to a nation and were often indifferent to nationalism.¹³ In this sense, I also embrace Rogers Brubaker’s contention that nations are “perspectives on the world”

⁹ Teodoro Bakŭrdzhieva, *Ruse gradŭti horata* (Ot kraia na XIV do 70-te godini na XIX vek) (Ruse: Avarngard Print, 2013); Kzechka Siromahova, *Ruse prez vŭzrakzdaneto: ikonomika, prosveten i kulturen kzivot, tsŭrkovno-natsionalni vorbi, revoliutsionno-osvoboditelno dvikzenie* (Ruse: Dunav Pres, 1997); and Zvi Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk: From Periphery to Capital of the Tuna Vilayeti* (Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006); and Eric Hobsbawn, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ About indifference to nationalism, also see Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

rather than “things in the world.”¹⁴ He shows that grouping individuals into nations or ethnicities often overlooks the diverse and complex relationships within these constructed categories.

Major nation-states of the nineteenth century were not all alike and took different forms. In the case of Bulgaria, nation building followed a complicated path under the influence of West European Orientalism. It entailed an “an explicit rejection of its Ottoman past” and in the post-Ottoman period, a rejection of “its Muslim minority presence.”¹⁵ Muslim minorities constituted the “other” against which Bulgarian identity was formed. However, in practice, Bulgaria’s conception of Muslims, ranged between “sameness and difference, brother and enemy.”¹⁶ Similar negotiations took place between Bulgarians and Greeks. Nationalism put Greeks and Bulgarians in a complicated situation in which they had to decide whether to leave their motherland, or to adopt an imposed identity.¹⁷

In Ruse, people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds experienced three different political systems within fifteen years (1864-1879), namely a “modernized” Ottoman administration, a Russian provisional government, and a Bulgarian national regime. The city itself transformed from an Ottoman provincial capital into a major Bulgarian city. I explore what these transformations meant for the rapidly disintegrating

¹⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17.

¹⁵ Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁷ Theodora Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands: Nationality and Emigration among the Greeks of Bulgaria 1900-1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Ottoman Empire and for the Muslims, Christians, and Jews, who experienced rapid and remarkable change in an urban context.

The city of Ruse, in present-day northern Bulgaria, first appeared in Ottoman records in the early seventeenth century and was described as a town near the medieval settlement of Cherven. At the northern edge of Ottoman Rumelia, Ruse developed into a crucial military outpost during a period of continuous warfare with the Russian and Habsburg Empires. But Ruse also played an increasingly commercial and cultural role in the empire. Its agriculturally based commodity trade was facilitated by its close proximity to the fertile plains of the adjacent Dobrudzha region between the lower Danube and the Black Sea. The Danube itself allowed access to Central Europe, and therefore, it became a site of complex engagement with the “West.”

Under Ottoman rule, Ruse was inhabited by a variety of religious and ethnic groups. Migration and conversion had continuously changed the ethnic and religious makeup of the city. Following their fourteenth-century conquests, the Ottomans settled in the Dobrudzha region in large numbers and mixed with the local populations, in particular Slavic-speaking Christians. In the seventeenth century, Turkish-speaking Muslims, Slavic-speaking Orthodox Christians and Armenians were the three major communities in Ruse. The city also accommodated many other small groups including Greeks, Vlachs, Roma, and foreign merchants, especially from Dubrovnik. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-74, Ruse briefly came under Russian rule, but the Ottoman Empire regained the city following the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. The Ottoman government subsequently invested in Ruse to develop the city as a military and

commercial center. In the late eighteenth century, Jewish merchants also began to settle in Ruse from the surrounding cities.¹⁸ The influx of Muslim refugees from the Ottoman territories lost to Russia, mostly Circassians and Tatars, and the recruitment of soldiers from other parts of the empire also altered the demographics and further contributed to the diversity of the city.¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, another group of newcomers to Ruse arrived from the West, including merchants, diplomats, and religious missionaries. The prospering economy attracted many foreign merchants, in particular those from Austria, Britain and France, who opened local offices or permanently settled in the city. After 1864, Ruse became an Ottoman administrative center that hosted foreign consulates that brought in many consuls, diplomats, and their families. Major European countries including Austria, Great Britain, France, Russia, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Belgium, and Germany established consulates in the city.²⁰ During this period, Protestant and Catholic missionaries also began to organize their religious missions in the Ottoman Balkans. In 1857, the American Methodist Episcopal mission, for example, started in Dobrudzha and was soon centered in Ruse.²¹ These foreigners were significant additions to the historically mixed population of the city.

¹⁸ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 47.

¹⁹ Kemal Karpat, "Ottoman Urbanism: The Crimean Emigration to Dobruca and the Founding of Mecidiye, 1856-1878," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 3, no.1 (1984-85), and Nedim İpek, *İmparatorluktan Ulus Devlete Göçler* (Trabzon: Serander, 2006).

²⁰ *Reports Relative to British Consular Establishments: 1858-1871*, Vol. 3 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1872), 29.

²¹ *Annual Report of the American Bible Society*, Vol. 78 (New York: American Bible Society, 1894), 127.

The Ottoman Empire managed ethnic and religious diversity through flexible administrative practices, which are generally referred to as the “*millet* system,” a form of self-rule through religious institutions. In legal cases not involving any Muslims, non-Muslims were under the civil and religious jurisdiction of their respective *millet* whereas Muslims regulated themselves through the Islamic law (*şeriat*). The *millets* were organized along confessional lines as Muslim, Orthodox Christian, Armenian, and Jewish with the later additions of Catholic and Protestant *millets* in the nineteenth century. The *millet* authority, however, was not centralized until the late Ottoman period.²² Allowing local autonomy, this relative religious tolerance contributed in large part to the longevity of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans.

Under Ottoman rule, the Greek Patriarchate had extensive religious and political authority over the Orthodox Christian community. Using this privileged position, the Greek Patriarchate abolished the Bulgarian Orthodox archbishop of Ohrid in 1767, closed Bulgarian religious schools in 1800, and declared Greek as the sole language of Orthodox churches in the empire. This process of Greek cultural and linguistic domination continued with strict applications, such as the prohibition of religious ceremonies in Slavic languages.²³ The growing Bulgarian bourgeoisie also tended to be “Hellenized” as the Greek merchants dominated the market in many Bulgarian villages and towns. In the

²² About the *millet* system, see Karen Barkey, “Rethinking Ottoman Management of Diversity: What Can We Learn for Modern Turkey?” in *Democracy, Islam and Secularism in Turkey*, eds. Ahmet Kuru and Alfred Stepan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 12-31, and Daniel Goffman, “Ottoman Millets in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, II (1994), 135-59.

²³ Halil İnalcık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi*, (Istanbul: Eren Yayınları, 1992), 18–9.

beginning of the late eighteenth century, however, Bulgarian nationalism emerged to challenge the dominant position of the Greeks in religion, culture, and commerce.²⁴

In the nineteenth century, the activities of Balkan nationalist movements began to increasingly undermine Ottoman authority. In 1830, an independent Greek nation-state was established in the south of Thessaly, and Serbians gained an autonomous region to the west of the province of Nish. Similarly, the Ottomans effectively lost control of the Danubian principalities, namely Wallachia and Moldavia, in 1856. The Ottoman struggle with maintaining authority in the provinces continued with the Bulgarian peasant uprisings in the 1850s, and the establishment of the Bulgarian Secret Central Committee in Bucharest in 1866. The members of the committee created armed bands called *cheta*, which hoped to spark a mass national uprising. The Russian Empire, utilizing Pan-Slav ideology, openly supported the central committee against the Ottoman Empire. The British, French and Austrians, however, did not welcome Russian presence in the Balkans and worked to maintain the status quo through diplomacy.²⁵

The Ottoman government was intent on keeping its remaining Balkan territories in the empire. Through reform, Ottoman statesmen planned to marginalize nationalist activity while consolidating Ottoman authority in the region. It was under these conditions that Ottoman reformers advanced Ottomanism.²⁶ Since 1839, the reforms had

²⁴ George G. Arnakis, “The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism”, in *The Balkans in Transition: Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics since the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Charles and Barbara Jelavich (Hamden: Archon Books, 1974), 136.

²⁵ The diplomacy related to the events and dynamics related to the decline of the Ottoman Empire is broadly referred to as the Eastern Question.

²⁶ About Ottomanism, see Alexander Vezekov, “Reconciliation of the Spirits and Fusion of the Interests: Ottomanism as an Identity Politics” in *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern*

set out to restore past Ottoman grandeur using modern European models. Until the early 1860s, however, the Sublime Porte had primarily focused reform efforts on the center of the empire rather than the periphery.²⁷ Significantly, it was Ottoman minority populations, as much as “outside enemies” that provoked the shift in the focus of Ottoman reform to the Danube region. As such, the so-called *Tuna Vilayeti* (Danube Province) was created in 1864 as a “pilot region,” with Ruse as its capital. Under the new provincial administration, a number of reforms were enacted with the goal of bringing stability to the region and better integrating different ethnic and religious groups, in particular Slavic-speaking Christians, into the Ottoman political system.²⁸

As the provincial capital, Ruse and its hinterland became a central focus for experimental reforms, which brought many new institutions, and large-scale economic investments to the city and its environs. In choosing a provincial capital, Ottoman officials had first considered the city of Tŭrnovo, an option that had been proposed by Bulgarian notables and was predominantly inhabited by Bulgarians. The Ottoman government, however, chose Ruse because of its strategic geographic location and demographic structure—it was a cosmopolitan port city with a Muslim majority. They also appointed Midhat Pasha as the governor of the province—a progressive Muslim-Ottoman statesman who was originally from Ruse. Midhat Pasha brought a cadre of high-

Europe, ed. Diana Mishkova (New York, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 47-78; and Julia Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁷ About the Ottoman reforms, see Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Stanford J. Shaw, “The Central Legislative Councils in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Reform Movement before 1876” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. *V.1, No.1.* (January 1970); Carter V. Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁸ Christian populations in the region spoke different forms of the South Slavic languages.

ranking officials from different ethno-religious groups who, like many local elites, supported the reforms. Midhat Pasha's appointment was a turning point for Ruse. His modernization projects paved the way for rapid development, with the approval and fiscal support of the Ottoman administration.

After 1864, the Ottoman government established a representative system in which elected Muslims and non-Muslims represented their respective communities in the provincial assembly. This system also created administrative, municipal, judicial and commercial councils (*meclis*). The political integration involved recruiting Christian Bulgarians for government offices (at mostly middle and lower level positions) on the condition of competency and trustworthiness.²⁹ Midhat Pasha's reforms also included the secularization of schools, the publication of a bilingual provincial newspaper, and funding students' education in Europe. At the same time, Ruse's economy had progressively developed with the new transportation and communication network, financial institutions, and commerce. The city itself went through urban reconstruction with wider streets and European architecture. It became, in a sense, a model city of the *Tanzimat* in the Balkans. Ruse flourished as an international port city where foreign merchants and residents engaged in commerce at local, regional and international levels.

The literature on the *Tanzimat* primarily addresses the question of whether the reforms were a success or failure, focusing on a particular region, ethnic or religious group as well as specific reforms. In the Balkans, Turkish scholars generally present Midhat Pasha as a successful governor and a heroic figure of the reforms in the

²⁹ Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 101.

provinces.³⁰ Yonca Köksal and İlber Ortaylı, however, criticize the reforms because they appealed to the upper class rather than the large masses of peasants, arguing that because of this, Midhat Pasha could not create a cohesive Ottoman identity in opposition to Balkan nationalism. They consider the *Tanzimat* unsuccessful, arguing it failed to hold the Balkans within the empire.³¹ My case study shows that the rural reforms such as agricultural credit cooperatives and a model farm directly targeted peasants and that during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, most Bulgarians in Ruse remained neutral, if not loyal to the Ottoman Empire. In general, they made efforts to protect themselves from the destruction of war, without adhering to a collective nationalist agenda. Because of this, I argue that the Russian victory in 1878 was a failure of the Ottoman military, and not, in fact, a failure of the political integration of the *Tanzimat* reforms.

Bulgarian scholars depict the *Tanzimat* period as a struggle between Bulgarians and the Ottoman Empire, in which the former triumphed with Russian support.³² Russian historiography follows a similar approach with more emphasis on the achievements of the leading Pan-Slav N.P. Ignatiev, the Russian ambassador to Istanbul, against his “nemesis” Midhat Pasha.³³ The Russian and Bulgarian-language literature presents the

³⁰ İsmail Selimoğlu, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Tuna Vilayeti 1864-1878* (PhD Diss., Ankara University, 1995); Bekir Koç, *Midhat Paşa 1822-1884* (PhD Diss., Ankara University, 2002); and M. Hüdai Senturk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bulgar Meselesi 1850-1875* (Ankara: TTK, 1992).

³¹ İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), 136, and Yonca Köksal, “The Application of the Tanzimat Reforms in Bulgaria: State Building in the Ottoman Empire (1839-1878),” electronic publication of Kokkalis Program, Harvard University, 1999. <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW1/GSW1/11%20Koksal.pdf>

³² Georgi Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskii vilayet* (Veliko Tŭrnovo: Vital, 1994); Milena Tafrova, *Tanzimatŭt, vilaetskata reforma i Bŭlgarite: administratsiata na Dunavskii vilayet* (1864-1876) (Sofia: IK “Gutenberg,” 2010); Teodoro Bakŭrdzhieva, *Na krachka pred vremeto, dŭrzhavnikŭt reformator Midhat Pasha 1822-1884* (Ruse: Avargard Print, 2009); and Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside.”

³³ E.I. Fadeeva, *Midhat Pasha: zhizn i deiatel'nost* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

reforms as failed attempts and particularly criticizes the economic development projects, as they included the imposition of *corvée* labor and unjust taxation on the Bulgarian peasantry.³⁴ As I argue in this dissertation, the reality of the labor system was much more complex: while labor was mandatory, workers were fairly compensated by the government. In addition, the government imposed required mandatory labor practices across the board, on all social classes and ethno-religious groups. They also encouraged volunteerism, donations, and other forms of aide to assist in these projects. The additional taxes required to finance government projects were minor compared to other taxes at the time, and were equally paid by Muslims and non-Muslims. Therefore other ethno-religious communities, including Muslims, were subject to the *corvée* labor and unjust taxation of the Ottoman government.

Despite the negative image of Midhat Pasha and his reforms in Bulgarian literature, a number of recent studies by Bulgarian scholars have developed a more positive and nuanced view of the *Tanzimat*, underlining the relative success and economic growth that Ottoman modernization achieved.³⁵ Milen Petrov presents the *Tanzimat* as a system that was considered, at least in the short term, a viable alternative to Bulgarian nationalism:

Armed with the discourse of “Ottoman modernism,” the political opportunities of the *meclises* (council), the legal opportunities of the *nizami* (regular) courts and, last but not least, with the carrot of a huge

³⁴ For instance, see Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha*, and Siromahova, *Rise prez vīzrakzdaneto*.

³⁵ Tafrova, *Tanzimatūt, vilaetskata reforma i Būlgarite*; Bakūrdzhieva, *Na krachka pred vremeto*; Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside.”

imperial market and the economic opportunities it offered, Midhat's administration did put together a viable alternative to Bulgarian nationalism and managed, in the short run at least, to marginalized the nationalists' political goal and tactics.³⁶

Although Petrov's study primarily focuses on the four-year term of Midhat Pasha as governor, he rightly argues that the Ottoman Empire created an alternative to Bulgarian nationalism through reforms. Even after the end of Midhat Pasha's term, all of the modernizing institutions of the *Tanzimat* remained intact and the Ottoman government remained invested in the integration of Christian Bulgarians until the Russian occupation.

The primary focus, however, of Bulgarian scholarship on this period is on the national revival, which presents Bulgarians as a unified political entity under Ottoman suppression and downplays the role of Bulgarians who sided with the Ottomans.³⁷ It also exaggerates and romanticizes the Bulgarian uprisings and presents them as a mass movement. Bulgarian nationalists, however, could not establish long-lasting ties with peasants and Bulgarian intelligentsia—both of whom initially supported nationalist goals but came to oppose revolutionary violence.³⁸ On the verge of integration, many Bulgarians believed that their interests would be best served with the longevity of the Ottoman Empire.

³⁶ Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 435-6.

³⁷ For instance, Roumen Daskalov states, "The participation of Bulgarian Muslims –*pomaks*– in putting down the revolt (The April Uprising) and committing the greatest atrocities is the nationally awkward moment that rarely receives mention in the historical narrative," Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest; New York: Central European Press, 2011), 200.

³⁸ Thomas A. Meininger, *The Formation of a Nationalist Bulgarian Intelligentsia, 1835-1878* (New York: Garland, 1987), 398.

During the reforms, the Ottoman government increased military precautions against the Bulgarian revolutionaries, who were mostly organized in Romania. After the suppression of the revolt led by Stefan Karadzha and Hadzhi Dimitür in 1868, the revolutionaries were unable to organize any serious uprising until 1876 when the so-called April Uprising took place in the south-central part of the province. Barbara Jelavich, for instance, states, “The April Uprising, which became the major event in the later Bulgarian nationalist mythology, was a complete failure as a revolution.”³⁹ Although it was a complete failure as a revolution, Russia used the atrocities committed by the Ottoman irregular troops against Bulgarians as pretext for its invasion of the Ottoman Empire. On April 24, 1877, Russian troops crossed the Pruth River, occupied the north of the Danube, and launched attacks on the Danube province. The Quadrilateral arrangement of fortresses in Ruse, Silistra, Varna and Shumen, the so-called *kale-i erbaa*, served as the major military zone for the Ottomans with the Danube as the line of defense. These Ottoman fortresses held out throughout the war and were gradually evacuated after the armistice.

Literature about the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8 tends to focus on the military and diplomatic aspects of the conflict.⁴⁰ Bulgarian scholars have shown a keen interest in the war because of its relation to national liberation. As a result, however, Bulgarian scholarship often exaggerates Bulgarian participation in the war of 1877-8, presenting it

³⁹ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 347.

⁴⁰ For a recent example of these studies, see M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett, *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2011).

as a collective Bulgarian front against the Turks.⁴¹ They often present Bulgarians as a unified political entity, liberated by the Russians. This gives the impression that Bulgarians welcomed their “liberators” and generally supported Russia of their own volition. The Bulgarian historiography downplays the role of Muslim Bulgarians, or *Pomaks*, and the wealthy Christian Bulgarians, called *chorbaci*, who had a vested interest in the longevity of the Ottoman Empire, often labeling them as traitors. Similarly, many Turkish scholars tend to overemphasize the role of Bulgarians in the atrocities committed against Muslims, depicting Christian Bulgarians as hostile to all non-Orthodox Bulgarians.⁴²

My case study suggests that during the Russian bombardment in Ruse, Bulgarians suffered as much as any other ethnic group, losing their lives and property at the hands of their “liberators,” while being protected by their Ottoman “oppressors.” Muslim Bulgarians and *chorbaci*s continued to support the Ottoman Empire, and in many cases, Christian Bulgarians in the villages also helped their Muslim neighbors escape from the Russians. In the state of upheaval prior to the Russian occupation, only a select group of Bulgarians, armed by Russians, participated in the atrocities committed against Muslims, especially in the villages. They were not necessarily inspired by nationalistic feelings but instead they sometimes opportunistically plundered the properties of the wealthy in the

⁴¹ For instance, see Doino Doinov, “The Participation of the Bulgarian Volunteer Force in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78” in *Insurrections, Wars, and The Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, eds. Bela K. Kiraly and Gale Stokes (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁴² Ömer Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria, 1878-1908* (Ankara: TTK, 1998), and Bilal N. Şimşir, *The Turks of Bulgaria 1878-1985* (London: K. Rustem, 1988).

state of chaos. Bulgarian participation on the Russian side was limited to 5-7000 men, who were mostly armed and trained by Russians prior to the war.⁴³

The surrender of the Ottoman garrison on February 8, 1878 officially marked the end of Ottoman rule in Ruse and placed the city under the command of Russian generals. Russians then formed a provisional government to prepare Bulgarians for self-rule and to preserve order and security during this process. On March 3, 1878, the Treaty of San Stefano, signed between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, created a new Bulgarian principality. On July 13, 1878, representatives from Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire met in Berlin to settle affairs in the East.⁴⁴ The treaty signed in Berlin returned Macedonia to the Ottoman Empire and created another autonomous province, Eastern Rumelia, with Plovdiv as its capital. These redistributions cost the Bulgarian principality much of its territory, although it retained control of areas in the north, including the cities of Vidin, Tŭrnovo, Varna, Sofia and Ruse. Two other major cities of the Ottoman Danube province, Nish and Tulcea, were excluded from the Bulgarian principality. As compensation for their participation in the war, Serbia gained control of the former and Romania, the latter. The newly drawn borders left a large Muslim population in Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia and a significant Bulgarian population in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁵ With its strategic location in central north,

⁴³ Doinov, "The Participation of the Bulgarian Volunteer Force in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78."

⁴⁴ *Turkey No. 44 (1878) Treaty Between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East, Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1878).

⁴⁵ In June 1878, Midhat Pasha was still in exile in London, but he published an article to inform the representatives of the Great Powers about Bulgaria, proposing division of the Bulgarian principality between the East and West of the Yantara River, fifty kilometers west of Ruse. The base of this proposal was the predominant Muslim population in the cities such as Ruse, Silistra, Shumen and Varna in the East

Ruse bridged the predominantly Muslim region in the east and the Bulgarian Christian majority in the west.

The Treaty of Berlin also reduced the terms of the Russian provisional government to nine months, and required the Russians to withdraw from Bulgaria immediately after the election of a prince and the completion of a Bulgarian constitution. Therefore, in April 1879 when the Constituent Assembly adopted the Tŭrnovo constitution, and Alexander of Battenberg became the prince of Bulgaria, Russians began appointing Bulgarian governors and withdrawing their military. In Ruse, Ivan Ivanov became the first Bulgarian governor on April 28, 1879, symbolizing the beginning of Bulgarian national rule in the city. The implementation of the Berlin Treaty, recovery from the destruction of the war, and normalization of inter-ethnic relations, shaped the local affairs in Ruse during the early years of the Bulgarian government.

In the early post-Ottoman period, scholars tend to characterize the Russian provisional government either as an institution set up to prepare Bulgarians for self-rule or a Russian effort to ensure influence in the Balkans.⁴⁶ This literature discusses the major issues of this transitional period, such as international diplomacy, the Tŭrnovo Constitution, the election of the prince, the party politics between the so-called Liberals

as opposed to the Bulgarian majority in Sofia, and Vidin in the West. See Midhat Pasha's "The Past, Present and Future of Turkey" in *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, edited by James Knowles Volume III January-June 1878 (London: C. Kegan Paul & CO., 1878), 990-991.

⁴⁶ For instance, see Goran D. Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko upravlenie v Bŭlgariia 1877-1879* (Sofia: Bŭlgarska Akademeia na Naukite, 1958); Maria G. Manolova, *Normotvorcheskata deĭnost na vremennoto Rusko upravlenie v Bŭlgariia 1877-1879* (Sofia: Ciela, 2003); Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements 1806-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*; and B.H. Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans 1870-1880* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937).

and Conservatives, and ethnic violence.⁴⁷ Yet, historians tend to analyze the Russian provisional government in the Bulgarian principality independently of the Ottoman historical context, and portray Bulgarians as unified in support of a national state and their Russian “liberators.” Richard Crampton, for example, omits Midhat Pasha and his reforms in his studies. His discussion of the post-war period focuses on the Tŭrnovo constitution and the split between Bulgarians as Conservatives and Liberals rather continuity and change from the Ottoman rule.⁴⁸ Similarly, C.E. Black details the electoral system that the provisional government used in the elections for the constituent assembly, and presents it as a newly introduced system, even though it was in use since the mid-1860s.⁴⁹

Similarly, many of the institutions established under Russian rule, were, in fact, simply restored from the Ottoman period by a process that generally involved changing their names and the appointment of new officials.⁵⁰ Bulgarian scholarship on the early post-Ottoman period tends to present these institutions as new and national, either briefly

⁴⁷ C.E. Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1943); Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria 1878-1908*; Ī. Angelova, et al., *Bŭlgarskite dŭrzhavni institutsii 1879-1986: entsiklopedichen spravochik* (Sofia: Dŭrzhavno Izd. D-r Petŭr Beron, 1987); Vasil Popov, et al, *Bŭlgarskata zemskata voĭska 1878-1879* (Sofia: Voeno Izdatelstvo, 1959) and Rashko Ivanov, et al., *Sotsialno-politicheska istoria na Bŭlgariia 1878-1848* (Svishtov: Akad.Izd. Tsenov, 1995).

⁴⁸ Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and *Bulgaria 1878-1918*.

⁴⁹ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government*, 55-6.

⁵⁰ In Ruse, the model farm, agricultural credit cooperatives, the municipal council and the Court of Appeals, for example, were restored under the Bulgarian national government while those such as the printing house and the orphanage (*Islahhane*) were completely destroyed during the war. See Ivan Radkov and Liubomir Zlatev, *Rusenskata obshtina 1878-1949* (Ruse: Dŭrzhaven Arhiv, 2002); Ivan Markov Ivanov’s “Sŭzdavane na apelativnata sŭdebnata intitutsiia v Ruse” in *Iubileĭ nauchna konferentsiia po arheologia i istoria na tema, gradŭt, po povod 100 godini Rusenski muzeĭ, Izvestiia: gradŭt arheologiia i istoria*, Tom IX (Ruse: TS Grup OOD, 2005); and *Agricultural Bank of Bulgaria: Balkan States Exhibition London 1907* (Sofia: G.T. Paspaleff, Printer and Litographer, 1907), 13-16.

mentioning or omitting their Ottoman origins. As my dissertation argues, the “modernized” administrative system of the *Tanzimat* remained intact with minor changes in the Bulgarian principality. Although Russians invested in Bulgarian nationalism and Pan-Slavism, the transfer of power to Christian Bulgarians took place gradually and the cooperation between Muslim and Bulgarian elites continued.

The early post-Ottoman literature also focuses on ethnic violence and forced immigration of non-Bulgarians. Non-Bulgarians, particularly returning war refugees, suffered the most from the disruptions and violence of the transitional period. Turkish historians emphasize the sufferings of Muslims and tend to present Bulgarians as hostile to all non-Bulgarians.⁵¹ My study adds a different case study that shows that Ruse avoided large-scale violence and preserved its plural society with gradually growing Bulgarian dominance. After the end of the Russian provisional government, ethnic relations improved in the city due to the efforts of the local Bulgarian government and Muslim citizens of the new nation-state. Despite its liberal constitution and Western influences, the national government used many Ottoman practices such as granting religious autonomy and military exemption tax to manage its diverse population.

Methodology

My project is based on extensive research in the archives and libraries of Turkey and Bulgaria as well as relevant Western sources, which include the British, French, Austrian and Russian consular reports, newspapers, traveler accounts, diaries and the

⁵¹ For instance, see Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria, 1878-1908*, and Bilal Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri: Belgeler Cilt 1, Doksanüç Muhacereti 1877-78* (Ankara: TTK, 1989).

records of American protestant missionaries. First and foremost, I explored Ottoman archival sources, most of which are preserved in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, the “Oriental Department” of the St. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, and the local Bulgarian State Archives in Ruse. These archival documents include various types of records including *irade* (imperial decrees), *sicil* (court registers), *salname* (yearbooks), and *defter* (financial records), all of which are valuable sources for uncovering the social, political and economic dynamics of the city. In the National Library in Sofia, I examined provincial newspapers and consular reports from the period in various languages. This library is also home to Bulgarian archival collections including visual images, records and memoirs from important personages from the Ruse region. I also used the collections at the local archive of Ruse, which housed several different types of materials—in particular, the records of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the local Bulgarian government after independence.

My dissertation follows a chronological order from the Ottoman provincial reforms of 1864 to the establishment of the Bulgarian national government. The first three chapters explore the Ottoman reform period. In the first, I investigate Midhat Pasha’s socio-political reforms and how they affected ethno-religious communities in Ruse. Here I argue that during the reforms, Bulgarian Christians and Muslims came into close contact and cooperated in modernization projects, creating new kinds of interaction between these two communities, including political alliances for elections. Many residents of Ruse found the representative system, as well as the educational and cultural reforms to be progressive, and made efforts to benefit from the new institutions. The

Ottoman government had increasingly recruited Christian Bulgarians into administrative offices, and created a group of Bulgarian elites supportive of the reforms and committed to the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter argues that the political integration of Christian Bulgarians was more successful than has been presented in the existing literature on the *Tanzimat*, and that these socio-political reforms and modernization projects convinced many Bulgarians to invest in the longevity of the empire.

The socio-political reforms were also accompanied by large-scale economic development projects. Ruse emerged from this period as an international and cosmopolitan port city with Western connections. In chapter 2, I explore how economic reforms, Western investment and trade, as well as Ruse's proximity to the Danube influenced its economic development. Here, I am interested in how these changes impacted ethnic relations. I argue that the local economy in Ruse had increasingly developed contact with the West and that markets in Ruse largely remained under the control of non-Muslim local merchants.⁵² Christian merchants had traditionally dominated markets in the Ottoman Empire and in the nineteenth century, they had increasingly played a role as intermediaries in the developing commerce with the West. Indeed, the economic development projects of the *Tanzimat* did not necessarily create a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Ottoman government attempted to

⁵² About the Christian dominance, see Traian Stoianovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant," *Journal of Economic History* (June 1960), 234-313, and "The Social Foundations of Balkan Politics 1750-1941," in *Balkans in Transition: Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics Since the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Charles and Barbara Jelavich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 297-345. Also see Wayne S. Vucinich, "The Nature of Balkan Society under Ottoman Rule," *Slavic Review*, Vol 21, No. 4 (1962), 597-622.

integrate them through common Ottoman citizenship, secular commercial courts and consular services.⁵³

As I argue, Christian Bulgarians supported the reforms, co-invested in infrastructure projects, established and developed closer ties and special commercial relationships within their communities, with other groups, and with the local government. With the improved transportation system and business network, local merchants were able to export domestic goods, in particular grains, wool, textile and agricultural products. Although the economy declined slightly during the panic of 1873, the period leading up to the war, the Danube province was one of the most prosperous regions in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁴ By investing in the longevity of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarian commercial elites came to oppose revolutionary violence and continued to cooperate with the government and other ethno-religious communities. Rather than upsetting the balance of ethnic relations, close contact among these elite Bulgarian Christians and Muslims as well as the presence of many foreign merchants and travellers created an atmosphere of tolerance in Ruse relative to the rest of the region.

The rise of Bulgarian nationalism was one of the many challenges to Midhat Pasha's reforms. Chapter 3 examines the extent to which the Bulgarian nationalist movement made a place for itself in Ruse. As this chapter explores, during the *Tanzimat*,

⁵³ Reşat Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 52.

⁵⁴ There is a historiographical debate whether western goods caused an economic decline in the Balkans. My study supports Michael Palairot's argument that the economic decline in Bulgaria took place after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 with the destruction of the war and the loss of the Ottoman markets rather than the penetration of import goods, Michael Palairot, *The Balkan Economies c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 81.

Bulgarian nationalists in Ruse established local organizations such as *Karan* and *Kubrat* to help revolutionaries cross the Danube and transfer arms from the Bulgarian Secret Central Committee in Bucharest. Their activities, however, remained limited and failed to incite any revolt against the Ottomans because of the strict Ottoman surveillance and lack of support from locals. The Ottoman government found pragmatic solutions to cope with the Bulgarian revolutionaries, imprisoning or exiling them to Anatolia, and executing only those who actively took part in armed uprisings. The Ottoman strategy also included recruitment of Bulgarians into the newly established military units along the Danube—a line of defense against the armed bands of the Bulgarian Secret Central Committee in Bucharest.

I also argue that Bulgarians in Ruse were primarily concerned with establishing their own church independence from the Greek Patriarchate rather than an independent nation state. In an effort to thwart the nationalist movement, Midhat Pasha supported Bulgarian religious autonomy. On February 6, 1865, the Ottoman sultan issued a decree, granting Bulgarians in Ruse a specific form of self-government, the Bulgarian National Church Parish (*Bŭlgarskata Tsŭrkovna Narodna Obshtina*). Many of the pro-Ottoman Bulgarian elites took the leading role in this new institution, which regulated Bulgarian churches and played an intermediary role between the Bulgarian community and the Ottoman government. Through this alliance against the Patriarchate, many Bulgarians sympathized with the Ottoman government, as it was an important step towards the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, which took place in 1870.

Chapter 4 examines the effect of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-8 on the residents of Ruse. Here I argue that the Russian invasion did not elicit support from most Bulgarians in Ruse, who actually suffered from the Russian bombardments as much as any other ethnic or religious groups in the city. At the beginning of the war, the suspension of navigation on the Danube and the departure of many foreign merchants had a great impact on the economy in Ruse. Most local residents stayed in the town and continued their daily routine. It was not the first time that Russians had invaded the city, however, the heavy Russian bombardment, starting in June 1877, left Ruse in ruins and displaced much of its population.⁵⁵ The war destroyed the material prosperity of the last three decades in the region. In Ruse, residents' suffering and the destruction of the bombardment led to anti-Russian sentiment among all ethnic and religious communities, including Bulgarians.

Following the surrender of the Ottoman garrison in Ruse, Russians took charge of forming a provisional government, which I examine in chapter 5. Here I argue that the Ottoman administrative system provided a structural foundation for the formation of the new government under Russian generals in Ruse. Without radically changing the form of government, the Russians military seized key government offices and controlled or expelled the existing Ottoman ruling elites. The Russians exclusively worked with Bulgarian intellectuals and public figures of the Ottoman reform period. The new ruling class predominantly included merchants, young teachers, doctors, journalists, and

⁵⁵ In one such attack in 1812, the Russian military destroyed the defense fortress in Ruse, which the Ottomans restored shortly after. Due to Ruse's location on the northern border of the Ottoman Empire, there was a precedent for Russian invasion.

lawyers who represented the urban, rather than rural, population. Many of them were educated at Western schools in Paris, Tabor and Istanbul, or in Russia, and some newly appointed Bulgarian officials had worked for the Ottoman government before the Russian occupation. As for middle and lower level offices, the provisional government allowed many non-Bulgarian bureaucrats and even *zaptiyes* (police officers) to continue their jobs and selectively incorporated Christian *chobaci* into the new ruling elite. The provisional government was moderate and inclusive—a pragmatic solution to rule a diverse population, even though it continued investing in Bulgarian nationalism and Pan-Slavism. Russian rule, however, faced opposition not only from Muslims but also from Christian Bulgarians who often criticized the new officers, taxes and the appointment of Russian priests in some of their churches.

The return of the war refugees was one of the major issues after the conclusion of the war. In chapter 6, I examine the difficulties that the war refugees had upon their return. Under Russian occupation, Bulgarian nationalism began to appeal to broader masses of Bulgarians in the region. Russians and Bulgarian nationalists did not allow many non-Bulgarians, in particular wealthy Muslims, to return to their homes and even forced them to leave the principality. Unlike other towns such as Sofia, Kustendil, Ihtiman, Kara Lom and Svishtov, where Muslims rose in armed revolt against the new government, violence in Ruse was relatively mild. Ruse avoided large-scale violence and preserved its plural society with gradually growing Bulgarian dominance. Russia's failure to invade Ruse and the peaceful surrender of the city after the armistice, created circumstances conducive to the cohabitation of Turks, Bulgarians, and other ethno-

religious groups. Additionally, Bulgarian's minority status in Ruse also affected their ability to exert influence over other ethnic groups. Sizable Turkish, Armenian, Jewish, and Greek populations, as well as foreign consuls and merchants, limited the scope and scale of pressure from Russians and their Bulgarian supporters.

After the election of the Bulgarian prince and drafting of the constitution, on April 28, 1879, Ivan Ivanov became the first Bulgarian governor of Ruse. The final chapter of this study is also devoted to analyzing how the departure of the Russians and the establishment of a Bulgarian government in Ruse affected ethno-religious communities in the city. I argue that all ethnic groups, including Bulgarians, were pleased with the departure of Russians, which significantly eased ethnic tensions in the city. The Bulgarian government pragmatically handled the issues with Muslims such as political representation, conscription and property confiscation. Muslims became better represented in the National Assembly, and the Bulgarian government allowed Muslims to buy military exemptions, which was similar to the Ottoman system. Some property was confiscated from Muslims in Ruse, but generally urban planning was not ethnically motivated. Since the war destroyed the city, property requisitioning occurred as part of reconstruction, as opposed to directly targeting non-Bulgarian populations within Ruse. The "European" remaking of the city had already started under Midhat Pasha's governorship and it did not necessarily exclude Muslims. Even though non-Bulgarians were under pressure from the gradually growing Bulgarian dominance within the nation-state, Ruse did not experience forced mass emigration. Muslims and non-Muslims continued to work together after Bulgarian independence, just as they did during the

Ottoman reform period. The cooperation of Muslim and Bulgarian elites continued particularly in the elitist Conservative Party, which ruled the new principality immediately after the Russian provisional government. Ruse preserved many of the modernized Ottoman institutions and continued to be the site of many new establishments such as the first private bank and the pharmacy association.

Tracing the transformation of Ruse from the Ottoman provincial capital to one of the major Bulgarian cities, my dissertation specifically contributes to the study of the development of Southeastern European nationalism and urbanism. It shows that Bulgarian nationalism was often contested by other political loyalties and self-definitions. Through various progressive reform programs, the Ottoman Empire promoted secular Ottomanism, and increasingly integrated Bulgarian Christians into the Ottoman political system. In the course of the 1860s and 1870s, these socio-political reforms and economic development laid the foundation for a modernized Ruse, which became an international commercial center. The response of individuals to the emerging and competing ideologies of Bulgarian nationalism and Ottomanism was complex and multifaceted and was based on the interplay of loyalties, urban interactions, and self-interest. After Bulgarian independence, the local government in Ruse did not reject ethnic diversity of Ottoman Ruse, but rather preserved the existing social structure while gradually investing in Bulgarian nationalism.

This study allows for comparison with studies of other Ottoman cities in the region, and contributes to the larger picture of the evolution of Bulgarian-Turkish relations in the nineteenth century. It sheds light on the larger regional issues of the

tensions between nation and empire, center and periphery, which had a particular cast in urban environments. It was there, among the urban, educated populations of Ruse that not only Bulgarian nationalism flourished, but also that Ottoman, and then modern European cosmopolitanism grew and endured.

Chapter One: Ottoman Reform and Pragmatic Governance in Ruse

On July 8, 1864, the Ottoman government recalled Midhat Pasha, the governor of Nish, to the capital. There, with the input of Midhat Pasha, the Ottoman reformers, Fuad Pasha and Ali Pasha, issued the Regulations of the Provincial Administration (*Vilayet Nizamnamesi*). Modeled after the French system, the new provincial administration was then put into effect on October 13, 1864 after the sultan's approval.⁵⁶ It was a political move to extend the modernization and political integration of *Tanzimat* to the countryside. As such, the Ottoman government combined the provinces of Silistra, Nish and Sofia into the Danube province (*Tuna Vilayeti*). This was to be a "pilot region" for the experimental reforms.⁵⁷ Ruse became the capital and Midhat Pasha was appointed governor. One of the main goals of the reforms was to better integrate non-Muslims, in particular Bulgarian Christians, into the Ottoman political system. Thus, the government promoted the notion of *Osmanlılık* (Ottomanism), declaring every individual living on Ottoman lands to be an Ottoman citizen regardless of their faith, language and ethnicity.⁵⁸

As the symbol of *Tanzimat* ideology in Ruse, governor Midhat Pasha established a provincial assembly and councils (*meclis*) for administration, municipality, justice and

⁵⁶ For the regulations, see *Vilayet Nizamnamesi*, Düstûr 1. Tertip (Istanbul 1289), 608-624, and *Tuna Vilayet Nizamnamesi*, BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi), I.MMS no: 1245. Also see M. Hüdai Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bulgar Meselesi 1850-1875* (Ankara: TTK, 1992), 253–271 for the differences between these two copies of the regulations and their transliteration to the Latin alphabet.

⁵⁷ Midhat Pasha carried out similar projects in other provinces. See his governorships in the provinces: Nish (February 4, 1861- October 25, 1864), Danube (October 25, 1864- March 6, 1868), Baghdad (February 27, 1869- July 31, 1872), Syria (November 24, 1878- August 5, 1880) and Aydın (August 5, 1880- May 17, 1881).

⁵⁸ The nationality law of 1869 defined Ottoman citizenship as "every individual born from an Ottoman father and an Ottoman mother or only from an Ottoman father is an Ottoman subject," Kemal Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden-Boston-Koln: Brill, 2002), 639.

commerce, where elected non-Muslims and Muslims represented their communities. The number of candidates in the elections was equally divided between Muslims and non-Muslims. The new system increasingly recruited Christian Bulgarians, particularly wealthy and bilingual citizens, to the Ottoman administration, creating a pro-Ottoman group of elites who supported the reforms. This was a drastic shift from the traditional method of government, in which the *chorbazhi* held an intermediary position between state and Christian Bulgarian community, and who generally held their posts for life. By limiting the terms of service to a year or two, the new system appeared to be more dynamic and inclusive, and brought Bulgarian Christians and Muslims into closer contact within government offices.

Respecting Bulgarian demands for religious autonomy from the Greek Patriarchate, the Ottoman sultan Abdülaziz himself issued a decree for the establishment of a specific form of Bulgarian self-government in Ruse. In 1865, the Bulgarian community established their own religious institution, the so-called the Bulgarian National Church Parish (*Bŭlgarskata Tsŭrkovna Narodna Obshtina*). Administered by elected Bulgarian elites, this new institution was revolutionary in Ruse, as it meant official recognition of a Bulgarian *millet* before the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870.

During the *Tanzimat*, Bulgarians also enjoyed some freedom of cultural and literary expression. The reforms included new secular schools, which Muslims and non-Muslims could attend together, a state publishing house run by Bulgarian Christians and Muslims that published a bi-lingual newspaper (*Tuna* or *Dunav*) along with other

newspapers in Bulgarian, Ottoman Turkish, and French. The publishing house also provided textbooks and school materials for Bulgarian schools. The Ottoman government also funded education in Europe for both Muslim and non-Muslim students they hoped to hire for government offices. Bulgarian elites actively participated in the commissions that enacted these reforms, and further established other cultural institutions such as *chitalishte* (reading rooms).

In the 1860s, the Ottoman Empire created a viable alternative—secular Ottomanism—to Bulgarian nationalism. With the goal of integrating Christian Bulgarians into the socio-political fabric of the empire, the reforms were successful, at least among some segment of Bulgarians, who took a pragmatic stance and enjoyed the opportunities the Ottoman government offered. The political representation, religious autonomy, new schools, and cultural institutions convinced many Christian Bulgarians to invest in the longevity of the Ottoman Empire, and thus made it difficult for the nationalists to gain popular support.

Administrative Reforms

The Ottoman government chose Ruse as the capital of the Danube province because of its diverse population with a Muslim majority and its reputation as a site of peaceful coexistence. In 1865, the population in Ruse was 20,644.⁵⁹ Based on the census of 1866, the ethnic and religious percentages in Ruse were 51.8 percent Muslim, 37.6 percent Bulgarian, 1.2 percent Muslim Roma, 1 percent non-Muslim Roma, 3.7 percent

⁵⁹ Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskii vilaet*, 54. According to Pletnov, the population in Ruse included 10,765 Muslim, 7676 Christian, 778 Albanian, 956 Jewish and 469 Roma citizens.

Armenian, and 4.7 percent Jewish.⁶⁰ Ruse also accommodated many foreign merchants, diplomats and officers of foreign consulates. By the mid-1870s, foreigners made up nearly ten percent of the city's population.⁶¹ Considering another ten percent of the population was Armenian, Jewish, or Roma, urbanizing Bulgarians represented one of the main communities in Ruse at around 30-35 percent of the population.



Figure 1: The Administrative Centers of the Danube Province.⁶²

Unlike most Ottoman cities, Ruse did not have strictly segregated quarters for ethno-religious communities.⁶³ In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were

⁶⁰ Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City*, 350.

⁶¹ In 1872, for example, the British consul reports that there were 1528 Austrian and 122 British citizens, not including their wives and children. *Reports Relative to British Consular Establishments: 1858-1871*, 29.

⁶² The map is drawn based on the map of the Danube province from 1865. For the original map, see BOA, HRT.h 780. The reforms of 1864 were modeled after the French administrative structure, which was based on a three-level government. Below the national government, departments (or regions), *arrondissement* (districts) and cantons were administered by elected councils. Similarly, the Ottoman system divided the Danube province into seven administrative units called *sancak* (also referred to as *liva*), which were further subdivided into districts (*kaza*), which were divided into sub-districts (*nahiye*). As the capital, Ruse included nine districts, one sub-district, and ninety-three villages.

⁶³ For instance, Donald Quataert compares Salonika with Aleppo, which had more inclusive neighborhoods. See Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 180-1.

twenty-five neighborhoods (called *mahalle* in Ruse), all of which were ethnically and religiously mixed, except for one Armenian, one Jewish and a few Muslim quarters. Most of the Christian Bulgarians lived in neighborhoods such as Büyük/Goliam Varoş, Süleyman Çiflik/Voyvoda, Hacı Hüseyin Çiflik, Hacı Memiş Çiftlik together with Muslim Turks.⁶⁴ Similarly, Turks and Bulgarians lived side-by-side in nearly half of the villages of the Ruse District. In the late 1870s, V. Teplov was commissioned by the Russian embassy in Istanbul to collect statistical data about the demography of the Danube province, supposedly based on the Ottoman census of 1866. He later published his findings in St. Petersburg. Categorizing the villages as Christian, Muslim, and mixed, Teplov's study indicates that there were ninety-three villages in Ruse divided between Christians and Muslims as well as sixteen Christian, thirty-seven Muslim, and forty mixed communities.⁶⁵ The category of "Christian" in Teplov's table includes not only Christian Bulgarians, but also other Christian communities such as Greeks, Romanians, and Serbians. The Muslim villages included Turks, Pomaks, Tatars, Circassians, and Muslim Roma. The coexistence of Muslim and non-Muslim populations in these communities may explain why the Ottoman government chose Ruse as the provincial capital because the reforms were supposed to bring these communities together to create a cohesive Ottoman identity.

With the goal of alleviating conflict, the reforms of 1864 made provisions for the establishment of a new political system in which elected Muslims and non-Muslims

⁶⁴ Teodora Bakürdzhieva, *Bulgarskata obshtnost v Ruse prez 60-te godini na XIX vek: istoriko-demografsko izsledvane* (Sofia: DIOS, 1996), 10.

⁶⁵ V. Teplov, *Materialy dlia statistiki Bolgari, Frakii i Makedonii s prilozheniem karty razpredeleniia narodonaseleniia po veroispovedaniiam* (St. Petersburg: 1877), 101-24.

could represent their communities in the administrative, judicial, and municipal councils. Among the new councils, first and foremost was the Provincial General Assembly (*Meclis-i Umumi-i Vilayet*), which consisted of regional delegates, two Muslim and two non-Muslim, from each *sancak*.⁶⁶ The delegates, together with the governor and *ex officio* members, met in Ruse once annually to submit their proposals and review those of the governor. Within forty days, the assembly discussed proposals regarding administration, education, public works, justice, security, agriculture, commerce and the economy.⁶⁷ Its function was similar to the State Council (*Şura-yı Devlet*) in Istanbul, which received annual legislative proposals from provincial representatives.⁶⁸ Although the Provincial General Assembly lacked actual legislative power, it allowed local representatives to discuss government policies as an advisory body, which formed the backbone of the Ottoman constitutional system in 1876.⁶⁹

The Council of Provincial Administration (*Meclis-i Idare-i Vilayet*), however, was the highest council, and held broad responsibilities within the government, public works, agriculture and foreign affairs. For instance, it took charge of purchasing the tools and equipment for infrastructural projects, collected taxes, and oversaw hospitals,

⁶⁶ According to İsmail Selimoğlu, instead of 28 delegates from seven administrative units, only 21 were elected, three from each and together with *ex officio* members, the assembly had 35 members. Article 82 of the Nizamname of 1864 pointed out that three delegates from each district would join the assembly. Thus, although 28 delegates from the districts should have been in the assembly only 21 delegates from the districts, together with the governor and the high-ranking officials totally 35 members, attended in the meeting of the Provincial General Assembly, BOA, I.MVL, no: 26162 cited by Selimoğlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tuna Vilayeti (1864-1878)*, 51.

⁶⁷ Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Döneminde Anadolu Kentlerinin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapıları*, (Ankara: TTK, 1991), 261–262. Articles of the 1864 Nizamname, no: 27, 28, 29, 63, 64, 74.

⁶⁸ Stanford J. Shaw, “The Central Legislative Councils in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Reform Movement before 1876,” 74.

⁶⁹ İlber Ortaylı, *Tanzimat Devrinde Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri 1840-1880* (Ankara: TTK, 2000), 91-92.

schools, cemeteries, market places, mining, police, and municipalities.⁷⁰ It was made up of three Muslim and three non-Muslims delegates and four *ex officio* members including the secretary, accountant, judicial representative and the official of foreign affairs.⁷¹ This council also coordinated with other government bodies such as the municipal and judicial councils, and had the right to intervene if needed.⁷² The Council of Provincial Administration needed at least five members to open a session and a two-thirds majority of the total votes was required to make decisions. If votes were equally divided, the governor made the final decision.⁷³ Similar councils were established at all levels of the administrative hierarchy and in villages. In the new system, villagers elected a *muhtar* (head of the village) and formed a council of elders to work with him. If the village had more than twenty households, it could have two *muhtars*.⁷⁴

The regulations of 1864 also made provisions for the secularization of the judicial system. As such, the government established two new courts, which were later combined: the Court of Appeals (*Meclis-i Temyiz-i Hukuk*) and a criminal court (*Meclis-i Cinayet ve De'vâi*).⁷⁵ With six elected members, three Muslim and three non-Muslim, and a chief justice, this court decided cases that the sharia courts, the courts of religious communities, or the commercial court (*Meclis-i Ticaret*), failed to settle. Although the

⁷⁰ Article of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 77.

⁷¹ Article of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 13.

⁷² Article of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 78-79

⁷³ Article of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 83.

⁷⁴ Articles of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 58,59,60,61,62.

⁷⁵ Articles of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 13-24. These two courts were combined together while keeping their responsibilities independent of each other since the number of issues concerned with the Court of Appeals was rather limited, BOA, I.MVL no: 23773.

commercial court itself was a secular body and both Muslims and non-Muslims were represented, the Court of Appeals was the highest judicial court.⁷⁶

In addition to these institutions, the Ottoman government established a municipal council (*Belediye Meclisi*) in Ruse in 1865 based on Midhat Pasha's proposal. According to Tetsuya Sahara, the Danube region, including Ruse, was the first provincial region where the municipal council was introduced. In describing the imperial edict that outlined the principles of the municipality in Ruse, Sahara argues that the Ottoman government later applied the same rules to other provincial municipalities, such as those in Syria.⁷⁷ Thus, the municipal council in Ruse represents the first provincial municipality to introduce fully developed and systematic rules and regulations in the Ottoman Empire and served as an example for other regions.

On October 24, 1867, the Provincial General Assembly voted for the establishment of municipalities in other district centers based on the successes in Ruse.⁷⁸ According to the principles issued in September 1865, the municipal council in Ruse was made up of six elected members (two Muslims, two Bulgarians, one Armenian and one Jew, elected for a two year term), and worked with the mayor and his assistant. In the elections for the municipal council in Ruse, Muslims were underrepresented based on their population. They elected only two members, while the other four came from the

⁷⁶ Article of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 25 describes the role of the commercial court.

⁷⁷ Tetsuya Sahara, "The Making of the Modern Municipal Government in the Ottoman Balkans: The Distribution and Religious Structure of Municipal Councils as seen through the Provincial Yearbooks," presented at the AEEES (January 22th, 2000 at Aoyama Gakuin University).
<http://www.na.rim.or.jp/~aees/reikai/sahara.html>

⁷⁸ BOA, I.MVL Dosya 542, Gömlek 24362 and 26138.

non-Muslim communities.⁷⁹ The staff of this new institution included an accountant, a secretary, an engineer, a physician, a number of inspectors, police officers and a laborer (to maintain the office). With the exception of the mayor and elected members, employees were paid monthly salaries up to 500 *gurush*, while laborers received a salary of 150 *gurush*. The Ottoman government funded the municipality in Ruse by allocating a portion of taxes on buildings and construction permit fees, and used a part of the income from the passport and customs offices. The municipal council had no right to collect taxes other than those specified above and was required to deposit extra income into the bank accounts opened at the newly established local bank (*Menafi Sandigi*), so that these funds would gain interest.⁸⁰

The municipality held a wide range of responsibilities including overseeing stores, bazaars and fair grounds, checking weights and measurements, constructing and maintaining sidewalks, roads, water and drainage systems and street lighting, regulating construction, securing hygiene and cleanliness (especially in restaurants), providing fire departments, and helping the homeless.⁸¹ As I will detail in chapter 2, this institution significantly contributed to the reconstruction of Ruse, changing the look and pace of the city with a new urban plan modeled after European cities.

Even before the foundation of Ruse as a multi-ethnic and secular municipality, Sultan Abdulaziz approved the establishment of the Bulgarian National Church Parish (*Bŭlgarskata Tsŭrkovna Narodna Obshtina*), which was created on February 6, 1865 to

⁷⁹ BOA, I.MVL Dosya 542, Gŏmlek 24362.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

serve the Bulgarian community in Ruse.⁸² According to Raina Gavrilova, the *obshtina* was not a cultural institution, but a specific form of self-government, serving primarily as an intermediary between inhabitants and the state with respect to taxes. It became a representative body of the urban population in charge of maintaining churches, regulating religious affairs, and economic and social relations with the authorities.⁸³ In Ruse, on March 1, 1865, the Bulgarian community held elections for this church organization and formed an administrative committee composed of twelve members, four appointed by the church, seven elected, and a chair, Nil Izvorov, appointed by the church.⁸⁴ Bulgarian elites, including Midhat Pasha's supporter Ivancho Hadzhipenchovich and a *chorbaci* Kostaki Marinovich won the election and served for the *obshtina*.⁸⁵ The Bulgarian *obshtina* and the other new councils operated identically, and thus, this institution should be placed within the broader representative system of Ottoman modernization. It was a drastic shift from the Ottoman *millet* system in which the Greek Patriarchate held strong authority over the Orthodox Christian community. The *obshtina*, on the other hand, undermined the authority of the Greek Patriarchate, as the Bulgarian community began regulating its own religious affairs, and thus created tensions between two Christian communities. It was kind of its own millet institution for the Bulgarian Orthodox Christians in Ruse. Considering the mass movement for an independent Bulgarian church

⁸² Stoian Īordanov and Teodora Bakŭrdzhieva, *Podrani izvori za istoriata na grad Ruse i rusenskiia kraĭ II-XIX v.* (Ruse: Avangard Print, 1999), 148.

⁸³ Garilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 123-4.

⁸⁴ Dobri Ivanov, Tsoni Iliev, Encho Dragnev, and Ivan Nauchov were the appointed members whereas Kostaki Marinovich, Ivancho Penchovich, Simeon Zlatov, Evst. Tsankov, Dim. Danovich, H. Atanas Petkovich and Kostaki Dinolov. Īordanov and Bakŭrdzhieva, *Podrani izvori za istoriata na grad Ruse*, 153-4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 153.

in the city, the Ottoman government in Ruse pragmatically sided with the Bulgarians. In fact, Greeks were already disloyal and established their nation-state after their revolution. The Ottoman support further improved relations with Bulgarians, as they began to see the government as an ally in their struggle against the Greek Patriarchate.⁸⁶

After establishing all of these new institutions, the Ottoman government created an electoral system to recruit representatives. Elections had different procedures based on the size of the administrative units. In the villages, Ottoman subjects of any ethnicity or religion, aged 18 and above and who paid at least 50 *gurush* annual tax to the state were eligible to vote for the council of elders and the *muhtar*. In order to run for these positions, candidates had to be at least 30 years old and pay over 100 *gurush* a year in taxes. Elections were held annually and there was no limitation on the number of terms officials could hold. Upon the approval of district governors (*kaymakam*), *muhtar* and the council members began their work. If the *muhtar* died or was removed from his position, elections would be held earlier than the scheduled date.⁸⁷ The new system challenged the privileged position of local landlords (*ağa*) who had long exercised control over village affairs.

The same requirements applied to the elections in the sub-districts (*nahiye*) with minor differences. The head of this council (*müdür*) had to be literate, and priests, *imams*, teachers and government officials were ineligible to run in these elections. If the *nahiye* was composed of both Muslims and non-Muslims, the *müdür* was to be elected from the

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of the “Church Question” in Ruse.

⁸⁷ The Articles of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 67, 68, 69, 70.

majority and his assistant will be from the minority. The appointments were subject to the district governor's approval.⁸⁸

The elections in the district centers for higher councils were held every two years by a commission called *Tefrik Cemiyeti*. This body consisted of the governor, high-ranking officials, and the leaders of religious communities. The commission prepared a list of qualified candidates aged thirty or above, who paid at least 150-*gurush* in taxes, and were literate (if possible). The number of candidates was equally divided between Muslims and non-Muslims. In localities with more than one non-Muslim community, the number of non-Muslims was further divided. The number of candidates on the list was three times higher than the number of seats available in the councils. After elections, two-thirds of the candidates made it to the second round of the election process. The district governor would then eliminate a further half and the remaining names were elected.⁸⁹ This multi-phased election system allowed the government to exercise control over the councils, and generally the number of seats were equally divided between Muslims and non-Muslims. The appointed members of the council limited the role of non-Muslims in decision making. For instance, the Provincial General Assembly had twenty-eight elected members, two Muslim and two non-Muslim from each district center, but in practice it actually had thirty-five members, including the appointed members who were mostly Muslims.⁹⁰ Similarly, the Provincial Administrative Council was to be composed of three Muslim and three non-Muslim elected members as well as five appointed members. With

⁸⁸ BOA, I.MMS, no: 2382, articles 10, 11, 12, 13.

⁸⁹ The Article of the *Nizamname* of 1864, no: 81.

⁹⁰ Selimoğlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tuna Vilayeti (1864-1878)*, 51.

the inclusion of these appointed members, however, the council had seven Muslim and four non-Muslim members.⁹¹

On October 25, 1864, Midhat Pasha became the governor of the Danube province, with the goal of better integrating non-Muslim populations, in particular Christian Bulgarians, and creating a cohesive Ottoman identity. Shortly after his appointment, he came to Ruse with an ethnically diverse group of ruling elites such as Armenian Odiyan Efendi and Albanian Ismail Kemal Bey, but all shared the common ideology of Ottomanism (See Figure 2).⁹²



زھرا ناك پر بادشاہ: قوم و ولايت عثمانیہ مندوبانہ اجتماع پاشا و ارکانہ معین

پر وندہ شاعر؛ آگیش زمان اولوئک خیالی جهان «مکر» دیش ایی؛ شیدئی «آگیش زمان اولوئک خیالی جیر اولور» دیک لازمدر، شوکور دیکتکر نومه و اشع قانون اساسیه شیدر حریت عدت پاشا مرحومک طوئه اولیکسندره ارکان ولايت ایل برار آبرودئی فوطول اولور. نامی کال تک « طوئه نادن کیدورسه وطن نادن کیدور » دیمهک بو ولايتک ایستد ایشی اقدام ایلمش ایی. اولوچا کوزملولونیکه نایت فیمه و آلیهسته رومانی ولايت باقیهسنگ اتلنقال ایلدی شو اولنده ارواح املاحدن روس بلتک اگ نژاده «تاتار و معذب اولایق عدت پاشا مرحومدر - چونکه طوئا باقیه سر ایلندن «استان اولور» اولورینه یئندیرلرک خراج و ملک- بروک و طوئه دولتی ایون-سکر و اعزام اولوئورن؛ «کلهکیم زمان» بو سر ایلی و نهده شوکتلو انگیزی برده «دیجهک ادر و ننگه خولاق فیمه معنی کشف ایش و اسباب استقامت نشیت پونعه دای شوک دیجان ایلمش اولان اولور. عدت پاشا تک طوئه و ایلیکی ۱۲۸۱ تاریخنده باشلاقی ایون بومم ایلی سنه۱۲۸۰ بریکلادر.

Figure 2: Midhat Pasha and his ruling elite.⁹³

⁹¹ Skender Rızaj, “Midhat Pasha’nın Rumeli’de Vilayetler Kurulmasındaki Rolü”, *Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri: Bildiriler Tartışmalar Edirne: 8–10 Mayıs 1984*, (Ankara: TTK 1986), 60.

⁹² Ortaylı, “Midhat Paşa’nın Vilayet Yönetimindeki Kadroları ve Politikası,” *Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri: Bildiriler Tartışmalar Edirne: 8–10 Mayıs 1984*, (Ankara: TTK 1986), 227.

⁹³ <http://sinanculuk.blogspot.com/2013/01/culuk-midhat-pasa-gariban-koyluyu.html>, accessed on November 23, 2015.

Despite his influence on appointments, Midhat Pasha was required to work with Muslim conservatives, mostly high-ranking officials chosen by the center, who did not genuinely support reform. Among them, for example, Sururi Efendi and Senih Efendi, opposed the establishment of the Court of Appeals, which, they argued, would close Islamic courts. They sought support from other officials such as Nazif Efendi, a judicial inspector, and Mehmet Efendi, the *mufti* of Ruse, but their attempts failed.⁹⁴ In addition, Nusret Pasha, who was in charge of settling refugee populations, refused to work with the new governor. The reformist Grand Vizier (the prime minister of the Ottoman sultan) Fuad Pasha, however, supported Midhat Pasha and increased his authority, replacing Nazif Efendi with Necip Efendi, and Senih Efendi, with Rifat Efendi.⁹⁵ This illustrates Midhat Pasha's efforts to build his own cadre of reformers. An Austrian traveler, Felix Kanitz, described Aziz Pasha, the governor of Vidin appointed by Midhat Pasha, as a Western educated, bilingual reformer who worked diligently to improve his region and to cooperate with Bulgarians. Thanks to his successful efforts, Kanitz reported, Bulgarians praised him as the "father of Bulgarians."⁹⁶

During his governorship, Midhat Pasha's efforts focused on recruiting moderate Muslim and non-Muslim elites into his administration. The Provincial Administrative Council (*Meclis-i Idare-i Vilayet*), for instance, was composed of three Muslims and three non-Muslims with four *ex officio* members. In December 1864, the governor

⁹⁴ BOA, I.DH. no: 37120 and 37109.

⁹⁵ *Midhat Paşa'nın Hatıraları: 1, Hayatım İbret Olsun [Tavsıra-i İbret]*, edited by Osman Selim Kocahanoğlu, (Istanbul: Temel Yayınları, 1997), 45-46. BOA, I.DH. no: 37109- 37120.

⁹⁶ Felix Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan: Historisch-Geographisch-Ethnographische Reisestudien Aus Den Jahren 1860-1876*, II. Band (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung Von Hermann Fries, 1877), 9.

proposed two ethnic Bulgarians for the council, Hadzhi Ivan (Ivancho) Penchovich of Ruse and Hadzhi Iordan Nikolov of Elena, who were elected and remained in these posts until 1868. The governor's proposal also mentioned Ahmed Efendi (the head of Ruse's commercial court) and Molla Aga from Sofia as potential Muslim candidates, while stating the governor was still searching for two more members.⁹⁷ The governor's initial approval and support played an important role in the elections for high offices. According to a story about the pro-Ottoman Bulgarian, Penchovich, Midhat Pasha tested Penchovich's trustworthiness by sending someone to bribe him to gain a position in an administrative council Penchovich rejected his proposal, and thereby gained Midhat Pasha's trust.⁹⁸ Indeed after Midhat Pasha became the head of the State Council in Istanbul, he appointed Penchovich as a member of this council. The reports of the Russian consul in Ruse also recount similar incidents in which the Ottoman government tested the loyalty of Bulgarians. In a similar story, a group of Turkish spies went to a Bulgarian village and presented themselves as Hungarian. They then made provocations against the Ottoman government to see the reaction of Bulgarians to determine if they were loyal.⁹⁹

Working with his "trustworthy" Bulgarian supporters, the governor continued to recruit Bulgarians for his administration. For instance, Hadzhi Iordan Nikolov sent a letter to Nikola Mikhailovski, the director of the Bulgarian schools in Tŭrnovo, offering

⁹⁷ BOA, A.MKT.MVL Dosya 246, Gŏmlek 34.

⁹⁸ Pandeli Kisimov, "Istoricheski raboti, Midhat pasha, pŭrvii turski reformator," *Bŭlgarska sbirka* 5, no.9-10 (November-December 1898), 805.

⁹⁹ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavnyi arhiv, V-A2, op. 181/2, 1875, d.769, 140-142, in Ivo Zheŭnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877* (Ruse: 2009), 187.

him a position as an elected member of the Courts of Appeals and as supervisor for the Bulgarian section of the provincial newspaper. “Let me know immediately if you would like to take these posts,” he wrote, “So I can tell Vali Pasha to summon you (officially).”¹⁰⁰ Nikola Mikhailovski eventually came to Ruse and served on the council for the education reforms with Todor Shishkov. Dragan Tsankov and Ivan Chorapchiev took the leading role in the state-publishing house and its provincial newspaper *Tuna/Dunav* that was published in both Bulgarian and Turkish.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the Ottoman government offered Angel Künchev, a Western educated Bulgarian, the directorship of the model farm, *Numune Cifligi*, near Ruse.¹⁰² According to Pletnov, Bulgarians were well represented in the highest-level councils, and there were over ten Bulgarian delegates in the Provincial General Assembly, three appointed as district *müdürs* (director) in 1865 and two Bulgarian physicians hired by the Ottoman government.¹⁰³

The officials already holding positions at the middle and lower level offices, such as the police department, district councils, and agricultural cooperatives, often continued their work but under the pressure of being fired upon the governor’s judgment. The requirement necessary to remain in these posts was to be “competent” and “trustworthy.”¹⁰⁴ The Ottoman government also granted honorary medals and bureaucratic promotions to those who met these expectations. For instance, Petür Zlatev,

¹⁰⁰ Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 109-10.

¹⁰¹ See the section on the education reforms about Nikola Mikhailovski and Todor Shishkov, and the section on the publishing house about Dragan Tsankov and Ivan Chorapchiev.

¹⁰² Alexander Vezenkov, “In the Service of the Sultan, In the Service of the Revolution: Local Bulgarian Notables in the 1870s,” in *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-building*, eds. Hannes Grandits, Nathelie Clayer and Robert Pichler (London; New Work: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 149.

¹⁰³ Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravljenieto na Dunavskii vilaet* 48-49.

¹⁰⁴ Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 101.

Midhat Pasha's Bulgarian advisor, became a deputy district governor of Vidin. He later served in the judicial and administrative councils. Dragan Tsankov was also appointed as a deputy district governor in Nish in 1868 and in Vidin in early 1870s.¹⁰⁵ Hadzhi Ivancho Efendi (the head of the Commercial Court) was promoted to the higher office with the second rank of the Ottoman bureaucracy. Stefan Karagiozov Efendi (a member of the provincial administrative council) was also honored with the same position. Mihailovski Efendi, Dimitraki Efendi (a physician in Ruse), Mösyö Andonaki (a physician in Samakov) were also awarded the fifth rank imperial medal (*Mecidiye Nişanı*). In addition, Mr. Vacha from the Austrian Steam Navigation Company in Ruse was also granted the third rank imperial medal.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Midhat Pasha tried to create a sort of Bulgarian bourgeoisie attached to Ottoman rule that supported his reforms in the province.

As a Russian report from Ruse revealed, Sabri Pasha, the governor of Ruse appointed by Midhat Pasha, established close contact with wealthy, well-educated, bilingual Bulgarians.¹⁰⁷ St. Clair and Brophy also mention that short-term appointments made the positions in the administrative councils competitive, creating dependency on good relations with the government and the ruling elites.¹⁰⁸

This dynamic system led to cooperation of ethnic groups as well as corruption in some cases. In a petition addressed to the Bulgarian bishop in Ruse, a group of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 245.

¹⁰⁶ BOA, I.DH. no: 38984.

¹⁰⁷ Fadeeva, *Midhat Pasha*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Stanislas Graham Bower St. Clair and Charles A. Brophy, *A Residence in Bulgaria or Notes on the Resources and Administration of Turkey* (London: John Murray, 1869), 393.

Bulgarians complained that although they believed that the elections were for the good of public, in their own village they voted under pressure from a Muslim candidate, Hasan Agha. They argued that he was corrupt, but backed by Mehmed Ali Agha in Ruse whom he bribed with gifts. They asked the Bulgarian bishop for help to elect another Muslim candidate Ismail Efendi, whom they trusted.¹⁰⁹ This illustrates that Bulgarians were more concerned about corruption than the ethnicity of the candidate. Bulgarians and Muslims also made political alliances. In the same elections, Armenians complained that Bulgarians cooperated with Muslims to elect one more Bulgarian candidate to represent non-Muslims in the administrative councils.¹¹⁰

The social prestige and privileges of the new administrative councils and offices attracted many Bulgarians to the Ottoman political system. Working for the government became an indication of their elite status. As Bulgarian nationalist leader, Zahari Stoianov, acknowledged the political integration of Bulgarian elites into the Ottoman administration through councils was not just symbolic, but an effective political move.

If the Ottoman government, instead of persecuting the young forces of Bulgaria, had chosen to open the door for them to various civil and military positions, in other words if we had a greater number of Ivancho and Iordancho Efendis...Then the empire would still exist today and the crescent would still be waving over Sofia and Plovdiv...¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ The petition was signed by Georgi Vasilev, Stoicho, Georgi Rodev, Vasil Karacof, V. Ivanov, Dimitrar and Stanchov on January 28, 1876. DA-R (Dûrzhaven Arhiv Ruse) F.43K, op.1 ae.12, 1.25 and 73.

¹¹⁰ DA-R F.43K, op.1 ae.12, 1.79.

¹¹¹ Stoianov, *Zapiski*, vol. 1. 231. Cited in Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 247.

This shows the split between nationalists and pro-Ottoman Bulgarians and Stoianov laments that Bulgarians accept positions in the government offices:

The Ottoman government tried to kill the (Bulgarian) intelligentsia by exiling it to Diyarbekir, but it would have done much better to turn that intelligentsia into *efendis*, since we know from experience that all those Bulgarians in Ottoman government service men of rotten character, and were more loyal to Osman's throne than the Turks themselves.¹¹²

While being critical of Bulgarians who cooperated with the Ottoman government, Stoianov points out the Ottoman exile policy from which Bulgarian revolutionaries suffered, was less effective than political integration. It was, however, a tradition in the Ottoman administration to exile political threats to other parts of the empire. Ruse itself housed many Kurdish exiles from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia including Han Mahmud of Van, Mehmet Salim Agha of Diyarbekir, and Ali, Sadun and Ahmed of Mardin. Some of them were eventually able to return to their hometowns, but those like Han Mahmud died in Ruse and his family continued living there.¹¹³ Ironically, Midhat Pasha himself was exiled to London at the onset of the war of 1877-8, as Abdülhamid II accused him of instigating the coming war.

From Midhat Pasha's perspective, the participation of local elites in the administration helped the government establish a fair system of taxation, which reduced complaints from the *reaya* (tax paying subjects). He mentions that despite the abolition of

¹¹² Ibid, 247.

¹¹³ BOA, DH.MKT. Dosya 2336 Gömlek 44; MVL Dosya 89 Gömlek 26; MVL Dosya 463 Gömlek 1.

many high taxes and increases in salaries, the province's revenue had grown considerably.¹¹⁴

The success of Ottoman integration was also reflected in letters of Bulgarians living abroad. On December 23, 1870, a Bulgarian student in Tabor, Vasil Hristov, sent a letter to his friend Tiho in Ruse, asking about the state of affairs in the city.

Mihail Mintev wrote that the Bulgarian nation is progressing, but you did not mention it. I read all your letters but you did not even mention that there were Bulgarians in Ruse. I assume they changed a lot. Is commerce is developing in Ruse? Are Bulgarians prospering? Are there still some people using religion to make money? Are older girls getting married or forced to be Turkish? Did Bulgarians completely lose their Bulgarian identity? Say hello to my friends there if I still have some. Are they getting ready to smash me when I return?¹¹⁵

Tiho's response is not available, but Vasil Hristov's letter clearly indicates that Bulgarians in Ruse were integrated to such a degree that Hristov feared the loss of their Bulgarian identity— at a time that, ironically, Bulgarian national identity was just beginning to form.

Similarly, the British vice consul, F.F. Sankey reported his observations about the changing interethnic relations.

¹¹⁴ Midhat, *The Life of Midhat Pasha: A Record of His Services, Political Reforms, Banishment and Judicial Murder* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street W. 1903), 39.

¹¹⁵ Nikola Obretenov, *Spomeni za Bŭlgarskite vŭstaniia* (Sofia: Otechestveniiia Front, 1970), 116.

During the thirty years of residence in the Levant, I have been able to remark the gradual dying out of the bad feeling between Turks and Christians, as also between different sects of the latter, when they were living together on good terms and in the same villages. The petty annoyances (for they were nothing more) to which the Christians had to submit were equally felt by the Turkish peasantry, and Turkish rule was mild, if despotic.¹¹⁶

Consul Sankey indicated that before the war, ethno-religious groups lived side by side in the same villages without serious ethnic tension during the reform period. Integrations in many aspects of life took place, but, as in the case of education, separation was still intact.

Educational Reform

Until the nineteenth century, public education in the Ottoman Empire was based on confessional schools. In 1835, the first secular schools for Bulgarians were opened in Gabrovo. The Bulgarian community began to organize their own schools modeled after European examples, free of charge and open to the public. Though the Bulgarian community generally shouldered the economic burden of public education, the Russian Empire provided textbooks, school supplies, and financial aid. The majority of the teachers at these schools were Bulgarians who studied in Russia.¹¹⁷ Two of the British

¹¹⁶ *Turkey No.42 (1878) Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1878), Inclosure 2 in Doc.33, 57.

¹¹⁷ Diana Karabinova, "A Late Attempt to Find an Integrative Approach Through Common Secular Education: Midhat Paşa as a Governor of the Danube Province (1864–1868)", *International Congress on*

residents of the province, Stanislas G.B. St. Clair and Charles A. Brophy, observed the growing Russian influence on Bulgarians through the new schools.

Since the schism, the Bulgarians have established a few schools, which they call national, and in which an individual strongly perfumed with garlic gives lessons to a dozen of the village children; but what does he teach them? To read what are called the Bulgarian characters, a strange medley of Russian lay and ecclesiastical type, to know the figures of the Russian ecclesiastical arithmetic, which are letters, and finally to repeat the orthodox and imperial catechism prepared for the Bulgarian nation in books printed for this special purpose: this catechism teaches one great truth to the infant Bulgarians that above the Sultan is God, and above God is the Czar.¹¹⁸

It was the fear of the influence of Russian Pan-Slavism that compelled the Ottoman government to reform the education system in the Danube province.

In 1865, Midhat Pasha formed a joint-council of Muslims and non-Muslims to create a unified “secular” school system. Two members of the council, pro-Ottoman Bulgarian intellectuals Nikola Mikhailovski and Todor Shishkov, were strong supporters of Midhat Pasha’s education reform. Mikhailovski earned his doctoral degree from Moscow State University and worked as a school director in Tŭrnovo. He believed that only strong, centralized state-authority could modernize the education system and

Learning and Education in the Ottoman World (12–15 April 1999, Istanbul), (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2001), 240–243.

¹¹⁸ St. Clair and Brophy, *A Residence in Bulgaria*, 387.

accepted an invitation to serve on the council. He was also a proponent of the theory that Bulgarians were of Turkic origin, a hypothesis developed by Pavol Jozef Šafárik, in an attempt to justify his pro-Ottoman political views.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Shishkov, a graduate of the Sorbonne University in France, supported the integration of Bulgarian schools into the modernized imperial system. Although their proposed curriculum allowed each ethnic group to use their own language in education, it emphasized the need for all citizens to master Ottoman Turkish, the official imperial language. Considering themselves reformers, Mikhailovski and Shishkov were invested in the modernization and uplift of Bulgarians within the Ottoman Empire.¹²⁰ According to a letter to the *obshtina* from Bulgarian residents, the education reforms received popular support, confirming the need to learn Ottoman Turkish but also suggesting Turks learn Bulgarian as well. Another letter from the *obshtina* shows the Bulgarian community's desire for modern, secular schools with a list of courses to be included in curriculum such as arithmetic, geometry, algebra, physics, French, Turkish, Bulgarian, and Bulgarian history.¹²¹

The secularization of schools weakened the influence of the Greek Patriarchate on the Bulgarian community, which traditionally attended Greek Orthodox schools run by the Orthodox Christian *millet*. As new Bulgarian schools created tensions between Bulgarian Christians and the Patriarchate, Midhat Pasha again sided with Bulgarians and insisted on the educational reforms.¹²² Since 1839, the *Tanzimat* reforms had spurred the

¹¹⁹ Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 242.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 242-43.

¹²¹ Īordanov and Bakŭrdzhieva, *Podbrani izvori za istoriata na grad Ruse i Rusenskiia kraĭ* II-XIX v., 188-89.

¹²² Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 225.

opening of new secular schools for both Muslims and non-Muslims such as *rüşdiye* (middle school) and *idadiye* (high school) in the district centers and large towns.¹²³ Midhat Pasha's goal was to extend secular schools in the Danube province. According to Carl Ritter von Sax, an Austrian diplomat, Midhat Pasha believed that within forty or fifty years, nobody would construct mosques or churches. Instead, they would build schools and humanitarian institutions. Midhat Pasha often criticized traditional Muslim schools for not teaching science, and praised the (relatively) secular schools of non-Muslims.¹²⁴

During the *Tanzimat*, the number of modern schools had drastically increased. According to the British consul in Ruse, in 1869, there were around 800 schools in the province, accommodating 32,000 students; a number, which he thought, was exaggerated. Among these schools, there were 27 junior high schools attended by 2500 students each. Teaching Arabic, Persian, Turkish, calligraphy, basic arithmetic, and geography, these schools received textbooks, maps and other schools supplies from the Ottoman government. The teachers came mostly from Istanbul where they attended the Muslim theological schools (*medrese*). The province itself also had 100 *medreses*, teaching Arabic, Persian, the principles of Quran and Islamic law.¹²⁵ In 1875, there were 143 primary schools in the *sancak* of Ruse. Of these, eight were in the town itself. The reforms, however, focused more on the junior high schools, the first of which opened in

¹²³ BOA, I.DH, no: 36231 and BOA, BAD, no: 307, s.73. The establishment of primary schools for Bulgarians in Plovdiv was reported in BOA, I.MVL, no: 25784.

¹²⁴ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 223.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 223.

Lovech in 1853. By 1875, the government increased the number of this type of school to forty.¹²⁶

During the reforms, the Armenian and Jewish communities continued regulating their own education systems, but they also went through structural changes without direct state interference. For instance, until the mid-nineteenth century, the *meldar* (the traditional Jewish primary schools) were the main institution where male and female students learned how to read religious texts. This institution, however, did not teach language, grammar, or any secular subjects other than arithmetic.¹²⁷ The British consul in Ruse, Robert Dalyell, wrote that, “As in the rest of the Empire, the Jews teach very little. To be precise, they teach nothing beyond the principles of their religion. The children learn only to read and write.”¹²⁸ Ottoman Jews here as elsewhere in the Empire were Sephardi who spoke Ladino as well as Turkish, and a few could read and write in these languages as well as Hebrew. Hardly any of them however, were able to speak Bulgarian.¹²⁹ The Jewish education system went through changes in the 1860s, mostly through the efforts of Avraham Rosanes, and the Alliance Israelite Universelle in the 1870s, a Jewish organization established in Paris in 1860 to help Jewish communities in the “East”, through secular educational institutions, which taught French and other subjects such as physics, chemistry, and geometry, for both boys and girls.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Şimşir, *The Turks of Bulgaria*, 15.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 227.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 227.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 228.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 244.

The Ottoman government promoted its education campaign in the provincial newspaper *Tuna/Dunav*. In its early issues, the newspaper stated that it was the responsibility of parents to send their children to school, both boys and girls, at age five, six or above.¹³¹ On July 21, 1865, the newspaper published Midhat Pasha's note to the *mufti* of Pleven, stressing the importance of education and asking for their cooperation in encouraging parents to send their children to the newly established schools. Although there was no mandatory education, Midhat Pasha framed education as a moral obligation. The newspaper also stated that, "No child was to be left out. Those without parents should be sent to the reformatories. It was obligatory for parents to send their children to school, a moral duty for everyone in this world and in the next."¹³² On November 27, 1865, the newspaper announced that the provincial assembly was discussing opening new *rüşdiye* and *idadiye* in district centers.¹³³ On December 8, 1865, the newspaper published information about the examinations in the junior high schools in Ruse and Varna.¹³⁴ The provincial newspaper kept citizens informed about the public campaign for education and new schools. The government effectively used *Tuna/Dunav* as a means to propagate government education reforms.

Specialized schools (*Islahhane* or orphanages, later transformed to *Sanayi Mektebi*, or vocational schools) were a successful example of Midhat Pasha's new secular schools, providing elementary secular education and artisan training. Although the first *Islahhane* were established in the city of Nish in 1860, Midhat Pasha opened another

¹³¹ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 2, March 10, 1865.

¹³² *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 21, July 21, 1865.

¹³³ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 35, November 27, 1865.

¹³⁴ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 41, December 8, 1865.

school in Ruse in 1864.¹³⁵ The Ottoman government listed the main objective of these schools as to increase the level of education amongst the local lower and middle class populations, protect orphans and poor children, and contribute to the rebirth of native Ottoman light industry such as textiles. This provided the Balkan people, especially Bulgarians, with new job opportunities through their training in the *Islahhane*. Students, regardless of their ethnicity and faith, attended these schools together and were taught by both Bulgarian and Turkish teachers.¹³⁶ Later, a similar school was established for girls and was one of the first examples of female education in the Ottoman period. In Ruse, the distribution of male students was 85 Muslims, 51 Bulgarians and 1 Jewish student, while in the female institution there were 30 Muslim students and 21 Bulgarians.¹³⁷ By 1874, the female *Islahhane* in Ruse accommodated about 60 Muslim and non-Muslim students, who studied the subjects ranging from French to piano.¹³⁸ The “secularized” nature of education at these institutions contributed to the pragmatic approach taken by Midhat Pasha during the reform period, mixing diverse populations.

Students in the *Islahhane* were very disciplined and studied under a strict schedule. They were divided into groups of ten, one of whom was the leader. Their daily routine, as described in the regulations, included rising early for morning prayer, cleaning their rooms, and breakfast followed by a two-hour class. Students spent their afternoons

¹³⁵ BOA, I.MVL, no: 26270.

¹³⁶ *Islahhaneler Nizamnamesi* (The Regulation of the Reformatories), Düstur, I.Tertip, II. Cilt, pp. 277–295.

¹³⁷ Osman Ergin, *İstanbul Mektepleri ve İlim, Terbiye ve Sanat Müesseseleri Dolayısı ile Türkiye Maarif Tarihi*, Vol.I-II (Istanbul: Osmanbey Matbaası 1939), 525.

¹³⁸ Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 122.

training as artisans.¹³⁹ The curriculum of the *Islahhane* was similar to other primary schools, but it included Bulgarian language courses and training for artisans.¹⁴⁰ Students in the dorm were subject to strict disciplinary rules to maintain order among the diverse group of students.¹⁴¹ Male students specialized in light industry and manufacturing, such as lithography, typesetting, bookbinding, carpentry, and shoemaking. Female students mostly engaged in textile work, like embroidery and weaving.¹⁴²

Through donations, government funding, and revenue from running small businesses, the *Islahhane* experienced substantial economic growth and made profitable investments in the flourishing port city. For instance, it built a consular house on the banks of the Danube near the Bulgarian school on land provided by the government. In May 1865, the Austrian consul rented this house for a five-year contract at a rate of 30,000 *gurush*, paid in advance. In 1870, the rental cost of this property rose to 7560 per year. On January 6, 1866, the *Islahhane* opened a tavern hotel overlooking the river. In eight months, the *Islahhane* made 4139 *gurush*, an 8 *para* profit from the hotel, which was much less than expected. The following year, on September 13, 1867 the *Islahhane* leased the hotel to an Italian businessman for five years. The financial records of the hotel indicated that the rental rates were 25,000 *gurush* for the first year, 30,000 for the second, 35,000 for the third, 40,000 for the fourth and 42,500, totaling 172,500 *gurush*. Yet, at the end of the five-year term, the collected amount appeared to be only 112,000

¹³⁹ *Islahhaneler Nizamnamesi*, Articles, 32 and 33.

¹⁴⁰ Nafi Atuf, *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi Hakkında Bir Deneme*, (Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi 1930), 169.

¹⁴¹ *Islahhaneler Nizamnamesi*, Articles 38 and 41.

¹⁴² *Islahhaneler Nizamnamesi*, Article 39.

gurush.¹⁴³ While this was less than the target, the *Islahhane* still gained almost four times the profit from the lease than it had during the first eight months when it was self-run, indicating an eye for profit. While these projects were not necessarily as profitable as predicted, it demonstrates how the *Islahhane* delved into a variety of business ventures for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The *Islahhane* hotel also served as a venue for special events such as theatrical performances, concerts, balls and European dance lessons that had increasingly brought local elites in close contact with the residents or visitors from the West.¹⁴⁴ Austrian journalist and traveler Felix Kanitz, who published multiple volumes on the Balkans, provides the details of his time at the *Islahhane* hotel in 1871, and found his stay satisfactory.

On the first floor, the hotel owns a big hall, which during wintertime is used for receptions, balls, and for performing small operettas and comedies. The dining hall on the ground floor was already decorated as a *table d'hôte* and *à la Carte*. In addition to that, there was a buffet with Hungarian and French wine and some Greek, French, and Bulgarian newspapers, but surprisingly not a single German one.¹⁴⁵

Kanitz indicates the cultural diversity of the guests at the hotel, but complained about the lack of German publications. The landlord offered his apologies “by cleverly complimenting the Germans who were usually multi-lingual and know at least to read in

¹⁴³ For the financial records of the *Islahhane*, see BOA. T.d. 82.

¹⁴⁴ Teodora Bakürdzhieva, “Ruse: grad velik i mnogo türgovven.”

<http://www.bulgaria.com/Science/Teodora.htm>

¹⁴⁵ Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan*, 13.

French, but with other nationalities this would rarely be the case.”¹⁴⁶ The landlord said that in the future he would subscribe to their country’s periodicals. Albert De Burton, a visitor from England, also described the cultural diversity and Western influence on the hotel, adding that the hotel also had a billiard-room and instrumental music every evening.¹⁴⁷ As part of the cosmopolitan cultural life of the city, the hotel hosted foreign leaders, consuls, diplomats, journalists, merchants and many other guests from Europe and the Middle East. The hotel became a meeting place for these elites, their foreign colleagues, and international visitors and officials.

Besides the consular house and the tavern hotel, the *Islahhane* also owned a number of stores, a bakery, a bagel shop, houses near the port and the train station, and land along the railway. Some religious foundations such as the Hacı Şerife Hanım organization donated funds for store rentals to support *Islahhane*.¹⁴⁸ The *Islahhane* also constructed, managed, and acquired covered storage facilities, which were in high demand after the construction of the Ruse-Varna railway.¹⁴⁹

The *Islahhane* brought together students of many different ethnic and religious backgrounds, provided them with a secular education, and trained them as artisans. Upon their graduation, some students were offered the opportunity to study abroad in Paris while others received funding from the *Islahhane* to start their own businesses. The

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Albert De Burton, *Ten Months' Tour in the East: Being a Guide to all that is Most Worth Seeing in Turkey in Europe, Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt and the Nile* (London: F. Bowyer Kitto, 1870), 38.

¹⁴⁸ For the financial records of the *Islahhane*, see BOA. T.d. 82.

¹⁴⁹ Another document gives the locations of the storage facilities as İnebekçi and Aşıklar, NBKM.OO. (Natsionalna Biblioteka “Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodii” *Orientaliski Otdel*) F.112, a.e. 327. The Ottoman government in Ruse often requested funding from the Porte to construct covered facilities at the customhouse at the port, see BOA. IDH. 42077; BOA. I.MVL 26277.

school even sponsored some students from Istanbul to study abroad in Western Europe. It was not the first time the Ottoman government funded students' education in the West. After the Crimean War, the Ottoman government sent a number of Bulgarian students to Europe for their education. For instance, D. Minchov, Dagorov, C. Georgiev, Kirkov, Tachov, Chomakov attended the Ottoman Imperial School (*Mekteb-i Osmani*) in Paris to study French, geography and history.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the *obshtina* in Ruse sent Simeon Zlatev and Ivan Danev to Tabor (now in the Czech Republic) to attend the agricultural school, and Zlatev later continued his education in Prague.¹⁵¹ A letter from Ivan Danev mentions that there were twenty-six Bulgarians students in Tabor, including those who paid for their own education.¹⁵²

The *Islahhane* in Ruse brought together students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and served as a successful example of a unified secular school. It had an impact on the government decision to establish similar schools in other provinces, among them the industrial school *Dersaat Sanayi Mektebi*, founded in Istanbul upon Midhat Pasha's return in 1868.¹⁵³

The State-Printing House and the Provincial Newspaper, *Tuna/Dunav*

As of 1864, there were no printing houses in the Ottoman Danube province. Bulgarians acquired their school materials and religious texts from Russia and Austria.

¹⁵⁰ Raia Zaimova, "The Sultan's Subjects at the Ottoman Imperial School after the Crimean War," *Uluslararası Osmanlı ve Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri Sempozyumu 11-13 Mayıs 2005*, (Eskişehir: Odunpazarı Belediyesi Yayınları, 2005), 271. About the Mekteb-i Osmani, see Adnan Şişman, "Mekteb-i Osmani 1857-1864," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları V* (Istanbul: 1986), 83-160.

¹⁵¹ Luibomir Zlatev, "The Members of Parliament of Rouse in the Constituent Assembly" *Naucheni Trudove na Rusenskiia Universitet*, Tom 51, Serii 6.2, (Ruse: 2012), 184-5.

¹⁵² Obretenov, *Spomeni za Bŭlgarskite vŭstaniia*, 111.

¹⁵³ See Mehmet Ali Yıldırım, *Dersaat Sanayi Mektebi: Istanbul Sanayi Mektebi 1868-1926* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2013).

The Ottoman government was particularly concerned about the growing Russian influence on Bulgarians. Therefore, the regulations of 1864 made provisions for establishing a state-printing house where the Ottoman government itself could locally print the desired materials.¹⁵⁴ Shortly after Midhat Pasha became the governor, he established the printing house in Ruse with lithography machines designed to publish texts in Turkish, Bulgarian, French, Greek and old Slavonic.¹⁵⁵ It began to publish textbooks for schools, religious manuscripts for the church, government yearbooks (*salname*), newspapers, journals and some literary works by Bulgarian and Turkish writers for the public. Educational and religious materials were published and distributed free of charge while other commercial publications were sold at discounted rates.¹⁵⁶ The central government provided the printing house with an annual allowance of 100,000 *gurush* to subsidize these publications.¹⁵⁷

Muslims and Bulgarian Christians worked together in the state-printing house. The staff included a director, an accountant, a lithographer, a binder, Turkish and Bulgarian editors, a French translator, two employees for distribution of publications and fifteen workers. Twenty-five convicts from the local prison took charge of cleaning and the unskilled labor needs of the publishing house. This institution also provided instruction for students from the *Islahhane* who received their training in lithography,

¹⁵⁴ The *Nizamname* of 1864, Article 9.

¹⁵⁵ By 1877, the number of lithography machines increased to four, and the printing house also acquired six smaller machines, Selimoğlu, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Tuna Vilayeti 1864-1878*, 133.

¹⁵⁶ BOA, I.DH, no: 37115, lef.1.

¹⁵⁷ BOA, BI, no: 91.

binding and publishing.¹⁵⁸ The first director of the state-printing house was Dragan Tsankov, a Bulgarian intellectual, journalist and French instructor.¹⁵⁹ His Turkish student Ahmet Midhat Efendi became the chief Turkish editor. He also appointed Ivan Chorapchiev the chief Bulgarian editor, and Yusuf Ziya Efendi as the head of lithography.¹⁶⁰ This new institution brought Turkish and Bulgarians together and served as a joint investment for both communities.

The Bulgarian members of the printing-house, Tsankov and Chorapchiev, were intellectuals who supported and legitimized the Ottoman reforms. Prior to his appointment, Tsankov held various mid-level positions as a clerk within the Ottoman administration and taught French in schools in Istanbul. During that time, he supported the short-lived Bulgarian Uniate movement (1860-1861), whose members desired unification with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1865, Midhat Pasha hired Tsankov as the director of the state-printing house and promoted him as deputy district governor to Nish in 1868, and to Vidin in the early 1870s.¹⁶¹ Ivan Chorapchiev was hired by the Bulgarian schools in Ruse as a French teacher in 1865, but soon afterwards Midhat Pasha recruited him to join the staff of the printing house where he translated several Ottoman legal

¹⁵⁸ İsmail Eren, "Tuna Vilayet Matbaası ve Neşriyatı (1864–1877)," *Türk Kültürü*, Vol. III (January 1965), 313–15.

¹⁵⁹ Tsankov had previously worked as a civil servant in the Ottoman administration. In the early 1860s, he was also a supporter of uniatism, a movement seeking to unify the Bulgarian church with Rome. In 1878, he initially opposed the April uprising, but after independence he turned against the Ottomans and became the leader of the Liberal party. He eventually served as the third Prime Minister of Bulgaria. Ivan Chorapchiev published Turkish and French alphabets for Bulgarian students.

¹⁶⁰ According to the yearbook from 1869, Ethem Efendi became the director, Hafız Zühtü Efendi the Turkish editor, Nikola Efendi the Bulgarian editor, Ahmet Midhat Efendi the French translator, Selim Efendi the accountant, Cenap Efendi an assistant editor and two Bulgarian translators. Kocabaşoğlu, "Tuna Vilayet Gazetesi," *OTAM* 2 (January 1991), 145.

¹⁶¹ See Margarita Kovacheva, *Dragan Tsankov: obshtestvenik, politik, diplomat do 1878* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1982).

codes to Bulgarian and published textbooks for Bulgarian schools to teach Bulgarian students French and Ottoman Turkish.¹⁶²

The regulations of 1864 also included the publication of a provincial newspaper, the first in the Danube province. The state-printing house began to publish the first issue of the bilingual newspaper *Tuna/Dunav* on March 8, 1865. This newspaper remained in circulation until June 1, 1877 when its offices were hit by the Russian bombardment. The newspaper was composed of four pages, two in Turkish and two in Bulgarian, and divided into four main sections, domestic news, foreign news, general matters, and announcements.¹⁶³ Ismail Kemal, and later Ahmed Midhat Efendi, worked as the chief editors of the Turkish section while Ivan Chropchiev and Stoil Popov served as the Bulgarian editors. Published twice weekly, each issue was sold for 40 *para*. By the fifth issue the newspaper announced it had already had 520 subscribers, increasing to 1300 by the tenth issue. Compared to the provincial newspaper *Hüdavendigâr* in Bursa, which sold around 80-100 copies per issue, *Tuna/Dunav* was widely distributed in the province. Students of junior high schools received the newspaper for free, a political move to connect with the literate youth.¹⁶⁴

The state-printing house also published the official yearbooks of the province, and many other newspapers and periodicals in Turkish, Bulgarian and French. In 1875, N. Spanopoulo edited the political, commercial and financial newspaper *Eftab* or *Le Soleil* (*The Sun*) published in Turkish and French that later closed due to financial issues. Ismail

¹⁶² Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 243-45.

¹⁶³ BOA, BAD, no: 308, p. 29.

¹⁶⁴ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 11, May 16, 1865.

Kemal published the monthly literary periodical *Mecra-yi Efkar* or *Istochnik Mneniia* (*Source of Opinions*) between 1867 and 1868 in Turkish and Bulgarian, though only three issues were ever published and circulated. Similarly, T.H. Stanchev published a spiritual periodical called *Slava* (*Glory*), twice monthly between 1871 and 1873. *Slava* was intended to promote moral education and intellectual progress. R.I. Blaskov published an educational and pedagogical magazine called *Uchilishte* (*School*) in Ruse and Bucharest, twice monthly between 1871-1873.¹⁶⁵ It served to encourage education and thus was designed for teachers, students, and their parents. Though many of these projects were short-lived, they were representative of the reform period and demonstrated the government's interest in providing a venue for progressive and integrative projects in the press.

In Ruse, there was also a handwritten newspaper called *Poraziia* (*Mischief*), edited by Ivan Manzov in 1865. This newspaper contained caricatures and satirical and humorous articles. The paper was pasted on walls in public spaces and many articles dealt exclusively with Midhat Pasha's reforms. *Stupan* (*Farmer*) was another local newspaper published in Bucharest, Vidin, and Ruse between 1874 and 1876. Its articles were devoted to agriculture, animal husbandry, the silk industry, apiculture, cooperatives, and rural family economy. T. H. Stanchev, Kr. Iv. Mirski, N. Suknarov, Spas Atanasov Tumparov, Mihalaki Georgiev, and others aimed to educate farmers and improve agriculture and land use (see chapter two for details).

¹⁶⁵ Eren, "Tuna Vilayet Matbaası ve Neşriyatı (1864–1877)," 316.

Among all these newspapers, *Tuna/Dunav* appears to be the only publication that directly addressed politics, and was a necessary tool to publicize the reforms and Ottomanist vision to the public. Local Bulgarian language newspapers also appear to have supported the reforms and were complementary about the new projects. For instance, *Uchilishte* promoted modernization of schools and Bulgarian public education, in line with Midhat Pasha's education campaign. The Bulgarian revolutionaries began publishing nationalist newspapers abroad such as *Dunavski Lebed* (Danube Swan).¹⁶⁶ Under Ottoman surveillance, however, they were not openly circulated in the province.

Diversity in the press also indicated the cosmopolitan nature of the audience, and represented the interests of the growing bourgeoisie. The local press in Ruse, however, still excluded Bulgarian nationalist sentiments even though nationalist newspapers may have been unofficially circulated. Only with the onset of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, *Bŭlgarin* (Bulgarian), a Bulgarian nationalist newspaper published in Bucharest, began to make its appearance in Ruse, and after the war moved its center to Ruse. After Bulgarian independence, other publications in Ruse, such as *Slaviansko Brastsko* (Slavic Brotherhood) *Slavianin* (Slavs), *Telegraf* (Telegraph), and *Makedonets* (Macedonian) systematically carried out nationalist and Pan-Slavist propaganda.

The Zora (Dawn) Reading Room

Another new institution in line with education reforms and developments in the press was the opening of a public library or *chitalishte* (reading room) in Ruse.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States*, 272.

¹⁶⁷ For reading rooms as an urban institution, see Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 187-193.

Founded on March 25, 1866, on the initiative of Dragan Tsankov, the reading room in Ruse named *Zora (Dawn)*, functioned as a Bulgarian cultural center (see Figure 3).¹⁶⁸ It provided its members with a number of foreign newspapers, periodicals and original or translated books. *Zora's* catalog included, for example, newspapers such as *Le Courier d'Orient (Oriental Post)*, *Turtsia (Turkey)* and *Vizantis (Byzantium)* and Western literary works such as *Le Médecin malgré lui (The Doctor/Physician in spite of Himself)*, a French comedy by Molière and *Die Räuber (The Robber)*, a German drama by Friedrich Schiller.¹⁶⁹ This institution brought the residents of Ruse into closer contact with Western literary works.



Figure 3: A Picture of Zora from the 19th Century.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Veselina Antonova, *Vŭzrozhdenskoto chitalishte 'Zora' v Ruse* (Ruse: Avangard Print, 2010).

¹⁶⁹ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 222-3. For *Zora's* subscription for *Le Courier d'Orient* and *Turtsia*, see DA-R, F. 14K, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 126, 130 and 134.

¹⁷⁰ NBKM. OO. C I 5635.

Zora also held lectures, cultural events and theatrical plays, which were open to public. The women's organization *Stupanka (The Female Farmer)*, for instance, worked with the *chitalishte* to organize the play *Raĭna Kniaginia (Princess Raina)*.¹⁷¹ Young Bulgarians went to *chitalishte Zora* to celebrate the day of Cyril and Methodius, organize charity events and read Bulgarian and foreign periodicals. Veselina Antonova argues that the *chitalishte Zora* brought the older educated elites and young students together around a national cause. She presents *Zora* as a nationalist institution, stating that "The Bulgarian elite was able to stay in close contact with young Bulgarians through this institution and organized them for their struggle against the Greek Church and later the Ottoman government. After the liberation, their members took important administrative positions in the new government."¹⁷² Yet while she rightly points out that the institution helped facilitate cooperation amongst Bulgarians, this did not necessarily translate to nationalist, let alone revolutionary sentiment. The celebration of the day of Cyril and Methodius was a Bulgarian cultural event celebrated even in the imperial capital. One of the Bulgarians students at Robert College in Istanbul, Petŭr Chernev from Ruse, mentions in his letter that thirty-six Bulgarian students at this institution rented boats and sailed along the Bosphorus and sang Bulgarian songs to celebrate this holiday.¹⁷³ Chernev's letter indicates that these activities of Bulgarians were in no way suppressed by the government even in the capital and thus were seen as cultural acts rather than political.

¹⁷¹ DA-R, F. 14K, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 133.

¹⁷² Antonova, *Vŭzrozhdenskoto chitalishte 'Zora' v Ruse*, 167.

¹⁷³ Obretenov, *Spomeni za Bŭlgarskite vŭstaniia*, 110-1.

Members of *Zora* included some Bulgarian revolutionaries including Toma Kürdzhiev and Nikola Obretenov, but the pro-Ottoman Bulgarian elites, such as Ivan Chorapchiev, Dragan Tsankov and Ivancho Penchovich also played a leading role in the establishment and administration of this institution. Many held important positions in the Ottoman government as Bulgarian representatives of the municipal, administrative and judicial councils of the province. The *chitalishe* was open to the public and financial support came from people of various ethno-religious backgrounds including Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Jewish and Russian.¹⁷⁴ The Ottoman government openly supported this institution, providing venues and chairs for events.¹⁷⁵ Under strict Ottoman surveillance, it is unlikely that the government would allow a nationalist or revolutionary organization at the heart of the provincial center. Moreover, the Bulgarian cultural revival did not necessarily have separatist or nationalist goals. Many pro-Ottoman Bulgarian elites worked within these Bulgarian cultural institutions while being politically loyal to the Ottoman Empire.

Indeed, most of the Bulgarian members of the *Zora*, including pro-Ottoman elites, took part in the struggle for Bulgarian religious independence from the Greek Patriarchate, often seeking Ottoman support against Greeks. For instance, the *chitalishte* sent a letter to the municipality to complain that on March 29, 1872 the provincial newspaper *Tuna/Dunav* published an article from the Greek newspaper *Vizantis* in support of their Patriarchate.¹⁷⁶ The members of *Zora* also played an important role in the

¹⁷⁴ DA-R, F. 14K, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 23-24.

¹⁷⁵ DA-R, F. 14K, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 132 and 152.

¹⁷⁶ DA-R, F. 14K, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 134-a.

establishment of the *Bŭlgarsko Pevchesko Druzhestvo (Bulgarian Singer's Union)*, which wanted to eradicate Greek liturgy from the church.¹⁷⁷ Bulgarians in this institution generally saw the Ottoman government as an ally against the Greek Patriarchate rather than carrying out a separatist or nationalist agenda against the Ottoman Empire.

Until the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, *Zora* served as a cultural center serving educated Bulgarians. During the war, this institution was shut down because of the heavy Russian bombardment. After Bulgarian independence, the members of *Zora* took important administrative positions in the new government. For example, Nikola Stoichev served as the minister of foreign affairs, Georgi Zhivkov became the minister of education, Radi Ivanov the director of postal services, Petŭr Chernev, Todor Hadzhistanchev and Nikola Stoichev became members of the Constituent Assembly, and Z. Stoianov served as the president of the national assembly. George Marinovich, Panaŭot Angelov, H. Obretenov and Kosta Armianov also accepted government positions.¹⁷⁸ In 1883, Toma Kŭrdzhiev attempted to reopen the *chitalishte*. This, however, did not take place until 1956 under the Communist regime. *Zora* was one of the institutions of the Ottoman reform period that still exists in present-day Ruse, and continues to operate under the same name.

Conclusion

After 1864, the Ottoman government systematically attempted to integrate Christian Bulgarians through socio-political reforms. Under the new administrative

¹⁷⁷ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 223.

¹⁷⁸ Antonova, *Vŭzrozhdenskoto chitalishte 'Zora' v Ruse*, 167.

system modeled after the French examples, Muslims and non-Muslims were able to represent their communities. The provincial assembly and administrative councils, an early step towards democratic forms of administration, negotiated between the state and locals in modernization projects. The establishment of the municipality, state publishing, modernization of judicial courts and schools essentially resulted from local demand rather than a top-down reform projects. The reforms brought an ethnically diverse group of elites together, who supported the reforms and benefitted from the opportunities they offered, following a pragmatic approach towards Ottoman political integration. The Ottoman government itself took a pragmatic stand and promoted its Bulgarian supporters into power positions. Many Bulgarians sympathized with the Ottoman government because of its stance against Greek hegemony in their religious and cultural activities. This process was sometimes interrupted by each Ottoman governor's approach towards the Bulgarian question, foreign involvement or the actions of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, but the reforms significantly improved inter-ethnic relations in Ruse. The political representation, religious autonomy through the *obshtina*, improved literary and cultural expression, attempted secularization of public schools played an important role in the Bulgarian support for the reforms and thus the longevity of the Ottoman Empire. They significantly weakened the influence of the Bulgarian nationalists, who were mostly in exile, either in Anatolia or Romania and Serbia.

Chapter Two: Economic Modernization of the *Tanzimat*

Large-scale economic investments accompanied the political integration of Christian Bulgarians in Ruse. Midhat Pasha's idea was to bring diverse communities together on economic development projects that would bring material prosperity to all citizens. For him, economic growth meant to integrate Christian Bulgarians, commercial elites in particular, into the Ottoman economic system, as they would co-invest and benefit from the new economic opportunities. Therefore, the reforms particularly addressed the problems of peasants and merchants, who demanded improvements in the transportation and communication network, new financial institutions and regulations in commerce.

With the approval and fiscal support of the central government, Midhat Pasha mobilized all the resources of the province to reconstruct the local economy. Supported by Western investments, Ruse, capital of the Danube province, received some of the first railroads and telegraph lines, the first agricultural bank, the first model farm, and the first secular industrial schools in the Ottoman Empire. The government also sponsored an extensive transportation infrastructure with newly constructed paved roads and bridges, a steam navigation company, and newly opened commercial fair grounds. In the 1860s, Ruse had increasingly developed as an international port city connecting the Ottoman Empire with Central and Western Europe, and became one of the most prosperous regions in the empire.

The development and infrastructure projects were the products of collective labor from all the populations in the province, and thus should not be regarded as unjust taxes

or unpaid labor extracted from one specific ethno-religious group. Although the state held its subjects responsible for participating in government labor projects, peasants rarely worked without reciprocal compensation. Working for the government did not necessarily mean an unfair burden for locals. Instead, in some cases, it was a welcome employment opportunity for peasants outside of the harvest season or a beneficial business arrangement for local contractors.

While commerce and new business opportunities contributed to urban growth, increasing productivity and a new transportation network opened the Danube province to the West as well as the expanding markets within the empire. Commercial fairs in and around Ruse attracted merchants, artisans and shopkeepers from other cities and provinces, many of whom permanently moved their businesses to the Danube region. Foreign merchants, mostly Austrians and Englishmen, exchanged goods within the city, utilizing steamboats on the Danube and the railroad to Varna on the Black Sea. Many merchants settled in the town, opened local branches of their companies, and ran businesses such as hotels, textile factories, and grain export offices. Economic growth brought skilled laborers to the city, including engineers, technicians, medical doctors and pharmacists. After the opening of the Ruse-Varna railway, the city hosted a large number of visitors traveling between Vienna and Istanbul. By the mid-1870s, foreigners constituted nearly ten percent of the city's population.

In Ruse, foreign merchants were mostly interested in exporting domestic products, grains and silk in particular, to their home countries rather than importing European goods, which locals found expensive and luxury. Although local products

dominated the markets in Ruse, Ottoman merchants began to fashion their shops and products with European styles, appealing to the large number of foreigners in the city. With the economic growth and developing trade, the residents of Ruse, both Muslim and non-Muslim, began to form joint stock companies and cooperated to take a greater share in commerce.

Even though economic growth slowed after the recession of 1873, this was far from a sharp decline. The positive results of the economic reforms in the Danube province encouraged the Sublime Porte to implement the same projects in the other provinces. In the 1860s and 70s, merchants generally benefited from the expansion of domestic and international trade as well as the material prosperity it brought to the local economy. Peasants had many employment opportunities in the highly commercialized and diversified rural economy. With the agricultural cooperatives, peasants also grew stronger against the exploitation of the wealthy upper class through usury and *corvée* labor. Thus, a large segment of Bulgarians, both urban and rural, eventually came to oppose revolutionary violence and relied on the longevity of the Ottoman economic system in order to maintain their own interests.

Reconstructing the Local Economy

After the Crimean War (1853-56), the Ottoman military alliance with the European powers against Russia, and Westernization through reform brought the Ottoman Empire into closer contact with the West. The Ottoman government made concessions to British, French, Austrian and Prussian companies for major investments

such as railroads and telegraph lines. Utilizing Western capital and technology, the Sublime Porte made efforts to improve the local economies, improving transportation infrastructure, increasing production, and creating new jobs, and supporting domestic and international commerce. By 1864, the developing market economy in the Danube region, however, still needed crediting institutions, modern roads and above all railways, the liquidation of brigandage and establishment of commercial courts.¹⁷⁹ Focusing on these needs, Midhat Pasha's goal was to improve the local economy in the Danube province, bringing both Muslims and non-Muslims on mutually beneficial economic projects.

One of the first projects was the extension of the telegraph lines to the smaller towns and villages. By the time the Ottoman government created the Danube province in 1864, Ruse and other district centers were already connected by telegraph to Istanbul and Western Europe through Austria. The French laid the first telegraph lines in Ruse during the Crimean War in the spring of 1855, connecting the city to Varna, Shumen and Bucharest.¹⁸⁰ The Ottoman government rented a merchant house as the first telegraph office, which also accommodated French telegraph technicians. After the conclusion of

¹⁷⁹ Virginia Paskaleva, "From the History of Bulgarian Trade during the Third Quarter of the 19th Century," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1981, 1-2, 121.

¹⁸⁰ In the Crimean War, Britain and France sided with the Ottoman Empire against Russia. Because of the need for rapid communication among allies, the British laid an underwater cable connecting the Crimean peninsula with Varna on the Black Sea coast. Shortly after the British laid another cable connecting Varna with Istanbul in February 1855 and then the French completed the Varna-Bucharest line passing through Shumen and Ruse. See Roderic Davison's "The Advent of the Electric Telegraph in the Ottoman Empire" in *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History 1774-1923: The Impact of the West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 133-165; Soli Shahvar, "Concession Hunting in the Age of Reform: British Companies and the Search for Government Guarantees; Telegraph Concessions through Ottoman Territories, 1855-58," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.38, No.4 (October 2002), 169-193, and Nesimi Yazıcı, "Balkanlar'da İlk Osmanlı Telgraf Hatları", *Balkanlar'da İslam Medeniyeti Milletlerarası Sempozyumu Tebliğleri Sofya, Nisan 21-23, 2000* (Istanbul: IRCICA 2002). For the correspondence with the French company regarding the construction of the Varna-Ruse-Bucharest line, see BOA. A.AMD. Dosya 53, Gömlek 45; A.DVN.NMH Dosya 8, Gömlek 4.

the war, the Porte continued extending telegraph lines for administrative and commercial purposes. In 1858, two more lines connected Ruse with Turnovo in the south and with Lom, Pleven, Svishtov and Vidin in the west. According to Ottoman sources, the local elite, and merchants in particular, supported these projects. For instance, in Vidin, 124 Muslim and non-Muslim notables signed a petition to the sultan in support of the project, offering financial support as well as some construction materials.¹⁸¹ Commercial fairs served as a place where merchants periodically met, while the telegraph system allowed continuous and effective communication between meetings.

Under Midhat Pasha, after 1864, the Ottoman government laid telegraph lines to smaller towns to better coordinate administrative and economic affairs.¹⁸² Locals again provided the poles and labor for these projects while the Porte paid for the machines, devices, and other tools imported from Europe. In 1866, for example, the Supreme Council in Istanbul approved a payment of 62,000 *francs* to Midhat Pasha for the technical equipment for the telegraph lines.¹⁸³ The Danube region received the first telegraph lines in the Ottoman Empire shortly after they appeared in Western Europe. The telegraph system proved to be an efficient way to communicate throughout the region.

¹⁸¹ Yazıcı, "Balkanlar'da İlk Osmanlı Telgraf Hatları," 114-115, BOA. A.MKT.MHM. Dosya 155, Gömlek 28.

¹⁸² Midhat Pasha sent a number of letters to the Porte regarding the need for the new telegraph lines to improve commerce in the province. BOA. I.HR. no:12218 and 12673.

¹⁸³ The project included the following towns: Balçık, Pazarcık, Hezargrad, Cuma-i Atik, Lofça, Nikopol, Rahova, Köstendil, Samakov, Dubniçe, Ivraniye, Osman Pazarı, Tutrakan, Gabrova and Ivraça. BOA, I.MVL no: 24647 and BOA. I.HR. no:12673.

and Varna was about six hours. It provided convenient transportation of passengers and cargo, such as grain, timber, and cattle, to the Black Sea ports and Istanbul.¹⁸⁷

During the first two years of the construction of the railroad, 15,000 laborers worked on the project.¹⁸⁸ In 1865, the Ruse-Varna railway began operation, with some technical complications, which, in some cases, caused deadly accidents. By the official opening on November 7, 1866, the provincial newspaper *Tuna/Dunav* recounted a number of incidents, in total six people lost their lives. The newspaper reported that some passengers fell off of the train cars because the car doors did not close properly, and the hooks to the tracks fell apart, detaching and sometimes derailing the cars.¹⁸⁹ Cattle herds were a major concern for the railway as they caused accidents on the tracks. The Ruse-Varna Railway Company eventually announced that it would not compensate owners for cattle killed by trains. Passengers were scared of these accidents because oxen derailed trains and caused engine fires.¹⁹⁰ Because of these incidents, the company shut down the railway due to safety issues. Yet, these problems continued even after the re-opening of the railway in the spring of 1867.¹⁹¹ The Ottoman government suspected sabotage by anti-reform activists and enacted severe fines for those involved.¹⁹² Despite these problems, this was the first major railroad constructed in the Ottoman Balkans, and thus was likely to experience some initial difficulties in transportation modernization.

¹⁸⁷ *The Railway News and Joint Stock Journal*, February 25, 1865.

¹⁸⁸ Petrov, *Tanzimat for the Countryside*, 140.

¹⁸⁹ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 31, September 29 1865; Issue 64, April 10 1866; Issue 78, June 1 1866.

¹⁹⁰ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 123, November 6, 1866.

¹⁹¹ Derailments, fatal collisions, and other major problems continued to be reported in *Tuna/Dunav* after the railroad reopened in the spring of 1867 – e.g. Issue 187, 28 June 28, 1867; Issue 206, September 3, 1867; Issue 220, October 22, 1867; Issue 236, December 17, 1867; and Issue 249, February 4, 1868.

¹⁹² *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 187, 28 June 28, 1867.

At the same time, harsh winter conditions also seriously affected railway operations.¹⁹³ These were consistent problems for the railway company. In 1868, a British traveler named Agnes Smith complained “the railway between Rustchuk and Varna was the worst in Europe, so bad that trains were not allowed to run by night.”¹⁹⁴ Similarly, in January 1870, an Australian newspaper (referencing *The Figaro*) recounted a passenger’s story of travel difficulties on the railroad in Bulgaria.

The carriages are dirty, the curtains torn, the doors will scarcely close.

Now we traverse immense plains bordered on the horizon by a chain of mountains, now we skirt marshes, and in the reeds, which are sometimes 10 meters in height, we see herds of buffaloes (oxen), their muzzles smoking in the cool morning. Every instant the engine driver gives signals of distress, and the train stops. A herd of buffaloes has invaded the line, and bars the passage. It is true that the locomotive is ornamented with a triangular buffalo spear, but in stabbing one of these animals there would be a risk of running off the rails over the bodies of others...¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 125, November 13, 1866.

¹⁹⁴ Reinhold Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama: British Travelers in 19th Century Turkey* (Amsterdam-Atlanta: 1999), 42.

¹⁹⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 6, 1870, 5; *The Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, January 15, 1870, 8; *The Mercury*, January 17, 1870, 2; *Northern Argus*, January 28, 1870, 4; *Warwick Examiner and Times*, January 29, 1870, 4; and *Launceston Examiner*, April 26, 1870, 3.

The Australian newspapers, however, noted that in spite of the technical difficulties, there was extraordinary traffic on this route because it was the sole railway in the region.¹⁹⁶

The monopoly of the Ruse-Varna railway generated a sizable profit. The Russian consul in Ruse, A.N. Moshnin, reported the following numbers:¹⁹⁷

Years	Number of Passengers	Profit from passengers and postal services (in francs)	Amount of grain transportation	Profit from grain transportation (in francs)	Total Profit (in francs)
1869	62,122	751,376	775,222,106	472,359	1,223,735
1870	66,285	685,124	990,521,820	505,101	1,138,288

In 1870, while the number of passengers rose compared to 1869, profits from passengers declined, suggesting a reduction in ticket prices. Traveling on the first grand railway in the province, however, was a luxury that only the wealthy could afford. The price of a first class ticket was 45 *francs*, equal to the value of one share of the company.¹⁹⁸

In spite of high ticket prices, the large number of passengers, nearly three times the total number of people in Ruse, indicates the demand for the railway. The Ruse-Varna railway routed passengers and cargo moving from Vienna to Istanbul through Ruse, and the city to profit from the increase in international business and trade. The large number of hotels also indicates that Ruse received many visitors. Because Ruse was a regional hub for travelers from Europe and the Middle East, hotels, like railroad tickets,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskiiia vilayet*, 99.

¹⁹⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 6, 1870, 5.

were expensive.¹⁹⁹ At the onset of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, the city had 55 hotels, many of which had foreign names that emphasized their cosmopolitan flair, such as London, Paris, Romania, Bucharest, and Hotel de la Station, while others had Turkish and Bulgarian names such as *Islahhane* (Orphanage), *Gülşahane* (Royal Rose), *Tsarigrad* (Istanbul), and *Natsional* (National). Following the Western model, some of these hotels had cafes and restaurants.²⁰⁰ Edward Dicey, one of the special correspondents of the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*, visited Ruse on his journey from Paris to Istanbul en route to Egypt to attend at the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869. He recounted his stay at a hotel in Ruse.

As usual the boat arrived too late for the train to Varna. Advertised to start at 11, it waits till two for the arrival of the steamboat, and even then has generally set off without it. The consequence is that, as there are no trains to Varna till the following morning, passengers have to pass a night at Rustchuk at no small expense, and with the chance of considerable discomfort. There is one small tavern hotel near the station; and what accommodation it could afford was completely taken up by the half-dozen passengers who got out at Rustchuk. Personally, however, it would be ungrateful of me to complain. Bad quarters have long ceased to trouble

¹⁹⁹ Edward Dicey, one of the special correspondents of *The Daily Telegraph*, visited Ruse on his journey from Paris to Istanbul en route to Egypt and mentioned, "Passengers have to pass a night in Ruse at no small expense." Edward Dicey, *The Morning Land*, Vol I. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1870), 19.

²⁰⁰ Siromahova, *Ruse prez vizrakzdaneto*, 72.

me; and all the afternoon I have spent sitting in the balcony in front of tour hotel, looking over the Danube.²⁰¹

Dacey complained about the hotel's high prices and general discomfort but explains that he enjoyed staying at his hotel in Ruse for the unparalleled views of the river.

Aside from the revenue from passengers, a large portion of the profits from the Ruse-Varna Railway came from grain transportation. Steamship companies did not typically transport grain, which allowed the Ruse-Varna railway to dominate this part of the agricultural market.²⁰² English merchants had a keen interest in Bulgarian grain, as Britain was a major grain importer at the time. The railway company provided a key service, carrying 17,000 tons of grain within six months in 1870. The company, however, suffered from the fluctuations in the grain export market caused by poor harvests, lack of warehouses to clean and prepare grains for shipment, and more importantly, the Ottoman tithe policies, all of which caused delays in shipping and an overall decline in grain production.²⁰³ The government also placed goods transportation under strict surveillance for security and tax collection, and required the railway company to provide reimbursement for lost cargo.²⁰⁴

Demand for rail service for both passengers and cargo was so high that the Ottoman government decided to add another line in an even bigger development project,

²⁰¹ Dacey, *The Morning Land*, 19.

²⁰² AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavniĭ arhiv, V-A2, op. 181/2, d.764, l. 139-162, cited in Zheĭnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 105-117.

²⁰³ *The Railway News and Joint-Stock Journal*, Vol. XIV-December 1870 (London: The Office of the Railway News, 1870) 321. "Ottoman laws stipulated that no crop should be marketed unless it could be proven that its tithe was already paid. The tax farmer would usually evaluate the crops, determine the amount of tithe that was due on them, and contact the crops while they were still on the ground." See Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, 77.

²⁰⁴ NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 79/3, l.79 and 80/5, l.60.

the Rumelia Railways, built between 1869 and 1875 by a Prussian company led by Baron Maurice De Hirsch.²⁰⁵ In 1873, Rumelia Railways merged with Ruse-Varna Railways and Rumelia took charge of business operations. During the war of 1877-78, the railroad was of utmost importance to the Ottoman military because it enabled effective transportation of soldiers and supplies within the Quadrilateral of Fortresses, a military zone between the cities of Ruse, Silistra, Varna and Shumen.²⁰⁶ The Ruse-Varna line served as the chief route connecting Central Europe with the East until 1888 when the Istanbul-Edirne-Belgrade railroad took over its role, eventually becoming the main route in the region.²⁰⁷ In 1888, the Bulgarian government purchased the Ruse-Varna railway. Although it did not become the main thoroughfare in the region, the government continued to invest in the railway, expanding the line to Romania after the construction of the Ruse-Giurgiu Bridge in 1952.

The construction of the railroad line should be considered a successful infrastructure project. It served as the only major railway in Ottoman Europe for a number of years, moving cargo and passengers throughout the region. It also provided a key transportation route in the war of 1877-78. After 1865, the Ruse-Varna Railway had significantly the international commerce in Ruse and brought large number of European visitors the city.

²⁰⁵ For the Rumelia Railways and Baron Maurice De Hirsch, see Kurt Grunwald, *Turkenhirsch: A Study of Baran Maurice De Hirsh Entrepreneur and Philanthropist* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1966), and Engin, *Rumeli Demiryolları*.

²⁰⁶ See Chapter 4 for the discussion of the Ottoman Quadrilateral of fortresses.

²⁰⁷ Engin, *Rumeli Demiryolları*, 41. Here it should be noted that at that time there was no railway neither in Istanbul nor in Anatolia except for the 130 km long Izmir-Aydin line, which was also completed in 1866.

Although the Ottoman government worked with the French and British companies in the construction of the telegraph lines and the railroads, Midhat Pasha himself pioneered the establishment of new transportation companies. In an attempt to counter Austrian dominance of the Danube, Midhat Pasha established the Steam Navigation Company called *Idare-yi Nehriyye* (River Administration) with the hopes of bringing river commerce under Ottoman control. Before Midhat Pasha's efforts, the small Ottoman fleet contained only a few military vessels and no commercial steamships while Austrians had dominated freight transport on the lower Danube since 1830.

Establishing a fleet required extensive funds that neither the Ottoman central government nor the local government could provide. To solve this financial problem, Pasha decided to privatize state lands. He moved the famous fairground in Cumaya to a larger plot of land where the district could construct 2000 stores and shops (to be sold or rented to merchants). This strategic maneuver generated 100,000-kese *gurush*.²⁰⁸ Despite some opposition from villagers, Pasha privatized the Karasu fairground for 3000 *liras* and sold a plot of wooded land in Dobrova near Tŭrnovo for 4000 *liras*. With the profits, he established the Steam Navigation Company in 1865.²⁰⁹ To begin building the fleet, Pasha purchased two steamships, the Nish and the Seyyare, and later, the vessels Sofia and Midhat Pasha.²¹⁰ Expanding the size of the company, Akif Pasha bought three more

²⁰⁸ BOA, I.MVL no: 26288.

²⁰⁹ BOA, I.MVL no: 24614 and 24714.

²¹⁰ *Tabsira-i İbret*, 50-52.

steamships, the Vidin, Lom and Zıştovi, along with nine cargo ships from Europe. The company also ordered two more steamships, christened the Abdülaziz and Rusçuk.²¹¹

Although the Ottomans had occupied the region for centuries, the River Transportation Company marked the first time the government invested in commercial shipping on the Danube. Austrian dominance of this commercial enterprise relaxed in this period, largely due to the influence of the British and the French. In 1856, the International Danube Navigation Commission, formed at a conference in Paris, declared that navigation of the river would be made available to all nations. In 1871, a conference in London extended the Commission for twelve more years.²¹² While maintaining dominant positions in the Black Sea ports, English and French vessels began to operate in the Danube as well. From 1864 to 1880, Austrian exports to the Ottoman Empire, including Serbia and Romania, increased by only 16,000,000 *florins*, as the English and French took a greater share in the Ottoman market.²¹³ While certainly not a major factor, the Ottoman fleet contributed to Austria's decline in shipping. Furthermore, Bulgarians later used some Ottoman ships as part of their own commercial fleet.

The Steam Navigation Company and the Ruse-Varna Railway better connected Ruse to Central Europe and the Black Sea ports, but the Danube province as a whole needed to improve the inland transportation. In order to facilitate the flow of commercial goods and passengers, beginning in 1864, the Ottoman government engaged in an

²¹¹ BOA. IMMS no: 1697.

²¹² For the international regime of the Danube, see *Accounts and Papers, Vol. LXXXII (Turkey): Treaties and Other Documents Relating to the Navigation of the Danube: 1856-1875* (London, 1878).

²¹³ *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1883*, New Series Vol. VIII, Whole Series, Vol. XXIII, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1884), 44.

extensive road and bridge construction and improvement project.²¹⁴ According to Midhat Pasha's memoirs, by the end of his term as governor, the government constructed almost 3000 kilometers of paved roads and as many as 1420 bridges, including those in Nish. Although Fadeeva accepts those numbers, Pletnov corrects the number of bridges to 230.²¹⁵ Either way, scholars agree that Midhat Pasha extensively developed Bulgarian transportation infrastructure. As shown in figure 5 below, new roads connected all the major cities in the Danube province. The old administrative center of Ottoman Rumelia Sofia served as a central point in the west while the Quadrilateral of Fortresses dominated the east. The network facilitated horse drawn carriage passenger and cargo transportation.



Figure 5: The paved roads and railways constructed between 1864 and 1868.²¹⁶

Among the new bridges, the *Belenski Most* (Belen Bridge) in the Ruse district which is still in use in Bulgaria today, ranked as one of the largest and most spectacular projects of the period (see Figure 6). Kolyo Ficheto, a local master, directed the construction of this

²¹⁴ This was actually a continuation of the road constructions started in Nish. BOA. I.MVL no: 25981.

²¹⁵ *Tabsira-i İbret*, 48. Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskia vilayet*, 109.

²¹⁶ The region indicating the province is in its original form, and the neighboring regions are re-created based on the original map in BOA, HRT.h 780.

stone arch bridge over the Yantra River (50km west of Ruse) near Biala.²¹⁷ According to Midhat Pasha's article, published right after the war of 1877-78, the Yantra River was a natural border between the Turkish majority in the eastern part of the province and the Bulgarian majority in the west.²¹⁸ Thus, in line with the *Tanzimat* ideology, Midhat Pasha may have considered the construction of the bridge over the Yantra an attempt to connect the two communities, even though both halves were mixed and had other populations.



Figure 6: Belenski Most over the Yantra River.²¹⁹

The financial burden of the transportation projects and the necessary labor created a complex relationship between state and its subjects. These development projects involved both voluntary and mandatory participation, paid and unpaid labor, and required taxes and donations. Engineers and foremen mostly came from the capital, but some local masters and a few foreign professionals took part in the projects. Midhat Pasha initially encouraged voluntary collective labor, assigning a portion of the construction to each

²¹⁷ For the architectural details of the bridge, see *Handbook of International Bridge Engineering*, edited by Wai-Fah Chen and Lian Duan (Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 280.

²¹⁸ Midhat Pasha's "The Past, Present and Future of Turkey," 990-991.

²¹⁹ Chen and Duan, *Handbook of International Bridge Engineering*, 280.

village along the road.²²⁰ For instance, the government divided the labor for the Ruse-Tŭrnovo route between the inhabitants of these two cities, assigning the construction of a twelve-hour-long route to the District of Tŭrnovo and a five-hour-long route to the District of Ruse. Similarly, the Biala-Pleven route was divided into three, two or three-hour-long tracts between the inhabitants of Svishtov, Lovech and Nikopol, the peasants of Pleven provided the remaining necessary labor.²²¹ Road construction projects demanded a large number of laborers. For example, 10,000 people worked on the Ruse-Silistra route.²²² To guarantee enough workers, the government authorized local administrators to mobilize the workforce in their regions, using police forces if needed.²²³ Those who did work paid a fee of up to six *gurush* per day while those who refused to work had to option to pay a fee that could be used by the government to hire other laborers, an option available to the wealthiest residents.²²⁴ The exemption fees of wealthy elites provided employment opportunities for peasant laborers, still allowing the government to receive what was essentially free labor from peasants. The “forced-paid” labor requirement demonstrates the complexity of power relations between the state, the wealthy elites, and workers.

While the government levied mandatory labor, it was not without reciprocal compensation. Since the *Tanzimat* reforms had officially abolished *corvée* labor, the

²²⁰ BOA. I.MVL no: 24965. *Tabsira-i İbret*, 48.

²²¹ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 34, October 20, 1865.

²²² *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 68, April 27, 1866.

²²³ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 1, March 3, 1865.

²²⁴ Fadeeva, *Midhat Pasha*, 25.

government paid a six *guruş* daily wage to workers.²²⁵ Compared to the wages in other parts of the empire, the government paid laborers in the Danube province were reasonably compensated for their work. For instance, Donald Quataert argues that in Salonika, where unskilled laborers received some of the highest wages in the empire, workers made between five and eight *gurush* per day.²²⁶ Similarly, Eugene Rogan's work on Transjordan in the late Ottoman period indicates that a wheat harvester in Yaduda made eight *gurush* per day, a barley harvester earned five *gurush*, and a woman harvesting beans and vetches brought in only three *gurush*.²²⁷

Despite the reasonable wages, the Ottoman administration system, however, was open to abuses and corruption.

This undertaking [of the Rustchuk and Varna Chaussee] was commenced about four years ago, and the line traced by a foreign engineer, to whom the contract was given. This gentleman, instead of paying for the necessary work, had it all done by *corvée* (forced labor of peasantry) and pocketed the sum intended for the wages of the laborers, in addition to his own handsome salary as engineer.²²⁸

This indicates that in some cases the government allowance for laborers was abused by the construction administration. Although the scale of corruption is not clear, it is

²²⁵ Ibid, 25.

²²⁶ Donald Quataert, "The Industrial Working Class of Salonica, 1850-1912" in *Jews, Turks and Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*, edited by Avigdor Levy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 202), 208.

²²⁷ Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 169.

²²⁸ St. Claire and Brophy, *A Residence in Bulgaria*, 27.

unlikely that a foreign engineer levied unpaid labor on the peasants without local partners.

In addition, according to Pletnov, the government assumed that the inhabitants would work 5-6 days total on a paved road construction project, but in reality they worked 30-36 days. In some cases, farmers complained that the scheduled work time conflicted with their farming season.²²⁹ Construction generally continued throughout the year, and it naturally conflicted with farming season. However, it would also be a yearlong employment opportunity for many peasants out of their harvesting season.

The government mandated that the presumed “chief beneficiaries” of the roads and bridges, the locals, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, take charge of providing labor and construction materials.²³⁰ Considering the mixed populations in Ruse, both Muslims and Bulgarian Christians contributed to these projects. The government mobilized all the resources and used labor not only from peasants but also from social groups. In 1873, for instance, the governor of Ruse asked the soldiers in the garrison, predominantly Muslim, to take a part in the construction of the irrigation system because this project also benefitted the military.²³¹

Wages for laborers and other construction expenses came from both donations and taxes. Milen Petrov lists a number of cases in which the locals made generous donations for construction and renovation of existing bridges. He states that construction took place at almost no cost to the government; peasants repaired bridges for pay and

²²⁹ Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskii vilayet*, 109

²³⁰ Fadeeva, *Midhat Pasha*, 25.

²³¹ BOA. A.MKT.MHM. Dosya 459, Gömlek 93.

planted trees along the road free of charge. Petrov also notes that taxes paid for road construction. For instance, in the Ottoman fiscal year of 1281 (March 1865 through March 1866), the amount of money needed for constructing roads was 150,000 *gurush*, to be paid by the local inhabitants.²³² Ottoman sources also show that Midhat Pasha appealed to the Supreme Council in Istanbul to fund the maintenance of the new roads and bridges. He proposed hiring 200 full-time laborers (to be paid 1,200-1,500 *gurush* annually) and a foreman (to be paid 3,000-*gurush*). For the average worker, this would amount to five days a week for one year. An additional one-*gurush* tax, levied on each of the 200,000 households, would account for these labor costs as well as material expenses such as shovels, picks and carts. The wealthy would have to pay the share of the poor who could not afford this additional tax.²³³

Even though Turks and other ethnic groups participated in the projects, Russian propaganda from Russian ambassador N.P. Ignatiev encouraged Christian Bulgarians to stand against the labor and financial burden of the projects. He believed, and his propaganda dictated, that it caused suffering amongst Russia's Slavic brothers under Turkish rule.²³⁴ The additional taxes, however, paled in comparison to the existing the taxes under Ottoman rule. The average sum of taxes collected from the Danube province between 1865-1877 was 136 million *gurush*, of which 45 million *gurush* came from Ruse. The additional taxes accounted for less than one percent of overall tax collection. The other major taxes paid by Christian Bulgarians was the military exemption tax,

²³² Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 137-138.

²³³ BOA, I.MVL. no: 25981 and 24965.

²³⁴ Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravljenieto na Dunavskii vilayet*, 109; Fadeeva, *Midhat Pasha*, 25.

which, at 25 *gurush* per year, was less than a laborer made for five days of construction work. The one-*gurush* additional tax would be a sixth of the daily construction worker wage and a third of the tax that peasants paid for a sheep per year.²³⁵

Although contemporary labor politics were complicated, Midhat Pasha completed the aforementioned projects, opening paved roads and viable passenger and cargo routes in the region. The paved roads required regular maintenance, and thus initially had the potential to harm vehicle's goods. While admitting that there were ongoing problems, the governor expressed his satisfaction with his travel to Shumen on a new route (approximately 100 kilometers) in twenty hours.²³⁶ Foreigners in the region also complimented the governor on his transportation project. Referencing Kanitz, Pletnov states that history would remember Midhat Pasha as the governor of the Danube province, because of his "comprehensive and successfully carried out road project, which made a considerable contribution to the development of Bulgaria."²³⁷ Similarly, Keren cites the German engineer, Presel, who explained, "Midhat Pasha granted a well planned and successfully realized road network to the Danube province, which covered extensive territory." These scholars also argue that, following the departure of Midhat Pasha from the province in 1868, the conditions of the new roads deteriorated due to his successors' negligence.²³⁸ The British consular reports also confirm that the government paid little

²³⁵ BOA, HR. SYS, Dosya 344, Gömlek 1, s. 64/2.

²³⁶ Zvi Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 173.

²³⁷ Pletnov, *Midhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskii vilayet*, 109-10.

²³⁸ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 173.

heed to the new roads after Midhat Pasha's tenure in office.²³⁹ Kanitz, however, indicates that Ömer Fevzi Pasha, one of the governors, was dedicated to maintaining and improving Midhat Pasha's infrastructure projects. Despite the lingering problems with maintenance, and the questionable fairness of labor practices, the Pasha's road project served as the main transportation network for many years and formed the basis for the modern-day highway system in Bulgaria.

To complete the transportation network from urban to rural areas, Midhat Pasha also invested in a transportation company that provided cargo, passenger, and postal services using horse drawn carriages. Pasha founded the Carriage Factory (*Araba Fabrikası*) in Ruse to locally produce the carriages needed for the transportation company.²⁴⁰ It operated along the Ruse-Shumen-Varna route. As new roads opened, the company extended its network to other towns.²⁴¹ The provincial newspaper often reported on these improvements, and announced the new destinations and the fares.²⁴² The company sold 250 shares, each valued at 20 *liras*, to investors, including Midhat Pasha himself. After a short period of time, the company began to turn a profit for investors, returning two *liras* in dividends to each shareholder. It also increased the number of carriages to 133 and doubled the number of horses. The value of the Transportation Company, including assets and real estate, rose to 10,000 *liras*.²⁴³ The Carriage Factory increased its production of carriages beyond the needs of the Transportation Company

²³⁹ *Commercial No.24 (Trade Reports) Reports from Her Majesty's Consuls on the Manufactures, Commerce, &c., of Their Consular Districts*, Part V. (London: Harrison and Sons, 1877), 1565.

²⁴⁰ BOA. I.MVL no: 24899.

²⁴¹ BOA, I.DH no: 37383.

²⁴² *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue: 9, April 28, 1865.

²⁴³ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue: 48, January 26, 1866.

and began selling the surplus to private parties, further increasing profits. The two companies also hired a number of drivers, workers and office employees, creating jobs in the region.²⁴⁴

The development of the Transportation Company in conjunction with the Carriage Factory serves as an example of government-funded local industry. Along with bringing profits to the government of Ruse and providing more employment options for its citizens, these two companies provided better transportation to both urban and rural destinations in the region.

Reconstructing the City

The *Tanzimat* reformers were enthusiasts of Westernization. The Ottoman reforms intended to “Europeanize” the urban character of Ruse. The newly established municipal council (*belediye*) took charge of regulating and reconstructing the city, prioritizing hygiene and the aesthetic landscape of Ruse. Starting with a campaign to clean the public areas, the municipality banned food vending, animal slaughter, and waste disposal on the streets. Shop owners were required to sweep the portion of the street surrounding their stores, and villagers driving carts through the city were required to clean the excrement of their animals before leaving. The municipality also designated new cemeteries, outside of the settlements, and prohibited shallow burials. The reforms also forced people to build fences around the old graves and cemeteries in the city to prevent people and animals from contracting possible infections and diseases. Citing hygiene and health concerns, the government moved some industries, such as leather tanning, to the

²⁴⁴ Selimoğlu, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Tuna Vilayeti 1864-1878*, 118-9.

eastern side of the city where the slaughterhouses were located, to prevent potential disease and contamination.²⁴⁵

The modernization project also included the construction and improvement of roads within the city. In some cases, the government tore down old neighborhoods to construct wider streets. This shows similarities to other urban reconstructions in Europe such as Georges-Eugene Haussmann's renovation of Paris in the same period. As in the case of Istanbul, the Ottomans, however, were generally cautious of adopting the elements of urban modernism in Europe symbolized by Hausmann.²⁴⁶ In Ruse, Midhat Pasha's urban planning included gradual additions of European elements, particularly in architecture, to the original Oriental-Ottoman design. Yet, even though the municipal council prepared a map of what the city should look like, urban planning in Ruse faced opposition and resistance from the inhabitants, whose property was confiscated and neighborhoods demolished. As a result, amendments to the initial renovation project focused more on the available open space along the river, as in the case of Consuls Street. Running in a straight line parallel to the Danube, Consuls Street accommodated most of the consulate buildings and residences (see Figure 7). Most of the new buildings had European architectural designs and the signature yellow paint.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 142-43.

²⁴⁶ Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*.

²⁴⁷ *The Argus*, July 7, 1877, 5.



Figure 7: A View of the Consular Street in 1878.²⁴⁸

Through fundraising campaigns and donations, the wealthy inhabitants, for the most part, shouldered the financial burden of these public works projects. It was not the first time the Ottoman government asked the wealthy elites of Ruse to fund infrastructure projects. In 1861, two notables of Ruse, Hacı Derviş Ağa and Hacı Ömer Ağa, constructed a sidewalk from the Sarıbayır gate of the fortress to the bazaar in the city center, a job for which they received thank you notes from the government.²⁴⁹ Extending about 28 kilometers, the new paved roads, in many cases, included sidewalks and streetlamps for safety purposes. The provincial newspaper even claimed that the new gaslights helped merchants extend their business hours, and artisans could now work after sunset. The 50 new lamps were the first of 150, and the number would further

²⁴⁸ NBKM.OO. C III 1229, 1.44.

²⁴⁹ BOA, A.MKT.UM. Dosya 519, Gömlek 62.

increase to 350 total by the end of the project.²⁵⁰ While it appeared that the government wanted to reduce the use of lanterns, and standardize the use of street lamps, Albert De Burton indicates that in the early 1870s, “at night, everybody is obliged to carry a lantern; otherwise he is liable to be arrested.”²⁵¹

The Ottoman urban reforms attempted to renovate Ruse as a model city on equal ground with its western counterparts. The municipal council enacted a number of regulations for hygiene and carried out infrastructural projects to Europeanize the landscape of the city. In 1871, Kanitz commented on the modernization projects in Ruse.

Midhat, with his typical energy, ordered the demolition of an entire city quarter within a year, construction of new streets toward the city center, and of the already mentioned quay. If he had stayed longer in the office as governor, I believe that in a short period, Ruse supported by its marvelous situation would have outstripped in its beauty all other cities on the lower Danube. In the given situation it might not compete either with Giurgiu nor with the up and coming Belgrade as far as architecture, roads, streetlights and cleanliness are concerned. Today’s Ruse resembles a woman who vainly tries to cover her ugliness with make-up and plaster.²⁵²

Kanitz’s comments demonstrate both the success of Midhat Pasha’s reforms but also their eventual stagnation. Still, Midhat Pasha was clearly invested in Ruse, transforming it into a modern, model city in the *Tanzimat* reforms in the provinces.

²⁵⁰ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 182.

²⁵¹ De Burton, *Ten Months’ Tour in the East*, 38.

²⁵² Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien Und Der Balkan*, 12.

Rural Development

In the Danube province, traditional agriculture was the main source of income for the majority of the population. This agrarian economy consisted of small-scale family farming, animal husbandry, and large-scale farming in which peasants worked for landowners as sharecroppers or laborers, who were generally Bulgarian Christians. There was no agricultural institution to provide farmers with financial assistance, farming equipment, and seeds. Loan sharks and the wealthy, land-owning elite, known as *gospodar*, who were predominantly Muslim, but also included some non-Muslims, took advantage of the situation, lending high-interest loans to peasants and profiting from their labor and production.²⁵³ The conflict between these two social classes partially accounted for the peasant uprisings in Bulgaria in the 1840s and 1850s, which were driven by social and economic motivations rather than national.²⁵⁴

In order to reform the old agrarian system and protect peasants from exploitation, Midhat Pasha introduced two new institutions: The Agricultural Credit Cooperatives and a model farm. In establishing these institutions and empowering peasants, Pasha initiated a political attack on the wealthy elites. Midhat Pasha established his first experimental cooperative in Pirot (near the modern day Serbian city of Nish) on November 20, 1863. Following the creation of the Danube province, he opened new cooperatives in Ruse, Eski Cuma (Türgovishte), Nish, Pirot, and Leskofca in 1865.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ While there is no direct translation for *gospodar*, it loosely translates as “wealthy elite.”

²⁵⁴ For the Vidin uprisings of 1841 and 1850, for example, see Halil Inalcık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi*.

²⁵⁵ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue I, March 3, 1865.

Historians argue as to whether these cooperatives were modeled after European examples, in particular the German Raiffeisen's model. For instance, Maria Todorova suggests possible German and French influences on Midhat Pasha's project after he visited Western Europe in 1858. She points out that Raiffeisen's first cooperative began in 1849 and that the agricultural bank in France opened in 1852.²⁵⁶ As part of the broader context, agricultural cooperatives began to appear in Western Europe in the 1860s and 1870s.²⁵⁷ Regarding the cooperatives that Raiffesien, a Protestant village mayor, sponsored in the late 1840s, David Peal's study shows that they actually acted as charitable "bread unions" (*brotvereine*) that helped orphans, widows, and villagers who fell on hard times. Encouraging collaboration and charity among Christians, the first credit cooperative in his parish was founded in 1864 with Protestant and Catholic affiliations. He wrote about the principles of his rural charity and self-help in a handbook that was published and circulated in 1866.²⁵⁸ Yet, Midhat Pasha established his first cooperative in 1863 and formed his handbook of cooperatives in 1865, a year before Raiffeisen created his own. Based on the dates as well as Pasha's preference for secular

²⁵⁶ Maria Todorova, "Obshtopoleznite Kasi ne Midhat Pasha" *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1972, 5, 58.

²⁵⁷ In Italy, the first agricultural association was founded to regulate the delivery of raw materials in 1866. In Great Britain, the first agricultural cooperative was founded in 1867, providing supplies like seeds and fertilizer. In Portugal, the first regulatory law of cooperatives was created 1869. In the Netherlands, the first cooperative influenced by Raiffeisen model was formed in 1877, promoting solidarity and mutual help. In Belgium, the first cooperative was created just after 1850 to provide basic products such as potatoes and flour, but it functioned more as a store. In France, in 1885 the Agriculture credit society was created in agreement with the rules of a workers' trade union. See Carlos Morales Gutierrez's "A Comparative Synthesis of 20th Century Agricultural Cooperative Movements in Europe" *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, 33(1) 2005, 47-65.

²⁵⁸ David Peal, "Self-Help and the State: Rural Cooperatives in Imperial Germany" *Central European History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Sep., 1988), 246-47.

support of peasants, it seems highly unlikely that Pasha modeled his agricultural cooperatives after Raiffeisen's.

In terms of structure, Pasha and Raiffeisen's cooperatives were quite different from one another, even though both were based on the idea of "self-help." As noted above, Muslim and non-Muslim trustees ran Midhat Pasha's cooperatives as secular institutions, whereas the church took a leading role in Raiffeisen's model. The German model functioned as a charity organization, similar to the Ottoman pious foundation system (*vakıf*), helping the poor and needy based on donations rather than operating as a credit cooperative. Finally, the Ottoman government took a leading role in its cooperatives, whereas the government had little involvement in Raiffeisen's cooperatives.²⁵⁹

Midhat Pasha decided on twenty principles for this new institution that the Porte approved on February 7, 1865.²⁶⁰ His self-help project relied on a system of collective labor known as *imece*, in which peasants worked together on a plot provided by the government. Each household received a half-*dönüm* (equivalent to 500 square meters) to plant wheat, barley, and especially corn, which was best suited for the climate. As such, the government opened arable state land for cultivation, in some cases renting private land for cooperative farming. Both Christian and Muslim peasants provided labor on their

²⁵⁹ See Michael Prinz's "German Rural Cooperatives, Friedrich-Wilhelm Raiffeisen and the Organization of Trust 1850 – 1914" Paper delivered at the XIII IEHA Congress Buenos Aires, July 2002. <http://prinz-germany.de/raiff1.pdf> accessed on July 26, 2014.

²⁶⁰ BAO, I.DH. 36970. The revised regulation was issued on July 19, 1867 and applied to the cooperatives in the other provinces. For the text of the *Nizamname* of Memleket Sandıkları see, Düstür I. Tertip. V.2., 387-398. For its transliteration see, Seçil Akgün, "Midhat Paşa'nın Kurduğu Memleket Sandıkları: Ziraat Bankası'nın Kökeni" *Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri: Bildiriler Tartışmalar Edirne: 8-10 Mayıs 1984* (Ankara: TTK 1986), 202-211.

days off, Sundays for Christians and Fridays for Muslims. At the end of the season, the Council of Elders in the villages collected harvested crops and sold them at auctions in the district centers. The council then allocated a third of the profits to the infrastructure of the villages and reinvested the rest into the cooperative. The government also allocated five percent of the *öşür* tax for the cooperatives.²⁶¹ Upon the approval of the village councils, the cooperative lent the money they had collected to the farmers for a year, loaning no more than 2000 *guruş* at a 1 percent monthly interest fee. The cooperative partially used the income from the interest for public works in the villages.²⁶²

The executive board of the cooperative consisted of two Muslim and two non-Muslim trustees as well as one Muslim and one non-Muslim secretary. The government either constructed or rented offices for the cooperative, which was initially open once a week, and then twice a week because of high demand. The government sent an inspector to the cooperatives once or twice a year to check on the financial records.²⁶³

Tuna/Dunav proudly reported the growth of the cooperatives over time. In May 1865, it stated that the profits of the cooperatives increased to 226,000 *guruş* and farmers had already borrowed 198,000 *guruş* to purchase oxen.²⁶⁴ Within three years, this number increased to 20 million *guruş* and to 60 million *guruş* by the end of 1876.²⁶⁵ The rapid growth indicates that as businesses, the agricultural cooperatives experienced great success.

²⁶¹ Öşür taxes were collected from the agricultural products of the Muslim population.

²⁶² *Tabsıra-i İbret*, 49-50; BOA. I.DH no: 36970.

²⁶³ BOA, I.MVL. no: 26172.

²⁶⁴ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue: 7, April 14, 1865.

²⁶⁵ For the table showing the budgets of the cooperatives see, Selimoğlu, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Tuna Vilayeti 1864-1878*, 113-115, and Todorova, "Obshtopoleznite Kasi ne Midhat Pasha," 56-76.

The success of the rural cooperative encouraged Midhat Pasha to extend this developing banking system to the urban centers. After the approval of the Sublime Porte, he transformed the cooperatives into an agricultural bank called *Emanet Sandığı* (Safe Box) in the urban centers. The first branch opened in Ruse on January 20, 1868, and spread to other cities. The bank allowed the city dwellers to deposit savings, from 20 to 500 *gurush*, and would receive nine percent interest in return. The bank leased the deposits to farmers at a 1 percent monthly (12 percent annual) interest rate as before.²⁶⁶ The government and merchants also benefitted from the opening of other bank branches in Ruse, such as the Ottoman Bank, founded in 1856 with British capital, which opened a local branch in 1875.²⁶⁷

Until the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the agricultural bank was highly institutionalized, especially in northern Bulgaria, which came under Russian rule after the war. The Agricultural Credit Cooperatives were some of the first institutions that the Russian provisional government restored in June 1878. Under the Bulgarian national government, the regulations of 1894 entrusted the administration of these cooperatives to the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture, and the following year they became local representative of the Bulgarian National Bank. In 1903, the government officially changed its name to the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank (*Bŭlgarska Zemedelska Banka*). The Ottoman government modernized the remainder of the cooperatives and incorporated them into the Turkish Agricultural Bank (*Ziraat Bankası*) in 1888.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ BOA, I.MVL no: 26200.

²⁶⁷ *Commercial No.24*, 1565.

²⁶⁸ Akgün, "Midhat Paşa'nın Kurduğu Memleket Sandıkları: Ziraat Bankası'nın Kökeni," 199-200.

As part of his agricultural reform in 1865, Midhat Pasha established the *Numune Çiftliği* model farm in Ruse (see Figure 8). Pasha imported modern farming tools from Europe to improve regional agriculture by increasing the efficiency of planting and harvesting. In late 1868, the farm purchased horse-drawn combine harvesters from London for 3500 *gurush*, paid for by the cooperatives. After receiving thirty-three harvesters, the farm hosted a training program in which a few farmers from each town came to learn how to use the new equipment. When they returned home, they were then able to train others. The farm rented the new harvesters to farmers until they were paid for, and then sold them directly to the farmers. The model farm also worked to develop higher quality seeds for increased harvests. As such, it collected sample seeds from other provinces of the empire, such as Skopje and Istanbul, to sow in the farm to find which crops were the most viable and productive in the area.²⁶⁹

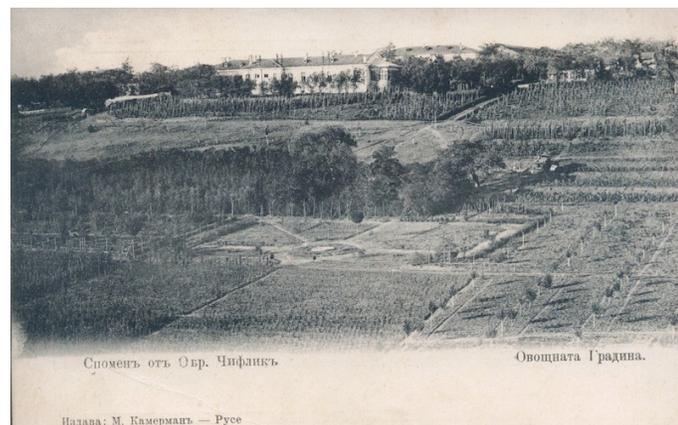


Figure 8: The Model Farm in Ruse.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ For the documents with respect to the model farm, see Stoianka Kenderova, “Osmanoturski Dokumenti za «Numune Chiflik» (dnes ‘Obraztsov Chiflik’) Krai Ruse” *Izvestiia na Dürkzavnite Arhivi* 40 (Sofia: 1980), 159. Also see BOA. YB (04) Dosya 9, Gömlek 74 and ŞD. Dosya 2078, Gömlek 37.

²⁷⁰ NBKM.OO. C I 3389. The document did not include the date the photo was taken, but it is likely to be in the late 1870s or early 1880s.

In line with the government projects to improve agriculture, Bulgarians started publishing an agricultural and economic newspaper called *Stupan (Farmer)* in Bucharest, Vidin, and Ruse from 1874-76. *Stupan* illustrates the support, at least among certain elites, for the agricultural modernization and improvements that model farms brought to the region, suggesting that the Ottoman projects were not top-down imperial reforms but instead reforms intended to meet local needs. Far from being a politically motivated publication, *Stupan* aimed to improve agriculture and the rural economy. It was the first newspaper to bring up issues of land use, agriculture, and peasant life. While it is unclear who exactly initiated these conversations, it is evident that journalists at the newspaper were not writing as political figures but instead as intellectuals committed to educating farmers in the best available practices. Published openly in the capital of the province, Ottoman authorities tacitly supported the publication.

Along with an introduction, this newspaper was divided into sections for agricultural cooperatives, folk economy, and farming education. In the first issue published on January 1st, 1874, the newspaper stated that knowledge of the land was the key to efficient farming.

We always say that our land is perfect, but the truth is that we do not know our land well. We do not know how to treat it. We only exploit it without fertilizing, and that is why it is getting worse. There are different types of soil... How should we feed the livestock during winter? We do not feed animals good food. You should prepare the food for the entire winter in

advance. What farmers should do in January, when they do not have work, is to think about how to improve their farms in spring...²⁷¹

The newspaper was attempting to educate farmers about agriculture and encourage year-round agricultural labor. In 1875, the newspaper began to tackle social and moral issues, such as drinking alcohol. For example, the January 1st, 1875 issue criticized people who drank the local hard liquor *raki* and recommended that they cease or at least limit their alcohol consumption.²⁷²

The newspaper was published in Bulgaria monthly in its first year, and then twice monthly in the following year. Although it was distributed widely in Northern Bulgaria, especially Vidin, Ruse, and Tulcea, the primary audience of the newspaper, peasants, were largely illiterate. The educated Bulgarians then took the responsibility to read the papers in cafes or other public places for peasants. As such, the contributors of *Stupan* particularly urged teachers to take the leading role and criticized those who were unwilling to do so.²⁷³

The model farm in Ruse proved to be the first successful agricultural school in Ottoman history. Clearly supported by peasants the model farm, along with the newspaper *Stupan*, helped bring contemporary agricultural knowledge to the region. The example appeared successful, as the Ottoman government opened new model farms in Istanbul and Ankara, although only in the 1890s.²⁷⁴ After the formation of the Bulgarian

²⁷¹ *Stupan*, January 1, 1874, Year I, Issue 1, 3.

²⁷² *Stupan*, January 1, 1875, Year II Issue 1, 16.

²⁷³ *Stupan*, November 15, 1875, Year II Issues 21-22, 176.

²⁷⁴ Prior to the model farm in Ruse, an agricultural school was established in the Ayamana farm in Istanbul in 1847, but it failed and closed down in 1851. See Mehmet Ali Yıldırım's "Osmanlı'da İlk Çağdaş Zirai

principality, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Kliment Branitski, a former priest in Ruse, restored the Ruse model farm in 1881. In 1883, the model farm was transformed to an agricultural school offering a three-year training in farming. It still exists in modern day Bulgaria as the Institute of Agriculture and Seed Science.²⁷⁵

Commerce in Ruse

The new institutions and infrastructure offered farmers and merchants easy access to products and merchandise in the growing markets, both foreign and local. Ruse played an intermediary role, as a port city for imported goods to Istanbul and Galatz while exporting local goods, consisting principally of grain, through Varna and Braila. Because merchants did not pay a duty in Ruse, there is no figure available indicating the exact value of commerce in Ruse, however, it was the main route available to merchants in the Danube province.²⁷⁶ The commercial exports of the province consisted of wheat, barley, corn, flour, tallow, butter, flax, cheese, dried meat, skins, poultry, cattle bones, wool, and firewood. Foreign imported goods included manufactured textiles, coffee, sugar, steel, iron, timber, salt, machinery, copper, and coals.²⁷⁷ An American consular report from 1898 outlines the commercial landscape:

To maintain a position in the Bulgarian market, goods must be the cheapest procurable; and they must be supplied on fairly long credit. Our

Eğitim Kurumu: Ziraat Mektebi (1847-1851)", *OTAM*, S. 24, (Ankara 2010), 223-240. Only in the 1890s, the Ottoman government opened agricultural schools and model farms in Istanbul and Ankara, namely Halkali Ziraat Mektebi (1892) in Istanbul and Ankara Numune Tarlasi ve Coban Mektebi (1898) in Ankara.

²⁷⁵ Institut po Zemedelie i Semezhantie "Obraztsov Chiflik" Ruse, accessed October 26, 2015, <http://izs-ruse.org/en/istoria.php>.

²⁷⁶ *Reports Relative to British Consular Establishments: 1858-1871*, 29.

²⁷⁷ *Commercial No.24*, 1565.

cottons answer both these conditions. Most of the Manchester houses doing business with this part of the world have local branches or agencies, which are available to discriminate between buyers who may or may not be trusted in a way which is impossible for British houses trading direct with customers here. This is not the case with Birmingham and Sheffield manufacturers, who have no local representatives, and who manifest a not entirely unjustifiable reluctance to sell their goods on credit to native dealers. Foreign, particularly Austrian, houses are generally well represented, and they further supply a low-class article with which ours as a rule cannot compete.²⁷⁸

The nature of commerce in the 1860s was much the same as the 1890s. According to the report, success in the Bulgarian markets required low prices and extensive credit. This might be because in Bulgarian agrarian society most farmers and peasants were paid only once or twice a year at harvest time. With low transportation costs and established agencies along the Danube, Austria had an advantageous position for trade with Bulgaria and was the only country that had direct trade with Ruse.

Ruse accommodated a diverse group of Europeans, who composed nearly ten percent of the total population. According to the British consular reports, by 1872, there were 1528 Austrian and 122 British subjects who settled in Ruse, not including their wives and children, and a small number from other countries. Although some Europeans

²⁷⁸ *Consular Reports-October 1898: Commerce, Manufactures, etc*, Vol. LVIII, No. 217 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 501-502.

were diplomats and officers in the consulates, the majority were merchants and businesspeople.²⁷⁹ Referencing Turkish sources, from the early 1870s, Kanitz lists the population of the city as 23,000, with “10,800 Turkish, 7700 Bulgarian, 1000 Jewish, 800 Armenian, 500 Roma, 800 Romanian and Serbian, 200 Austrian and Hungarian, 100 Greek, 100 German and others including English, Polish, Russian, Italian, etc.”²⁸⁰ Despite the difference in the figures, both sources indicate a high number of foreigners in Ruse.

In the 1860s and 70s, the Danube province was under Ottoman surveillance, and the authorities generally approached foreigners with suspicion, considering them to be spies working for their home countries. For instance, Ottoman agents arrested a commission merchant named Mihalaki Georgi Abram Ayos in Giurgiu, accusing him of acting as a Russian spy.²⁸¹ Similarly, “Nikola” in Ruse and a linen draper “Dimitri” in Tulcea were arrested as Serbian spies.²⁸² The Ottoman documents also indicate that a *hafiy*e (police intelligence officer) followed the Austrian consul on his trip to Gabrovo and Tŭrnovo and reported all his interactions.²⁸³

Not all foreigners were treated as spies, but many foreign visitors still had difficulties at the Customs Office for their entry to the Ottoman Empire because of bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption. In 1875, British authorities petitioned the

²⁷⁹ *Reports Relative to British Consular Establishments: 1858-1871*, 29. Especially after 1864, Austria, Great Britain, France, Russia, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Belgium and Germany established their consulates in Ruse, while the United States used the British Consulate. The Ottoman sources also mention the participation of Iranian merchants in the commercial fairs within the District of Ruse but there is no significant record of their business in the city. NBKM.OO. F.113, A. a.e. 84.

²⁸⁰ Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien Und Der Balkan*, 15.

²⁸¹ BOA. HR.MKT. Dosya 66, Gŏmlek 29.

²⁸² BOA. MVL. Dosya 959, Gŏmlek 26.

²⁸³ BOA. A.MKT.UM. Dosya 257, Gŏmlek 58; HR.MKT. Dosya 163, Gŏmlek 46.

Ottoman foreign office, complaining that their subjects had difficulties at the passport office in Ruse.²⁸⁴ In line with this correspondence, De Burton, recounted his experience in Ruse in 1870.

Before leaving London it is necessary to obtain one from the Foreign Office, and have it *viséd* at the Turkish Embassy, otherwise you would not be allowed to enter the Ottoman Empire. They are especially strict with persons entering by Bulgaria. Before quitting any place, when you inquire about the departures of steamboats, inquire also whether your passport is *en règle*. This precaution will often avoid a great deal of annoyance. On landing [in Ruse], baggage is examined and passports taken away by the Turkish officials; you can get your passport again by applying an hour or two later at the Konac through your consul.²⁸⁵

Burton points out that the Ottomans were particularly strict along the borders of the region where Bulgarians live. It is likely that the precautions taken to protect the border with Romania, where the Bulgarian revolutionary committees were stationed, slowed down the processing time at the passport office. A correspondence between the passport office and the governor of Ruse also indicates that the office had technical problems in preparing documentation for local merchants and artisans going to Vlashko in Romania.²⁸⁶ Kanitz also mentions the corruption at the Customs Office, claiming that the

²⁸⁴ BOA. HR.TO. Dosya 250, Gömlek 8.

²⁸⁵ De Burton, *Ten Months' Tour in the East*, xxviii and 38.

²⁸⁶ NBKM. OO. F.112, a.e. 332.

officers were bribed.²⁸⁷ It seems that the difficulties that travelers faced at the passport office in Ruse affected not only English subjects but also others, including the Ottoman citizens.

Many of these foreigners settled in Ruse and ran businesses that catered to both locals and travelers. For instance, a German woman named Mariam managed a *han* (caravanserai), an Italian businessman leased the *Islahhane* hotel, a German citizen ran the Hotel de la Station near the train station, and a French citizen named Rodenski operated a silk factory.²⁸⁸ Foreigners also attempted to take a share in the food industry dominated by the locals. A petition from the Greek consul in Ruse to the governor Mehmed Asim Pasha indicates that the consul asks for the governor to allow a Greek citizen, a baker named Giorgios (written as Jorj in Ottoman Turkish), to sell his bread in Ruse.²⁸⁹ Although the document does not indicate if the baker received the permission, another document indicates that in Ruse there were already forty bakeries.²⁹⁰ Despite the high number of bakeries in the city, particular ethnic groups requested special treatment based on commercial agreements.

Through the commercial treaties known as the capitulations, the Ottoman Empire granted privileges to European merchants in the Ottoman market. Based on the capitulations, foreign consuls had a right to interfere on behalf of the affairs of their subjects, which, in theory, protected Europeans from the “abuses” and “corruption” of the

²⁸⁷ Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien Und Der Balkan*, 13.

²⁸⁸ See the following sources respectively on each case. NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 13/89; BOA. T.d 82; Du Burton, *Ten Months' Tour in the East*, 38; BOA. A.MKT.UM. Dosya 513, Gömlek 78.

²⁸⁹ NBKM.OO. F.112, a.e. 330.

²⁹⁰ NBKM.OO. F.112, a.e. 21.

Ottoman administration. The capitulations gave foreign merchants a favorable position compared to the local merchants, which itself led to inequality and abuse. For instance, two Jewish merchants, one Ottoman and one German, participated in the fair in Cumaya. While the German citizen was exempt from the fair tax, the Ottoman merchant had to pay it.²⁹¹

But based on the capitulations when a foreign merchant committed a crime the offended party, whether local or foreign, had to apply to a foreign merchant's consul for legal action. St. Clair and Brophy provide a detailed discussion of the capitulations and the abuses and corruption that they allowed. One such conflict took place between Midhat Pasha and the foreign consuls in Ruse:

... Midhat Pasha went so far as to order a verification of weights and measures by the police; but here he was stopped by the Capitulations, the great protector of all abuses committed by foreigners; the Consuls cried out with one voice, "This is an attack upon our rights, we only can judge or interfere in any way with our respective subjects: to allow the Turkish police to enter the shop of a foreigner is to open the door to Turkish speculation and corruption." In the face of this refusal nothing could be done, and consequently false weights and measures flourish as they always did and always will do in Turkey.²⁹²

²⁹¹ NBKM.OO. F.113 a.e. 187.

²⁹² St. Clair and Brophy, *A Residence in Bulgaria*, 387-88.

Midhat Pasha eventually enforced the law to abolish false weights and measures, but could only apply penalties to Ottoman subjects who violated the law.

With the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, signed on May 27, 1855 between Greece and the Ottoman Empire, Greek merchants obtained the same commercial privileges as every other European nation.²⁹³ According to St. Clair and Brophy, Greek merchants knowingly relied on the corruption of their own government consulates, which either declined to prosecute malfeasance or referred plaintiffs to the Greek courts in Athens, which always ruled in favor of their countrymen. St. Clair and Brophy gave the example of the following incident in Ruse:

A Mr. R., one of the most honest Hellenes in the country, makes a contract with the Varna and Rustchuk Railway Company for 15,000 sleepers; like all the speculators of this country, he has no capital with which to carry out the undertaking, and on the strength of his fair reputation, succeeds in getting paid in advance by the English company; shortly afterwards he announces that 6000 sleepers are procured, and agents of the company are sent to examine them; they arrive and find a heap of charred and smoking wood. Strong suspicions of incendiarism are entertained, and doubts raised whether the 6000 sleepers ever existed, but the heap of wood is too thoroughly destroyed to allow any decision as to its original constituent parts; the Greek consulate is referred to, but it is found advisable not to

²⁹³ Edward A. Van Dyck, *Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire: Report of Edward A. Van Dyck, Consular Clerk of the United States at Cairo*, Part I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), 23. Also see, Feroz Ahmad, "Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations 1800-1914," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, II-I (2000), 1-20.

proceed in the matter, and the Company has to put up with the loss of the sum advanced.²⁹⁴

In other words, the Greek merchant received the payment from the Varna and Ruse Railway Company in advance for 6000 sleepers, but he did not deliver them. Based on the Capitulations, the Greek courts would handle the issues and protect them from answering for their crimes. Also citing difficulties with Greeks, De Burton commented on the Greek merchants in Ruse, stating, “If you have the misfortune to come across a Greek, who is the biggest scoundrel and rogue in the world.”²⁹⁵

Orthodox merchants, both Greeks and Slavs, in Ottoman Europe had been the chief traders of the region.²⁹⁶ The protection of the capitulations gave Greeks a monopoly on Eastern commerce, and the Greek consuls effectively used the commercial privileges to protect their citizens. For instance, the Ottoman customs office tried to tax the alcohol that Greek merchants imported through Austrian merchants.²⁹⁷ The Greek consul, however, made efforts to prevent over-taxation on the alcohol that his subjects imported.²⁹⁸ The Ottoman officials also reported that some merchants claimed to be Greek with same falsified Greek passports to benefit from the privileges, even though they were actually Ottoman citizens. As punishment, the government forced them to sell

²⁹⁴ St. Claire and Brophy, *Twelve Years' Study of The Eastern Question in Bulgaria*, 215.

²⁹⁵ De Burton, *Ten Months' Tour in the East*, 38-39.

²⁹⁶ See Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant,” 234-313.

²⁹⁷ NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 8/141, and NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 80/1 p.21.

²⁹⁸ NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 8/141, and NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 10/92.

their goods and move elsewhere unless they had established businesses in the cities of their residence.²⁹⁹

Foreign merchants in Ruse often recounted their interactions with local merchants of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds in and around the city of Ruse. John Carnegie, a British merchant, commented on Turks, Bulgarians and Romanians:³⁰⁰

We liked the Turks better than we did either the Bulgarians, who were sullen people, or the Romanians, who, though lively and smart, were not quite so honest as they might have been. The Turks, as regarded commerce, were slow and antiquated; but their word was their bond, and even the poorest of them had a personal dignity and self-respect, which made intercourse with them very pleasant.³⁰¹

Carnegie clearly sympathized with the Turkish merchants. Barkley, however, emphasizes the pragmatic nature of people in Ruse in nearly all transactions they had with Europeans, either diplomatic or commercial, to utilize whatever means that were beneficial for their interest. He states, “There was a widely held idea that the Turk is truthful and the Christian untruthful. My experience leads me to believe that all are not only equally untruthful, but hold in contempt those that are truthful.”³⁰²

²⁹⁹ BOA. A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 57, Gömlek 99.

³⁰⁰ The Carnegie family had done business in Eastern Europe for three generations, carrying commerce in grain and other products of the great Danube valley, with their headquarters in Ruse and Giurgiu.

³⁰¹ Archibald Forbes, *Czar and Sultan: The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78* (London: Simpkin, Marshal, Hamilton, Kent & Company Limited, 1894), 2.

³⁰² Henry Barkley, *Bulgaria Before the War: During Seven Years; Experience of European Turkey and Its Inhabitants* (London: John Murray, 1877), xiv.

Even as Ruse contributed to trade connecting the East and West with a high volume of international commerce, local goods still dominated its markets. Local products included textiles (wool, silk, linen), tanned leather, handmade shoes, steam flourmills, gunpowder, soap, and tobacco. Agricultural goods chiefly consisted of grains, dried fruits, cattle, poultry and dairy products. Barkley describes a marketplace in the city in the late 1860s as thoroughly diversified.

I went into the street with its wretched one storied shops open to the front, displaying such commodities as old iron, rope, dried figs, locusts, black or white Bulgar caps, sheep's milk cheese, Turkish shoes and slippers, earthen water-bottles, tobacco, and many other such things, useful to the natives, but not pretty nor much calculated to drain the pockets of an European.³⁰³

The quote illustrates a traditional Ottoman market with domestic products, but it does not mention imported goods from Europe. According to Kanitz, the whole trade with local products was practically under domestic monopoly. In the mid-1870s, however, the bazaars in Ruse showed European influence.

On some days, the small and the big bazaar streets in the center of the Turkish quarter show activity. People from the countryside who have sold their goods, animals, vegetables, etc. flock into the colorfully outfitted Bulgarian shops, some of which, already furnished in European style,

³⁰³ Ibid, 6.

show inspiring displays. Among all of them, manufacturers of Turkish shoes and clothes are the most represented.³⁰⁴

Kanitz shows that local shop owners in Ruse began to fashion their stores in a “European” manner even though they still sold domestic goods.

By the 1870s, however, foreign merchants opened numerous shops offering European luxury goods such as branch shops of Vienna clothing and shoe manufacturers.³⁰⁵ European goods, mostly luxury items, were more widely available at stores in Christian neighborhoods, and sellers priced these goods accordingly. Bulgarians elites took an interest in European fashions, goods, and culture. *Stupan* noted that “people used to wear cheap shoes before, and now young people buy very expensive shoes (seventy-ninthy *guruh*). Now we are more interested in luxuries.”³⁰⁶

The growing interest in European styles influenced traditional Ottoman products, and many merchants incorporated elements of European design. As the European goods were luxurious and rather expensive for the locals, some chose to buy locally made Ottoman products, influenced by European styles, rather than European imports. Kanitz noted his experience in Ruse:

I namely liked to spend my time in the shop of an elder Muslim who, with a rare stylistic taste, created the finest bowls, sugar and tobacco boxes, pipes, etc. on his primitive potter’s wheel. With a refined taste, he knew how to place the ornamental work just at the right place without adorning

³⁰⁴ Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan*, 19-20.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 19-20.

³⁰⁶ *Stupan*, July 15, 1875, Year I, Issue 13-14, 136.

profusely—an exercise of taste which is seldom found among occidental craftsmen. Unfortunately, Abdullah, even among his colleagues, was already an exception as imports from Europe provoked them to experiment, which harmed the original charm of their miniature art.³⁰⁷

Of course, not all goods came from Western Europe. Ruse controlled much of the salt trade, for example, because of its proximity to the Romanian city of Giurgiu.³⁰⁸ The Ottoman government benefitted from housing Romanian salt because it produced tax revenue. A Russian document lists a rate as high as seventy percent.³⁰⁹ To protect its tariffs, the Ottoman government also issued strict regulations to prevent smuggling, but it often failed to control the illegal trafficking of salt.³¹⁰ For instance, in September 1867, a prison guard named Azim joined two police officers on the Danube, Hasan and Mehmed, in smuggling salt. The government fired them from their positions, and they paid heavy fines.³¹¹ Similarly, in July 1873, some captains of boats on the Danube illegally brought salt from Romania, like captain Derviş, who was captured with 11,150 *okka* (14,294.3 kg) of salt.³¹² Legitimate merchants, however, such as Serbian Mayor Misho and Jewish

³⁰⁷ Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan*, 19.

³⁰⁸ Romania was the chief salt exporter in the region with its rich mineral resources, meeting the demand in the Ottoman markets.

³⁰⁹ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyĭ arhiv, Polit. Otdel, op. 244, 1879 g.d. 1, 1-33, cited in Zheĭnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 221. The price of salt was mentioned in a document from 1856 as 40 gurush for 100 okka (128.2 kilograms). NBKM. OO. F.121, a.e. 113.

³¹⁰ The Ottoman government had a special office, *Tuz Idaresi*, to oversee salt trade. BOA. MVL Dosya 1077, Gŧmlek 59. Especially in 1873, the volume of salt smuggling had increased, and thus the government banned illegal salt trade with multiple orders. See NBKM. OO. F.Rs.60/4, l. 6; BOA. I.ŞD. Dosya 27, Gŧmlek 1271; BOA. A.MKT.MHM, Dosya 457, Gŧmlek 78.

³¹¹ BOA. MVL Dosya 1080, Gŧmlek 6.

³¹² NBKM. OO. F.Rs.60/5, l. 25. Another salt smuggler named Taki was also captured around that time and sent to the court. NBKM. OO. F.Rs.60/4, l. 8.

merchant Avram, agreed to contracts with the Ottoman administration that allowed them to import salt, which was then redistributed to other towns and provinces.³¹³

In the markets of Ruse, the Ottoman government purchased the majority of local products in order to meet the needs of the state and supply goods to other provinces, the capital in particular. For instance, it purchased a large amount of coal from Gabrovo, Triavna, Elena, and Diranovo (near Tŭrnovo) for the Steam Navigation Company and steam flourmill, timber from Razgrad for the industrial school, and roof tiles from Vidin for construction.³¹⁴ Thus, the state itself had commercial relations with local merchants, either Muslim or non-Muslim, who made significant gains from this trade.

In the 1870s, fears of a probable Russian attack compelled the Ottoman government to increase its military presence in the province, especially in the Quadrilateral of Fortresses. Maintaining the large number of troops increased the demand for goods from the local market. In Ruse, seven local establishments produced military goods, such as uniforms made by the industrial school for girls. The Ottoman government often purchased shoes, clothing, grain, cattle, salt, and horses from the local market to

³¹³ BOA. A.MKT.MHM Dosya 258, Gömlek 81; NBKM. OO. F.119, a.e. 949.

³¹⁴ In 1872, the government orders 500,000 roofing tiles and pays 65 gurush for 1,000. NBKM. OO. F. 26, a.e. 11591 and F.31 A, a.e. 32. In 1876, another order for 1,000 roof tiles was placed from Kalafat. NBKM. OO. F.Rs.59/11, l.61. In 1873, the industrial school in Ruse buys 90 pine trees from Razgrad. NBKM. OO. F.112, a.e. 326. In 1875, the governor of Tŭrnovo informs the coalmines office in Ruse that they cannot deliver the coals from Gabrovo, Diranovo and Elena to Ruse on account of lack or enough carriages. NBKM. OO. F.Rs. 1/88, l.4. In May 1877, the government purchases coal for the Steam Navigation Company and the steam flourmill in Ruse also requests 100,000-kilogram coal from the Triavna coalmines. NBKM. OO. F.Rs. 2/59 and OAK. 52/66. The first steam flourmill in Ruse was established in 1876 with the machinery imported from Europe. See NBKM.OO. F.Rs.9/228. Vidin also provided Ruse with wood coal. See NBKM. OO. F.VD. 99/14, l.9.

meet the needs of the army.³¹⁵ Government purchases created interdependent commercial relations between the state and merchants. For instance, the government purchased grains worth 86,365 *gurush*, including 6,643 kilograms of barley, from a local non-Muslim merchant in Ruse named Yorgi.³¹⁶ In addition to grains, tobacco was another local product and a Bulgarian businessman, Manol Hadzhi Kostatin, owned the tobacco factory in Ruse.³¹⁷ It is likely that the largest buyer of the tobacco at the time was the Ottoman army, which had a total of 9300 soldiers in January 1877.³¹⁸ Indicating the demand from the army, *Tuna/Dunav* reported on July 14, 1877, that in Orhaniye and Kutuklu (villages near Ruse), the residents donated 1524 *okka* (1954 kg) of tobacco to the Ottoman army.³¹⁹ The state-owned gunpowder factories in Ruse sold the surplus in other cities, such as Tŭrnovo. An accountant in Ruse confirmed a payment of 3150 *gurush*.³²⁰

During the reforms, Bulgarian commercial elites grew in wealth and economic power. Among them, Hristo Ganev and Vasil Radev, for example, had run a textile business and the Simeon brothers traded in window glass, books and ironworks. Dragan Tsankov, the director of a printing house, founded a law firm while Stoil Popov, an editor at the provincial newspaper, opened an office for translating and writing petitions in

³¹⁵ For instance, in 1864, the army in Ruse and Nikopol receive shoes from Silistra for 112 *gurush*. NBKM.OO. F.KG. 4/73. In April and May 1877, the government in Ruse buys 1568 *arşın* (1,066.24 meters) clothes from Sofia, and Ruse sends 548,278-kilogram dried/sliced bread to the army in Nish. NBKM.OO. NPTA. XIX 8/37, l.112 and 116. The army purchases 40 horses and barley from Rahova. NBKM.OO. F.VD. 114/4. l. 84 and 95.

³¹⁶ NBKM.OO. F.112. a.e. 1431. Not only the Ottoman government but also the foreign consuls often engaged in wheat trade, buying and send wheat to their home countries. NBKM.OO. F.32, a.e. 406. 1206.

³¹⁷ NBKM.OO. F.Rs. 76/11.

³¹⁸ This number is taken from an estimate by the Russian Consul. AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, V-A, op. 181/2, 1877, d.772, 16-17, in Zheŭinov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 187.

³¹⁹ *Tuna/Dunav*, Issue 1172, July 14, 1877.

³²⁰ See NBKM.OO. F.112 A, a.e, 1079 l.1 for Tŭrnovo, and NBKM.OO. F.Tn. 30/4, l.77 for Servi.

foreign languages.³²¹ Despite the economic progress, some Bulgarians were critical of their commercial elites. Petko Slaveikov, for instance, wrote an article about the local economy of Ruse, published in the Istanbul-based, Bulgarian language newspaper *Makedonia* (Macedonia). He recognized the outstanding economic growth that Ruse enjoyed, but he also laments that Bulgarians did not work hard to take a greater share in the market than foreign merchants.³²²

In order to preserve their commercial and financial interests, local merchants, both Muslim and non-Muslim, cooperated with each other, the government and foreign merchants. For instance, Turks and Bulgarians formed joint-stock companies, such as the company for spirits in Tulcea in 1872.³²³ An Ottoman petition illustrates a joint business of a Muslim and non-Muslim businessmen, Nikolaki and Halil Efendi of Ruse who received loans from Hüseyin Efendi.³²⁴ Local merchants also worked as partners of foreign merchants. Haim Mayer, a Jewish merchant from Prussia, for example, ran a business in grain transportation, and worked with local intermediaries. He had accrued financial losses amounting to 49,385 *gurush* from the wheat trade and other transactions with a local merchant Fazil Aga. His local partners, including Muslim, Christian, and Jewish merchants, and the customs office then sent a joint petition to the central

³²¹ Siromahova, *Ruse prez vŭzrakzdaneto*, 71. Teodora Bakŭrdzhieva adds Kostaki Marinovitch as a prominent merchant of this period in Ruse. See Teodoro Bakŭrdzhieva's *Kostaki Marinovich 1829-1885*, (Ruse: Avangard Print, 2007). The Bulgarian newspaper *Bŭlgarin* labels him as a chorbaci who resumed his political power after the Bulgarian independence. See Issue 48, April 22, 1878, 3 and Issue 56, May 20, 1878, 2-3.

³²² *Makedonia*, September 19, 1871, cited in Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 195.

³²³ Paskaleva, "From the History of Bulgarian Trade during the Third Quarter of the 19th Century," 120-121.

³²⁴ NBKM.OO. F.112 A, a.e. 1310.

government in support of Haim Mayer against Fazil Aga.³²⁵ Considering the amount of money involved in the case, it is clear that Haim Mayer carried out large-scale trade in the region, which required local partners and beneficiaries. The failure of Haim Mayer would negatively affect his local partners and the Ottoman customs office in charge of tax collection. This most likely forced the customs office (and local merchants) to support him in order to ensure their financial wellbeing. Protecting self-interest brought together merchants of various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Barkley details the complex interdependent relationship between the wealthy Bulgarian and Muslim elites.

Again, when on one side the Bulgar is keen to acquire wealth by industry, aided by cunning, and has no scruples about honor, etc., of which he has never heard, and, on the other his masters and tax-gatherers are needy and equally anxious for money, it is not difficult to understand that a satisfactory arrangement can be made. Thus it is that when a Bulgar arrives at having considerable available wealth, it is nearly invariably by having an influential Turkish partner in the background. It can be readily understood how precarious this prosperity must be; the mere fact of the prosperity itself raises a host of enemies, who are jealous of a Christian getting rich out of the Padishah's Earth (the universal theory), and who by reason of his secret connection is probably spared many of extortions to

³²⁵ NBKM. OO. Rs. 8/41, l.1. The petition included the names of Muslim merchants (Ali Efendi, Ismail and Mehmed), Jewish merchants (Yosef, Salomon and Musa Avram), Christian merchants (Stephan and other one's name is not legible), Ahmed (Customs Officer).

which they, the *Osmanlis*, are subjected. Consequently, if the great man dies, or is disgraced, accusations pour in against his unfortunate Bulgarian partner, who, if he escapes complete ruin, can only do so by a judicious distribution of that gold which is only less dear to him than life itself.³²⁶

Barkley points out that commercial elites, both Muslim and Christian, were motivated by their financial interests, which required them to cooperate to gain wealth. Significantly, the commercial elites had to invest in the longevity of the empire to maintain their economic gains.

The reforms increasingly opened traditional local economies to Western capitalism to a more competitive marketplace, creating interdependencies between local merchants and the state. The Ottoman reformers were supportive of Westernization, and the state itself had to pioneer large-scale economic projects, as there was no large private enterprise to finance and carry out the projects. After the Crimean War (1853-56), a number of Bulgarian trade firms and joint-stock comp were established. The war was a turning point in economic history of the region, bringing western capital and investments.

Under siege by the onslaught of Western capitalism, some of the local companies declared bankruptcy while many new companies were established at the same time. The uneasy atmosphere of the capitalist world, dependence on European capital, the unstable Ottoman economy and politics affected the volatile economy. The trade courts sold the property of many individual merchants at auction, and other small companies merged.³²⁷

³²⁶ Barkley, *Bulgaria Before the War*, xii-xiii.

³²⁷ Paskaleva, "From the History of Bulgarian Trade during the Third Quarter of the 19th Century," 120-121.

The competitive market and new commercial network compelled local merchants, of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds to work together for mutual benefit.

During the Ottoman reform period, many foreign goods flooded the Ottoman markets. These imports affected the local industries, and Michael Palairet states, “The consensus among Bulgarian scholars was that the proto-industries reached their apogee in the 1860s, then declined rapidly in the face of import penetration.”³²⁸ Palairet, however, argues that with the destruction of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8 and loss of Ottoman markets, local industries in the Danube region collapsed only after the Russian “liberation.”³²⁹

The case of Ruse shows that in the 1870s, economic growth in the Danube region slowed because of the international recession of 1873, but nonetheless the economy recovered immediately and continued to grow. The tax registers from the last ten years of Ottoman rule in Ruse indicate that the tax revenue remained stable until 1873, ranging between roughly 47 and 57 million *gurush*, followed by a sharp decline to 31 million *gurush* in 1873-74 (the Ottoman fiscal year of 1290). In the following two years, tax revenue recovered, reaching 48 million *gurush* in 1876-77 (1292).³³⁰ The registers clearly indicate the impact of the global depression of 1873 on the Ottoman economy, but they also suggest that the financial decline did not last long.

³²⁸ Palairet, *The Balkan Economies*, 81.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³³⁰ BOA, HR. SYS Dosya 344, Gömlek 1.

At the onset of the war of 1877-8, the war correspondents began to come to Ruse and documented the economic condition of the city. Among them, Wentworth Huyshe, for example, goes so far as to argue that Bulgarians prospered even more than Turks.

We saw in 1877 no indications that the dawn of liberty would brighten so quickly into promising sunshine, and we were considerably puzzled by the fact that evidences of Turkish oppression and tyranny were difficult to discover, in the midst of the material prosperity, which the Bulgarians enjoyed. Even under the heavy tax upon their industry exacted by the Porte, they thrived upon their fertile fields, and, for all we could see, were better off than the Turkish population.³³¹

Orthodox merchants had traditionally dominated the Ottoman markets and held substantial wealth. In the 1860s and 70s, however, Bulgarian peasants also attained a material prosperity with the new investments and institutions. Barkley, for instance, states, “It has occasioned surprise and apparently indignation to some people since the war began to find that the material prosperity of the Bulgar was so much greater than they expected.”³³² Barkley described Bulgarian peasants as those “who generally owned animals such as oxen, horses, sheep and cows, and paid taxes to the government by the cultivation of what was practically their own land.”³³³ In other provinces in the Ottoman Empire, such as Anatolia, the recession of 1873 had a more profound negative effect on the economy. Famine also ravaged the region, causing the deaths of 150,000-200,000

³³¹ Wentworth Huyshe, *The Liberation of Bulgaria: War Notes in 1877* (London: Bliss, Sands & Foster, 1894), 145.

³³² Barkley, *Bulgaria Before the War*, xi-xii.

³³³ *Ibid*, xi-xii.

people.³³⁴ The Danube province, however, was agriculturally rich and, supported by the cooperatives and the model farm, provided surplus grain to help feed others in the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

In the last three decades of Ottoman rule in the Danube region, through economic growth, the Ottoman government's goal was to integrate Bulgarian Christians into the socio-political fabric of the empire. Supporting peasants against the wealthy elites in the rural areas and merchants in the urban centers, the reforms conducted a number of mutually beneficial development projects. Ruse received large-scale economic investment, both from the Ottoman government and Western enterprises, which contributed to Ruse's development as an international port city. Ruse emerged from this period as an international, cosmopolitan city with close connections to the West. Ruse became, in a sense, a model city of Ottoman modernization. The projects established an effective transportation system, an agricultural bank, a model farm, an industrial school, foreign and domestic trade and business in the city, all against the backdrop of the newly modernized urban setting.

The Ottoman government applied a complex system of labor practices to achieve the modernization projects, mobilizing all its resources and workforces. The labor required for these projects was imposed on all social classes and ethno-religious groups. Labor was mandatory but fairly compensated or voluntary and unpaid. The wealthy had the option of paying for their share of labor costs and even made significant donations to

³³⁴ Yener Bayar, "1873-1875 Orta Anadolu Kıtılıđı" (M.A. Thesis, Marmara University, 2013).

support these developments. Similarly, projects helped create employment opportunities for peasants out of their harvest season. The government also collected additional taxes from all subjects regardless of ethnicity and religion, and they proved to be minor compared to the already existing taxes.

The projects brought Turks and Christian Bulgarians, especially commercial elites, into a close contact, co-investing in the city's modernization and even forming joint companies to run their businesses. The growing commerce in Ruse attracted many foreign merchants and travelers, further contributing to the atmosphere of tolerance and diversity in the city. The panic of 1873 slowed down the economic developments in Ruse, but the city recovered quickly and resumed its progress until the war of 1877-78 stopped the growing economy. It was under these conditions when the Russian Empire declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 24, 1877.

Chapter Three: Ottoman Struggle with Bulgarian Nationalism in Ruse

In the late eighteenth century, Bulgarian nationalism began to develop as a reaction to the dominant position of Greeks within the Orthodox Church. From this conflict emerged the seeds of the Bulgarian national revival. A small number of “awakeners” made the first calls for a cultural revival, which was transformed into a national revival with its own institutions, first ecclesiastical and then political.³³⁵ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the authority of the Ottoman Empire was decentralized in the provinces. Wealthy elites (*ayan*, *eşraf*, *chorbaci* or *gospodar*), who were mostly Muslim but included some Christians, exercised control over the local affairs in the Danube region and often abused their power. This led to peasant uprisings in Nish (1841) and Vidin (1850), which were largely driven by social and economic concerns, rather than nationalistic sentiment.³³⁶

In the 1850s, Bulgarian demands for a religious autonomy grew stronger. When the Ottoman government recognized the Protestants as separate *millet* in 1850, and the Armenian Catholics established their own church in 1852, Bulgarians began to demand the same rights. After the reform decree of 1856 (*Islahat Fermanı*), which promised equality of rights and privileges to all Christians, the Bulgarian struggle for an independent church intensified. Although this was central to the development of

³³⁵ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 44-45. Bulgarian historians generally points out Saint Paisii of Hilendar’s book, *Istoria Slavianobŭlgarskata* (Slavonic-Bulgarian History) published in 1762 as the start of the Bulgarian National Revival, which ends with the liberation in 1878. For the history of the Bulgarian National Revival, see Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans*.

³³⁶ See Halil Inalcık, “Application of the Tanzimat and Its Social Effects,” *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 5, (1973), 97-128.

Bulgarian religious and cultural consciousness, it did not necessarily entail political separation from the Ottoman Empire.

By the 1850s and 1860s, Bulgarians also experienced a cultural revival through the newly established Bulgarian schools, press and reading rooms (*chitalishte*). Many young Bulgarians also attended schools in Istanbul and some wealthy families sent their children abroad for their education. The Ottoman government itself promoted western education and sent many students, including some Bulgarians, to the Ottoman Imperial School in Paris.³³⁷ Through their education under western influence, Bulgarians were exposed to revolutionary ideas, and some began to advocate not only religious independence from the Patriarchate but also separation from the Ottoman Empire. Because of Ottoman surveillance and lack of support from locals, Bulgarian revolutionaries were mostly organized in Serbia and Romania. Soon after the reform of 1864, the largest revolutionary group in Bucharest established the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC) in 1867, creating armed bands called *cheta*, hoping to spark a mass national uprising. Crossing the Danube, they attempted to instigate revolts in the 1860s and 1870s, but their attempts all failed.

In Ruse, Bulgarian nationalists established local revolutionary organizations such as *Karan* and *Kubrat*. Their primary goal was to recruit and organize Bulgarians for an uprising against the Ottoman government, and help the revolutionaries cross the Danube and transfer arms from Romania. Their efforts were, however, inefficient, and the

³³⁷ See Raia Zaimova, "The Sultan's Subjects at the Ottoman Imperial School after the Crimean War," 269-73.

Ottoman government experienced minor clashes with the nationalist organizations. Generally, the Ottoman government found pragmatic solutions to cope with the Bulgarian revolutionaries, imprisoning or exiling them to Anatolia, and executing only those who actively took part in armed uprisings.

The idea of establishing an independent church appealed to broader masses of Bulgarian Christians in Ruse than did separation from the Ottoman Empire. Many of the pro-Ottoman Bulgarian elites also advocated for an independent Bulgarian church, and sought Ottoman support. Midhat Pasha's strategy was to divorce the church question from Bulgarian nationalism. He pragmatically sided with Bulgarians against the Greek Patriarchate in regions with a Bulgarian majority. In Ruse, he played a key role in the establishment of the *obshtina*, a body of Bulgarian religious self-rule, and backed Bulgarians in their conflicts with Greeks. Many Bulgarian Christians began to see the Ottoman government as an ally against the Greek Patriarchate, and this made it difficult for Bulgarian nationalists to gain support from locals against the Ottomans.

The Ottoman government was more concerned about a possible Russian invasion than about attacks by the Bulgarian revolutionaries. In the mid-1860s, Midhat Pasha raised security to its highest level in the Danube province. He reinforced the borders with additional police stations (*karakol*), created new military units, increased the size of the armies and equipped them with the arms he imported from Britain and the United States. The military reforms included the recruitment of Bulgarians into the newly established border patrol along the Danube, a line of defense against external threats. After the Ottoman suppression of the 1868 uprising led by Stefan Karadzha and Hadzhi Dimitür

near Vishovgrad, Bulgarian revolutionaries were unable to organize another insurgence until the April Uprising of 1876. However, the massacres of Bulgarians by the Ottoman irregular troops during the suppression of the April Uprising gave Russia pretext to declare war against the Ottoman Empire in 1877.

Bulgarian Revolutionaries

In the early 1860s, the majority of the Bulgarian revolutionaries were in exile, mostly in Serbia and Romania. Among them, Georgi Rakovski in Serbia attempted to unite Bulgarian revolutionaries and start an armed struggle against the Ottoman Empire with a provisional command in Belgrade. The first Bulgarian legion of 1862 implemented his ideas, but the Serbian government forced him to leave the country.³³⁸ The Bulgarian revolutionaries then began to organize in Bucharest and established the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee. Their strategy was to form armed bands, or *cheta*, which were to be sent to the Bulgarian countryside to incite rebellion. The armed bands, however, had a small number of fighters and were easily suppressed by the Ottoman forces. The *cheta* of Panaiot Hitov, for instance, had thirty members, and Petūr Petkov's band in Nikopol had fifteen members.³³⁹

The central committee organized two relatively larger *cheta* actions, one led by Filip Totu and Panaiot Hitov in April and May of 1867 and another by Stefan Karadzha and Hadzhi Dimitūr in July 1868. In the first one, Filip Totu crossed the Danube near Svishtov with fifty revolutionaries, and fought with the Ottoman forces. Thirty of them

³³⁸ Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 86.

³³⁹ Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bulgar Meselesi*, 187.

were killed in the fight and the rest escaped to Serbia with the *cheta* of Hitov. In the following year, Karadzha and Dimitür crossed the Danube between Svishtov and Ruse, and marched towards Vishovgrad near Tŭrnovo where they hoped to incite a mass uprising. This *cheta* was able to recruit 124 fighters, 101 of whom, including Dimitür, died in the clash with the Ottoman troops. Karadzha was captured alive with severe wounds, but was executed in Ruse after a trial in the criminal court.³⁴⁰ The Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee nearly collapsed after the failure of these armed revolts and Rakovski's death from tuberculosis.³⁴¹

Ruse did not experience any organized uprising, but did see minor clashes with the revolutionaries. One such incident took place in the summer of 1867, known as the Steamboat Incident (*Vapur Hadisesi*), in which a Bulgarian and a Serbian activist came to Ruse on an Austrian steamboat. Ottoman intelligence officers had already notified the police to arrest them before they disembarked. The revolutionaries, however, resisted the police at passport control and killed officer Hafız Çavuş. In the fight, one died immediately and the other died later from severe wounds. The Serbian government, supported by Russian ambassador Ignatiev, petitioned the Ottoman government, complaining that a Serbian citizen was killed illegally and asking for reparations. The Ottoman government wanted to avoid international conflict with Russia and Serbia and agreed to send 700 *gurush* to the family of the Serbian activist.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 190.

³⁴¹ Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 87.

³⁴² *Tabsira-i İbret*, 75.

Midhat Pasha's reforms and the integration of Christian Bulgarians into the political system limited the influence of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee and their Pan-Slav allies. However, their hatred of Midhat Pasha led to two assassination attempts, one by BRCC and another by a Serbian nationalist, both of which failed. In the first attempt, the central committee paid an Austro-Hungarian teacher in the *Islahhane* to kill Midhat in the courtyard of the school. The teacher, however, was nervous and fainted when he was about to shoot the governor. He escaped and found refuge at the Austrian consulate where he confessed. The consulate then sent him to the Ottoman court where he defended himself, saying that he was drunk when he accepted the offer. The Ottoman court released him, allegedly because of his lack of a criminal history, coupled with his confession and honesty.³⁴³ In this manner, Midhat Pasha avoided direct confrontation with Austria-Hungary over the actions of the BRCC and maintained peaceful international relations in the face of revolutionary opposition.

In the second incident, the Serbian prince Mihailo commissioned a 35-year-old man named Ivan to assassinate Midhat Pasha in Ruse. Ivan first tried to get a job as a stableman and grocer in the service of the governor, but was rejected. Attributing this rejection to his Christian faith, Ivan converted to Islam, changed his name to Ömer, and again applied to work in the service of Midhat Pasha. The Ottoman police suspected Ivan's insistent attempts to gain employment in the governor's service and began investigating his activities in Ruse. Eventually an Ottoman spy intercepted a letter from Ivan to Serbian officials about an assassination plot. The letter was hidden in a carved

³⁴³ Ibid, 76.

shepherd's crook and given to a Bulgarian on his way to Belgrade. Addressed to one of Prince Mihailo's officials, the letter included a summary of what Ivan had done in Ruse and mentioned that Midhat Pasha was well-protected by Albanian officers. He promised to shoot Pasha when he had a chance and asked the Serbian government to take care of his family in Serbia in case he was killed. The police arrested Ivan and took him to court where he confessed. The court ruled in favor of his execution but Midhat Pasha referred the case to Istanbul where Ivan's punishment was commuted to life imprisonment in Diyarbakır.³⁴⁴ As in the resolution of the previous assassination plot, the Ottoman government clearly did not want to trigger serious international reactions to small threats from external enemies.

Despite their comparatively small numbers, Bulgarian nationalists did have a presence in Ruse, with an affiliate called the Ruse Revolutionary Committee, or *Karan*, founded on December 10, 1871. The leading members of this committee included Nikola Obretenov, Toma Kürdzhiev, Radi Ivanov, Zahari Stoianov, Nikola Tabakov Ilarion Dragostinov, Gancho Karamazhnikov and Nikola Sekilarov.³⁴⁵ In addition to this group, Nikola's mother, Tonka Obretenova, known as Baba Tonka (see Figure 9), was a well-known Bulgarian revolutionary who sheltered the members of *Karan* and helped them receive logistical support from the central committee in Bucharest. Many of Baba Tonka's children took part in the nationalist movement as well. Her sons Petür and Angel participated in Stefan Karadzha's uprising in which Petür was killed in 1868. Her sons

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 76-78.

³⁴⁵ Obretenov, *Spomeni za Bŭlgarskite vŭstaniia*, 162.

Nikola and Georgi were the participants of the April Uprising of 1876. Her daughter, Anastasiia, married Zahari Stoianov, a Bulgarian nationalist intellectual, who also took part in the April Uprising.³⁴⁶



Figure 9: Baba Tonka.³⁴⁷

Despite their efforts, the *Karan* Committee failed to gain popular support from Bulgarians and it did not succeed in instigating a popular uprising. Toma Kürdzhiev took the leading role in organizing revolutionary activities. Kürdzhiev was born in 1850 and attended the industrial school established by Midhat Pasha in the 1860s. He worked for the Ottoman municipality of Ruse in the early 1870s. After the establishment of *Karan*, he worked as a teacher in the Bulgarian village of Chervena-Voda where he created an armed band (see Figure 10).³⁴⁸ According to Nikola Obretenov's account, the committee members were disorganized and in need of arms. The Ottoman government uncovered

³⁴⁶ For the short biographies of Baba Tonka and her sons and daughter, see Mariana Dimitrova and Stoian Ĵordanov, *Litsata na Ruse ot I-vi do credata na XX vek: Entsiklopedichen spravochnik* (Ruse: Avangard Print, 2011), 258-61.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 261.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 199.

Kürdzhiev's plot in 1875 and arrested twelve members of his *cheta*. He was briefly imprisoned, but was not executed.³⁴⁹



Figure 10: The Chervena-Voda *Cheta*.³⁵⁰

Kürdzhiev and other revolutionaries created the intelligence organization *Kubrat* to recruit Bulgarians for their cause.³⁵¹ Their members played an important role in the April Uprising of 1876, which took place in the south-central region of the Danube province. In fact, this revolt was part of a series of uprisings against the Ottoman Empire, known as the Balkan Crisis of 1875-78, which started in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1875 and ended with the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8. During this period, in June 1876, Serbia also declared war against the Ottomans, and many of the Bulgarian revolutionaries went to Serbia to fight against the Ottomans. The number of Bulgarians on the Serbian side

³⁴⁹ For the revolutionary activities in Ruse and the role of Kürdzhiev, see Obretenov, *Spomeni za Bŭlgarskite vŭstaniia*, 159-187.

³⁵⁰ Nikolai Nenov, *Spasiavaneto na Rusentsi ot zakolevie. Gradski mit i mesta na pamet* (Sofia: ROD, 2012), 21.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, 21.

was around 4000 men, many of whom died during the course of the war.³⁵² Along with the surviving revolutionaries, Kŭrdzhiev served in the Russian army as a Turkish translator during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78.³⁵³ The Balkan Crisis mobilized the Bulgarian revolutionaries, many of who saw Russian invasion necessary for their independence.

The Church Question

The Bulgarian struggle for a church that was independent from the Greek Patriarchate gained more support from Bulgarians than the Bulgarian nationalist movement. In fact, rather than advocating independence from the Ottoman Empire, many Bulgarians sought support from the Ottoman government against the power of the Greek Patriarchate. In Ruse, the “church question” had created tensions between the two Orthodox Christian communities even before the establishment of the Danube province. In the early 1860s, Bulgarian elites sent multiple petitions to the governor in Silitra, refusing to pay taxes to the Patriarchate and demanding the removal of the Greek bishop Sinesius.³⁵⁴ Without a comprehensive solution, tensions continued to simmer during Midhat Pasha’s governorship.

As discussed in chapter 1, the Ottoman government established the Bulgarian *obshtina*, an autonomous religious institution for Bulgarian Orthodox Christians in Ruse,

³⁵² Approximately 4000 Bulgarian volunteers were sent to Serbia and over 1700 fell dead, Vesselin Traikov, “Bulgarian Volunteers in the Serbo-Turkish War of 1876,” in *Insurrections, Wars, and The Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, ed. Bela K. Kiraly and Gale Stokes (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 167.

³⁵³ Dimitrova and Īordanov, *Litsata na Ruse*, 199.

³⁵⁴ For the petitions, see Tetsuya Sahara, *An Eastern Orthodox Community During the Tanzimat: Documents from a Register of the Bulgarian Society in Ruse 1860-1872* (Tokyo: KSI, 1997).

who then began to regulate their own religious affairs in 1865. The *obshtina* banned the Greek bishop Sinesius from their church and even forced him to leave the city. Sinesius, however, insisted on staying in his position. Large crowds of Bulgarians protested Sinesius and forced him to leave, but he found refuge in the Ottoman governor's residence (*konak*). Settling the issue, Midhat Pasha sided with the Bulgarians rather than attempting to restore Sinesius to his position, but asked the protesters to allow Sinesius to return to his house.³⁵⁵

As a pragmatic governor, Midhat Pasha initially adopted an impartial approach to the “church question” and avoided commenting on the issue in public, selectively showing support to both the Bulgarian and Greek communities. While he favored the Greeks in the pro-Patriarchate cities such as Varna, he sympathized with the Bulgarian struggle in areas such as Ruse where people were opposed to the Patriarchate.³⁵⁶ According to the British consul in Ruse, Pasha believed that the Ottoman government should meet the religious demands of Bulgarians in order to keep them indebted to the sultan and away from nationalist propaganda.³⁵⁷ In fact, the alliance with Bulgarians against Greeks was a mutually beneficial policy, as Greeks had already proven to be disloyal to the Ottoman government and established an independent state.

Bulgarian elites in Ruse, including Midhat Pasha's supporter Ivan Penchovich, sought support from the governor for an independent Bulgarian church. Pasha eventually saw the utility of siding with the Bulgarians, hoping to win over the Bulgarian Orthodox

³⁵⁵ Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 342.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 339-40.

³⁵⁷ Zina Markova, *Chetata ot 1868 godina: po sluchai 150-godishninata ot rozhdenieto na Hadzhi Dimitur i Stefan Karadzha* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1990), 118.

community. He removed some Greek bishops, eased the prohibitions on the tolling of church bells, accepted the right of the Bulgarian community to control their religious affairs, and denied the Patriarchate's requests to limit the publication of Bulgarian religious texts at the state publishing house in Ruse.³⁵⁸

With these measures and his support for the establishment of an independent church, Midhat Pasha was able to gain Bulgarian sympathy and to effectively remove the "church question" from the Bulgarian nationalist arsenal. In particular, Bulgarians who had been involved in the struggle for an independent church began to support Midhat Pasha's wider reforms and to oppose revolutionary violence. For example, Aleksandŭr Stoilov Boev (also known as Aleksandŭr Exarch) a Bulgarian intellectual, journalist, and politician, was a strong supporter of the establishment of Bulgarian Exarchate, and took a pro-Ottoman stance during the uprisings of 1867-68.³⁵⁹ As Boev noted in a letter:

Two years ago, in Rusçuk, our nation showed its brave rejection of the foreign influences and the rebellious insinuations of certain criminals (i.e. the *cheta* or armed bands). Glory is due to Midhat Pasha who worked so hard for the betterment of the Danube *vilayet* in this case too he wisely and perceptively foresaw the great evil that was about to befall us, and that could potentially bring great hard to the country.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 345.

³⁵⁹ About Aleksandŭr Exarch, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, "Aleksandır Ekzarh ve 19.-20. Yüzyıllarda Avrupaya giden Bulgar Yolları," *Tarih ve Toplum-Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, (Güz 2005), 209-17.

³⁶⁰ Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside," 216.

On March 11, 1870, the Ottoman sultan issued a decree recognizing the Bulgarian Exarchate in Istanbul.³⁶¹ However, when the Exarchate made efforts to extend its authority over Orthodox Bulgarians, it often came into conflict with the Greek Patriarch. Orthodox Christians had to decide which church they belonged to, and dissention between Bulgarians and Greeks led to a physical fight in Ruse on the 1873 New Year's Day. As a result, the Greek minority community was completely segregated from the Orthodox Church in Ruse, and constructed their own chapel.³⁶²

The Bulgarian Church in Ruse also had minor issues with Muslim conservatives. In 1871, the *kadi* of Ruse prohibited the tolling of the Bulgarian church bell, which triggered a reaction from Bulgarians. The governor Ömer Fevzi Pasha, however, re-permitted the tolling of the bell. After Ahmet Rasim Pasha became the governor of Ruse in October 1871, the bell issue reemerged and Bulgarians sent a detailed petition to the Ottoman government on November 26, 1871.³⁶³ The Austrian traveler and journalist Felix Kanitz described this incident in detail. After complementing the progressive Ömer Fevzi, Kanitz accused governor Ahmet Rasim of being anti-Bulgarian because he was a native Greek who converted to Islam at age twenty-two in order to make his fortune. Kanitz argues that as a Muslim and a Greek, Ahmet Rasim had two reasons not to protect the rights of Bulgarians. These tensions forced the Ottoman government to remove Ahmet Rasim from his position in June 1872, and Kanitz stated, "Since then, the bell was rung without any objection. A few Turkish fanatics sold their land around the church, but

³⁶¹ Demetrius Kiminas, *The Ecumenical Patriarchate: A History of Its Metropolitanates with Annotated Hierarchy Catalogs* (Rock Vile, MD: Borgo Press, 2009), 21.

³⁶² Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien Und Der Balkan*, 18.

³⁶³ DA-R, F 43K, op. 5, a.e. 4.

that did not worry Bulgarians. The majority of the Turkish population got used to the odious sound as time passed.”³⁶⁴ This tension was short-lived, and John Carnegie, a British resident in Ruse, documented the good relations between Bulgarian Christians and Muslims in the 1870s:

In the days before the war [of 1877-8], at least as regarded Bulgaria north of the Balkans, the country with which we were familiar, the Turks and Bulgarians were fairly good neighbors. The former were the dominant race, but they were not oppressive, and the Bulgarians purchased non-molestation by an occasional present to the Turkish Mullahs [Islamic clerics or mosque leaders].³⁶⁵

The friendly interactions between Bulgarian Christians and Muslims are also documented in the Bulgarian accounts. Pandeli Kisimov, for example, details the celebration of the Christian feast day of St. John the Baptist, which brought Muslims and Christians together.³⁶⁶ As part of the celebration, young Bulgarians pick a local notable and drag him to the nearest stream of water, either lake or river, to baptize him. The only way to escape from getting wet was to pay a ransom to those who bought him. The young Bulgarians knowingly chose the wealthy or high-ranking officials to get a better ransom, and thus they usually pick the Muslim police officers (*subaşı*) in the villages, directors and even governors in the cities. This was also a way of fundraising for the Bulgarian

³⁶⁴ Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan*, 17.

³⁶⁵ Forbes, *Czar and Sultan*, 2-3.

³⁶⁶ Pandeli Kisimov, “Istoricheski raboti: Stari narodni obichai,” *Bŭlgarska sbirka* 6 (1899).

schools. Kisimov recounts a story that Bulgarians even picked Midhat Pasha and some of his officials, and then escorted them to the banks of the Danube where they settled a ransom after friendly interactions.³⁶⁷ Prior to the war of 1877-8, Bulgarian Christians and Muslims lived on good terms without any major conflict. The activities of the revolutionaries, and more importantly the possibility of another war with Russia, however, forced the Ottoman government to increase its military presence in the region.

Military Reforms

In the reform decree of 1839, the Ottoman government promised to protect the life, property and honor of its subjects. This pledge was aimed at providing stability in the empire in general, and after 1860, in the provinces in particular. Though this promise was vague, the term “protection” largely applied to security against revolutionary violence, bandits, violent acts of powerful notables and the arbitrary rule of government officials. However, the Ottoman Empire had already fought a series of wars with Russia before 1864, and another Russian invasion was one of the largest threats to security and stability in this period.³⁶⁸ Therefore, the Porte created new armed forces, increasing the size of its military, and imported a large quantity of arms from Britain and the U.S.A. The military reforms in the Danube province were not necessarily a response to the raids of Bulgarian revolutionaries, but were instead preparation for an anticipated Russian invasion.

³⁶⁷ For an English translation of the story, see Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 374-75.

³⁶⁸ The Russo-Ottoman War of 1806-1812, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29, and the Crimean War of 1853-6.

Since the majority of Bulgarian revolutionaries in exile in Romania and Serbia traveled back and forth across the Danube, one of the first precautions the Ottoman government took was to strengthen border security. Before the creation of the Danube province, Midhat Pasha, then the governor of Nish, had established police stations (*karakols*) and blockhouses along the Serbian border to stop the Bulgarian revolutionaries from moving into Ottoman lands.³⁶⁹ After 1864, Midhat Pasha extended this project, constructing sixty new *karakols* along the Danube while repairing and improving the existing outposts (see Figure 11). The Ottoman government recruited 700 volunteers composed of both Muslim and non-Muslim locals, and divided them into groups of ten volunteers, assigning one of these units to each *karakol*. Each officer received an annual salary of 1800 *gurush* and 200-*gurush* for extra expenditures. The villagers also provided for their basic needs such as food, water, and wood in the winter.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ BOA, I.MVL no: 22455; 22099; 24192, 24547; BOA. IDH no: 39454.

³⁷⁰ For the map showing the locations of the police stations and the division of the police forces, see BAO, B.I. no:102; *Tabşıra-i İbret*, 71-72. About the repairs of the existing military structures, see BAO, I.MVL, no: 24230; 23100; 23031.



Figure 11: A depiction of a *karakol* by Felix Kanitz.³⁷¹

The chief security force in the city, however, was the *Asakir-i Zabtiye*, which was first introduced in the imperial capital in the mid-1840s. According to the registers of the Ottoman ministry of finance, this new police department was immediately instituted in Ruse as well. In 1852, it was composed of fifty-two officers, twenty-seven of whom were from Ruse. Police-chiefs were paid 500-*gurush* monthly salaries, while mid-level officers received 80 *gurush* and low-level officials earned 50 *gurush*.³⁷² After the Crimean War, the number of officers rose to 104 with a small salary increase.³⁷³ Despite the

³⁷¹ Felix Kanitz, *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan: Historisch-Geographisch-Ethnographische Reisestudien Aus Den Jahren 1860-1879*, I. Band (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung Von Hermann Fries, 1879), 81.

³⁷² For the list of officers and their monthly salary for 1852, see BOA. ML.MSF.Df. no: 7300.

³⁷³ For the list of officers and their monthly salary for 1857, see BOA. ML.MSF.d 13452-7.

predominant position of Muslims in this department, there were some Bulgarian Christian officers as well. An Ottoman document from 1860 indicates that Hristo, a Christian officer in Ruse, lost his life in the service and the government set up a monthly allowance to his family.³⁷⁴ Despite the Muslim majority within the department, Christians could serve officers within the force, and the government compensated Muslims and Christians equally for their service.

Midhat Pasha put additional regulations in place to prevent police misconduct against citizens.³⁷⁵ The new rules went into effect in August 1867. They defined the primary goal of the police as to protect the lives, property, and honor of the public—the same goals mentioned in the reform decree of 1839. After pointing out that only governors and police chiefs could give orders to officers, the regulations describe the ideal officer as “well-behaved, without bad habits, making efforts to gain people’s sympathy.”³⁷⁶ They were “well-dressed and clean, timely and executing orders properly, treating Muslims and Christians in a kind and sweet manner even if they were prisoners, criminals or murderers, not using any verbal or physical assault, and not being drunk.”³⁷⁷ The regulations make it clear that those who did not obey these rules would be punished. Officers were forbidden to use weapons against the unarmed—even in cases of murder—and those who killed unarmed suspects would also be considered murderers and punished

³⁷⁴ BOA, AMKT.NZD. Dosya 352, Gömlek 27.

³⁷⁵ Midhat Pasha was particularly concerned about misuse of authority by Ottoman armed forces as a whole. When he was the governor of Nish, he even moved some military garrisons away from urban centers and forbade military officers to live in towns. BOA, I.MVL no: 21115.

³⁷⁶ NBKM. OD. 112, 7595.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

accordingly.³⁷⁸ These regulations reveal the government's intention to improve relations between the police officers and citizens and to protect Christians from possible police misconduct.

In addition to the new *karakols* and *asakir-i zabtiye*, Midhat Pasha established another armed unit in the rural areas, the *Asakir-i Ihtiyatiyye* (Emergency Forces). The uprising of 1867, led by the Bulgarian armed bands, inspired the creation of these village militias, which could provide additional forces in a crisis. The government employed Muslim men between 15 and 60, and armed and trained them annually. They received a 40 *para* (one *gurush*) daily wage while they participated in the service.³⁷⁹ The Ottoman government recruited these irregular troops, also called *bashibazouk* (*başibozuk* in Turkish), primarily from *pomaks* and Muslim refugees (Circassians in particular) from the territories the Ottomans lost to Russia.³⁸⁰

Although these irregular troops played a key role in suppressing peasant uprisings, the Ottoman government failed to exercise extensive control over them, as they were called for duty as needed. Armed Circassian refugees in particular often abused their power and committed atrocities against Christian Bulgarians. Driven out of their homes by Russian occupation, these refugees arrived in the Danube province in miserable conditions and struggled to make their living in a new territory.³⁸¹ Poverty, hunger and

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ *Tabsira-i İbret*, 70.

³⁸⁰ According to Richard Crampton, many members of the Ottoman irregular detachments were Bulgarian Muslims or *pomaks*, Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 19.

³⁸¹ Henry Barkley describes the miserable condition of the Circassian refugees, "The Tatars had endured fearful hardships in their emigration, but they were small compared to what the Circassians went through; for most of the Tatars had money and all had goods of some kind, and also they could speak Turkish

adaptation to a new region compelled the refugees to commit crimes to survive, and these newcomers were often held responsible for fomenting conflict with Bulgarians.³⁸² According to Huyshe, these refugees often directed their hatred of Russians towards Bulgarians without making distinction between these two Slavic-Orthodox Christian communities.³⁸³ The conflicts between the newcomers and Bulgarians were not representative of the relationship between Muslims and Christians as a whole. These events occurred mostly in the villages, where government control was less comprehensive and they did not significantly affect the cosmopolitan society of Ruse.

The free reign exercised by these village militias would ultimately damage the relationship between the Ottoman government and Christian Bulgarians, and would add fuel to the fire of nationalist rhetoric. Bulgarian nationalists often publicized abuse and atrocities against Bulgarian peasants and for the nationalists, tensions between the bashibazouk and Bulgarian Christians became a symbol of Ottoman oppression. In the case of the massacres that took place at Batak and in other Bulgarian villages at the beginning of the April Uprising of 1876, nationalists exaggerated the number of people killed, and, as one British source put it, “a war unparallel[ed] for its horrors, and perhaps its consequences has been the result”.³⁸⁴ In fact, the conflict between the bashibazouk and Christian villagers was as much a clash between Christian Bulgarian revolutionaries and

whereas these unfortunates had literally nothing and not one in two hundred knew any Turkish.” Barkley, *Bulgaria Before the War*, 75.

³⁸² Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 351-52.

³⁸³ Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 134-35.

³⁸⁴ The British sources point out that the numbers in these massacres were exaggerated, “The deeds of the Bashi-Bazouks at Batak and in other Bulgarian villages, immensely exaggerated by thoughtless, designing or unscrupulous men, and the consequence of a panic which subsequent events have shown justified, were insufficient to arouse public opinion in England to such extent against Turkey that a war unparallel for its horrors, and perhaps its consequences has been the result,” *Turkey No. 42 (1878)*, Doc. 61, 94.

Muslim Bulgarian militias as it was a conflict between Bulgarians and the Ottoman Empire.

In the 1860s and 1870s, as the size of the army increased, new recruits from other provinces of the Ottoman Empire came to the Danube province in large numbers. At the outset of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, Ruse itself accommodated nearly ten thousand soldiers.³⁸⁵ This also created tensions between the locals and newcomers. For instance, the Ottoman government recruited another group of irregular troops, the *Zeybek* from Western Anatolia, as part of war preparations. These new inhabitants of the Danube province, however, interacted with locals in the same manner as the Circassians had, leading to conflicts with the local Bulgarian populations. In his war notes, Wentworth Huyshe provided a testament to the fairness of an Ottoman governor of Ruse when confronted with a conflict between a *Zeybek* soldier and a Bulgarian. Huyshe described a railroad repair project, in which both Turkish and Bulgarian laborers worked together. When a Bulgarian worker offended a *Zeybek* Turk, he retaliated by throwing a hammer at the Bulgarian's head, causing a severe wound. The Turk was arrested and brought to the Ottoman governor, who, after hearing both sides of the dispute, ordered that the Turk receive thirty strokes and be executed immediately (see Figure 12).³⁸⁶ While clashes between newcomers might result in personal violence, the Ottoman government attempted to be evenhanded in their management and judgments of such cases, which

³⁸⁵ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyī arhiv, V-A, op. 181/2, 1877, d.772, 16-17, in Zheīnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vūshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 187.

³⁸⁶ Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 136-8.

were not, by and large, representative of the relations between local Muslim and Christian populations.



Figure 12: Punishment of a *başbozuk* at the Ruse Train Station.³⁸⁷

While building armed forces in the 1860s in the Danube province, the Ottoman government imported large quantities of arms and ammunition from Britain and the U.S.³⁸⁸ For the Ottomans; the most serious threat was a possible Russian invasion and the Sublime Porte placed multiple orders for 1500, 15,000 and 50,000 carbine rifles from the Birmingham Small Arms Company based in England and the U.S.³⁸⁹ English sources confirm military rifle exports to the Ottoman Empire, as well as France, Russia, and Prussia.³⁹⁰ According to military historian John Walter, the Turkish Sniders were

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 137.

³⁸⁸ For a broader study of Ottoman arms imports, See Jonathan Grant, “The Sword of the Sultan: Ottoman Arms Imports, 1854-1914” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (January, 2002), 9-36.

³⁸⁹ BOA. HR.SYS (03), Dosya 83, Gömlek 45; Dosya 84, Gömlek 5, 14, 16, 39 and 42; Dosya 88, Gömlek 29; Dosya 89, Gömlek 7; Dosya 96, Gömlek 24 and 29; Dosya 99, Gömlek 15.

³⁹⁰ *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, January 1, 1868 (London), 23; *Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, Vol.CXI. Edited by James Forrest, (London: The Institution of Civil Engineers, 1893), 181.

conversions of U.S. rifle muskets, supplied after the end of the Civil War. He also notes that in December 1867, the Ottoman government ordered 21,000 Long Enfield Sniders and 6,000 Snider Actions from the Birmingham Small Arms Company.³⁹¹ On April 3, 1866, Midhat Pasha asked the central government for permission to transport American rifles via the Ruse-Varna Railway.³⁹² In his account, Midhat Pasha also mentions his request of 40,000 rifles to arm the Ottoman troops.³⁹³

The number of rifles imported from the U.S. had gradually increased in the mid to late 1860s. The largest orders were made in the early 1870s, including 46,000 muskets and 5,000 carbines along with ammunition. Around that time, Oliver Winchester visited Istanbul and brought back an additional order for 200,000 Martini-Henry rifles, also known as Winchester-Henry carbine rifles.³⁹⁴ Midhat Pasha initially used these rifles to arm his newly established police stations and village militia. By the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, the Winchester carbine became the principle cavalry arm for both regular and irregular Ottoman troops in the Danube province.³⁹⁵ The number of arms clearly indicates a build up for war with a major enemy rather than with small bands of revolutionaries.

³⁹¹ John Walter, *Rifles of the World*, 3rd Edition (Lola, Wis.: Krause Publications, 2006), 459. He also suggests that the first rifle conversions were undertaken in Ottoman Turkey, not Britain as is typically argued.

³⁹² BOA. A.MKT.MHM. Dosya 352, Gömlek 70. 440/63, 354/40. In his memoirs, Midhat Pasha also mentions that he requested 40,000 rifles from the center to arm the militia. *Tabsıra-i İbret*, 70.

³⁹³ *Tabsıra-i İbret*, 70.

³⁹⁴ Dean Boorman, *The History of Winchester Firearms* (New York: Lyons Press, 2001), 31.

³⁹⁵ Huyshe compares the Russian Kranka rifle with Winchester carbine: "A Kranka rifle, a breechloader with the Snider action, heavy, clumsy, ill-balanced; a wretched weapon for a mounted man, and as different as could be from the handy little American-made Winchester carbine, which all the Turkish cavalry, regular and irregular, carried, Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 163. Boorman also recounts an anecdote from Rauf Pasha in which some six hundred Cossacks surrounded Rauf Pasha with his small Circassian guard, but the Circassians were able to kill most of the Cossacks thanks to their effective Winchester-Henry rifles. Boorman, *The History of Winchester Firearms*, 33.

Conclusion

During the *Tanzimat*, Bulgarian Christians were politically fragmented. Although Bulgarian religious independence from the Greek Patriarchate appealed to broad masses, including pro-Ottoman Bulgarian elites, the revolutionary movement demanding separation from the Ottoman Empire failed to receive public support. In Ruse, nationalist organizations such as *Karan* and *Kubrat*, were extensions of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee that attempted to assist the revolutionaries crossing the Danube and transferring arms from Romania to organize a mass national uprising. Despite their efforts, lack of popular support and Ottoman surveillance limited their actions. In fact, the small-scale *cheta* activities of these revolutionaries were not the primary military concern of the Ottoman government in the 1860s and 1870s. Instead the Ottoman government was particularly concerned about a potential war with Russia, and it drastically increased its military presence in the region, especially in the 1870s.

Despite the fact that a Russian invasion was the Porte's primary military concern in the region, the Ottoman government pragmatically sided with Bulgarians against the Greeks in the "church question." By advocating Bulgarian religious autonomy, governors such as Midhat Pasha might gain the support of Bulgarians who might otherwise be tempted by nationalist rhetoric. The creation of the autonomous Bulgarian *obshtina* in 1865, and the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870 did not contradict the Ottoman administrative system, which had already divided society along confessional lines. This alliance made it harder for the separatist organizations such as the BRCC to

gain support in Ruse, and Muslims and Bulgarian Christians generally lived on good terms prior to the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8.

Chapter Four: The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8 and Bulgarian “Liberation”

Beginning in the summer of 1875, a series of uprisings in Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Danube province took place against Ottoman rule. With the involvement of the Great Powers, these local revolts became an international affair known as the Balkan Crisis of 1875-8. In April 1876, Bulgarian nationalists organized an insurrection against the Ottoman government in the south-central part of the Danube province, inhabited predominantly by Bulgarian Christians. The Ottoman irregular troops or bashibazouks brutally suppressed the revolt. In June 1876, Serbia declared war against the Ottomans, with the Bulgarian revolutionaries participating on the Serbian side. In December 1876, the European Powers called a conference in Istanbul and proposed giving autonomy to the Christians as a solution to the Balkan crisis. In response, Ottoman reformers declared the first Ottoman constitution, assuring non-Muslim representation in the imperial parliament. The first parliament met in March 1877. Russia, however, found Ottoman reforms insufficient and declared war on April 24, 1877 under the pretext of protecting and liberating Christian Slavs under Ottoman rule. Russian armies then marched towards the Danube province in the west and the Caucasus in the east.

In the European theatre of the war, the Quadrilateral arrangement of fortresses in Ruse, Silistra, Varna and Shumen, the so-called *Kale-i Erbaa*, served as the major military zone for the Ottomans with the Danube as the line of defense (see Figure 13). These Ottoman fortresses held out throughout the war and were gradually evacuated after the armistice. Among these, Shumen was the main garrison, and Ruse held the second most important position because of its railroad connections to Shumen and Varna and its

strategic location on the Danube. At the beginning of the war, the suspension of navigation on the Danube had a profound effect on Ruse's economy. Beginning in mid-June 1877, the heavy Russian bombardment destroyed a greater part of the city and caused displacement of its population to the bare hills in the surrounding area. For Ruse, the war brought continuous bombardment between the Ottoman garrison in Ruse and the Russian strongholds in Giurgiu and Slobozia on the Romanian side of the Danube. Some villages near Ruse changed hands between the two armies, but the Ottomans repelled the Russian attacks and Ruse remained under Ottoman control throughout the war.

Bulgarian reactions to the war of 1877-8 were multi-dimensional and complex, as they were rather fragmented based on political leanings, social class, and religion. In Ruse, the war did not cause any significant change in inter-ethnic relations and most residents continued their daily routine until mid-June 1877 when the heavy Russian bombardment from Giurgiu began. Then, all residents of the city, including Turks, Bulgarians, Jews, and Armenians, suffered from Russian bombardments and many lost their lives and property. Ironically, the Ottoman government itself protected its Bulgarian citizens from the attacks of their so-called "liberators." In Ruse, Bulgarians mostly remained neutral if not loyal to the Ottoman Empire. Muslims and Christian Bulgarians maintained their good relations, and in the villages occupied by Russia, many Bulgarians made efforts to protect their Muslim neighbors from the Russian soldiers and armed bands of Bulgarians. The Bulgarian volunteers in the Russian army were mostly the members of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee.

On February 8, 1878, a week after the armistice of Edirne took effect, the Russian general Totleben took over Ruse and established his headquarters there. The Ottoman Empire gradually evacuated the city, withdrawing its soldiers and war materials. Upon the arrival of the Russians, pragmatism won the day and all ethnic and religious groups participated in Russian celebrations and made efforts to avoid confrontation with the Russians. This officially marked the end of nearly five hundred years of Ottoman rule in Ruse, after which the Russian generals directly governed the city until April 28, 1879.

Ruse under Russian Attacks

The continuous cycle of war between the Ottoman and Russian Empires since the seventeenth century ended with the decisive war of 1877-1878. It was a disaster for the Ottoman Empire, which suffered an enormous loss of territory, including Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Thessaly, parts of Anatolia and Cyprus. In all, the Ottoman Empire ceded about a third of its territory and over 20 percent of its population.

On April 24, 1877, Russian troops crossed the Pruth River and marched towards the Danube province, which became the major theatre of military operations in Europe.³⁹⁶ By the end of May, the Russian army occupied the northern side of the Danube from Kalafat in the west to Galatz in the east, concentrating its strongest military forces at the

³⁹⁶ The following describes the three main stages of the war in the European theatre: From April 24 to July 3, the Russian army concentrated in Romania and started passing the Danube and establishing their headquarter in the southern bank of the river. At this stage, the Russian army moved from Kishinef to Svishtov. Between July 4 and December 10, the Russian army marched from Svishtov to the Shipka Pass and then the Orhaniye Pass. From December 11 to March 3, after the fall of Pleven on December 10, the Russians marched from the Shipka Pass to San Stefano near Istanbul where they signed a treaty, passing through Sofia, Plovdiv and Edirne. For the details, see Francis Vinton Green, *The Campaign in Bulgaria, 1877-1878* (London: Hugh Rees, Limited 1903).

Romanian city of Giurgiu, opposite Ruse. In the meantime, the Sublime Porte placed strong garrisons under Abdülkerim Pasha in the four great fortresses on the south side of the Danube-Vidin, Nikopol, Ruse and Silistra, as well as two others in Shumen near the Balkan Mountains and Varna on the coast of the Black Sea.³⁹⁷

With a strategic location on the Danube, the Ottoman garrison in Ruse made any Russian attack impractical, and enabled the Ottomans to protect the Dobrudzha region against attempts to pass the river. The range of elevations in the hills running parallel with the Danube and lying behind the city gave the Ottoman army the power to strengthen the city's defenses with a series of redoubts. The principle entrenchment, called the *Levent Tabya*, was at the highest elevation, 1300 yards from the ramparts. The Ottoman government constructed this fortress the year before the war. It was butterfly shaped with two pentagonal redoubts, providing barracks and casemates to accommodate 2000 soldiers. 300 cannons, mostly Krupp, were mounted on the city walls.³⁹⁸ The war transformed the city into a military base, and *The New York Times* vividly described the view of this stronghold as “a charming picture, with its white walls and red roofs, and tall tapering minarets rising above the sea of dark glossy foliage, formed by the countless gardens which are so prominent a feature of every Eastern city.”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Israel Smith Clare, *Illustrated Universal History: Being a Clear and Concise History of All Nations* ... (Philadelphia: J.C. McCurdy & CO, 1881), 559-560.

³⁹⁸ *The War Correspondence of the "Daily News" 1877 with a Connecting Narrative Forming a Continuous History of the War between Russia and Turkey to the Fall of Kars*, (London: Macmillan and CO. 1878), 92-94; “The Value of Rustchuk”, *The New York Times*, September 14, 1877, 4.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

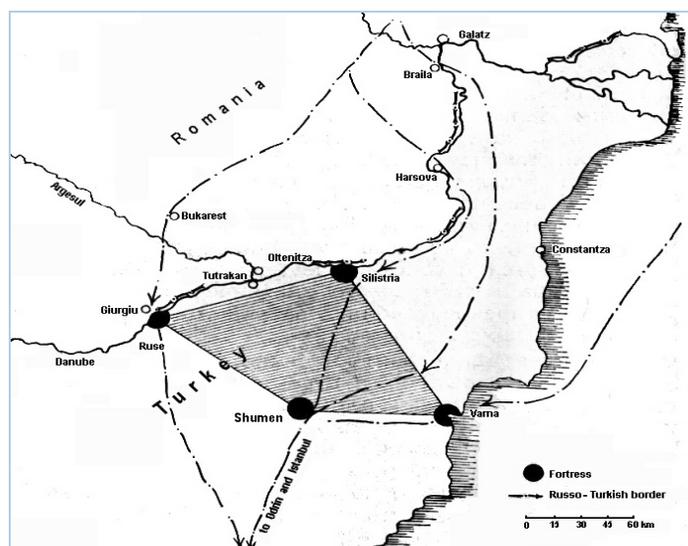


Figure 13: The Ottoman Quadrilateral.⁴⁰⁰

With respect to the size of the Ottoman army in Ruse, the Russian consul Vasili Kozhevnikov reported on January 20, 1877 that there were 13 infantry and artillery battalions, 9300 soldiers in total.⁴⁰¹ After the outbreak of the war, forty battalions of Ottoman infantry held the city, mostly *redifs* (reserve soldiers). The bulk of the *nizams* (regular troops) were transferred to the Ruse-Shumen line. During the war, the Ottoman army had a total of nearly 26,000 men under the command of Eşref Pasha and Tahir Pasha, who served as the military governor of the fortress.⁴⁰² The garrison in Ruse also included a mobile brigade, under the command of Mustafa Zefi Pasha, for offensive attacks.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ http://www.bulgarianartillery.it/Bulgarian%20Artillery%201/Deposito_Varia/Balkan%20Quadrilateral.jpg accessed on August 8, 2013.

⁴⁰¹ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, V-A, op. 181/2, 1877, d.772, 16-17, in Zheinov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vūshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 187.

⁴⁰² Green, *The Campaign in Bulgaria*, 86; “The Value of Rustchuk,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1877, 4.

⁴⁰³ Frederick Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War 1877: A Strategical Sketch* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & CO., 1905), 95.

The Ottoman government considered the Danube a line of defense and placed it under martial law. The Ottoman commander in chief, Abdülkerim Pasha, had the authority to suspend navigation, to detain and requisition neutral vessels, and to confiscate their cargo. Then, he issued a notice on April 30 that as of May 3, all ships were prohibited from navigating on the defense line (See Figure 14). Ottoman authorities would seize any ship or steamer, small or large, navigating without their permission. Cargo would be confiscated and the captain would be regarded as a spy. Simultaneously, the Russians, who occupied Galatz in the east, issued a similar order closing traffic on the river. This interference with the free navigation of the Danube obviously caused Austria and Great Britain concern and both insisted on adherence to the Capitulations and the provisions of the Treaty of London in 1871. After several correspondences, the Russian and Ottoman governments assured Britain, Austria, and other parties involved in trade on the Danube that the interruptions were temporary and provisional, an inevitable result of war.⁴⁰⁴ As an international port city, the suspension of navigation on the Danube greatly affected Ruse.

⁴⁰⁴ Henry Montague (Sir), *The Russo-Turkish War: Including an Account of the Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Power and the History of the Eastern Question*, Vol. I ed. H.M. Hozier (London: W. Mackenzie, 1878), 402-403.



Figure 14: A View of the Port in Ruse, April 18, 1877.⁴⁰⁵

On May 10, 1877, the British consul Robert Reade notified British nationals and the residents of Ruse about shots exchanged between Russians and Ottomans in towns along the Danube. Reade wrote that he expected the Russians in Giurgiu, on the opposite side of the Danube, to bombard Ruse. Immediately after this notice, a branch of the Ottoman Bank in Ruse closed.⁴⁰⁶ All the consuls in Ruse sent their wives and children away.⁴⁰⁷ Others began moving to safer cities such as Edirne and Istanbul. One of the Jewish residents of the city, Shelomo Rosanes, for instance, mentioned in his account “in May 1877, the brother of my esteemed father, Señor Mordekhai, left town, taking with him all the merchandise he could carry from his shop (various kinds of cloth), and

⁴⁰⁵ NBKM,OO. C III 1229, 47.

⁴⁰⁶ Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 36-38.

⁴⁰⁷ Montague, *The Russo-Turkish War*, 402.

journeyed to Istanbul.”⁴⁰⁸ According to Sir Henry Montague, a British army officer and business administrator, the great majority of Muslims in Ruse, in contrast, were not aware of the ensuing effects of the war and continued their daily routines.

The fatalist Turk has no notion of leaving his usual haunts, nor allowing his family to do so either, merely because there are a hundred thousand or two of Russians coming over to try to knock these batteries about our ears. The Mahometan natives go about what I was to call their business in their usual slow and stately manner, just as if Rustchuk were as safe as Grosvenor Square. Men of all ages and conditions, from old turbaned patriarch telling his beads to the beardless semi-Parisian looking youths in fezzes, whose present business in life is to roll up cigarettes, and look through opera glasses at the foe—all these saunter slowly about the place, as unconcernedly as if there were such thing as any disturbance in the East, and the Russians were all in the moon. There is something wonderfully captivating to the stranger in this universal exhibition of sangfroid.⁴⁰⁹

Montague describes the continuation of daily life in Ruse and portrays the city as “Oriental.” His description excludes the non-Muslims in the city, many of whom could also be characterized as wearing fezzes and smoking tobacco.

⁴⁰⁸ Shelomo Rosanes, *La Geneologia*, 201-204, cited in Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 265.

⁴⁰⁹ Montague, *The Russo-Turkish War*, 402.

Wentworth Huyshe, a war correspondent, however, provides a broader description of daily life during the early stages of the war, prior to the heavy Russian bombardment, which displaced the majority of the city's population.

And so all through the month of June, our scare having subsided, there was for all of us in Rustchuk a time of *dolce far niente*. Turk or Bulgar, Muslim or Giaour (non-Muslim), the whole population basked in the sun together; crowds of idlers formed themselves picturesque groups on the bluffs overhanging the river, and gazed dreamily into or across the placid stream, whose surface was unbroken save by the long reedy islands; children played in the quiet streets; milk seller lingered on his rounds; the orange merchant did an easy thriving trade.⁴¹⁰

As described above, despite the possibility of Russian attacks, the war did not make a significant impact on the daily interactions of ethno-religious communities in Ruse, and they mostly continued their daily routine.

After nearly two months of inactivity, in June 1877, the Russians began an active campaign on the Ottoman side of the Danube, fiercely bombarding Ruse from Giurgiu and Vidin from Kalafat (See figure 4). Their plan was to cross the Danube, neutralizing the fortresses in the Quadrilateral, crush the Ottoman forces in the field, and march over the Balkans Mountains to Edirne. The inadequacy of the Russian forces and the arrival of

⁴¹⁰ Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 42.

Osman Pasha's army on the right flank of the invaders brought a sudden halt to the initial plan.⁴¹¹

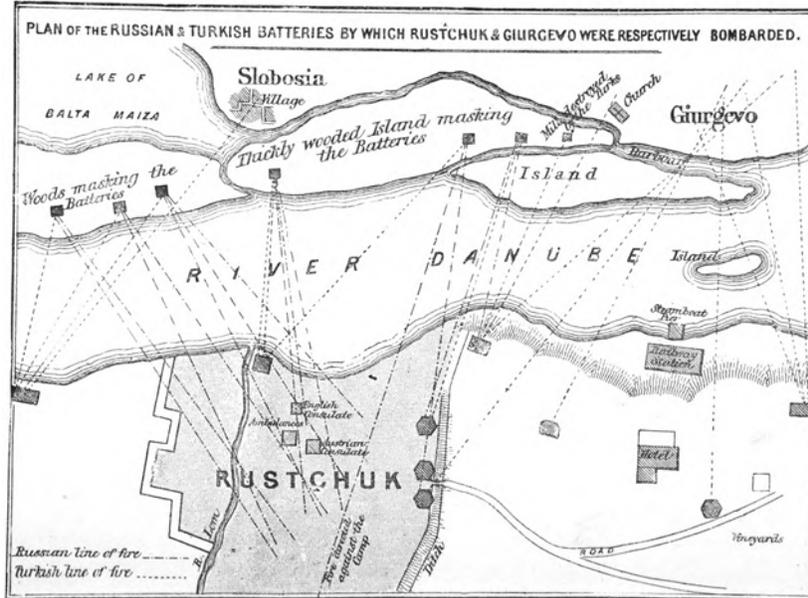


Figure 15: The Plan of the Russian & Turkish Batteries.⁴¹²

Instead, the Russian army continuously attacked the defenses of the city and the Ottoman troops responded from the opposite side of the river (see Figure 15). By late June 1877, the Russians' heavy bombardment left the greater part of Ruse in ruins. Neutral states were particularly concerned that the Russians had violated the laws of war as they deliberately targeted the consulates and defenseless parts of the city. English and American newspapers described these attacks as the folly of the Russian army.⁴¹³

Regardless of their intentions, Russian shells struck the English, French, German and Austro-Hungarian consulates as well as hundreds of civilians. Turks, Bulgarians,

⁴¹¹ Green, *The Campaign in Bulgaria*, 250.

⁴¹² Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 67.

⁴¹³ "The Bombardment of Rustchuk: Views of the London Times on the Firing Consulates" *The New York Times*, June 29, 1877, 1.

Jews, and others took their children and whatever possessions they could carry and escaped to hillsides and vineyards as shells killed many en route to safety (see Figure 16).⁴¹⁴



Figure 16: The Bombardment of Ruse.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁴¹⁵ *Harper's Weekly*, September 1, 1877, 694.

The Russian bombardment eventually led to the displacement of many inhabitants and a large population of refugees convened in the surrounding villages and towns. Even the governor of the city, Ahmed Kayserili Pasha, moved to a tent on the hillside.⁴¹⁶ Shelomo Rosanes, documented the details of the bombardments.

On Shabbat, the 15th of Tamuz (25 June) the Russian general warned the commandant of Ruscuk that the bombardment of the city would worsen. Nobody expected its intensity to be so terrifying. If until then only a few people had left the city, after June 26, when it seemed that a hail of fire and lead was raining on the city, many sought to escape by any means. Tens and hundreds of casualties lay scattered in the streets-wounded and killed. Among the victims was the mother of my revered teacher, Rabi Haim Bidjerano.... The bombardments did not differentiate between the various sections of the town. Shells landed on the Bulgarian Christian quarter, on the Armenians, the Moslems, and even on the Jewish quarter.⁴¹⁷

Shelomo Rosanes confirms the indifference to Russian invasion that Montague and Huyshe mentioned in their accounts. The residents of Ruse definitely miscalculated the strength of the Russian attacks from which they severely suffered. Shells struck not only the military structures and government buildings, but also took the lives of Ruse's citizens, destroyed their homes, and places of worship.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 564.

⁴¹⁷ Shelomo Rosanes, *La Geneologia*, 201-204, cited in Zvi Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 265.

The contents of the synagogue went up in flames; except for those things that were handed over to the city headquarter for safekeeping. Many unfortunate Jews who did not manage to escape to nearby towns found refuge in the hills and in the fields, seeking only to save their dear ones. It should be noted that most of the Jews in Rusçuk community have left the town, most of them going to nearby Shumla. Señor Barukh Chiprut has worked very hard to help the Jews evacuate Rusçuk.⁴¹⁸

Although this was not unusual for warfare at the time, the situation presented a paradox, described by Wentworth Huyshe.

The Bulgarians, too, suffered severely at the hands of their liberating friends, and many paid with their lives and property for the privilege of being “protected” by so great a Power. For the time they were content to be protected by their enemy. Poor Bulgars! After being massacred by the Turk owing to the protection of Russia, they were now being cut to pieces by Russia and protected by the Turk.⁴¹⁹

The supposed purpose of the Russian invasion was the protection and liberation of a suppressed nation. Many Christian Bulgarians, however, did not expect a Russian liberation. Of course, they also did not anticipate the ensuing massacre. The invasion resulted in a Russian power grab with high casualties among Turkish, Jewish, Christian Bulgarian, and Armenian populations in Ruse.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 265.

⁴¹⁹ Huyshe, *The Liberation of Bulgaria*, 62-3.

The Russian bombardment brought about the demise of Ottoman institutions established by the *Tanzimat* reforms. For instance, the war destroyed the secular industrial school, *Islahhane*, which served all ethnic and religious communities in the city.⁴²⁰ Shells struck the printing house in Ruse where both Bulgarian Christians and Muslims worked together and published the bilingual newspaper *Tuna/Dunav*, whose last issue on June 13, 1877.⁴²¹

Soon after the initial heavy bombardment from Giurgiu, it became evident that the Russian military assault followed a regular pattern. Every afternoon around five pm when the sun went down and the light was favorable, inhabitants camped on the hills watched a three-hour cannonade. Some people returned to their homes at night to pack up their wrecked goods and chattels (see Figure 17). As the Russian batteries opened fire, many lost their lives beneath their own roofs, especially in the Jewish quarter where houses did not have cellars.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ See chapter one.

⁴²¹ During the war, besides the local news, this provincial newspaper constantly reported the war preparations, the charity organizations in support of the Ottoman Imperial army, and provided some information about the Russian army. In the last issue, for example, it mentioned that the Ottoman navy detained a ship in the Danube and captured an English officer whom, they thought, was a spy; and that the Circassian, Tatar and Polish soldiers in the Russian army refused to fight against the Ottomans, *Dunav/Tuna*, Issue 1172, July 14, 1877, 2.

⁴²² *Ibid*, 61-2.



Figure 17: Night Scene in the Streets of Ruse.⁴²³

According to a Jewish resident, Salomon Binyamin, Bulgarians in Ruse also heard rumors that the Turks planned to plunder the houses of Christian Bulgarians, and slaughter any who remained in the city before the Russians took over the city. Many of them rushed to the train station to escape. Binyamin mentions that a group of notables including Metropolitan Grigorii, Ivan Vedar and Binyamin Rafael Nahmias together appealed to the supreme commander for further consideration regarding the alleged decision to invade the homes of Christian Bulgarians. Afterwards, Dilaver Pasha, who was second in command, repealed the order.⁴²⁴ According to Nikolai Nenov, however, this story was an urban myth and this confrontation never took place.⁴²⁵ Wentworth Hayshe, also mentions in his notes that when he visited the Ottoman redoubts on the hills, one of the artillery officers said, “we know perfectly well the houses of the leading

⁴²³ *The Illustrated London News*, July 14, 1877, 29.

⁴²⁴ Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 267-68.

⁴²⁵ Nenov, *Spasiavaneto na rusentsi ot zakolevie. Gradski mit i mesta na pamet*.

Bulgarians in the town, and at the first provocation this battery will open fire.”⁴²⁶ This also supports Salomon Binyamin’s assertion that the Ottoman army expected a provocation from the Bulgarian elite and was ready to shoot them. In fact, there is no Ottoman documentation suggesting that any confrontation took place or that any such attacks were being planned.

Towards the end of June 1877, the war entered a new phase as the Russian army crossed the Danube at Svishtov. On July 2, the Russians finished the construction of the bridge over the Danube, and subsequently started pouring into the province, moving towards the Balkan Mountains (see Figure 18). In response, the Ottoman government replaced Abdülkerim Pasha with German born Mehmed Ali Pasha (né Karl Detriot), who had come to Istanbul at fifteen and converted to Islam. Mehmed Ali’s plan was to launch an offensive attack from Ruse or Razgrad, compelling the Russian armies to a large, decisive battle between Plevna and Ruse long before the reinforcements could arrive. Süleyman Pasha, however, refused to follow orders and concentrated his forces at the Shipka Pass, most likely because the two generals disliked one another. Süleyman had always suspected Mehmed Ali’s Christian German heritage and attempted to engineer his failure. On October 2, 1877, Süleyman took over Mehmed Ali’s position as the commander-in-chief, after his failed operations.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 41.

⁴²⁷ Richard Friedrich Adelbert Graf von Pfeilburghausz, *Experiences of a Prussian Officer in the Russian Service during the Turkish War of 1877-78*, trans. Colonel C.W. Bowdler (London: Edward Stanford, 1893), 321-323.

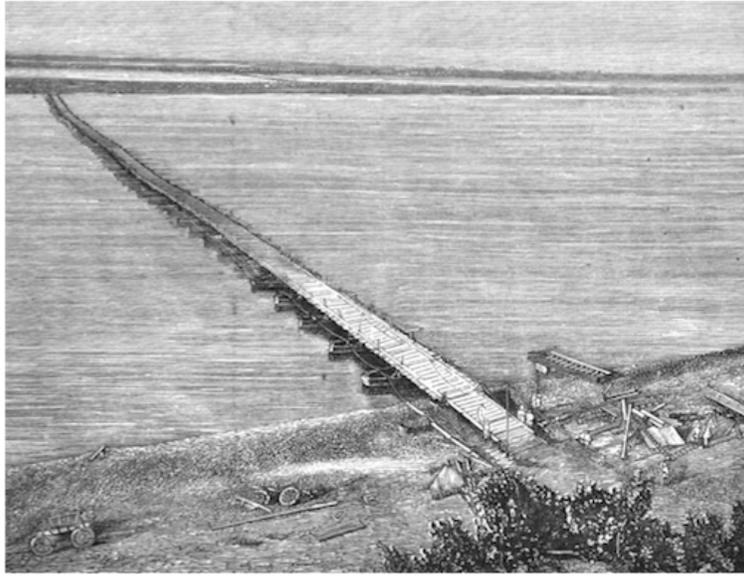


Figure 18: The Bridge over the Danube in Svishtov.⁴²⁸

As the Russian army began to advance in the Danube province, non-Bulgarians, Muslims in particular, began to escape from Russians and sought refuge in other towns, especially in the Ottoman Quadrilateral (See Table 1).

Ruse	1741
Silistra	4157
Rasgrad	4206
Shumen	5979
Eski Djuma	1735
Tutrakan	921
Osman Bazar	1603
Varna	2610
Balchik	1200
Hadji Oglu Bazardjik	1920
Pravadi	3616
Total Number of Families	29688

Table 1: The number of refugee families in August 1877.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ Huyshe, *Liberation of Bulgaria*, 79.

Although many people in Ruse left the city after the Russian bombardment in June, the city received a number of refugees from the towns under Russian occupation. The war continued with heavy cannoning between Ruse and Giurgiu, and fighting on the Lom. With rumors that the Russians were approaching the city, most of the remaining residents of Ruse abandoned their homes and farms. Their decisions were influenced by the panic caused by voluntary exiles flowing into Shumen, Razgrad, Varna and Deli Orman by trains and boats (see Figure 19).



Figure 19: A Refugee Family at the Rail Station in Ruse.⁴³⁰

Historiography regarding this stage of the war, in particular Bulgarian scholarship, generally gives the impression that Bulgarians welcomed their “liberators.” Bulgarian scholars tend to emphasize that the Bulgarian volunteer forces and peasants played a significant role in the Russian victory in the field.⁴³¹ In many accounts, the number of the Bulgarian volunteers, however, accounted for only around 5000 men. In

⁴²⁹ H. Mainwaring Dunstan, comp., and W. Burdett-Coutts, ed., *The Turkish Compassionate Fund: An Account of Its Origin, Working, and Results* (London: Remington and CO., 1883), 32.

⁴³⁰ *The Illustrated London News*, July 28, 1877, 89.

⁴³¹ Doinov, “The Participation of the Bulgarian Volunteer Force,” 176.

comparison with the Russian army of nearly 300,000 men along with Romanians and Serbians, this did not represent mass support from the Bulgarians. A historian of the late nineteenth century, William Miller, questioned the number of Bulgarian military troops. He also challenged the supposed mass peasant support for the Russians who purportedly delivered Bulgaria its independence.

In the war itself the Bulgarians played a much less important part than the Romanians. Bulgaria, disorganized by nearly five centuries of Turkish rule, which had sapped the martial spirit of the people, could do little but provide a theatre for the war... Volunteer corps were formed to fight by the side of the Russian and Romanian regulars; five thousand Bulgarians accompanied General Gourko in his operations in the Balkans, and won the praise of their allies by their gallant defense of the Shipka Pass, and their conspicuous bravery at Eski-Zagra, where four-fifths of the Bulgarian combats were left dead upon the field. But lack of military training, the terror inspired by the massacre of the previous year, and the fear of reprisal in case the war went against the liberators, hindered them from displaying those high military capacities...⁴³²

⁴³² William Miller, *The Balkans: Roumania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896), 210; according to a Romanian historian, Mihail Ionescu, Romanians lost 10,000 men of an effective force about 100,000 soldiers in the war of 1877-78, Mihail E. Ionescu, "The Equipment, Logistics and Performance of the Romanian Army in the War of Independence, 1877-78" in *Insurrections, Wars, and The Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, ed. Bela K. Kiraly and Gale Stokes (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 237; Milorad Ekmečić claims that Serbia gathered 82,000 troops in December 1877 for the same war, Milorad Ekmečić, "The Serbian Army in the Wars of 1876-78: National Liability or National Asset?" in *Insurrections, Wars, and The Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, ed. Bela K. Kiraly and Gale Stokes (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 296.

Historian William Murray echoes Miller's assessment a little over a decade later in 1911, indicating that the war did not elicit popular support from Bulgarians:

The principle battles of the war of 1877-78 were fought on what was considered Bulgarian soil, and the Bulgarian peasants helped the invading army in such ways as they could. There was not, however, any general rallying of Bulgarians to the aid of the armies sent against the Turks, though the five thousand and more volunteers who fought with the Russians and the Romanians were not found wanting in sustained valor.⁴³³

Despite the direct guidance and assistance of the Russians, historians estimate that the number of volunteers rose only slightly, somewhere from 5000 and 7440, during the war. Considering the size of the Russian army mobilized for the campaign in Bulgaria, which numbered approximately 200,000 men, and that of the Bulgarian population, which was over two million, the Bulgarian participation in their so called "liberation war" was minimal and insignificant.

Ironically, in the Serbo-Ottoman War of 1876 too, approximately 5000 Bulgarians had volunteered for military service, joining the Serbian forces against the Ottomans. Over 1700 lost their lives in battle.⁴³⁴ According to Doinov, the survivors of the Serbo-Ottoman War and the April Uprising of 1876, along with other members of the revolutionary bands in Romania, constituted a significant portion of the Bulgarian

⁴³³ William Smith Murray, *The Making of the Balkan States* (New York, Columbia University: Longmans, Green & Co., Agents, 1910), 129.

⁴³⁴ I.S. Ivanov, a Bulgarian in Russian service in Kishinev later claimed that he recruited as many as 5,000 Bulgarian volunteers for the Serbo-Turkish War of 1876, Milorad Ekmecic, "The Serbian Army in the Wars of 1876-78," 293; Traikov, "Bulgarian Volunteers in the Serbo-Turkish War of 1876," 167.

volunteers in the war of 1877-78.⁴³⁵ Thus, there was not a large population of Bulgarian nationalists to draw from in 1877. Instead, Russians depended on the same pan-Slavist Bulgarian nationalists who fought in the Serbo-Ottoman War, and received some peasant support.

In July of 1877, the Russian army crossed the Danube and began to arm Bulgarian peasants in the region under its control. The *Daily News* reported that many subsequently abused their power and, unaccustomed to weapons, committed atrocities against the other ethno-religious groups.⁴³⁶ The role of Bulgarian volunteers mirrored that of Circassians and the bashibazouks for the Ottoman Empire. It was the responsibility of these groups to terrorize inhabitants into vacating towns and villages in order to weaken the enemy before official Ottoman or Russian attacks. These armed Bulgarians, Circassians, and bashibazouks were driven by a variety of motivations including materialistic gains, not necessarily ethnic or religious hatred.

During the war, the violent actions of Bulgarian peasants were not necessarily motivated by belief in nationalist ideology, but class tensions also played a key role. In response to inflammatory accusations against Bulgarian peasants, the local Bulgarian newspaper *Bŭlgarin* published numerous articles regarding the massacres in Svishtov, Tŭrnovo and Kazanlŭk. As one article stated, the confiscation of Turkish property was orderly and was targeted only against wealthy Turks:

⁴³⁵ Doinov, "The Participation of the Bulgarian Volunteer Force," 173.

⁴³⁶ *The War Correspondence of the "Daily News" 1877 with a Connecting Narrative*, 292.

Young Bulgarians broke the doors and windows of the Turkish houses. Many houses were ransacked, but “in a peaceful manner.” This took place during the two days after the flight of the Turks and the arrival of the Russians, when there were no authorities to preserve order. However, the ransacked houses were only those of the Beys (notables), and what the Bulgarians, assisted by some Cossacks, did, was to take only some money and luxuries. This could happen in London or any other town in England under the same circumstances.⁴³⁷

While confirming the crimes, *Bŭlgarin* explained the massacres as the predictable consequences of war. According to the newspaper, poverty stricken residents from any ethnic group would steal from the wealthy. Therefore, potential war booty also was a motivating factor for the peasants to participate in the war. The next issue of the newspaper recounted a similar story in which the Bulgarians burned Turkish villages. The paper defended the Bulgarian instigators, insisting this incident took place only after the departure of the village’s inhabitants as revenge for livestock stolen by Turks in a neighboring Bulgarian village. The article’s author, however, was careful not to condone this act of vengeance, writing that the Bulgarians should have confiscated deserted Turkish property instead.⁴³⁸

In many cases, the actions of armed Bulgarian peasants were a response to the attacks of the Bashibazouks and Circassians. Residents of Ruse remained outside of

⁴³⁷ *Bŭlgarin* Issue 8, November 2, 1877, 1-2.

⁴³⁸ *Bŭlgarin* Issue 9, November 5, 1877, 1-2.

direct contact with the Russians and the Bulgarian armed bands throughout the war. During July and August 1877, the Russians attacked Ruse with vigor. Villages near Ruse, such as Kadıköy, Kazelova and Orhaniye, however, changed hands multiple times during the war. Both Muslim and Christian inhabitants of these villages suffered severely from wartime conditions.⁴³⁹ The *Daily News* reported terrible atrocities the Ottoman irregular troops committed against the Bulgarians in Kadıköy, where the correspondent observed the dead and decaying bodies of men, women and children. The newspaper also recounted a story, narrated by fugitives, in which Turks murdered some Bulgarian men in a village near Ruse, but did not touch women and children. The correspondent stated, “I testify to what I have written above, and also the murders in Kadıköy [which occurred before those in] Rustchuk. Still, the killing seems exceptional, and the regular Turkish troops have never been accused of acts of violence. The blame is always ascribed to the Circassians and the Bashibazouks.”⁴⁴⁰ As in the years prior to the war, the Circassians and other outsiders were accused of the more egregious war crimes. Although the violence did not reflect official Ottoman state policy, it was not unexpected under war conditions. Overall, though, the violence often consisted of episodic outbreaks perpetrated by opportunist groups.

As discussed in the first two chapters, the Ottoman government systematically integrated Bulgarian Christians into the social, political and economic system of the empire. Many were pleased with the new political system and the material prosperity that

⁴³⁹ “The Siege of Rustchuk” *The New York Times*, August 12, 1877, 5; *The War Correspondence of the “Daily News” 1877 with a Connecting Narrative*, 503-504.

⁴⁴⁰ *The War Correspondence of the “Daily News” 1877 with a Connecting Narrative*, 292-307.

the economic investments brought. As British consul Frank F. Sankey stated, “After the Russians crossed the Danube, according to their own account, they found a smiling and fruitful country, a contented peasantry and no signs of want.”⁴⁴¹ He further argued that the Russians were even jealous of the material wellbeing and flourishing conditions of the Bulgarian peasantry. Russians were aggrieved, as they fought to “liberate” a people who seemed to want for nothing.⁴⁴²

In his war notes, Wentworth Huyshe included a detailed dialogue between the Russian officers and the war correspondents, presenting the view of the Russian military when they came into actual contact with the Bulgarians.

We have been laboring under a misconception as to the condition of the Bulgarian Christians. We believed them to be oppressed, impoverished, impeded in the exercise of their religion, not sure of their lives for an hour, not sure of the honor of their women, or of their property. And so we were thrilled with enthusiasm for a veritable war of liberation. But how do we actually find the Bulgar? He lives in perfect comfort; our peasant cannot be compared with him in comfort, competence or prosperity.⁴⁴³

Huyshe corroborates Sankey’s account, describing the living conditions of Bulgarians, which were significantly better than those of serfs in Russia.

Thus did Russian officers express themselves to the correspondents with their army and the correspondents added their own testimony. “I should be

⁴⁴¹ *Turkey No.42 (1878)* Inclosure 2 in Doc. 33, 57.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, 57.

⁴⁴³ Huyshe, *The Liberation of Bulgaria*, 146.

glad,” wrote one of them, “if the English peasantry were as well off. The grain crops of the Bulgarian stretch far and wide. Every village has its herds; last year’s straw is yet in the stack-yards; milk may be bought in every house. And while the Bulgar is awaiting his liberation—objecting strongly to the decided chance of having his throat cut pending its achievement— he has as excellent a notion of turning an honest penny as any Yankee or Scot, and ‘sticks’ the Russian unmercifully. The liberators pay for all Bulgarian property they consume in the way of forage and provisions. And they have to pay! The Bulgar realizes that in this matter he is a master of the situation and he puts money in his purse.⁴⁴⁴

This was contrary to the anticipations of Russian soldiers many of whom were conscripted from noble estates and had been born into serfdom themselves. In response to this perception, *Bŭlgarin* acknowledged the relative affluence of the population, but attributed it to gaps in the Ottoman taxation system as a result of the war. The paper described the abject conditions in many Bulgarian villages, where people lived in huts with no windows. According to the newspaper, the real problem was the exorbitant rate of the taxes that the Porte imposed on Bulgarians.⁴⁴⁵ It would be unrealistic, however, to expect a rapid reversal of Bulgarians’ fortune after the outbreak of the war, as *Bŭlgarin* implied.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, 146.

⁴⁴⁵ *Bŭlgarin* Issue 13, November 19, 1877, 1-2.

After the Russian army crossed the Danube, Russians and Bulgarians came into actual contact in which their conflicts were as common as their cooperation. In need for provisions, Russian soldiers often went to the villages where Bulgarians often had to defend themselves and their property against Russian soldiers as depicted in an image below entitled “A Bulgarian Atrocity” (see Figure 20).



Figure 20: A Bulgarian Atrocity.⁴⁴⁶

In this image, the pig implies this is a Christian village and the Bulgarian woman with a child wearing a fez represents a typical Bulgarian family in Ottoman society. The animal and the other agricultural products on the ground indicate the prosperity mentioned in Russian and British accounts. Most importantly, however, the illustration reveals the ensuing conflict between Russians and Bulgarians despite the former’s rhetoric of Pan-Slav fraternity.

⁴⁴⁶ Huyshe, *The Liberation of Bulgaria*, 147.

Another area of conflict between the Russians and the Bulgarians was connected to the fez, a symbol of Ottoman assimilation. The introduction of the fez, by Mahmud II in 1826, meant to replace the traditional Muslim-identified turban with a more integrative hat to be worn by Ottoman elites regardless of religion. By the mid-nineteenth century, it became the most common headdress of the Ottoman upper class, including the Bulgarian *chorbaci*.⁴⁴⁷ During the war, the Russians generally identified their enemy as “the wearer of the fez.” According to the war correspondents of the *Daily News*, the Turks took advantage of this perception by using masked dummy figures wearing the fez to draw enemy fire. Russian soldiers would immediately fire at these mannequins, exposing themselves to the bullets of Turkish sharpshooters who hid on either side.⁴⁴⁸

Although it is hard to gauge the danger of wearing the fez for Bulgarians on the battlefield, the Russian dislike of fez as symbol of Ottomans was well documented by war correspondents in cities with a strong Russian presence. For instance, the *Daily News* recounted an anecdote from Sofia in which the Russians knocked the fez from people’s heads in the streets. The correspondent mentioned that people had no covering for the head other than the fez and were accustomed to wearing the fez on all occasions. Thus, they neglected to remove their fez when officers passed, unaware of the Russian custom of removing head coverings as a sign of respect. The Russian soldiers threw the hats of

⁴⁴⁷ Neuburger, *The Orient Within*, 90.

⁴⁴⁸ *The War Correspondence of the “Daily News” Continued from the Fall of Kars to the Signature of the Preliminaries of Peace with a Connecting Narrative Forming a Continuous History of the War between Russia and Turkey 1877-8*, (London: Macmillan and CO. 1878), 157.

passersby to the ground, which, as the correspondent noted, was “a rude way” to teach a lesson.⁴⁴⁹

The next day there were hats enough of all shapes and all dates to satisfy the most unreasonable of the fez-haters, and it was rather a ludicrous sight to see a full Turkish costume surmounted by a silk hat of date '50 or a fur cloak and a straw hat, worn by the same person. The style, however, was gradually reverting again to that of the period of the Turkish occupation, and the fez, which on the first afternoon was as provoking to the soldiers as a red rag to a bull, can now be worn without danger of insult.⁴⁵⁰

The correspondent asserts that by the end of the war, Russians were more tolerant of the fez than in the first months of the occupation, but the fez clearly carried symbolic weight. Even before the war, during the 1876 April Uprising, Bulgarian revolutionaries responded to the fez with disdain. Bulgarian revolutionary Zakhari Stoianov reported that “[Local Bulgarian men] rushed out to meet us bareheaded, tearing their fezzes to pieces and throwing them down in the mud.”⁴⁵¹ For a period following Russian occupation it was considered dangerous to wear a fez. Despite the pressure to change, however, many Muslims continued wearing the fez and Bulgarians gradually moved away from the fez to European style clothing as part of fashioning a national identity.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ *The War Correspondence of the “Daily News” Continued from the Fall of Kars*, 317 and 328.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁵¹ Zakhari Soianov, “Iz ‘Zapiski,’” 76, quoted in Neuburger, *The Orient Within*, 88.

⁴⁵² See Neuburger, “Under the Fez and the Foreskin: Modernity and the Mapping of Muslim Manhood” in *The Orient Within*, 85-115.

After the fall of Pleven on December 10, 1877, the so-called “Late Campaign” was a period of large-scale violence perpetrated against non-Orthodox communities by Russians and armed Bulgarian forces. Until their victory in Pleven, the Russians behaved cautiously and did not want to trigger resistance from the local populations, as they doubted their ultimate success. Then they turned to tyranny, with no respect for private rights or property. These troops burned houses and farms, plundered properties, and forced Muslims and other non-Orthodox minorities to flee into the remaining Ottoman territories. The Ottoman government regarded this violence as the targeted and deliberate extermination of the Muslim population in the region. The inhabitants of Muslim villages, joined by those from the scattered armies and disbanded Ottoman garrisons, engaged in guerilla warfare to defend their lives, property and the honor of their women. Noncombatant Bulgarians often suffered from guerilla fighting, but they also took it upon themselves to save some Muslim inhabitants, women in particular, from the Russians.⁴⁵³ Thanks to a history of peaceful coexistence, some Christian Bulgarians expressed solidarity with the Turkish Muslim populations in the midst of violent warfare. The majority of Christian Bulgarians did not take an active role in the war and some even provided assistance to their Muslim neighbors escaping from the Russian military. According to *Bŭlgarin*, in the village of Novo Selo near Tŭrnovo (an ethnically mixed community), eight Turks found refuge in the house of the Bulgarian priest. After living with the priest for a number of months, they converted to Orthodox Christianity.⁴⁵⁴ The

⁴⁵³ *Turkey No.49 (1878)*, Inclosure 1 in Doc. 10, 44-46.

⁴⁵⁴ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 3, Oct 15, 1877, 2.

motivation for the religious conversion, or the motivations of the priest in rescuing his neighbors, is unclear, but the priest definitely took the risk of sheltering his Turkish neighbors rather than cooperating with the Russians and armed Bulgarians.

The European Commission, sent to inquire into the condition of the Muslim fugitives after the war of 1877-8, reported numerous stories indicating the continuing good relations between Bulgarian Christians and Muslims. The British ambassador Sir A.H. Layard summarized the conclusions the commission reached.⁴⁵⁵

Two remarkable facts are proven by the evidence taken before the Commission: (1st) that the Russian soldiers took a leading part in the shocking and almost unparalleled outrages and cruelties committed upon the Mussulman population; and (2nd) that before the Russian invasion of Bulgaria and Roumelia the Mahommedans and Christians lived peacefully together on the most kindly and friendly terms. This latter fact was known to those who had some personal acquaintance with Turkey in Europe.⁴⁵⁶

The records of these commissions provide detailed stories of Muslims from Pleven, Ruse, Harmanlı, Plovdiv, and Kazanlık living in refugee camps. Pointing out the friendly relations between Muslims and Bulgarians in Harmanlı, the commission reported “their

⁴⁵⁵ The European Commission of the Rhodope was composed of the representatives of Austria, England, France, Russia, Italy and Germany, Colonel Raab, Mr. Fawcett, M. Challet, M. Basily, M. Graziani and M. Muller respectively, *Turkey No.49 (1878), Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the International Commission Sent to the Mount Rhodope District*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1878), Inclosure in Document 1, 2.

⁴⁵⁶ *Turkey No.49 (1878)*, Doc. 10, 42.

friendly relations were such that it was the Bulgarians who facilitated their passage of the Maritza with lamentations at their departure.”⁴⁵⁷

In the commission’s reports, stories of refugees are almost identical. All pointed to the good relations between Muslims and Bulgarians until the arrival of the Russians. Afterwards, it was the Russian army that instigated atrocities including arson, plunder and rape. In one story, confirmed by all the delegates of the commission, a group of Muslim refugees left Plovdiv, led by a man named Abdullah, when the Russian army invaded and began massacring peasants and carrying away young girls. Abdullah claimed that his Bulgarian neighbors begged him to remain among them, assuring that they would protect him.⁴⁵⁸ Another refugee named Ali added that the Russians imprisoned them in a house, but at night a Bulgarian opened the door and let them escape. Many descriptions recounted the assistance Muslims received from their Christian Bulgarian neighbors or friends.

Women were the chief victims of the war and suffered from violent acts including rape and violence, and thus composed the majority of the refugee population in the cities under Ottoman control:

Many women were wounded; they were unable to keep up with the others, and must have died on the road. These women relate unheard of cruelties; breasts cut off, mutilations, etc. Several women of Philippopolis were shut up during three days, and all the soldiers came and satisfied their brutal

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, Inclosure in Doc. 10, 55.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, Inclosure 2 in Doc. 6, 20-21.

passions upon them. Several women of Philippopolis have also seen women whose breasts had been cut off, young maidens violated and rendered pregnant, persons covered with tar and burnt alive.⁴⁵⁹

According to the report of the European commission, in the villages near Ruse, the Muslim refugees mostly accused Russians of these cruel acts, pointing to their amicable relations with Bulgarians:

These women strenuously declare that they lived in perfect harmony with the Bulgarians until arrival of the Russians, and have been subsequently received assistance from them; they cannot but be gratified at it. Several women of Nieboli (a village in the environs of Ruse) declared that they left their cottages before the arrival Russians, and through the fear of them. One of them was, nevertheless, violated by a Russian soldier at Bouyoukada.⁴⁶⁰

Bulgarians also identified Russians as the main perpetrators of these acts. The British ambassador Sir A.H. Layard reported a conversation with, Dr. Chomakov, Professor Panaretov and M. Demetri Grekov (a lawyer), Bulgarian deputies from Istanbul, regarding the treatment of Muslim communities:

They sought to throw the blame on the Russian authorities, who, they said, had placed arms in the hands of ignorant people, and had allowed them to

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, Inclosure 1 in Doc. 10, 44-46.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 44-46.

revenge themselves upon the Mahommedan population, without taking any measures to prevent outrages and excesses.⁴⁶¹

Beyond Ruse, violence in the region was not simply based on ethnic conflict but was a product of multiple factors including religion, social class, and local dynamics. Bulgarian elites in Istanbul characterize the Bulgarian peasants as “ignorant people,” who particularly targeted the wealthy. Victims of the violence also included Slavic-speaking Muslims, suggesting a religious component of the conflict. In the region near the Rhodope Mountains, for example, British consuls documented the violence against the *Pomaks*:

A well-known brigand, Petco, is the Chief of bands of Bulgarians, who plunder and massacre the Mahommedans. Bodies of Christians, bearing white flags, move about the district of Rodosto occupied by the Russians, and carry desolation and slaughter amongst the Mussulman villages. It is the cruel treatment, which the Mussulmans have received that has driven the inhabitants of the plains into the Rhodope Mountains, and has induced the Pomaks to rise in arms to defend their lives, property, and the honor of their women.⁴⁶²

After the fall of Pleven, the tenor of the campaign turned in favor of the Russian invaders. Following this victory, Russian generals considered two possible strategies for further operations. General Totleben favored taking the fortresses in Ruse and Silistra,

⁴⁶¹ *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part I, from the mid-Nineteenth Century to the First World War, Series B, the Near and Middle East 1856-1914, Vol.5, ed. David Gillard (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984) Doc. 47, 357.*

⁴⁶² *Turkey No.42 (1878), Doc. 61, 94.*

while the alternative plan was an immediate advance to Edirne over the Shipka Pass. Generals decided on the latter, which proved successful. By early January 1878, the Ottoman government was desperate for an armistice.⁴⁶³ The Sublime Porte subsequently made diplomatic efforts to negotiate with Russia through British diplomats. The Russian government, however, rejected the participation of an intermediary and required that the Ottoman government negotiate directly with Russia for peace. On January 31, 1878, the war ended with the Armistice of Edirne signed by the Russian Grand-Duke Nicholas and by Server and Namik Pashas who represented the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁶⁴ According to the terms of the armistice, the Ottomans would evacuate and surrender the fortresses of Ruse, Silistra, Vidin and Belgradchik to the Russian military. Ottoman forces were allowed seven days to withdraw troops to Shumen and Varna. Even before the news of peace, Russian officers at their headquarters in Giurgiu had already demanded Ruse's surrender and notified the consuls and other foreigners to leave within 24 hours before they entered the city.⁴⁶⁵

Ottoman rule in Ruse ended on February 8, 1878, at 2 pm, when the city was officially surrendered to the Russian army. General Totleben marched into the city with a large military force, including some Bulgarian volunteers. The Ottoman commander, Salem Pasha, presented the sword of surrender to Totleben at the nearest fortification. The Bulgarian delegation, led by the priest Kliment Branitski, met with the Russians on the outskirts of the city. They were holding their hats in their hands and carrying salt and

⁴⁶³ *The War Correspondence of the "Daily News" 1877-78, Continued from the Fall of Kars*, 196.

⁴⁶⁴ Clare, *Illustrated Universal History*, 584-586; Green, *The Campaign in Bulgaria*, 245.

⁴⁶⁵ *The New York Times*, February 7, 1878, 1.

bread in the Slavic tradition.⁴⁶⁶ Totleben greeted the crowd with “a few kind and warning words, shaking his finger at them, as if telling them to behave themselves properly.”⁴⁶⁷ The first encounter between Russians and Bulgarians did not necessarily indicate a desire to form a friendly alliance. Instead, it is likely that the priest led this delegation to ensure that his community was safe under the new occupying force, a pragmatic act that went beyond ethnic allegiances.

After the meeting outside the city, the Russians then went to the center of the city. *Bŭlgarin* described reactions to this march.

The streets were full of people, and male and female students were throwing colorful flowers on the “liberators.” On the banks of the river stood a big crowd, and everybody was enjoying the moment with tears of happiness, except for the Turks, who would not admit defeat. Russian music played everywhere. The celebrations continued at the church where Kliment gave a speech in Russian thanking the liberators. Afterwards, the Russian and Bulgarian leaders left the church to discuss the formation of the new government in the city.⁴⁶⁸

Bŭlgarin had supported the efforts of the Bulgarian volunteers and Russians throughout the war while still critiquing their violent outbursts. The newspaper presents the Russian occupation as “liberation” and the Russians as “liberators,” welcomed by the Bulgarians.

⁴⁶⁶ “The Evacuation of Rustchuk,” *The Times of India*, March 21, 1878, 3; *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 35, February 11, 1878, 2; Siromahova, *Ruse prez vižrakzdaneto*, 209; Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 264.

⁴⁶⁷ “The Evacuation of Rustchuk,” *The Times of India*, March 21, 1878, 3.

⁴⁶⁸ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 35, February 11, 1878, 2.

According to the account of an anonymous traveler from Bucharest published in *Bülgarin* after the Russians entered the town, the “liberation” of Ruse was more complex than initial reports suggest. On a Sunday morning the Russian soldiers, priests, and Muslim imams gathered at the main church where the Russians celebrated their victory. The cross-denomination and multi-ethnic nature of these ceremonies suggests compulsory participation. Little can be gauged from these proceedings, as resistance would not have been tolerated. But there were still many armed Turkish soldiers in the city who mingled with the Russian infantry and Cossacks. Turkish soldiers also went to the church to see the celebration. After seeing the big crowd, they took off their fez to greet the crowd in respect for the ceremony. There was a brief skirmish when two Turkish soldiers refused to remove their fez even after a warning from the Russian soldiers. In the end, however, they gave in, took off their fezzes, and walked away. Furthermore the Russian flag decorated not only Bulgarian houses but also Turkish dwellings. The Bulgarians hung flags in honor of Emperor Alexander bearing the white, blue, and red, the colors of the Russian flag. The green red and white Bulgarian flag was nowhere to be seen, as Bulgarians were still frightened of the competing Russian and Ottoman forces.⁴⁶⁹

At the time of the surrender, Ruse was almost an empty city.⁴⁷⁰ Local participation in the celebrations indicates the ease with which Russians could manage the small remaining population. After spending the night at the principal hotel, General

⁴⁶⁹ *Bülgarin*, Issue 38, February 25, 1878, 2; *Bülgarin*, Issue 39, March 1, 1878, 2-3.

⁴⁷⁰ Dunstan and Burdett-Coutts, *The Turkish Compassionate Fund*, 46.

Totleben had breakfast with his officers, asking for champagne and various bottles of wine, as if they had already forgotten that they were in a town that had been besieged for months and most likely did not have access to these luxury goods. Then the general personally inspected the city and its fortifications to establish his headquarters before he left for Giurgiu and Bucharest on his way back to Russia. He left the city under the command of General Dondukov-Korsakov. Totleben, however, left very few troops in Ruse, as he did not want his soldiers to settle in a town, cause trouble, and grow unfit for future military service (see Figure 21).⁴⁷¹ Although the Armistice of Edirne ended the military operations for the most part, the Ottoman and Russian governments continued peace negotiations until the Treaty of San Stefano signed on March 3, 1878. With their undefined status, the Russian generals formed a provisional government in Ruse immediately after the Ottoman surrender.



Figure 21: The Russian Military Officers in Ruse.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ "The Evacuation of Rustchuk," *The Times of India*, March 28, 1878, 3.

⁴⁷² NBKM, OO. C III 1229, 1.2.

Shortly after the peace, the city returned to everyday life, but with significant changes. People who separated during the war began to meet again at the train station and the port, crying and hugging. Eating and drinking continued as usual, Turkish vendors sold “sweet boza” labeled in Bulgarian and yelled “good quality tobacco” in Russian.⁴⁷³ The British consuls in other towns reported incidents in which the Russians tried to repress the use of the Turkish language, which also occurred in Ruse. One of these reports mentioned that the Jewish and Greek shopkeepers in Plovdiv no longer spoke in Turkish and pretended not to understand the language fearing that the Russian would label them Ottoman sympathizers. Secret police informants spread out across the city to spy for the Russian government, putting pressure on merchants to speak either Russian or Bulgarian. New Bulgarian recruits were eager to denounce former enemies for perceived or imaginary crimes.⁴⁷⁴

Unlike other towns that came under Russian occupation during the war, the peaceful surrender of Ruse prevented large-scale violence. The withdrawal of the Ottoman troops from the region took place gradually, beginning towards the end of the war. The Turkish guns and armaments had been taken to Shumen and Varna, and then to the Ottoman capital as quickly as possible.⁴⁷⁵ The last two regiments of Turkish soldiers left Ruse right after the arrival of the Russian forces. The French and English consuls

⁴⁷³ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 38, February 25, 1878, , 2; Issue 39, March 1, 1878, 2-3.

⁴⁷⁴ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Inclosure in Doc. 215, 203-204.

⁴⁷⁵ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Doc.83, 72.

along with the members of the Red Cross also left the city just a few days before the arrival of the Russian army.⁴⁷⁶

At the time of surrender provisions in Ruse were still sufficient to sustain the Turkish garrison for six to eight weeks. Ottoman troops were still able and willing to fight, and were left wondering why they had given up such a strong position. The Ottoman government sent a Turkish envoy to convince the Turks in Ruse of the order for surrender and that the Ottoman and Russian governments had signed an armistice.⁴⁷⁷ The Austrian government did not welcome the Russian occupation of Ruse and Silistra. They were particularly concerned about these port cities, which were of great importance for commerce on the Danube.⁴⁷⁸ The war, however, caused large economic destruction, as British consul Blunt reported many Bulgarians anticipated recovery would be a slow process.

Sensible and thoughtful Bulgarians appear to doubt the advantageous results to their nation, which the Slavophil anticipated from the war just concluded. They do not dissemble the obvious fact that the country at large will not recover for many a year to come to the prosperity which it attained since the Crimean War, and especially since the construction of the Rumelian Railway.⁴⁷⁹

Indeed, in the period that followed the war, the whole country suffered from high inflation. The price of wine rose from two to sixteen *francs*; even a loaf of bread formerly

⁴⁷⁶ "The Evacuation of Rustchuk," *The Times of India*, March 28, 1878, 3.

⁴⁷⁷ *The New York Times*, February 14, 1878, 1.

⁴⁷⁸ *The New York Times*, February 7, 1878, 1.

⁴⁷⁹ *Turkey No.42. (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 9. 22.

sold for a *piaster* was now worth three or four. Turkish paper money was worthless and was quickly replaced by Russian *rubles*.⁴⁸⁰ Levantine merchants flooded into Ruse to take advantage of the situation. They anticipated that the port city would become advantageous for commerce again, especially after the removal of the blockade on the Danube. Some Jewish merchants got permission to enter the town even before the Russians and took many of the available shops and stores at a rent of one or two *napoleons* per month. They then let the shops to others for a significant mark-up, from 50 to 300 *napoleons* per year; these rents were customary paid in advance.⁴⁸¹ Thus, Ruse resumed its commercial role in the region, but under Russian surveillance.

In the early days of the Russian occupation, the city still suffered from a number of problems. The hospitals in Ruse were full of patients suffering from typhus, which ravaged the city. In the past, the Ottoman government had often rented big houses to be used as hospitals, and brought doctors from other towns to address local epidemics. One of these converted dwellings consisted of eight or nine large rooms and belonged to a Bulgarian proprietor.⁴⁸² Merchants were also interested in renting this hospital building because of its proximity to local markets. The Bulgarian owner also wanted to maximize his gain and thus insisted on renting the whole building for 600 *napoleons* per year to a private business instead. Citizens in Ruse, however, had hoped that the property owner

⁴⁸⁰ *The War Correspondence of the "Daily News" 1877-78, Continued from the Fall of Kars*, 322. The new Bulgarian coinage based on the Lev, equal to the French *frank*, was introduced in 1881. The Lev, which means lion in the archaic Bulgarian, was divided into one hundred *stotinki*, which mean hundredths. Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 44.

⁴⁸¹ "The Evacuation of Rustchuk," *The Times of India*, March 28, 1878, 3.

⁴⁸² *Ibid*, 3; "The Turks still at Rustchuk," *New York Times*, February 14, 1878, 1.

would allow the building to continue functioning as a hospital to help the victims of typhus.⁴⁸³

On March 3, 1873, the Treaty of San Stefano officially ended the war of 1877-8, and Ruse became part of the newly created Bulgarian principality. Although the Russian generals had already started to form a new government in Ruse immediately after their occupation, the treaty officially recognized them as a provisional government to preserve order and prepare Bulgarians for self-rule.

Conclusion

Literature on the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8 focuses on the military aspects and diplomacy rather than analyzing local dynamics in light of the Ottoman reforms. This simplified perspective overlooks the ties that bound Bulgarian Christians with Muslims as well as with the Ottoman government. By exploring the complex Bulgarian responses to war and the possibility of a positive Ottoman legacy, the case of Ruse indicates that Bulgarians maintained their good relations with Muslims and mostly continued their normal daily life in the city. The Russians did not gain widespread popular support from Bulgarians, most of whom remained neutral throughout the conflict if not loyal to the Ottoman Empire.

In general, Bulgarians suffered from the Russian attacks as much as other ethno-religious communities. In the state of chaos during the war, many showed solidarity with their Muslim neighbors or friends, helping them to escape the atrocities committed by the Russian soldiers and their Bulgarian supporters. At the surrender of the Ottoman garrison

⁴⁸³ “The Evacuation of Rustchuk,” *The Times of India*, March 28, 1878, 3.

in Ruse, most of the residents had already left the city, and the remaining population had no choice but to cooperate with the Russian authorities. All ethnic and religious communities participated in the Russian celebrations, and made efforts to avoid conflicts with the new government.

Chapter Five: The Russian Provisional Government February 8, 1878 – April 28, 1879

On March 3, 1878, the Treaty of San Stefano between Russia and the Ottoman Empire officially ended the war of 1877-78. Bulgaria became an autonomous tributary principality with a Christian government and a national militia under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. The principality consisted of a large territory stretching from the Danube River to the Aegean Sea and from the Black Sea to Lake Ohrid and autonomous Serbia. The treaty made provisions for the creation of an Organic Statute and the election of a prince. It also permitted the Russian occupation of Bulgaria for approximately two years to preserve order, security, and tranquility during this process.⁴⁸⁴ Working with an assembly of Bulgarian notables, the Russians took charge of administrative re-organization and the formation of the Bulgarian National Army.

At the same time, the Ottoman government sought European support to reduce its territorial loss and to combat the growing Russian influence in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary and Great Britain did not welcome the Russian presence in a region in which they had a vested political and economic interest. On July 13, 1878, representatives from Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire

⁴⁸⁴ *Turkey No.22 (1878) Preliminary Treaty of Peace between Russia and Turkey Signed at San Stefano, 3 March 1878* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1878), 11-12. In the Treaty of San Stefano, both Russia and the Ottoman Empire defined the legal code of the Bulgarian principality as an “Organic Statute” rather than a constitution. Russia itself did not have a constitution and Abdülhamid II had already abolished the Ottoman constitution declared in 1876. The terminology created a debate at the Constituent Assembly of Tŭrnovo and some Bulgarian delegates such as Dragan Tsankov from Ruse insisted on calling the legal code a constitution, which was what it turned out to be.

met in Berlin, invited by Otto von Bismarck, to settle affairs in the East.⁴⁸⁵ The so-called Treaty of Berlin returned Macedonia to the Ottoman Empire and created another autonomous province, Eastern Rumelia, with Plovdiv as its capital. These redistributions cost the Bulgarian principality much of its territory, although it retained control of areas in the north, including the cities of Vidin, Tŭrnovo, Ruse, Varna, and Sofia. Two other major cities of the Ottoman Danube province, Nish and Tulcea, were excluded from the Bulgarian principality. As compensation for their participation in the war on the Russian side, Serbia gained control of the former and Romania, the latter. Because territories were so mixed, the newly drawn borders left a large Muslim population in Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia and a significant Bulgarian population in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸⁶ The treaty also reduced the terms of the Russian provisional government to nine months, and required the Russians to withdraw from Bulgaria immediately after the election of a prince and the drafting and ratification of a Bulgarian constitution.

Despite the territorial gains in the Treaty of Berlin, the Ottoman Empire refused to withdraw its military from Bulgaria before securing protection for its Muslim population. On February 8, 1879, the Russo-Ottoman Treaty of Peace, signed in Istanbul, confirmed the stipulations of the Treaty of San Stefano and the modifications of the Treaty of Berlin. Two months later, the Constituent Assembly in Tŭrnovo adopted the first

⁴⁸⁵ *Turkey No. 44 (1878)*.

⁴⁸⁶ In June 1878, Midhat Pasha was still in exile in London, but he published an article to inform the representatives of the Great Powers about Bulgaria, proposing a division of the Bulgarian principality between the East and West of the Yantara River, fifty kilometers west of Ruse. The base of this proposal was the predominant Muslim population in the cities such as Ruse, Silistra, Shumen and Varna in the East as opposed to the Bulgarian majority in Sofia, and Vidin in the West. See Midhat Pasha's "The Past, Present and Future of Turkey," 990-991.

Bulgarian constitution and the Grand National Assembly elected Alexander of Battenberg, a German prince, as prince of Bulgaria. Subsequently, the Russians began appointing Bulgarian governors and withdrew their military during the summer of 1879, leaving some officers in service of the Bulgarian army.

Under Russian rule, the Ottoman administrative system provided the institutional foundation for the provisional government in Ruse. Yet, this “new” government did not radically change the administrative system of the previous regime. Though Russians seized key government offices, they also attempted to control or expel the existing Ottoman ruling elite. Appointing Bulgarians to the powerful positions, the Russians worked primarily with Bulgarian intellectuals of the *Tanzimat* or the Bulgarian National Revival period. The new ruling class was composed of mostly merchants, young teachers, doctors, journalists, and lawyers who represented the urban, rather than rural, population. Many of them had close ties to the West and Russia through their education prior to the war. The provisional government allowed some non-Bulgarian mid and low-level officials to continue their jobs and selectively incorporated the *chorbaci* into the new ruling elite.

Nevertheless Russian rule in Ruse faced opposition from all ethno-religious groups, including Bulgarians. Heavy Russian bombardment during the war left the city in ruins and led to anti-Russian sentiment among all inhabitants, as people from all ethnic groups suffered and many abandoned their homes. Shortly after the armistice, the majority of Bulgarian refugees returned to the city. After nearly five hundred years of Ottoman rule and the systematic integrative projects of the *Tanzimat*, however,

Bulgarians did not immediately develop a strong sense of national identity. Although Bulgarians generally enjoyed the opportunities Russian rule offered, many, including some nationalists, were ambivalent towards the new government. They criticized the formation of the new government in which Russians worked primarily with the elite and imposed heavy taxes, as well as appointed Russian priests in some Bulgarian churches. They were particularly concerned about corruption in the administration and this led to a debate about who should run the public offices. Bulgarians were split between the old-experienced, mostly the existing Ottoman bureaucrats, and the young inexperienced new recruits, but the former took the leading role in Ruse.

Formation of the Russian Provisional Government

In the early days of the war of 1877-78, Russian Tsar Alexander II appointed a leading pan-Slav Prince Vladimir Cherkaskii to establish a new administration in Bulgaria under Russian supervision.⁴⁸⁷ Cherkaskii's primary goal was to coordinate the Russian administrative system with local institutions already operating in the region. At the beginning of the war, he set up a commission composed of three Bulgarians and three Russians to gather information and intelligence regarding the socio-political environment of Ottoman Bulgaria.⁴⁸⁸ After Cherkaskii's personal investigation and analysis of the Ottoman administrative system, legal codes, the organization of schools and churches, and the projected reforms by the Porte, he concluded that the Ottoman administrative system in the Danube province should remain in place. He generally found the system

⁴⁸⁷ According to C.E. Black, Cherkaskii's experience in the re-organization of Poland after the revolution of 1863 and in the settlement of the Russian Serf Question played an important role in his appointment. Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 52.

⁴⁸⁸ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 52-54.

satisfactory and attributed its faults to Ottoman administrators. Therefore, his intention was not to destroy the existing institutions, but to keep as many as possible intact while ending corruption in the system.⁴⁸⁹

As such, the Russian government had to modify the Ottoman system, which particularly concerned the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain, who feared Bulgaria's incorporation into the Russian political system. Communicating with the British government, Russian Prince Gorchakov stated on April 11, 1878 that the Russians planned to establish a constitutional government in Bulgaria, as they had in the Danubian principalities (Romania and Moldova) in 1830. Thus, he argued, rather than an extension of the Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, Russian leadership should contribute to the prosperity and independence of Bulgaria:

Hardly any change has been made in the existing institutions to which the country is accustomed. Care had only been taken that they should be carried out more effectually. The slight alterations which have been introduced are the abolition of the tax for exemption from the military service, the abolition of the tithes and the substitution in their place a more normal impost, the abolition of the farming of the taxes, which was the source of the principal abuses, and lastly the right given to the Christian inhabitants in mixed localities to challenge at election time those Muslims

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 53.

who have previously made themselves notorious by acts of fanatical persecution of the Christian population.⁴⁹⁰

Prince Gorchakov confirms Cherkaskii's assertion that the Russian government's primary concern was to use the existing institutions more effectively (with minor changes) in order to undermine the dominant position of Muslims in favor of Christian Bulgarians. In his statement, Gorchakov also explains how post-war conditions made the Russian provisional government necessary and inevitable, and thus they appointed Russian governors to the cities while educating Bulgarians in self-rule.⁴⁹¹

A Russian diplomatic note written by Ivan Krilov, however, points out Russia's intention to expand its sphere of influence in the Balkans. According to Krilov, Russia needs to work closely with Bulgarians and revive their dual identity, Bulgarian and Slavic.⁴⁹² In his report, Krilov mentions that the absence of powerful aristocracy would strengthen Russia's ability to control domestic affairs in Bulgaria. He argued that Russians would not have the same problems as they did with the Romanian aristocracy and even Serbian nationalists in autonomous Serbia. Krilov stated, "Unlike Serbians, Bulgarians did not have a strong national identity or a sense of national pride."⁴⁹³

Prince Gorchakov also compared Bulgaria with Romania in which Russia favored the aristocracy, maintaining all the privileges of the Boyars, and assuring Russian

⁴⁹⁰ *Turkey No.27 (1878) Further Correspondence Respecting the Preliminary Treaty of Peace between Russia and Turkey signed at San Stefano, 3 March 1878* (London: Harrison and Sons 1878), Document 2, 7.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴⁹² AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, Polit. Otdel, op. 244, 1879 g.d. 1, 1-33, cited in Zheĭnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 222.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, 224.

influence in these provinces through the elite.⁴⁹⁴ In Bulgaria, however, the Ottoman elite was diverse, including bureaucrats, merchants, wealthy *chorbaci* as well as nationalist intellectuals and revolutionaries, rather than an aristocracy. Nearly half of the population was non-Bulgarian, and in the eastern part of the principality, Muslims still composed the majority (see Figure 22).



Figure 22: Majority Population by Religious Group, 1876.⁴⁹⁵

Forming a new government, Russians found that the existing government structures did not preclude promoting pan-Slavism and ensuring their influence in Bulgaria. Working with the Constituent Assembly and local councils, Russian governors cooperated with the local elite, constituting an alternative form of Russian control that provided Bulgarians with a limited democratic experience. The Russians also found

⁴⁹⁴ A.W. Ward, G.W. Prothero and Stanley Leathes, *The Cambridge Modern History: Volume XI the Growth of Nationalities* (New York: The Macmillan Company 1909), 282.

⁴⁹⁵ Justin McCarthy, "Ignoring the People: The Effects of the Congress of Berlin" in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, 431.

Bulgarian nationalism and pan-Slavism a convenient doctrine to justify their actions in the principality. They planned to win over Orthodox Bulgarians, who, they thought, would support Russia as a Slavic ally. The initial plan, as mentioned in the Treaty of San Stefano, was a Christian government composed of Orthodox Bulgarians, excluding Muslims and other ethno-religious communities from key administrative offices.

One key reason why the Russians adopted the Ottoman administrative system is that the treaties did not allow the Russian administration sufficient time to systematically establish new Bulgarian state institutions. The Russian government knew that they would not be able to retain Bulgaria, and that their occupation would be provisional due to international pressure from the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers. Thus, the Russians focused on transferring power to their own supporters rather than establishing a new system.

In Ruse, Russian authorities began the task of creating a new government on February 8, 1878, when the Ottoman garrisons surrendered. They appointed a Russian governor to enforce the law and to collect taxes. They then started placing Bulgarian officials into existing Ottoman institutions such as the Administrative, Municipal, and Judicial Councils, the Police Department, and the Customs Office. During this process, Russian governors were confronted with the question of who should run government offices. They had difficulties finding the necessary cadres of Bulgarian professionals to fill the administrative positions for two reasons. First, the literacy rate among Bulgarians was low. Second, the Russians, suspicious of Ottoman officials and employees, even Bulgarians, were highly selective in their appointments. The Russians devised a strategy

to solve the issue, appointing their Bulgarian supporters to key positions and bringing in skilled labor from Russia to meet their immediate needs while simultaneously training Bulgarians for self-rule. The high level officials of the new administration in Ruse included: Military Governor, V. G. Zolotarev (who was later replaced with General A.A. Timochev and General V.P. Akimov); Vice-Military Governor, Daskalov (later replaced with A.A. Timochev); Chief of Staff, G. Kutuzov; Chief Administrator for the District of Ruse, Kapitan Logvenov; Chief of Police, Maīor Plets (later replaced with Kosta Stoianov); Head of the Judicial Council, Stoil Popov; Head of City Council, Atanas Garvalov; Head of Regional Administrative Council, Angel Simeonov (later replaced with S. Zlatev); Director of Customs, M. Stefanovich; and secretaries K. Kutinchev and I. Danev.⁴⁹⁶

The new administrative body consisted of a Russian governor and vice governor as well as Bulgarians appointed to existing Ottoman institutions. The new Bulgarian officials were mostly from Ruse. Although they were of different occupational backgrounds, they were all sympathetic to building a Bulgarian nation state. Many of them were from the educated elite that the Ottoman government created, and supported during the *Tanzimat*. For instance, the head of the Judicial Council, Stoil Popov, worked as a commercial agent in Istanbul until the mid-1860s when he moved to Ruse. Under Midhat Pasha, he became the editor of the Ottoman provincial newspaper *Tuna/Dunav* and took part in the foundation of the Bulgarian cultural center, *Chitalishte Zora*.

⁴⁹⁶ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 48 April 22, 1878, 3-4; Issue 56, May 20, 1878, 2-3; Issue 35, Feb 11, 1878, 2; Siromahova, *Ruse prez vŭzrakzdaneto*, 209-210.

Similarly, the head of the Regional Administrative Council, Simeon Zlatev, worked for the Ottoman municipal administration established on March 1, 1865 as part of Midhat Pasha's reforms. He was also co-founder of the *Chitalishte Zora*. In 1869, thanks to the funding from the Ottoman municipality in Ruse, Zlatev went to Tabor (now in the Czech Republic) to attend agricultural school and later continued his education in Prague. The municipality also funded Ivan Danev's education in Tabor. After graduation, he returned to Ruse and worked as a teacher. Danev took an active role in the war, siding with the Russians.⁴⁹⁷

Before the war, while in the service of the Ottoman government, a number of these educated Bulgarians were charged with being nationalist revolutionaries. For example, the Ottoman government exiled Simeon Zlatev to Sivas in Anatolia. Secretary K. Kutinchev's name appears in the Russian documents as a member of the nationalist committee that petitioned the Russian foreign office on December 25, 1876 and February 24, 1877 asking for support against the Ottoman government.⁴⁹⁸ The provisional government appointed Bulgarians to positions of power based on their education, experience, and proven political service to Russia.

As for the middle and lower level offices in Ruse, however, the new government acted pragmatically, trying not to trigger strong opposition from non-Bulgarians. To this end, the new government allowed some Muslim officials and even *zaptiyes* (police officers) to retain their current employment. Two prominent Turkish officials, Hasan

⁴⁹⁷ Zlatev, "The Members of Parliament of Rouse in the Constituent Assembly," 184-5.

⁴⁹⁸ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, 1-14, op. 11, 1876 g., d.6, pp.1-2; AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, V-A, op. 181/2, 1877, d.772, 35-38, in Zheinov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vünshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia*, 1865-1877, 181 and 194.

Efendi and Mustafa Efendi, for instance, continued working in the district administration. The newspaper *Bŭlgarin* accused Hasan and Mustafa of being corrupt, backing and even releasing some Turkish criminals. The newspaper recounted a story in which the governor of Razgrad requested the transfer of a Muslim criminal named Ali Kalenci detained in Ruse. After his interrogation, the Muslim police officers accompanied him on the way to Razgrad but they did not restrain him. While spending the night in a village called Torlak, Kalenci escaped. According to the newspaper, the Bulgarians blamed the Turkish officers and harshly criticized them. The Russian governor, however, did not want to escalate tensions with the Turks, and the vice-governor assured the people that he would discuss the issue with the Russian Imperial Commissioner to prevent such incidents in the future.⁴⁹⁹ The newspaper indicates that the Turkish officers continued their jobs under the provisional government and the Russian governor cautiously moderated tensions with them, even though they were accused of releasing a criminal.

The formation of the new government raised questions about the fate of the *chorbaci*, a group that had enjoyed a privileged position under Ottoman rule. According to a report from British ambassador A.H. Layard, soon after the Treaty of San Stefano, the Russian authorities ordered the *chorbaci* in Bulgaria and Rumelia to assemble in Edirne. They then asked the *chorbaci* to sign a statement addressed to the Russian Tsar Alexander indicating their gratitude for what he had done for the Bulgarians. According to the reports, most refused and consequently were imprisoned. The Russians even exiled one Christian notable from Ruse to Siberia after he refused to yield to their threats. He

⁴⁹⁹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 78, August 6, 1878, 2.

was released, however, in Bucharest when his exile proved unfavorable in Bulgarian public opinion.⁵⁰⁰ The report does not provide the details of the public reaction to the Russian mistreatment of the *chorbaci*, but it does note the continuing influence of this elite group on other Christian Bulgarians.

Russians selectively incorporated the *chorbaci* into the new ruling elite based on their presumed loyalty to the nation-state. The newspaper *Bŭlgarin* reported that the majority of the *chorbaci* in the Danube province either died or were killed by other Bulgarians during the war, but the elite class did not disappear completely.⁵⁰¹ As Ruse remained under Ottoman control throughout the war, the *chorbaci* in the city did not face direct confrontation with the Russian army or their Bulgarian counterparts on the battlefield. After Russian occupation, the new government cautiously cooperated with them, labeling some as traitors because of their pro-Ottoman stance. *Bŭlgarin*, for example, listed three of the surviving prominent *chorbaci*, P. Zlatov, Chorapchiev, and K. Marinovich. The newspaper described Chorapchiev and Marinovich as rich, honest, and excellent people, who gained the people's trust and returned to political life. Marinovich, a wealthy merchant, represented Ruse in San Stefano and later in the national assembly. Russian authorities, however, rejected Zlatov's attempts to take part in the new government, and labeled him as a traitor who collaborated with the Ottomans.⁵⁰²

The Russian governor also continued working with the existing administrative councils or *meclis*, but appointed Bulgarian directors to the higher councils. For instance,

⁵⁰⁰ *Turkey No.42 (1878)*, Document 15, 28.

⁵⁰¹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 56, May 20, 1878, 2-3.

⁵⁰² *Ibid*, 2-3.

he appointed Simeonov as the head of the Administrative Council, and Popov as the head of the Judicial Council.⁵⁰³ The administrative councils were composed of elected and appointed members, and the representatives of religious communities who were invited to specific events. Only councils in the villages and city districts, which were exclusively composed of single ethno-religious communities (segregated under Ottoman rule), enjoyed more autonomy and held significant power over local affairs.⁵⁰⁴

The electoral system for the administrative and judicial councils of Ottoman rule remained with only minor adjustments under Russian rule. All members of the councils, except for the representatives of religious communities, were elected by popular vote. There were two electoral groups: passive and active voters. Passive voters included all men over twenty years of age who owned real estate or businesses. In addition to meeting these basic requirements, active voters needed to be literate and at least thirty years of age. In elections, passive voters elected active voters in the proportion of one to every fifty households. These active voters then met at district centers to select the members of the council. The same system was used to elect the members of the county, municipal, or village councils. Especially in the judicial system, two-thirds of the members in the five provincial courts were elected by similar methods.⁵⁰⁵

Both the Ottoman and Russian electoral systems had age, property, and residency requirements to vote, and even higher property requirements and a literacy qualification to run for office. The Russians, however, changed the voting age from eighteen to twenty

⁵⁰³ Siromahova, *Ruse prez vŭzrakzdaneto*, 209-10.

⁵⁰⁴ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 55-57.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 55-57.

and did not require voters or those who ran for offices to be taxpayers, in part because they had changed the taxation system after the war.⁵⁰⁶ This complicated, multi-phase election system allowed the government to exercise power over the councils as needed. Although the Russian provisional government attempted to give a considerable share of the administration to Bulgarians in order to prepare them for self-government, in most cases they struggled to find candidates to fill the available positions who met the literacy qualifications.⁵⁰⁷

The Russians also restored Ottoman financial institutions in Ruse. After lifting the navigation blockade on the Danube imposed during the war, the city once again flourished as a commercial center. The auxiliary branch of the Imperial Ottoman Bank was re-opened and resumed business operations in early April 1878.⁵⁰⁸ The Agricultural Bank, established by Midhat Pasha in the 1860s, however, suffered severely during and after the war. In many cases, authorities or private speculators carried away cash and destroyed records. People who borrowed money refused to pay it back and many Muslim borrowers had fled without repaying their loans.⁵⁰⁹

After the Treaty of San Stefano, the Russian provisional government took measures to restore financial institutions and ensure their future economic wellbeing using the remaining records of the banks. When bank records were not available, special commissions, assisted by former functionaries of the bank, took charge of restoring the

⁵⁰⁶ The Ottoman electoral system had a requirement of being a taxpayer of at least fifty *piasters* in order to vote, and one hundred *piasters* to run for the village council. The amount increased for higher offices. The Russians dropped the tax.

⁵⁰⁷ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 55-57.

⁵⁰⁸ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 46, April 5, 1878, 3.

⁵⁰⁹ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 209.

institutions, traveling from village to village and inviting the inhabitants to declare their debts. While some people willingly acknowledged their liabilities, the commissions ultimately failed to reconstruct the banks' records. Despite the failure of the commissions to establish accurate financial information, on June 20, 1878, the Russians issued a regulation restoring the name and system of the Agricultural Bank as it had been during the Ottoman period, working under the supervision of the new provincial council and their permanent committees.⁵¹⁰

While restoring financial institutions, Russia also wanted to improve economic relations with the Bulgarian principality. According to a diplomatic note by Ivan Krilov, Russia had good potential to trade with Ruse:

Ruse imports far more goods than it exports. The local merchants sell grains, wool, and other textiles, but they buy much more from other countries. For instance, salt came from Romania, and the Ottoman government imposed a seventy percent tax on it. There is no financial institution to provide locals with low-interest loans. The interest rate is high, around 12-18 percent. Instead of Austrian capital and technology, Russia should bring skilled labor and work with Bulgarians. Ruse can benefit from the natural resources in the region such as coal and metals. It would be a good place to develop iron, wool, cheese, and alcohol

⁵¹⁰ *Agricultural Bank of Bulgaria*, 13-16.

industries. Like Austria, Russia can use river transportation to improve economic relations with this city.⁵¹¹

Krilov argued that Russia could be an alternative of Austria in commerce by investing in the region and benefit from the natural resources and local industries.

One of the major problems the Russian provisional government confronted as they began establishing the new government was the former bureaucratic language, which had been Ottoman Turkish. In Ruse, there were still a large number of Turkish, Armenian, and Jewish employees in government offices who spoke neither Bulgarian nor Russian.⁵¹² On September 4, 1878, the Russian provisional government ruled to regulate language use. On September 15, the Bulgarian newspaper *Maritsa* published the new regulations, which declared that the official language of Bulgaria was to be Bulgarian. While in both official communications and common use, many Turkish language words were regularly employed, the new law directed governors to use the following words in all official communications; for county (“Sancak”), the Russified Latin word “Gubernia;” for Governor of Sancak (“Mutesarraf”), the Russified Latin word “Gubernator;” for district (“Kaza”), the Bulgarian word “Okrushie”; for Governor of Kaza (“Kaymakam”), the Russo-Bulgarian “Okrushen Natshalnik”; for sub-district (“Nahia”), the Russo-Bulgarian “Okolia”; for director (“Mudir”), the Russo-Bulgarian “Okolen Natshalnik”; for member (“Aza”), the Slav word “Starai”; for Customs

⁵¹¹ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, Polit. Otdel, op. 244, 1879 g.d. 1, 1-33, cited in Zheĭnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 219-223.

⁵¹² The first Bulgarian governor of Ruse Ivan Ivanov gave a speech to the officials in Bulgarian and it was translated into Turkish for the non-Bulgarian officers, *Slavianin*, Issue 7, June 2, 1879, 55.

(“Gumrukthane”), the Slav word “Mitnitza” while the duty on foreign goods was to be called “Mito” and the duty on drinks, etc. was “Akcis” (“excise” Russified).⁵¹³

After changing the official language, the Russians restored the Ottoman Appeals Court, which was the highest court in the province. Under Ottoman rule, the *sancak* (counties) also had a court of appeals, composed of six elected members, three Muslim and three non-Muslim, and the *Kadi* (Ottoman Judge) or the *Naib* (representative of the *mufti*) as chair.⁵¹⁴ The provisional government appointed the following to the Court of Appeals in Ruse; Chair: Vasil Mishaïkov; Members Vasil Diamandiev, Andreï Manolov, Nikolaï Minkov, Ĭosif G. Dañelov; Secretary Toma Kürdkziev; and assistant Secretary Zahari Stoianov.⁵¹⁵ The new appointments were usually accompanied by ostentatious ceremonies performed by the governor and the Bulgarian Archbishop. This was also the case at the swearing-in and installment of six judges to the new Court of Appeals on September 20, 1878. The governor invited representatives of foreign countries to these official events.⁵¹⁶

Unlike the Ottoman judicial system, however, the Court of Appeals in Ruse consisted of appointed members all of whom were ethnically Bulgarian. According to Black, not only judges but also the personnel of the courts were entirely Bulgarian.⁵¹⁷ The

⁵¹³ *Turkey No.54 (1878), Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey*, Document 108, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1878), 85.

⁵¹⁴ Petrov, “Tanzimat for the Countryside,” 441; Selimođlu, “Osmanli Devleti’nde Tuna Vilayeti (1864-1878),” 69.

⁵¹⁵ The newspaper *Bŭlgarin* also mentions the following names as the members of the Appeals Court: Kostaki Marinovich, Teodor Markov, Georgi Malcheoglu, (all from Ruse), Aleko Hadzhikonstantinov (a famous writer) and Marin Beshkov from Svishtov. For the details about the Court of Appeals, see Ivan Markov Ivanov’s “Sŭzdavane na Apelativnata Sŭdebna Intitutsiia v Ruse,” 231.

⁵¹⁶ *Turkey No.54 (1878)*, 85.

⁵¹⁷ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 57.

provisional government primarily filled this court with the Bulgarian nationalists. These men, most of who had studied in Russia, had actively participated in the war.⁵¹⁸ The first president, Iakov Gerov, actually attained a position in the Ottoman Appeals Court in Istanbul before the war of 1877-78 thanks to the support of the Russian ambassador Ignatiev. During the war, he served as a translator for Colonel Artamonov. His experience with the Ottoman judicial system and support for the Russian army may have contributed to his appointment as the president of the Appeals Court in Ruse. Vasil Mishaïkov, who attended law school at Moscow State University, later replaced Gerov.⁵¹⁹

The newspaper *Slavianin* (*Slav*) described the members of the Court of Appeals as distinguished, honest, and intelligent people who were, however, despite their best intentions, inexperienced in law. Yet the newspaper also boldly stated that among the courts, only the Court of Appeals was fair in its decisions and dedicated to the execution of the law. Because of their dedication, despite lack of experience, the newspaper recommended that the Ministry of Justice consider keeping the staff and officials beyond the terms of their appointments. The newspaper also drew attention to the state of the new government's finances. The new government did not have enough money to pay these judicial officials, who only received their salaries sporadically and infrequently, and in

⁵¹⁸ Among the other members, Andreï Manolov also studied at Moscow University and worked as a teacher in Gabrova where he was arrested for taking part in the April Uprising. During the war, Manolov provided the Russians with a topographic map that he prepared to guide the Russian army. Vasil Diamandiev was born in Edirne and studied mathematics in Moscow and Kiev. He taught in Macedonia and Bessarabia. He was an active member of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee in Romania and initiated the organization that helped the Bulgarian volunteers. İosif G. Daïnelov was a follower of Rakovski and a participant in the struggle for the Bulgarian church. After the war, he became the governor in Plevn. Between 1880 and 1882, he became the president of the provincial courts in Silistra, Veliko Tŭrnovo, and Varna. Toma Kŭrdzhiev and Zahari Stoyanov were famous revolutionaries in Ruse. For details about the members of the Appeals Court, see Ivanov's "Sŭzdavane na Apelativnata Sŭdebna Intitutsiia v Ruse," 232-233.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, 231-233.

most cases with long delays.⁵²⁰ After mentioning their economic hardships, the author recommended the following salaries for them (in *francs*):

The Court of Appeals		The District Court
President	7000	5000
Vice-President	6000	4000
Member	4800	3600
Secretary	3000	2400
Assistant Secretary	1800	1800

Table 2: Salaries for the Court Personnel.⁵²¹

Around that time, a Russian captain in the Bulgarian Navy in Ruse received 2,400 *francs* per year along with free lodging.⁵²² A *mufti* only earned 2,000 *francs* annually. The salaries the newspaper recommended for the members of the Court of Appeals appear to be inflated, possibly showing the author's bias towards the court members. Despite the implied criticism, Russians continued reorganizing the existing government institutions and making new appointments. Based on the Treaty of Berlin, however, the Russian provisional government had two major responsibilities in the Bulgarian principality: to build a national militia and create an Organic Law.

Building a National Militia

Although the term “national militia” was used in the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, the Russians actually built a Bulgarian national army. Even before the war of 1877-78, some prominent Bulgarian nationalists such as Ivan Kishelski and Kiryak Tsankov had already suggested this idea. During the war, a number of Bulgarian volunteers who sympathized with the Russian cause participated in critical battles at

⁵²⁰ *Ibid*, 231.

⁵²¹ *Ibid*, 231.

⁵²² BOA, HR-SYS, Dosya 313, Gömlek 1, s. 15/1, and 8/1.

Shipka Pass in August 1877 and Shenovo in January 1878. These voluntary forces consisted of the members of revolutionary organizations and their armed groups were called the *cheta*. Although the majority of these troops died on the battlefield, those that remained formed the backbone of the Bulgarian National Army.⁵²³ In April 1878, Dondukov-Korsakov started building an army in Bulgaria and deployed six infantry and two cavalry divisions from Russia to train the new recruits. The Treaty of Berlin changed these initial plans as it reduced the territory of Bulgaria into a small, northern principality. This territorial loss, however, created an even stronger desire among Bulgarians to form higher-level military units and armed forces that would work towards unification with Eastern Rumelia, which they called Southern Bulgaria.⁵²⁴

In Ruse, some Bulgarian volunteer forces joined the Russian army upon the surrender of the Ottoman garrison.⁵²⁵ The provisional government recruited more soldiers from Christian Bulgarian families in the city and required each family to send one or two available young men.⁵²⁶ In order to bolster popular support, local newspapers often pointed to the eagerness of these men to join the army.⁵²⁷ By the end of summer 1878, many young Bulgarians had enrolled as soldiers. The British consul, Robert Reade, reported that he heard numerous stories in which the new recruits abused their power,

⁵²³ Doinov, "The Participation of the Bulgarian Volunteer Force," 173-74.

⁵²⁴ Iliia Iliev and Momtchil Ionov, "The Influence of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 on Balkan Armies," in *Insurrections, Wars and the Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, 362-363.

⁵²⁵ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 35, February 11, 1878, 2.

⁵²⁶ *Turkey No. 54 (1878)*, Document 108, 85.

⁵²⁷ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 74, July 23, 1878, 2-3.

harassing non-Bulgarians, particularly Muslims.⁵²⁸ The new government actually intended to enlist non-Bulgarians, but the Muslim community resisted conscription. The French Vice-Consul, M. Feret, reported that soon after Alexander of Battenberg became the prince of Bulgaria, a Muslim delegation from Ruse petitioned him, requesting military service exemption for a few years.⁵²⁹ The prince accepted the petition, but after the Russian's departure, the Bulgarian parliament passed a law in 1880 mandating that all adult male citizens were required to enlist in military service—a law that was extended to Muslim citizens in 1881.⁵³⁰

The demolition of the Ottoman fortresses became another major conflict between the Ottoman government and the Bulgarian principality. The Russians made use of the existing fortresses in Ruse when they established their headquarters. According to the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, however, the fortresses on the Danube were to be razed at the expense of the principality within at least a year, sooner if possible. The treaties also prohibited the construction of new military structures.⁵³¹ Before the principality demolished the fortresses in Bulgaria, however, the Ottoman government had the right to evacuate remaining war materials and other effects belonging to the Ottoman army.⁵³² Despite the stipulations of the treaties, the new government was, in practice,

⁵²⁸ *Turkey No.53 (1878), Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey*, Inclosure in Document 150, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1878), 147.

⁵²⁹ Archives des Affaires Etrangères de France, A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turquie-Rousschuk 1876-1879, Vol. III, ff.431-432-433, cited in Bilal Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri: Belgeler Cilt II, Bir Geçiş Yılı 1879* (Ankara: TTK 1989), 417-18.

⁵³⁰ Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)*, 152.

⁵³¹ See Article XII of the Treaty of San Stefano and Article XI of the Treaty of Berlin.

⁵³² The Ottoman army evacuated Ruse right after the armistice and moved its guns and military equipment to Shumen. The British consul Robert Reade reported on August 21, 1878 that the Ottoman government

hesitant to comply. The Russian provisional government failed to demolish not only the Ottoman fortress in Ruse but also military structures in cities all along the Danube to preserve Russian military interest.

In Ruse, the demolition of the Ottoman military structures created tensions between Muslims and Bulgarians as detailed in a court case about stones taken from the Ottoman fortress. According to the newspaper *Drevnia i Novaia Bŭlgaria*, on March 20, 1879, the *muhtar* (head) of the Turkish quarter in Ruse appealed to the court claiming that some Bulgarians had stolen stones from the Ottoman fortress. He provided a list of thirteen suspects, including both men and women. Based on Ottoman law, Article 230, the judge ruled that it was illegal to damage state property and to use stolen goods as construction materials. The suspects defended themselves in various ways. One of them stated that according to the Berlin Treaty, this fortress was supposed to be demolished, and since the government had not razed it, people had a right to do it on their own. Others asserted that they only used the stones in their gardens and not for commercial purposes, pointing out that some government offices also used them to construct sidewalks. The wives of the arrested men also participated in the trial, supporting their husbands by saying that they had purchased the stones from others. The suspects also stated that they did not receive any warning or notification from either the *muhtar* or from the local government that it was illegal to sell or buy public property. The suspects also argued that since the government left the fortress without a single soldier, it no longer had meaning

continued transporting the guns from Shumen to Varna by the railroad, *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Document 83, 72.

and value. Given the government's negligence, the defendants claimed they could not be accused of theft. The judge responded that even if the government left the fortress defenseless, stealing or trading public property was illegal. He also accused the police of not preventing this event, even though they knew it was illegal. He then ruled that anyone who procured the stones, whether knowingly or unknowingly, by either stealing or buying them, had to return them within a week. If the stones were used in public works and could not be returned, their value would be calculated and paid to the treasury. The defendants had the right to go to the Court of Appeals until October 23.⁵³³

Whether the defendants actually appealed their case is unknown, but this trial indicates that the courts in Ruse continued using the Ottoman legal code. It also reveals a conflict of interest between Ottoman foreign policy and the Muslim community in Ruse. While the Ottoman government constantly pressured the new government to demolish the fortresses in accordance with the Berlin Treaty, the Muslim *muhtar* was concerned about damaging the fortress. The defense transcripts of the suspects show how knowledgeable Bulgarians were about the details of the Berlin Congress, justifying their actions as an implementation of the treaty.

As it had previously, under Russian rule Ruse maintained its military importance as a port city on the Danube, connected to other cities by railroad. Russian military officers and volunteers officially left the principality in the summer of 1879, but they continued their direct support and involvement in the formation of the army. In Ruse, the Bulgarian government even repaired the fortresses and converted the Ottoman fortress

⁵³³ *Drevnia i Novaia Bŭlgaria*, Issue 3, December 10, 1879, 22-23.

Levent Tabya into an arsenal by importing a large quantity of arms from Russia. The Ottoman Empire often protested Russian military assistance and sought diplomatic support from the Great Powers to prevent armament and Russian military establishments in Bulgaria. In most cases, however, their efforts failed because of a lack of united European support.⁵³⁴

The Russians turned the Ruse port into a center for the Danube fleet, harboring both Russian ships and vessels captured from the Ottomans (see Figure 23). After the departure of the Russians, the Russian Naval Gazette, *Kronstadt*, published the details of the fleet in Ruse on October 22, 1879.

Bulgaria possesses at Rustchuk a small foundry and engineer works, established by Russian naval officers during the last Turkish war. The chief of the Bulgarian Naval Department is Captain Koukevitch, who temporarily commands the ‘Opyt,’ the yacht of the Prince of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian flotilla at present consists of the— ‘Kelasuri,’ schooner, Captain Leontieff commander, Prince Mevracordati assistant; ‘Vzryo,’ steamer; Captain Shismaieff commander; ‘Poradim,’ steamer, Captain Feodosieff; Gorny Studin, Lieutenant Ball, and the chief engineer of the flotilla is Sub-Lieutenant Maskin, of the corps of Russian Naval Engineers.

⁵³⁴ See Chapter 6 for details.

All of the above Russian naval officers were formerly actively employed in the Russian navy and have now obtained a leave of absence for service in ‘commercial’ capacities.⁵³⁵

After the nine-month period that the Treaty of Berlin allowed the provisional government, the Russian military presence changed forms and many of Russian naval officers were employed in the developing Bulgarian fleet as civil officers. It is likely that this was an attempt to ease the international pressure on Russia to withdraw its military from the Bulgarian principality. Under Russian rule, the Bulgarian principality built a national army, which had increasingly developed into a major military force in the region. In addition to building a national militia, creating a constitution defined in the treaty as the “Organic Statute” was the other major task of the Russian provisional government.



Figure 23: The Bulgarian Fleet in Ruse.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ *Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey*, Part XLIII, Document 103 (London: Great Britain Foreign Office, November 1879), 70-71.

⁵³⁶ Mariana Bŭrcheva, *Prekŭvelitsite na edin Rusnak v Bŭlgariia 1885-1886, spomeni na morskii ofitser Esper Serebriakov* (Ruse: Avangard, 2005), 79.

The Representation of Ruse in the Constituent Assembly

From February 10 to April 16, 1879, the Constituent Assembly met in Tŭrnovo to draft the constitution of the Bulgarian principality. Twelve members, both elected and appointed, were a part of the delegation from Ruse to the Constituent Assembly. Six of them came from the district council, trade court, provincial court, and the Bulgarian church; four were chosen in two-stage elections; and the Russian Imperial Commissioner appointed two (see Table 3).

Grigorii	Metropolitan
Nikola Stoichev	Chairman of the Provincial Court
Stoil Popov	Chairman of the Trade Court
Simeon Zlatev	Chairman of the District Court
Pavel Bratoev	Chairman of the District Council
Ivan Danev	Chairman of the District Council
DraganTsankov	Elected
Todor Hadzhistanchev	Elected
Petŭr Chernev	Elected
Ivan Hadzhipenchovich	Elected
Raicho Karolev	Appointed
Emin Agha	Appointed

Table 3: The Representatives of Ruse in the Constituent Assembly.⁵³⁷

According to Black, the Constitutional Assembly was a “truly representative body,” and there was no reason to consider the constitution an overt extension of Russian foreign policy.⁵³⁸ However, in Ruse, the Russians exercised control over the delegation, directly appointing two members and choosing five others from the high-ranking officials they had previously employed. Grigorii’s role as a religious leader earned him a position,

⁵³⁷ Zlatev, “The Members of Parliament of Rouse in the Constituent Assembly,” 183-184.

⁵³⁸ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 267.

and only four members were chosen by popular vote. According to the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, in localities where Bulgarians were mixed with other ethnic groups, the rights and interests of those minority populations were to be respected in both elections and in the preparation of a constitution.⁵³⁹ Emin Agha, however, was the only non-Bulgarian member of the delegation from Ruse in the Constituent Assembly. The Russians appointed him to represent the Muslim community of Ruse, about 39-40 percent of the population. The Jewish and Armenian communities, about 10-11 percent of the population, were not represented in the Assembly.

With both elected and appointed members, the delegation brought different and conflicting personalities together. One elected member, Ivan Hadzhipenchovich, had held important positions in the Ottoman administration as a municipal, school, and church official and had been a member of the Ottoman Council that had ordered the execution of Vasil Levski, the Bulgarian national hero. An appointed member, Raicho Karolev, had served on a commission to investigate Turkish atrocities against Bulgarians before the war of 1877-78, and later the Ottoman government accused him of revolutionary activities and arrested him in Gabrovo.⁵⁴⁰ The election of Hadzhipenchovich by popular vote was an indication of the continuing political power of the former Ottoman elite while Russians appointed the Bulgarian nationalist Karolev to the delegation.

In the delegation, Western educated Bulgarians took a leading role in Tŭrnovo. As mentioned before, Ivan Danev and Simeon Zlatev studied in Tabor, and later Danev

⁵³⁹ *Turkey No.22 (1878)*, Article VII, 12; *Turkey No. 44 (1878)*, Article IV, 17.

⁵⁴⁰ Zlatev, "The Members of Parliament of Rousse in the Constituent Assembly," 186.

continued his education in Paris and Zlatev in Prague. Danev worked as an editor for the Ottoman provincial newspaper *Tuna/Dunav*, while Zlatev worked for the municipality. Nikola Stoichev attended the English College in Malta and then worked for the railroad company in Ruse from 1866 to 1877.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, Todor Hadzhistanchev went to secondary school in Austria, Raicho Karolev studied theology in Kiev, and Petur Chernev went to Robert College, the American educational establishment in Istanbul.⁵⁴² Dragan Tsankov worked as a teacher at the French College in Istanbul where he established close connections with French and Polish Catholic missionaries.⁵⁴³

In fact, *Tanzimat* ideology itself promoted Western education and fought for a constitutional regime, eventually resulting in the first Ottoman constitution in 1876. The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, however, interrupted the democratization process in the Ottoman Empire, which caused the suspension of the constitution and Abdülhamid II's subsequent authoritarian regime. After the war, these educated Bulgarians of the *Tanzimat* continued their struggle for a constitutional regime, but under Russian rule. In Tŭrnovo, the delegates of the Constituent Assembly took charge of writing a constitution, in part based on Ottoman law, but also on Belgian and Serbian constitutions as well as custom.⁵⁴⁴ The political fragmentation of Bulgarians during the Ottoman reforms was reflected in the early Post-Ottoman period. While many Bulgarians were pleased with the

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 184-186.

⁵⁴² Ibid, 184-186.

⁵⁴³ He became the leader of the Uniate Movement, which some Bulgarians sought to unite with Rome in order to win an independent church. See Mercia Macdermott, *A History of Bulgaria 1393-1885* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 157.

⁵⁴⁴ M. Perry Duncan, *Stefan Stambolov and the Emergence of Modern Bulgaria 1870-1895* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 39.

opportunities the Russian provisional government offered, some, including former pro-Ottoman elites and even some nationalists, did not welcome the ways in which Russians transformed the existing system into the Bulgarian national government and their growing influence.

Bulgarian Opposition to Russian Rule

As explored in Chapter 4, the war of 1877-78 did not elicit much Bulgarian popular support for Russians from Bulgarians. Rather, Bulgarians in Ruse suffered from the Russian bombardment just as much as other ethno-religious groups. After the surrender of the Ottoman garrison, they had no choice but to cooperate. The goal of the Russian government was to change the dominance of Muslim Ottomans in favor of Bulgarian Christians, who then generally enjoyed a privileged position under Russian rule. Some Bulgarians, however, were hesitant to support Russians and their Pan-Slavist agenda and often criticized the new taxes, administrative appointments, and Russian involvement in their church.

Since the early days of the occupation, Russians were struck by the material prosperity in Bulgaria. Some noted with irony that they were “liberating” a people who were better off than Russians of the same class.⁵⁴⁵ Benefiting from the local economy, Russians started collecting taxes from all locals to compensate for the cost of the war. According to the British Vice-Consul Frank F. Sankey, the taxes imposed by the Russians soon became a heavy burden on all inhabitants of the principality, including Bulgarians, stating, “The aim of the Russian civil authority seems to be to squeeze out

⁵⁴⁵ See Chapter 4.

enough money in taxes and fines to defray the enormous salaries granted to officials, and that of the military to destroy as much property as possible.”⁵⁴⁶ Sankey then further argues that the financial burden of the Russian occupation displeased all ethno-religious communities, which, he thought, would hail the departure of the Russians as a deliverance and blessing.⁵⁴⁷

Russian involvement in Bulgarian religious affairs created other tensions between the two groups. The British consul, Robert Reade, reported from Razgrad, another town within the *sancak* of Ruse, that Russian involvement in Bulgarian churches created tensions but Bulgarians were hesitant to object.

There is one Bulgarian church under the ministry of several native priests. The Russians have recently introduced there two of their priests, who have not only strictly forbidden the ministry of the Bulgarians, but have substituted the entire Russian ceremonial for what has been hitherto observed there. This, as your Excellency may imagine, has created deep irritation amongst the Bulgarians, who, however, I am informed, are too timid to take any open notice of the matter.⁵⁴⁸

After the religious tolerance enjoyed by all groups under Ottoman rule and the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870, the Bulgarians did not welcome Russian appointments in their church. But they also feared discussing the issue publicly or taking the problem to higher authorities because of Russian pressure.

⁵⁴⁶ *Turkey No.42 (1878)*, Inclosure 2 in Document 33, 58.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, Inclosure in Document 14, 27.

Even Bulgarian newspapers such as *Bŭlgarin*, which had strongly supported Russia during the war, started criticizing the provisional government. They published various articles about the formation of the new government and popular ethnic Bulgarian opinion of the new administrative appointments. According to an article published on April 22, 1878, many Bulgarians were disappointed that they were excluded from the process of forming the new government, since Russian authorities cooperated only with Bulgarian elites.⁵⁴⁹ This indicates the Bulgarian expectation of political representation, a concept that Bulgarian nationalists used as part of their nationalist critiques of Ottoman rule. New, high-ranking officials were criticized for being young, incompetent, and corrupt. Pointing out their bad reputations and lack of experience, *Bŭlgarin* stated, “People do not trust most of these new officials, and think that they are paid for nothing. They share their ideas with family and friends, but they are hesitant to discuss them in public with their undefined legal rights.”⁵⁵⁰ In line with Consul Reade’s observation, *Bŭlgarin* also highlights Russian pressure on the Bulgarians, which suppressed any critique of Russian governance. As the British Vice-Consul Sankey notes:

Even the least thoughtful of the Bulgars can see, from the taste they have had of Russian institutions, that their so-called liberation would subject them to far heavier burdens than any they had to bear under Turkish rule, and that they would only be taken from under the mild despotic Government of the Sultan and placed under the reverse of mild rule of the

⁵⁴⁹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 48, April 22, 1878, 3-4.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 3-4.

despotic Czars. They now, having of necessity broken with the Turks, hold with the Russians from necessity and not from choice.⁵⁵¹

While he may have overstated his case, at least a portion of Bulgarians perceived Russian rule not as liberating, but instead at least as despotic as Ottoman rule.

In Ruse, Bulgarians particularly opposed some of the appointments the Russian generals made in the government offices. The provisional government, for example, transformed the Ottoman *zaptiye* (gendarme) into a new police force with a Bulgarian Police Chief named Kosta Stoianov. According to *Bŭlgarin*, people criticized Kosta for being too young and incompetent for the responsibilities of his position. They also often complained about the way police officers treated common residents of Ruse, even the victims of verbal assault and beatings.⁵⁵² Involving Kosta, *Bŭlgarin* reported two incidents, described as “scandals,” that illustrated continuing ties between Bulgarians and Turks as well as police corruption. In the first instance, a Turkish man robbed a Bulgarian woman and stole her valuables. After her petition to the governor, Kosta went to the thief’s house with the victim, who hoped to get her belongings back. Kosta, however, sided with the thief, enjoying coffee made by the suspect’s wife. He even went so far as to let the robber curse at the victim. He then left the house without conducting an investigation.⁵⁵³ The newspaper obviously thought that the Bulgarian police should be defending the Bulgarian woman, and more generally, the Bulgarian population from Ottoman “outsiders.” Kosta’s motivation, however, was not necessarily nationalistic but

⁵⁵¹ *Turkey No. 42 (1878)*, Inclosure 2 in Document 33, 57-58.

⁵⁵² *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 48, April 22, 1878, 3-4.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid*, 3-4.

rather personal, likely to be accepting a bribe, as described in another incident *Bŭlgarin* recounted. In the second incident, the new government ruled to reduce the number of bars in Ruse. Kosta closed many of these establishments, but one day after closing the bars, they were suspiciously reopened and back in business. Kosta had apparently accepted a bribe of 50-60 rubles to keep them open. After recounting these incidents, *Bŭlgarin* laments, “a young Bulgarian officer [Kosta] led a lot of people to think that the former police chief, Ismail Agha, was better, even though he was a Turk.”⁵⁵⁴ This indicates that some Bulgarians were more concerned about corruption in the new police department than the ethnic background of the Police Chief. Because of complaints about Kosta, the Council of Justice started an investigation in May 1878.⁵⁵⁵

In other cities such as Plovdiv and Edirne, Russian-backed Bulgarian police forces instigated violent attacks against other ethno-religious communities. The British consul, John E. Blunt, blamed the police for the plunder of primarily Turkish property in Edirne on March 18, 1878. He stated, “The town police force, organized by the Russians, and which was composed almost wholly of Bulgarians, so far from being means of preserving orders, appears to have taken the lead in the work of plunder.”⁵⁵⁶ Similarly, the British Vice-Consul Charles J. Calvert reported from Plovdiv on March 18, 1878 that the situation was comparable in his region.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 3-4.

⁵⁵⁵ One reason for the closure of the bars might be the high number of Romanian prostitutes in the city. They followed the Russian army, filling houses, hotels, and bars and many of them stayed. This eventually became a concern for many Bulgarians, expecting the Council of Justice to be strict about these prostitutes. *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 56, May 20, 1878, 2-3.

⁵⁵⁶ *Turkey No. 42 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 9, 21.

To this hour, the Turkish females are continually liable to outrage and dare not make any complaint. The new Bulgarian police are reported to be most active in these shameful proceedings, including their own inclinations as well as pandering to those Russian officers by whom they are liberally paid for their vile services.⁵⁵⁷

The new Bulgarian police took an active role in crimes committed against non-Bulgarians, in this case, crimes against Turks. Compared to the new police forces in these cities, the regiment in Ruse seems to represent an exception, where some Muslim officers maintained their jobs after the regime change and the Bulgarian police chief interacted in a friendly way with the Muslim community. Plovdiv and Edirne came under Russian occupation during the war and the battles between two armies led to large-scale disorder and violence. The nonviolent surrender of Ruse after the armistice significantly contributed to the continuity of the existing peaceful coexistence in the city. The Russian government did not wish to trigger opposition from the non-Bulgarian majority in the city.

In addition to the police department, criticism in Ruse also centered on the city council, which some citizens accused of not adequately regulating commerce. *Bŭlgarin* provided a detailed transcript of debates about numerous problems with pharmacies in town during the post-war period. The inhabitants of Ruse expected the city council to form a committee to regulate the locations and operations of pharmacies. They specifically complained about a large pharmacy owned by Moresh and Siabi, whom they

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, Inclosure in Document 7, 17.

suspected withheld or gave patients the incorrect prescriptions. The residents of Ruse accused this establishment of being more like “a bar with bottles, glasses, boxes, and spider webs” than a proper pharmacy.⁵⁵⁸ Another young pharmacist, Iakov Angelov, opened his own pharmacy, but Moresh drove him out of business by opening another pharmaceutical business on the same street. Angelov asked the municipal council for regulations, but the council sided with Moresh. The local newspapers thus criticized the municipal council for not overseeing pharmacies and creating an unfair market in which young Bulgarians such as Angelov could not run their own businesses.⁵⁵⁹

Citizens in Ruse further complained about unjust treatment, corruption, and long processing times at the Customs Office. Similar to the case of Police Chief Kosta, Customs Director M. Stefanovich was accused of incompetency and being unsuited for his position.⁵⁶⁰ According to *Bŭlgarin*, only young merchants were brave enough to petition the governor about these problems.⁵⁶¹ Just as during the *Tanzimat*, merchants actively participated in politics and established connections with the government in order to protect their own business interests rather than any national interest.⁵⁶²

Bŭlgarin also published a detailed story about returning Bulgarian exiles from Anatolia, emphasizing the indifference of merchants for the nationalist cause. According to the story, some Bulgarian exiles arrived in the city soon after the war, while others either died in exile or could not afford the travel expenses to return. Among them, G.

⁵⁵⁸ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 56, May 20, 1878, 2-3.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 2-3.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 2-3.

⁵⁶¹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 48, April 22, 1878, 3-4 and Issue 78, August 6, 1878, 2.

⁵⁶² *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 48, April 22, 1878, 3-4.

Nikolov and D. Stanchov reported that one of their friends had died and the remaining exiles were forced to stay in Anatolia, where they begged on the streets, lacking of money and clothing. After news about the exiles spread throughout the city, volunteers set up a local charity to generate money to help pay for their return. Tsonovov hosted a meeting in his house for this organization, asking the people of Ruse for donations. Poor people who lived in the neighborhood *Krainata Mahala*, which was apparently more patriotic, donated most of the 3,000 *gurush* collected. According to *Bŭlgarin*, merchants and other elites refused to contribute because they were “too busy.”⁵⁶³ A more likely reason for this discrepancy was that although maintaining the status quo that already benefited wealthier segments of society probably seemed prudent to commercial elites, a movement that might change the fortunes of poorer communities motivated greater subaltern participation.

As a result, a significant debate occurred in Ruse over who should run the government offices. The conflict hinged on whether older, more experienced candidates or younger, more nationalistic candidates should have the upper hand in the new government. The Russians and Bulgarian nationalists were suspicious of experienced officials with ties to the Ottoman system, whereas they presumed that younger officials would be more patriotic and more devoted to the new nation-state.

The criticism of young officials and the dispute between Moresh and Angelov exemplify the two-party political model in the early, post-Ottoman period – the division at the local level between “Conservatives” and “Liberals.” Although both parties were

⁵⁶³ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 53, May 10, 1878, 2-3.

nationalistic, the major controversy lay in the correct strategy for transforming the old Ottoman administrative system into a new national and self-managing alternative. The Conservatives consisted primarily of prosperous Bulgarians. They were paternalistic and advocated for a leadership run by wealthy citizens, and, thus, did not gain popular support. The Liberals included intellectuals, distinguished by their knowledge rather than their wealth. They supported a democratic government, universal suffrage, and a limited monarchy.⁵⁶⁴ Eventually, Liberals appealed more broadly to Bulgarian commoners, while wealthy Conservatives, were branded *chorbaci*.⁵⁶⁵ As a commercial center and the capital of the province, Ruse housed the wealthy upper class, and thus became a stronghold of the Conservative Party. This party was devoted to maintaining the privileged position of the upper class, including the Turkish elite.⁵⁶⁶ Considering this political climate, it is not surprising that the old, established pharmacist Moresh won the dispute against the new, young Angelov.⁵⁶⁷

In Ruse, Conservatives argued that older, experienced Bulgarians should hold key positions in the new administration, emphasizing the limited number of educated Bulgarians overall. They criticized new appointments, arguing that it would not be possible to train clerks, skilled workers, or experienced administrators in short order.

Among [the new officials] the intelligent could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Nobody completely matches his position. No need to single

⁵⁶⁴ Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, 117-123.

⁵⁶⁵ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 38.

⁵⁶⁶ Chapter 5 will discuss Conservatives and Liberals in Ruse and the representation of the Muslim community.

⁵⁶⁷ Angelov eventually joined politics and represented Ruse in the national assembly. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

anyone out, not one of them is a specialist or distinguished by his administrative abilities. Especially the two new secretaries, without denying that they are nice, smart, and well-behaved young men, educated in high school, we should admit that they are still too young and inexperienced to meet the requirements of their positions. The chairman of the Council of Justice, however, exceeds everybody with his practical knowledge of law and experience.⁵⁶⁸

While criticizing the young officials, the newspaper complimented a member of the old guard, Stoil Popov, who had previously worked as a clerk at an Ottoman court. Popov proved his loyalty to Bulgarian nationalism and he maintained his position in the new system.

By publishing the views of Conservatives and Liberals, and occasionally blaming both for not working together for the good of people, *Bŭlgarin* attempted to find a middle ground between the two parties. For instance, on July 27, 1878 it stated, “the young should wait to take a greater role in the government.”⁵⁶⁹ In the following issue, it suggested, “even if the young officers have visible flaws, their mistakes are excusable because we all make mistakes. Even if we do not have specialists in administration, we will be fine.”⁵⁷⁰ While agreeing that experienced officers should run the offices, contributors to the newspaper suggested the government should replace incompetent

⁵⁶⁸ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 56, May 20, 1878, 2-3.

⁵⁶⁹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 75, July 27, 1878, 2-3.

⁵⁷⁰ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 76, July 30, 1878, 2-3.

officials with young, better-educated Bulgarians. This indicates mixed opinions within the writing staff of the newspaper.

According to British sources, Bulgarians disliked both the elite *chorbaci* and the corrupt officers of the new government. British Consul J.E. Blunt from Edirne described the dilemma. “My interlocutors,” he wrote, “did not hesitate to predict that many Bulgarians, to escape the rapacity of their ‘Tchorbajies’ and the abuses of the new form of government, will eventually remove into the contiguous Turkish provinces.”⁵⁷¹ Blunt anticipated that Muslims, but also Bulgarians, would move into the remaining Ottoman territories in order to escape the power struggle—and the resulting violence—between the former dominant group and the new ruling elite. Bulgarians feared that the *chorbaci*, once empowered, would use their authority to preserve their own interests rather than those of the people. As for the new Bulgarian officials in Plovdiv, the British ambassador A.H. Layard pointed out that Bulgarian revolutionaries played an active role in the provisional government, cooperating with Russians.

The Bulgarians named to public offices, and whose duty it should be to administer justice, to maintain order, and to protect the lives and property of all classes, have been in many cases, as your Lordship will find by official reports from our consular agents, men of infamous character, some of whom had been convicted of most atrocious crimes. A well-known

⁵⁷¹ *Turkey No.42 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 9, 22.

brigand Petco is the Chief of bands of Bulgarians, who plunder and massacre the Mahommedans.⁵⁷²

Bulgarians who took an active role in the violence against Muslims were appointed to administrative positions. The reports of Layard and Blunt refer in particular to the region near the Rhodope Mountains, where the transfer of power from the Ottomans to the Russians and Bulgarians was especially violent.

Ruse remained on the periphery of large-scale disorders and violence resulting from the transfer of power, and the Ruse provisional government maintained a pragmatic stance toward negotiating conflict. The Russians worked primarily with the elites and many Bulgarian commoners at times contested Russian governance because of the despotism of generals who imposed heavy taxes, appointed corrupt officers, and involved themselves in local religious affairs.

Conclusion

In Ruse, the Russian provisional government adopted the Ottoman administrative system and essentially conducted state affairs through existing institutions shaped during the *Tanzimat*. On the one hand the Imperial Russian Commissioner appointed Russian governors to the provinces, and Bulgarian revolutionaries and intellectuals of the so-called Bulgarian Revival Period, were promoted to powerful positions in the Ottoman administrative system. Yet the emergent ruling class also included a number of Bulgarians formerly in the service of the Ottoman government. Some *chorbaci* also maintained their political clout within the principality and continued to influence the new

⁵⁷² Ibid, Document 61, 94.

government. In addition, Russian rule also allowed many non-Bulgarians to maintain their positions in middle and lower level offices. Ethno-religious pragmatism on the part of the Russian provisional government preserved Ruse's plural society with a gradually growing Bulgarian dominance in local government.

Chapter Six: The Return of War Refugees and Normalizing Ethnic Relations under the Bulgarian Government, 1879-1885

After the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-8, the return of war refugees was one of the major issues the new Bulgarian principality had to address in the early post-Ottoman period. The prospect of the principality inhabited by returning refugees, in particular Muslims, infuriated Russians and Bulgarian nationalists. The provisional government was particularly concerned about armed resistance and continuing Muslim dominance in the Bulgarian nation-state. Thus, the Russian authorities attempted to disarm the refugees upon their return and forced many, the wealthy and those who took an active role during the war in particular, to leave the principality.⁵⁷³ The Ottoman government often protested the ongoing violence against Muslims and the difficulties that refugees faced upon their return, and thus refused to evacuate the cities under Ottoman control before securing the safety and property of Muslim population in the principality. In order to expedite Ottoman withdrawal, Russians then eased the pressure on the refugees soon after the Treaty of Berlin.

During the early post-Ottoman period, Ruse represents an exceptional case, in which violence against non-Orthodox Bulgarians was relatively mild and the majority of the refugees returned to their homes. Because the Russian military did not invade the city during the war, the peaceful surrender was conducive to the co-habitation of Turks,

⁵⁷³ About the population movements in Bulgaria, see Justin McCarthy, "Ignoring the People: The Effects of the Congress of Berlin." About the post-war violence, see Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria, 1878-1908*, and Şimşir, *The Turks of Bulgaria 1878-1985*.

Bulgarians, and other ethno-religious communities. A large number of foreigners and non-Bulgarian majority in the city also limited the power of the provisional government and nationalist Bulgarians and their ability to exert influence over other ethnic groups. In Ruse, though the Russian government remained invested in supporting Pan-Slavism and Bulgarian nationalism, they neither wished to face large-scale opposition from the majority nor publicize the conflicts with non-Bulgarians to foreigners.

Following the completion of the constitution and the election of the prince in April 1879, the Russian authorities began appointing Bulgarian governors to the provinces and withdrawing most of their military from the principality. Bulgarians, independent for the first time after nearly five hundred years of Ottoman rule, and the brief Russian provisional government after the war of 1877-78, faced the problem of how to establish a fully functioning government. Bulgarians formed two political parties, the Conservatives and Liberals. Despite some internal factions, the former Ottoman elite (composed mostly of merchants) and clergy formed the backbone of the paternalistic and upper-class Conservative Party. The Liberal Party was primarily made of intellectuals and artisans who advocated for a more egalitarian government with a limited monarchy. These two parties vied for power in the immediate post-Ottoman years.

The political figures of Ruse, Conservative and Liberal, dominated Bulgarian politics on the national level. The first three Bulgarian Prime Ministers, Todor Burmov (Conservative), Kliment Branitski (Conservative), and Dragan Tsankov (Liberal) came from the local political scene in Ruse. As a commercial center and the capital of the province during the Ottoman reform period, many members of Bulgaria's wealthy upper

class lived and worked in Ruse. This historical connection to wealthy elites allowed Ruse to become a stronghold of the Conservative Party in the elections for the national assembly.

Following the departure of Russians, the Bulgarian government made efforts to normalize relations with ethno-religious communities. Although the new government with a liberal constitution reflected “Europeanized” administrative shifts, it often resorted to Ottoman practices, such as *millet* system and military exemption tax, to manage its diverse population. While the structure of many Ottoman policies remained, Bulgarians and Muslims traded positions as rulers. Muslims lost their dominant role to Christian Bulgarians and were subsequently treated as a minority. With their existing ties to elites of other ethno-religious groups, the Conservatives in Ruse appeared more tolerant of non-Bulgarian ethnic groups than the Liberals. Some Muslim elites took part in the Conservative Party and even became elected deputies to the national assembly, while others ran in the elections as non-party candidates. In the early years of Bulgarian independence, the representation of Muslims in Ruse had drastically increased in the National Assembly. Smaller communities such as Jews and Armenians, however, were still not represented at the local level.

Political interest in Bulgaria, from both Russia and Britain, visibly affected life in Ruse during this period. The British government continued providing humanitarian aid to returning Muslim refugees mostly in the villages of Ruse. Through the Compassionate Fund, the British consuls took an active role in the aid campaign, and gained the sympathy of Muslim population in Ruse. At the same time, Russian military assistance

continued and even some Russian officers returned to Ruse to serve in the Bulgarian army and navy. As Russian provisional rule had officially ended, this created a diplomatic crisis with the signatory countries of the Berlin Treaty, the Ottoman Empire in particular, Ruse accommodated one of the major military garrisons and a fleet on the Danube just as during the late Ottoman period.

The Return of the War Refugees

The war of 1877-8 left much of Bulgaria in a state of disorder. Armed Bulgarian bands that consisted largely of ideological nationalists but also some opportunists, and the Russian military committed many atrocities against non-Bulgarians, the wealthy and the war participants on the Ottoman side.⁵⁷⁴ After the armistice on January 31, 1878, war refugees began to return in large numbers as officials issued promises that their lives, honor, and property would be respected. Many, however, suffered from large-scale violence committed by the Russians and armed Bulgarians. In the city of Haskovo, for example, Turks, Jews, and Greeks were mistreated and abused by their fellow Bulgarian townsmen.⁵⁷⁵ Even members of the small Armenian community in Sliven were persecuted and forced to leave the country.⁵⁷⁶ According to the British vice-consul F.F. Sankey, these communities held the Russian government responsible for their suffering because it encouraged violence instead of preserving order.⁵⁷⁷ Sankey argued that Russian authorities often explained the violence as the Bulgarians' revenge against Turks

⁵⁷⁴ For the British correspondence regarding violence; see *Turkey No.42 (1878)*. Although Greeks and Bulgarians often shared grievances against the Muslims, the Bulgarians also carried out a movement against the Greeks, burning their farms, houses and property, *Turkey No.42 (1878)*, Document 13, 25.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid*, Document 60, 91-93.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 91-93.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*, Inclosure 2 in Document 33, 57-58.

for suppressing the Bulgarian nation and engaging in guerilla warfare and uprisings against the new government. Russians, however, could not provide a convincing argument to justify the persecution of the other ethno-religious groups; they accused these minorities of collaborating with the Turks.⁵⁷⁸

Fearing that Muslims would engage in armed resistance against the provisional government, Russians began disarming all of the returning refugees. Bulgarian newspapers in Ruse constantly reported the actions of the Turkish “rebels,” emphasizing the need to disarm the Turks. They argued that the violence would not cease until the authorities collected all weapons from the Turks.⁵⁷⁹ *Bŭlgarin* stated, “In Deli Orman, the authorities found dead bodies of Bulgarians killed by the Turks, and Turks are arming themselves to rise against the new government.”⁵⁸⁰ Another newspaper, *Slavianin*, reported on April 29, 1878 that a Turkish inhabitant of Ruse had denounced an uprising of Muslim conservative groups, the *molla* and *softa*. The police rewarded the Turk who had revealed the plot, captured the rebels along with seven hundred rifles, and sent them to Edirne.⁵⁸¹ Similar news continued into June 1878, charging Turks in the villages around Ruse with using arms against the Bulgarian peasants and police.⁵⁸² The Russian government used these incidents as an excuse to disarm all non-Orthodox Bulgarian inhabitants.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, Inclosure 2 in Document 33, 57-58.

⁵⁷⁹ *Slavianin*, Issue 12, July 7 1979, 93.

⁵⁸⁰ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 48 April 22, 1878, 3-4.

⁵⁸¹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 50, April 29, 1878, 3.

⁵⁸² *Slavianin*, Issue 9, June 15, 1879, 68-69.

Following the armistice, Ruse received a continuous stream of Muslim and non-Muslim refugees from surrounding towns and villages. Most of the refugees from Ruse had fled to Shumen and they faced a brutal search for arms by Russian and Bulgarian officials upon their return. The British consul Robert Reade reported the details of this process in the District of Ruse:

All the refugees, without distinction or regard to age and sex, had to submit to a most indecent and repulsive search for arms by Russi-Bulgar employees, who groped with their hands amongst the clothes and persons of the women and girls in particular, and forced open their boxes and packages, scattering the effects all about and seizing any object of value they came across, and when they happened to find any arm, they cynically offered it to the owner for an insignificant sum, not allowing him, of course, to have it back. This outrageous proceeding lasted the whole day. In the morning they were marched to Durankiue, where they had to undergo a similar ordeal. On the third day they were taken to the suburbs of Rasgrad, where, instead of men, Bulgar women and boys of fourteen or fifteen years of age actually stripped the poor half-dead women and girls almost naked, searching for arms all about their persons, notwithstanding two previous disgusting examinations.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸³ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 17, 18.

The Russian and Bulgarian officers were intent on disarming the returning refugees. As many of the refugees were women, the government even employed Bulgarian women and young boys to search for arms. This process continued in the following days:

The poor terror-stricken emigrants were then driven like herds of animals into the public slaughterhouse [Salhane] of Rasgrad, where they were kept for several days exposed to the fearful odours and filth of such places, to the broiling sun, and to the tortures of hunger, for the authorities of Shumla could not only afford them food for two days more than the time necessary to take them without halting to their homes.⁵⁸⁴

The choice of location for gathering refugees, a public slaughterhouse, appears to have been intentional, spreading fear among non-Bulgarians.

In the slaughterhouse, the Russian and Bulgarian authorities listed the conditions required for minority groups to remain in the country. The following groups were not allowed to stay in the principality under any conditions: those who took part in the war of 1877-8, those whose villages were in mountainous or wooded areas (with the reason that these were strategic positions for rebellion against the new government), those whose houses were currently occupied by Bulgarians, and all persons of high socioeconomic status—another way of ensuring that wealthy Turks, Jews, Armenians, and Greeks did not re-enter the principality. Even if a returning refugee met all of these requirements, Bulgarians still needed to testify to their trustworthiness and morality.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid, 19.

Bülgarin confirmed the abuse of returning refugees mentioned in the British consular reports. For instance, on November 30, 1878, the newspaper wrote, “In the earlier period, refugees were not allowed to return to their old villages. Instead, those who wanted to stay in Bulgaria had to settle in the houses of the Circassians or build new houses. The unreliable were not also allowed to remain in Bulgaria.”⁵⁸⁶ Just as the requirements for re-entry required “trustworthiness” and “morality,” the author employed the similar term “unreliable,” in reference to someone who had taken an active role against Russians during the war. The provisional government openly demanded that those who returned did not present an overt threat to the new regime.

Reade’s report also indicates that the provisional government actually applied the listed criteria to those in the towns such as Razgrad, Eski-Dzhuma, and Osman-Bazar. In Razgrad, Bulgarians occupied five of the seven Muslim quarters; the remaining two were allotted to the Cossacks. Many Muslim refugees found their homes in ruins, and sometimes their houses were burnt in their presence, as was the case with the notable Ahmed Agha Helvacizade.⁵⁸⁷

When refugees arrived at the railway station in Ruse, they underwent similar searches and seizures of arms. Compared to those in Razgrad, Osman-Bazar, and Eski-Dzhuma, the refugees in Ruse, however, received better treatment because of the large number of foreigners present in the city.⁵⁸⁸ The Russian government feared that the Ottoman government would use the stories as ammunition for their protests. In Osman-

⁵⁸⁶ *Bülgarin*, Issue 111, November 30, 1878, 3.

⁵⁸⁷ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 17, 19.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

Bazar, the Bulgarian governor even forced the Turkish refugees to sign a paper in Turkish, declaring that they were satisfied with his conduct. The Ottoman Commissioner, Sırrı Pasha then addressed a very strong protest to the Russian General Stolipine about the cruel treatment in the repatriation of the refugees.⁵⁸⁹

While the refugees continued returning, Russians pressured the Ottoman army to evacuate Shumen and Varna. Both cities still had war refugees in large numbers who were either not allowed to return to their homes or feared persecution by the provisional government. The Ottoman government argued that disarming refugees left them unprotected and vulnerable to continuing violence perpetuated by Bulgarian bands. Therefore, the Ottomans refused to leave these cities to the Russians until the refugees were re-settled and their safety was ensured. The difficulties faced by refugees prolonged the Ottoman evacuation of Shumen and Varna. Since the Treaty of Berlin had also reduced the term of the Russian provisional government to nine months, the Russians then had no choice but to ease the pressure on refugees and go to greater lengths to prevent violence against them, especially in the villages. Beginning in August 1878, the number of returning refugees had markedly increased. After reporting the news about the regulations that allowed the Turks to return to their villages, *Bülğarin* anticipated high ethnic tensions in the villages such as Kadikoy, where Turks found their old houses occupied by Bulgarians.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, 19.

⁵⁹⁰ *Bülğarin*, Issue 111, November 30, 1878, 3.

Even after the term of the Russian provisional government ended, the Bulgarian newspapers reported atrocious incidents perpetrated by armed Turks in the villages in the outskirts of Ruse and claimed that the violence would not cease until the authorities collected all weapons from the Turks, citing recent Turkish uprisings in Ihtiman, Kostendil, Tuzluka, and Kara Lom.⁵⁹¹ Most of these incidents took place in the villages where there was loose government control, and they were not unusual, as the government was in the process of establishing its authority in the rural areas.

On the other hand, Ottoman consuls reported acts of violence against Muslims, often referencing foreign newspapers in Europe. For example, the French language newspaper, *La Patrie (Homeland)* published an article on September 22, 1879, about the Turkish community in Ruse. According to the article, Muslims were under threat of being forced to leave the principality. The article claimed that all Bulgarians, without exception, were allowed to carry arms and serve as a civilian police force. In the article, Bulgarians openly confessed that their only goal was to force the Muslims to leave the principality. Muslims, for fear of being hunted down, were rushing to flee with their families as soon as they could get enough money to leave, abandoning all they had. Lucky refugees managed to sell their property for less than market value. For example, a large house with land and gardens were sold for around 1000 *francs*, an extremely low price.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹¹ *Slavianin*, Issue 12, July 7 1879, 93; Issue 13, July 14 1879, 97-9; Issue 16, August 18 1879, 126-8. In one such incident, for example, a Bulgarian woman was found hanged in her apartment. It was suspected that Turks had perpetrated the crime because the woman lived in a Turkish house, *Slavianin*, Issue 50, March 29, 1880, 404.

⁵⁹² *La Patrie*, September 22, 1879 in BOA. HR.SYS Dosya 304, Gömlek 1, s.178.

La Patrie also gives specific examples of violent attacks against Muslims in the surrounding villages of Ruse:

In the village of Koytumlu [within the district of Ruse] 300 families have been violently mistreated and their houses have been ransacked. There are a few dead but I could not find out the numbers. Similar violent scenes took place in the village of Irmil, where about 400 Muslim families live. Ali Agha, a public figure in Ruse, was also hit by Bulgarians on his way back from his vineyard that he is in bed with bad injuries. The son of Yuzbasi Mustafa, aged 35, has been strangled, and his body has been thrown in the Danube. The authorities know the culprits, those who lured the victim out of the town under the pretext of buying his vineyard.⁵⁹³

The French Vice Consul M. Feret in Ruse adds other examples of crimes committed by Bulgarians against Muslims, but most occurred in the villages outside of Ruse. Feret mentions that a group of Muslims arrived in Ruse from Tutrakan after walking all night and informed the governor that around 40-50 armed Bulgarians came to their village Karamemetler, plundered their houses, and stole their animals.⁵⁹⁴ He gives another example in which twenty Turkish families, about 200 individuals escaping violence from Tŭrnovo, arrived in Ruse and prepared to leave for Ottoman territory.⁵⁹⁵ The perpetrators of these crimes were not concerned about “arrest nor judicial pursuits.” Feret expressed

⁵⁹³ *La Patrie*, September 22, 1879.

⁵⁹⁴ Archives des Affaires Étrangères de France, A.A.E.- C.P.C. Turquie-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol III. ff. 413-418, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri: Belgeler Cilt II*, 391-93.

⁵⁹⁵ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turquie-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol III. ff. 399-401, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 379-380.

his concern that he was “afraid that such odious deeds recur everyday all over the province, and it will lead to desperate revolt from the Turkish population.”⁵⁹⁶ The newly created national militia failed to exercise control over the rural areas, in particular mountainous regions such as Tŭrnovo. Ruse served as a safer point of departure than any of the surrounding towns and villages. Many of these incidents involved plundering the property of the wealthy by armed Bulgarian groups rather than large scale-ethnic conflict.

The Bulgarian government pursued the extraordinary measures to establish its control in the principality. They also included bringing potential rebels to military courts and subjecting them to harsh penalties. Feret predicts that this would lead to the mass emigration of Turks from the region. He also details the circumstances of the ongoing immigration from Silistra and Tutrakan to the Dobrudzha region under Romanian control. Unlike in Bulgaria, the Romanian government was assisting Muslim immigrants, exempting them from taxes and military service. Feret argues that the Bulgarians were unaware of the potential dangers of losing agricultural producers in the region en masse, a population that had already declined drastically during the war.⁵⁹⁷

Ruse was not completely removed from ongoing violence. According to Feret, Muslims were scared of being outside after sunset.⁵⁹⁸ The English traveler Albert De Burton, however, indicates that even in the early 1870s, there was a safety concern in the city at night, stating, “At night, everybody is obliged to carry a lantern; otherwise he is

⁵⁹⁶ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turqiue-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol III. ff. 399-401, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 379-380.

⁵⁹⁷ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turqiue-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol III. ff. 413-418, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 391-393.

⁵⁹⁸ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turqiue-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol III. ff. 399-401, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 379-380.

liable to be arrested.”⁵⁹⁹ Feret also mentions that ten Turks were killed within a year, four in their homes, and that in every case, the murderers escaped justice. Feret’s report also recounts the story of a Turkish farmer named Batinli Alish Aga, whose watermelon carriage was attacked. He was forced to leave the market and was severely beaten as he left. Similarly, in another incident, five villagers came to Ruse by ox-driven carriages, and a group of Bulgarians detached the oxen, and stole them. Although two were eventually returned, the thieves kept the other animals. It appears that the police knew the identities of the thieves, though they were never arrested.⁶⁰⁰ While these crimes are certainly severe, they were not unusual in the history of the region. As discussed in Chapter 5, even the Bulgarian language newspapers criticized the corruption in the police department and accused the police chief Kosta Stoinov of not arresting a Muslim thief.

During the turmoil of the transitional period, the cities in the Bulgarian principality experienced large-scale population movements. Reports differ in their estimates of the total population of Ruse after the war as well as the demographic makeup of the city. In terms of the size of Ruse’s population, there was no demographic data from the period immediately before the war, but Ottoman sources estimate a total of 23,000-25,000.⁶⁰¹ According to a census conducted in the mid-1860s, the population of Ruse was 20,644, of which fifty-three percent of inhabitants were Muslim and forty-seven percent non-Muslim.⁶⁰² During the war, some residents permanently left the city, but the violence

⁵⁹⁹ De Burton, *Ten Months’ Tour in the East*, 38.

⁶⁰⁰ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turquie-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol III. ff. 399-401.

⁶⁰¹ Besides the Ottoman sources, the Australian newspaper, *The Argus*, gives the size of Ruse’s population as 23,000 during the war of 1877-78. *The Argus* (Melbourne, Vic.: 1848 - 1956), July 7, 1877, 5.

⁶⁰² Todorov, *The Balkan City*, 350 and 360.

instigated by the war and its aftermath led to migration from villages to urban centers. In the midst of war, Ruse had already received 1,741 refugee families from the region that came under Russian occupation.⁶⁰³

During the war of 1877-8, most residents of Ruse stayed in the surrounding villages and towns to escape the Russian bombardment. Many of them returned immediately after the armistice. On June 6, 1878, the British ambassador A.H. Layard reported the Ottoman official notes regarding the populations of Ruse:

District of Ruse			
	Villages	Muslims	Non-Muslims
Ruse	81	12156	12003
Shumen	116	28205	10467
Yeni Bazar	39	7379	2292
Silistra	235	21009	11932
Razgrad	145	42354	15378
Nikopol	61	11276	21901
Sistov	40	7975	14552
Pleven	47	9764	22024
Eski Dzhuma	47	12938	2965
Tutrakan	41	7750	2136
Total	852	160806	115650

Table 4: Muslim and non-Muslim populations in the Danube province.⁶⁰⁴

This table offers the first demographic figures available following the war, but it is unlikely that Ottomans conducted a new census after the war. Despite population movements, the table above indicates no drastic change in the demographic composition of the city since the confirmed reports in the 1860s. The total population also seems very similar to estimates given just before the war. Because of the large-scale violence and

⁶⁰³ See Table I in Chapter 4.

⁶⁰⁴ *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Vol.5, Inclosure in Document 45, 354.

lack of protection in rural areas, however, most Muslim refugees from the villages stayed in Shumen, while Bulgarians moved to urban centers.

With respect to the size and ethnic distribution of Ruse's population, a Russian diplomatic note by Ivan Krilov reported on February 20, 1879 that Ruse's population was smaller than the estimated 23,000-25,000. Instead, he suggested that the city had around 18,000 inhabitants, of whom 7,500 were Bulgarians, 9,000 Turks, 200 Armenians, 600 Jews, 50 Greeks, and a small number of Europeans, mostly Austrians.⁶⁰⁵ Although the ethnic distribution of the population in Krilov's report overlaps with the Ottoman sources from the 1860s, it showed around 5,000-6,000 fewer people. The Russian report is more likely to be based on new and accurate data, and indicates a net population loss from wartime strife.

Despite the turmoil of this transitional period, Ruse preserved most of its non-Bulgarian population. The autonomous Bulgarian Principality held its first census in 1880 and published the results in 1881 (see Table 5). According to this census, the ethnic composition of Ruse remained diverse.

⁶⁰⁵ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, Polit. Otdel, op. 244, 1879 g.d. 1, 1-33, cited in Zheĭnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vŭnshnata politika na Ruskata Imperiia, 1865-1877*, 215.

Bulgarian	11,342	43.36%
Turkish	10,252	39.20%
Jewish	1,943	7.43%
Armenian	841	3.22%
German	476	1.82%
Greek	291	1.11%
Romanian	231	0.88%
Russian	170	0.65%
Serbo-Croatian	113	0.43%
Romani	79	0.30%
Hungarian	76	0.29%
Tatar	74	0.28%
Italian	58	0.22%
French	58	0.22%
English	32	0.12%
Persian	19	0.07%
Polish	16	0.06%
Czech	16	0.06%
Others	69	0.26%
Total	26,156	

Table 5: The Ethnic Distribution of Population in Ruse in 1881.⁶⁰⁶

According to Ottoman sources from the last phase of Ottoman rule, the Muslim population numbered 12,156. The 1880 census indicates that the total number of Muslims decreased by less than 2,000. Yet, the total overall population of the city increased by approximately 2,000. In conjunction with the previous Census, this indicates that more Bulgarians were moving to the city. A loss of 2,000 Turks, however, might be considered predictable given the conditions of the war and the transitional period.⁶⁰⁷ While significant, these numbers do not represent a large-scale exodus. Though this was the first

⁶⁰⁶ Penka Angelova and Veselina Antonova, “Die Geburtsstadt von Elias Canetti” in *Elias Canetti: Der Ohrenzeuge des Jahrhunderts* (Ruse: Internationale Elias-Canetti-Gesellschaft, 2006), 16.

⁶⁰⁷ *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Vol.5, Inclosure in Document 45, 354.

time Turks became a minority in the city, they remained close in number to the majority Bulgarian population.

Bulgarian independence also had a significant demographic impact on Circassians, who were completely evacuated. Circassians were an ethnic minority that the Ottoman government had relocated to Bulgaria in the nineteenth century. This population had created tension with the Bulgarian population since their settlement in the region. Although Ruse had been one of the major Circassian settlements, according to the first Census in Ruse after independence, no Circassians were recorded and the number of Tatars, another relocated ethnic group, had dwindled to seventy-five.⁶⁰⁸ When Turkish refugees began returning to Ruse, the Bulgarian government forced many Turks to take up residence in Circassian houses or construct new dwellings.⁶⁰⁹

Among the returning residents, a representative of the Jewish community, Haim Moshe Bidjerano, sent a letter to the Alliance Israélite Universelle confirming that most of the Jewish refugees in Shumen returned to Ruse by June 1878. After describing the suffering of his community during the turmoil of war, Bidjerano expressed gratitude for the help the Alliance Israélite Universelle provided:

We, the Jews of Rusçuk, war victims and refugees of Shumla, hereby wish to express our gratitude and the esteem in which we hold you...when the war broke out we were in danger of annihilation. Death threatened us from every side. Fathers, mothers, and tender children died of starvation. We

⁶⁰⁸ Penka Angelova and Veselina Antonova “Die Geburtsstadt von Elias Canetti,”16.

⁶⁰⁹ *Bŭlgarin*, Issue 111, November 30, 1878, 3.

were left with no means of survival. But thanks to the bounty, which you generously extended to us, we had some respite. Due to your concern and care in our time of hardship, from the time we departed for Shumla until our return to Rusçuk we were never destitute. Now we are once again trying to earn our living in Rusçuk.⁶¹⁰

During the transitional period, Jews in Bulgaria also suffered from persecution under the new government, as they were often accused of collaborating with Turks. The Jewish community in Sliven followed the Turkish inhabitants on their retreat before the Russian army, fearing persecution based on their religion and Ottoman identity. Although some wanted to return to their homes, the Russian military, with Bulgarian support, drove them away.⁶¹¹

Similarly, in Yambol, Bulgarian inhabitants stopped Turkish and Jewish families attempting to return to their homes, shouting “Long Life to our Tsar Alexander! Away with the Turks and the Jews! Bulgaria for the Bulgarians!”⁶¹² Jews who returned to other towns also found that they could not even walk down the street without being insulted. One of them reported, “my grandfather is said to have stolen his grandfather’s oxen, and so I go to prison.”⁶¹³ Many citizens who supported the new government falsely accused Jews of a variety of criminal activities. Though this was the case in Yambol, in Ruse, Haim Moshe Bidjerano only mentions that Jews attempted to make their living again

⁶¹⁰ For the copy of the letter and its English translation, see Keren, *The Jews of Rusçuk*, 284-86.

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 284-86. Also see Mary Neuburger, “The Russo-Turkish Turkish War and the ‘Eastern Jewish Question’: Encounters Between Victims and Victors in Ottoman Bulgaria, 1877-8,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Volume 26 Number 2 (Winter 1996), 53-66.

⁶¹² *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Inclosure 2 in Document 141, 137.

⁶¹³ Ibid, 137.

without giving any information about the treatment they received from the provisional government, hinting that the treatment may have been acceptable.

The plight of refugees did not end upon their return to their homes. Most refugees desperately needed food and clothing and had contracted diseases such as typhus, smallpox, and dysentery. The suffering of civilians fostered public sympathy in England. In August 1877, during the height of the war, Baroness Burdett-Coutts founded the Turkish Compassionate Fund.⁶¹⁴ The Fund aimed to help civilians, particularly women and children. The British ambassador in Istanbul, Sir Henry Layard, and his wife played a leading role in the establishment of this organization along with many volunteers, including the English consuls and the director of the Ottoman Bank. Until it ended its operations in March 1882, it provided significant aid to Turkish civilians in Bulgaria.

Although British sources portray the Turkish Compassionate Fund as a humanitarian organization founded to help civilians, the active role of the British ambassador and consuls in the Fund suggest that it also reinforced their political alliance with the Ottomans. In Ruse, British Consul Reade brought the miserable conditions of the refugees to the attention of Lady Burdett-Coutts. She then authorized him to use £100 from the Fund to help them.⁶¹⁵ Working with the Chief *Kadi* and the *Mufti* of Ruse, Reade

⁶¹⁴ Dunstan and Burdett-Coutts, *The Compassionate Fund*, 23-24.

⁶¹⁵ Many organizations and institutions provided help for the victims of the war, including the Stafford House Committee under the superintendence of Mr. Barrington Kennett assisted with English surgeons; the British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded; the National Ottoman Society for the Relief of the Sick and Wounded; a Transport Corps under Colonel Borthwick and a fund initiated by Lady Strangford for the relief of both Russians and Turks, and a purely Russian fund established in England. All of these institutions primarily focused on the sick and wounded soldiers rather than the civilian victims of the war most of whom were women, children, and the elderly. Dunstan and Burdett-Coutts, *The Compassionate Fund*, cvii and 18.

took an active role in providing money, food, and clothing to the destitute refugees.⁶¹⁶ In October 1878, Safvet Pasha addressed multiple notes on behalf of the Ottoman government to the British Ambassador. The notes expressed their warm acknowledgement and gratitude for the services rendered by Reade in Ruse to the unfortunate victims of the war.⁶¹⁷ The refugees also sent a number of thank you letters to the Fund, especially to Consul Reade.⁶¹⁸

During the winter of 1879, a failed harvest and severe weather generated distress in Ruse and the surrounding districts. After receiving reports detailing the lamentable state of affairs, Sir Henry Layard in Istanbul again devoted a portion of the budget of the Turkish Compassionate Fund to the Muslim refugees in the villages of Ruse. The Fund appointed Mr. Dillon to carry out this humanitarian aid. His report from January 13, 1880, provides details about the operations of the Fund as well as the conditions of refugees in Ruse. When Dillon arrived in Ruse on December 14, 1878, the Turkish notables welcomed him, and decided how to distribute the £100 placed at Mr. Dillon's disposal. First, they asked the *muhtars* of several districts of the town to send lists of refugees in need. Muslim judge Kadi Efendi and Turkish notables then revised these lists. Next, the lists were returned to the *muhtars* in order to issue vouchers to all parties accepted by the *Kadi's* committee. This process took over a year, and on December 24, 1879, the Fund began active relief. On December 24, 25, and 26, from 10 am until 4 pm, they provided relief funds to about 1300 refugees who had settled in Ruse, with the great

⁶¹⁶ *Turkey No. 53 (1878)*, Inclosure 1 in Document 83, 73.

⁶¹⁷ *Turkey No. 54 (1878)*, Document 122, 97; Document 164, 130.

⁶¹⁸ Dunstan and Burdett-Coutts, *The Compassionate Fund*, cvii.

majority consisting of old women, barefoot and shivering with cold while standing in snow and ice.⁶¹⁹

With the remaining funds, 3000 *piastres*, Dillon bought corn and flour to distribute in Trestinek, Obretenik, and Damogila, all heavily damaged during the late stage of the war. Accompanied by a local named Hasan Bey, Dillon helped 139 refugees in Trestinek, 164 in Obretenik and 151 in Damogila with the help of the *muhtars*. In the Fund's documents, Dillon recorded the intense winter conditions that the returned refugees withstood in miserable hovels. These men and women tried to survive the cold because Bulgarians forbade the cutting of firewood. The returned refugees could not protect themselves from the wild animals and wolves, as they were disarmed on their return. Dillon stated, "The cold was so intense in these districts, and the snow so deep, that during the night, wolves ventured up to the house doors, and carried away the watchdogs. The Turks, being unarmed, cannot shoot them."⁶²⁰ Some, fortunate enough to return with their oxen and carts provided employment and food for their less fortunate brethren.

At the same time, the *muhtars* and imams of other villages asked for help due to similar conditions. For example, in the village Yoldbanar, 273 people of 603 were without food. Dillon, then, communicated with Sir Henry Layard for an additional £100 to relieve these villages with a note stating, "The gratitude of the Turkish notables and of the relieved refugees for the kindness extended to them by the noble English Lady (these

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 46-9.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 48.

are their own words) whose sympathy your Excellency had turned towards them is beyond description.”⁶²¹ After receiving a telegram approving the second installment, Dillon withdrew funds from the Ottoman Bank in Ruse on January 15, 1880 and purchased corn for the refugees. Two weeks later, after January 29, he went to the villages to help. The heavy frost made the process of converting corn to flour took longer than anticipated, and made it difficult for mills to operate. In the following days, Dillon visited each village, helping refugees.⁶²²

Dol Monastir	100 out of 120
Brostover	170 out of 219
Belcova	190 out of 257
Botrov	195, the whole village
Yoldbanar	221 out of 603
Beshbanar	230 out of 251
Balabanar	190 out of 240
Gov Monastir	156 out of 273
Batinza	465 out of 488
Osteritza	277 out of 605
Tchernevi	118 out of 206

Table 6: The number of the refugees who received aid in each village.⁶²³

After visiting these villages, Dillon stressed the deplorable conditions in Botrov, Beshbanar and Osteritza, which were completely destroyed in the war. Dillon mentions that in these villages, Bulgarians appropriated the cattle that refugees protected from the Russians. Amongst all villagers, only those in Chernevi saved some cattle. Returning

⁶²¹ Ibid, 49.

⁶²² Ibid, 49-50.

⁶²³ Ibid, 49-50.

refugees found their houses destroyed. Dillon requested an additional fund of £10 per village to help them survive until harvest season and fieldwork.⁶²⁴

Koprica	365 out of 620
Salaskioi	383 out of 410
Rasouva	247 out of 311
Stroko	81 out of 171
Aornica	240 out of 351
Kara Urbouka	300 out of 550
Kacelyevo	250 out of 503

Table 7: The villages that requested aid.⁶²⁵

The British humanitarian effort helped villagers living in the communities surrounding Ruse survive the difficult winter of 1879. This effort also reflected a continuing British interest in the political fabric of Bulgaria in quiet opposition to the Russians. With the collaboration of the Ottoman and British authorities, Ruse preserved most of its diverse population and did not experience mass emigration.

The Return of Foreigners

Many foreigners who had established political or commercial posts in Ruse before the war also suffered were affected by the turmoil of the war. As a commercial center and the capital of the province, Ruse had historically accommodated a high number of merchants, most of whom were Austrian and English, as well as the consuls and diplomats of other countries. Besides these groups, religious missionaries, particularly from the U.S. and Britain, formed another small community in the city. The consuls in Ruse, who had left the city before the arrival of the Russians, began to return after the

⁶²⁴ Ibid, 51.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, 50.

Treaty of Berlin, but did not receive official recognition by the Russian government. The reestablishment of relations with the Ottoman government and the settlement of post-war disputes concerned the Russian Imperial Commissioner. He avoided entering into official relations with foreign consuls, however, to prevent European pressure in favor of the Sublime Porte. Some consuls, like Reade, stayed in the towns under Ottoman control for fear of conflict with the Russians.⁶²⁶ Heightened tensions between the Russian authorities and foreign diplomats were evident in Reade's reports.

The Russian Generals and Governors appear to be independent of each other, and are far more despotic than any Turks; for I am told that foreigners at Rustchuk have been summarily imprisoned by various authorities, and the Governor has declined to interfere. Indeed, my colleagues at Rustchuk have ever since their return found their position most humiliating and intolerable, and I was told that I had taken the best course by keeping away.⁶²⁷

Reade stayed in Varna to resolve issues with land ownership of the British Consular building. The new government had claims to property that undoubtedly belonged to the Porte, including the British Consular house and the Ottoman Bank next door. According to Reade, Nicolaki Efendi of Listov delivered both of these buildings to the Ottoman government under Midhat Pasha, to repay a debt.⁶²⁸ The British consul permanently moved to Ruse only after the Russian governor Akimov returned the British consular

⁶²⁶ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 150, 147.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*, Inclosure 3 in Document 18, 20.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*, Inclosure 2 in Document 83, 73.

house in mid-September 1878.⁶²⁹ This delay might be considered a Russian strategy to prevent the pro-Ottoman British from becoming involved in local affairs.

Although most foreign consulates were reopened after the Treaty of Berlin, the Russian consulate in Ruse remained closed. On August 23, 1878, the Russian residents of Ruse petitioned the Asiatic Department of Russia, requesting the reorganization of the consular services. They also recommended Kara Mikhailov, who was in the service of the Russian imperial army during the war, for the consul position.⁶³⁰

Merchants composed the largest group of foreigners in Ruse, and they flooded back into the city immediately after the armistice. They often complained that the police now arrested them without any regard for their consuls, whose attempts to intervene also failed. For example, the Bulgarian authorities removed the French and Austrian vice consuls from the Commercial Tribunal where they were supposed to be present during the trial of two of their dependents. The consuls claimed that the new government in Ruse entirely ignored their offices, and, in open defiance of the Capitulations, imposed taxes and imposts on foreigners arbitrarily. Bulgarians composed the Tribunals, and they appeared to do just as they pleased with little interference from the Russians.⁶³¹

Protestant missionaries predominantly from the United States and Britain also returned to Ruse. By the mid- nineteenth century, Protestant Christians began to settle in the Ottoman Empire in relatively larger numbers, and the Ottoman government recognized the Protestant *millet*. Many American missionaries opened schools and

⁶²⁹ *Turkey No.54 (1878)*, Inclosure 2 in Document 27, 20.

⁶³⁰ AVPRI, F. SPB. Glavyi arhiv, 1-14, op. 11, 1878, g.d.1, 1-2, in Zheïnov, *Dokumenti ot arhiva na vûshnata politika na Ruskata Imperia, 1865-1877*, 206.

⁶³¹ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 150, 147.

printing houses, and particularly contributed to the modernization of education. Although the Ottoman Empire was rather tolerant of religious diversity, the Russian provisional government and Bulgarian nationalists invested in Orthodox Christianity and they did not welcome Protestant missionaries in the new principality. Upon their return, Methodist missionaries, for example, described the situation in Bulgaria:

When, in 1879, the missionaries were returned for another “tentative” occupation of the field, the indifferent Turk had given place to the hostile Russian, in the chief political power they had to encounter, and a conflict with the authorities was inevitable as soon as we undertook a seriously aggressive work.⁶³²

The tensions between Orthodox and Protestant Christians led to violence in some towns. For instance, in June 1878, Bulgarians in the village Kayalidere, near Sliven, persecuted Protestants after Orthodox Bishop Sarafen of Sliven exhorted the Bulgarians by saying “Protestantism will no longer exist in Bulgaria.” The *vekil* (representative) of the Protestant community Hagop Matteosian, asked the British consul for protection, and describes the abuses against Protestants:

The Orthodox Bulgarians set upon the Protestants, beat them, destroyed their fields and plundered their houses while the affrighted families ran as soon as possible to Adrianople to save their lives. The villagers, however, caught a few of the poor people and treated them very shamefully. One

⁶³² *Manual of the Methodist Episcopal Church: A Quarterly Magazine of Information Concerning the Benevolent and Publishing Interests of the Church, namely: The Missionary Society; The Sunday Schools; The Track Society; The Board of Church Extension; the Freedmen's Aid Society; The Board of Education; and The Book of Concern* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, January 1888), 17-18.

aged woman they took and tied her skirt over her head and beat her thus naked through the village. A younger woman they stripped entirely and made her dance with a man whom they also stripped of all his garments and to this spectacle the inhabitants of five surrounding villages were invited.⁶³³

In Ruse, however, there was a small number of Protestants, and they began to settle in Ruse in large numbers only after the departure of the Russians.

In the years after the withdrawal of the Russians from local affairs, pressure on the missionaries eased. A report from Methodist Episcopal Church stated, “The gradual unmasking of Russia, and the series of blunders by which she had been eliminated from the domestic politics of Bulgaria, have added greatly to the respect entertained for us and our work by the people to whom we were sent.”⁶³⁴ In the early 1880s, the Methodist Episcopal Church opened four schools in Northern Bulgaria, one in Ruse, and continued their mission, opening churches and distributing the Protestant Bible. Members of the Woman’s Foreign Mission Society, Miss Lina M. Schenck and Miss Ella Fincham took the leading role in the school in Ruse, accommodating around twenty students, while Clara Kailer was in charge of the Bible work in the city.⁶³⁵ These missionaries often pointed out the growing sympathy towards Protestantism, but, at the same time,

⁶³³ *Turkey No.42 (1878)*, Inclosure in Document 62, 95.

⁶³⁴ *Manual of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 18.

⁶³⁵ *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year of 1886* (Boston: Joseph W. Hamiltan Printer, 1886), 50.

complained that their students sometimes faced opposition and detraction in the Bulgarian public schools.⁶³⁶

Early Bulgarian Rule and Normalizing Ethnic Relations in Ruse

After Bulgarians took charge of the administration, they eased the pressure on the Muslim minorities, and attempted, at least in the short term, to integrate minority populations. Although there were notable instances of violence, and a slight decline in the Muslim population, Ruse was safer than many other towns and villages at the time. Ruse preserved most of its diverse population and Bulgarians and Muslim elites cooperated to settle the issues the Treaty of Berlin left in the principality. As such, the early national rule in the Bulgarian principality displayed a substantial degree of continuity from late Ottoman rule particularly in the management of the ethno-religious communities and modernization projects. The Bulgarian government used many of the Ottoman minority policies, and reopened many of the “modernized” institutions of the *Tanzimat*.

In Ruse, Ivan Ivanov, a former bureaucrat, became the first Bulgarian governor on April 28, 1879. He was a Russophile, who studied history and philology at Kiev University, and served in the Russian army as a volunteer during the Crimean War.⁶³⁷ Later he took part in the organization to draft Bulgarian volunteers for the Serbo-Ottoman War of 1876. He was also a journalist for the Russian press writing about Bulgarians.⁶³⁸ After assuming office, Ivanov delivered friendly messages to other ethno-religious

⁶³⁶ Ibid, 50.

⁶³⁷ In the post-Ottoman period, there was deep divisions in Bulgarian politics between Russophiles, who felt that the country simply should not go against the wishes of its liberators, and nationalists, who, whilst not against Russia as such, argued that Bulgaria had to pursue its own interests.

⁶³⁸ For a short biography on Ivan Ivanov, see Dimitrova and Jordanov, *Litsata na Ruse*, 141.

communities, indicating his desire to improve inter-ethnic relations. In a speech Ivanov gave to government officials on June 1, 1879, he stated that cooperation between ethnicities was of utmost importance to stability in the province. Ivanov's speech focused on the importance of building friendship and cooperation in all the ethnic communities while recovering from the war. His speech was translated into Turkish for the Turks, Armenians, and Jews who still worked in government offices.⁶³⁹ Ivanov's approach towards Muslims was indicative of Prince Alexander of Battenberg's tolerance, and even nationalists, began to show. As the Treaty of Berlin left a large Bulgarian population in the Ottoman territories, the Bulgarian principality was still entangled with its Ottoman neighbor. Therefore, it was, in many ways, dependent on good relations and provisional alliances with the Muslims of Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁴⁰

In the months following June 1879, Ivanov put his plans for the social integration—or at least the accommodation—of non-Bulgarians into action. In August 1879, during Ramadan, the Bulgarian government arranged for the clock tower in Ruse to chime in the Turkish manner, observing the Islamic prayer times as it did under Ottoman rule.⁶⁴¹ In 1870, Albert Du Burton documented the importance of Ramadan for Muslims in Ruse:

During my stay, it happened to be the feast of the Ramazan, which lasts for a whole month, during which time no Mussulman ever eats or smokes between the hours of 5 a.m. and 5 p.m., unless he is in delicate health, and

⁶³⁹ For his speech, see the Introduction.

⁶⁴⁰ Neuburger, *The Orient Within*, 35-7.

⁶⁴¹ *Slavianin*, Issue 18, August 18 1879, 144.

ordered by his doctor to do so, after which hours he may indulge to his heart's content.⁶⁴²

Ivanov's choice to honor Ramadan in such a public manner reflects his desire to include Muslims, a proverbial olive branch in order to ease ethno-religious tensions. Yet, cooperation between various ethnic and religious groups was not welcomed by all citizens in Ruse. *Slavianin* criticized Ivanov's tolerance and blamed the police for allowing the clock tower to chime in observance of Ramadan. The newspaper stated, "Do them favors, gentlemen, so that they can kill us more! This is a virtual humiliation!"⁶⁴³

During the early years of the Bulgarian government, Muslims, who lost their dominant positions in the local government, struggled to protect their rights as dictated by the Treaty of Berlin. As a result, they often tried to negotiate with the Bulgarian authorities. On August 23, 1879, sixty members of the Muslim community of Ruse sent a petition to Prince Alexander of Bulgaria and requested the following:

1. To be represented in the district councils with a number of members based on Article IV and V of the Treaty of Berlin and the provisions of the constitution of the principality.
2. To be able to use the Turkish language at the judicial courts as either petitioner or defender to avoid miscommunication and the potential inaccuracy of Bulgarian translators.

⁶⁴² De Burton, *Ten Months' Tour in the East*, 38.

⁶⁴³ *Slavianin*, Issue 18, August 18 1879, 144.

3. To be able to open their stores on Sundays and other Christian feast days, when they were forced to close.
4. To be exempt from conscription, as they had lost many young members of their community during the war, they were still recovering from the war, and some of them still had brothers in the Ottoman army for whom they would have to fight.⁶⁴⁴

One of the major concerns of the Muslim community in Ruse was political representation. Although there is no documentation of Muslim representation in the local councils, the sizeable Muslim population in Ruse represented themselves in the national assembly. In the Constituent Assembly, the Russian governor appointed only one non-Bulgarian member (out of a total of twelve representatives), Rashid Aga, to represent Muslims in the city.⁶⁴⁵ The new Bulgarian constitution followed the Serbian model and formed two assemblies, the Ordinary National Assembly (ONA) and the Grand National Assembly (GNA). The ONA met every year in October for two months after the harvest, and its members were elected for a three-year period. The GNA had twice as many elected deputies along with representatives from the church, the judiciary, and the local government. It also had the authority to elect regents and the head of state and to make changes to the state's boundaries and constitution with a two-thirds majority.⁶⁴⁶

In the first GNA (April 17 – June 27, 1879), two deputies of the fourteen total representatives, Rashid Aga and Ali Bey, represented the Muslim community in Ruse.

⁶⁴⁴ A.A.E.-C.P.C. *Turquie-Rousthok* 1876-1879, Vol. III f.f. 431-3, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 417-418.

⁶⁴⁵ See chapter five.

⁶⁴⁶ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 88.

The elections for the first GNA took place during the last phase of the Russian provisional government, before Prince Battenberg assumed power and appointed Todor Burmov as his prime minister in July 1879. In 1881, in the elections for the second GNA, the number of Muslim deputies increased drastically, from eleven to twenty-four. Among them, there were four Conservatives, Tefvik Bey, Niyazi Bey, Riza Hafiz Ibishov, and Emin Muameledzhi, and seven non-party deputies including Ali Efendi, Ahmed Shukri, Mesud Tiutiundzhi, Osman Efendi, Hamza Aga, Hamid Efendi, and Hasan Efendi. Although based on the Census of 1880, Turks composed 39.2 percent of the total population in Ruse; their representatives in the second GNA comprised 45.83 percent of the elected delegates. In a way, then, Turks were overrepresented in the new Bulgarian GNA. No Liberal representatives from Ruse were elected to the second GNA, only Bulgarian and Turkish Conservatives and other Muslim non-party candidates. This indicates that Conservatives of both Bulgarian and Muslim backgrounds held the majority of political power in the city. The elite nature of the Conservative party included the historically wealthy ruling class from both ethnic groups (see Table 8).

The First Grand National Assembly	The Second Grand National Assembly		The Third Grand National Assembly	
April 17- June 27, 1879	July 1-2, 1881	Political Party	October 19, 1886 - August 3, 1887	Profession
Ali Bey	Ali Efendi	non-party	Angel Delidanov	Farmer
Metropolitan Grigori	Ahmed Shukri	non-party	Geno Vürbanov	Farmer
Dimitraki (Dimitür) Selveli	Georgi Gerov	Conservative	Georgi Gerov	Merchant
Dragan Tsankov	Dimitür Selveli	Conservative	Grigor Nachovich	Minister
Ivan Danev	Evlogii Georgiev	Conservative	Deniu Pürgov	Farmer
Ivan Hadzhipenchovich	Emin Muameledzhi	Conservative	Dr. Dimitür Vachov	Lawyer
Kosto (Kostaki) Marinov	Ivan N. Hadzhienov	Conservative	Dimitür Grekov	Lawyer
Kuli Kutinchev	Ivanitsa Simeonov	Conservative	Emin Muameledzhi	Merchant
Marko Balabanov	Ivancho Popov	non-party	Dr. Zhechev	Physician
Nikola Stoichev	Iliia Trifonov	Conservative	Ivan Simeonov	Merchant
Petko Karavelov	Konstantin Stoilov	Conservative	Ivan Stoianov	Merchant
Petür Chernev	Marko Balabanov	Conservative	Ivan Tsvetkov	
Rashid Aga	Mesud Tiutiundzhi	non-party	Dr. Konstantin Stoilov	Minister
Stoil Popov	Niyazi Bey	Conservative	Mehmed Kafedzhiev	Farmer
	Osman Efendi	non-party	Osman Kecheli	Merchant
	Ikonom Petür Arnaudov	non-party	Petür Boiadzhiev	Farmer
	Petür Odzhakov	Conservative	Skender Bey	Merchant
	Petür Stanchev	non-party	Stefan Kiselov	Merchant
	Riza Hafuz Ibishov	Conservative	Stoian Nakov	Merchant
	Stoian Trifonov	non-party	Tefik Bayraktarov	Merchant
	Tefik Bey	Conservative	Todor Hadzhistanchev	Newsvendor
	Hamza Aga	non-party	Pilip Tsanev	Municipal employee
	Hamid Efendi	non-party	Hristo Ivanov	Lawyer
	Hasan Efendi	non-party	Hiusein Tabakov	Merchant
			Sharban Dimitrov	Merchant
			Ianko Angelov	Pharmacist

Table 8: The Representatives of Ruse in the Grand National Assembly.⁶⁴⁷

In general, representation in the ONA showed a similar pattern. In October 1879, the first elections for the ONA were held. In Ruse, this election brought a very diverse group of representatives together. The assembly consisted of twelve deputies, including the first Bulgarian Prime Minister Todor Burmov, Metropolitan Grigorii, a former Ottoman *chorbaci* Ivan Hadzhipenchovich, a Liberal Georgi Gerov, a Conservative Muslim Tefvik Bey (also in the GNA), and three other Muslim non-party deputies, Aziz

⁶⁴⁷ Source: Liubomir Zlatanov Zlatev and Rositsa Ivanova Stoianova, *Rusenskite Parlamentaristi 1878-1946* (Ruse: Izdatelstvo Leni An, 2011).

Efendi, Bekir Hasan Efendi, and Mustafa Efendi.⁶⁴⁸ In the second ONA of 1880, Muslims were again represented by the same four deputies, with the exception of Conservative Niyazi Bey who replaced the non-party deputy Mustafa Efendi. During the political crisis that had begun with the suspension of the constitution, the assembly from Ruse for the third ONA was reduced to five members, four Conservatives and one Liberal. Two of the Conservatives were again from the Turkish community, Tevfik Bey and Nuri Hadzhi Saliev. Most of the deputies, both Bulgarian and Turkish, were merchants or farmers, and a smaller number were lawyers, teachers, physicians, pharmacists, and government employees (see Table 9).

⁶⁴⁸ The rank of Metropolitan refers to the Orthodox diocesan bishop or archbishop.

The First Ordinary National Assembly		The Second Ordinary National Assembly	
October 21- November 24 1879	Party and number of votes	March 23- December 18 1880	Party and number of votes
Aziz Efendi	non-party - 9523	Aziz Efendi	non-party - 1277
Bekir Hasan Efendi	non-party - 9629	Bekir Hasan Efendi	non-party - 604
Georgi Gerov	Liberal - 4679	Georgi Gerov	Liberal - 908
Metropolitan Grigorii	Conservative - 11006	Metropolitan Grigorii	Conservative - 759
G. Shopov	non-party - 8432	Georgi Tsankov	Liberal - 804
Dimitür Grekov	Conservative - 8480	Dimitür Grekov	Conservative - -
Evlogii Georgiev	Conservative - 8583	Evlogii Georgiev	Conservative - 1413
Ivan Hadzhipenchovich	Conservative - 7660	Niyazi Bey	Conservative - -
Marko Balabanov	Conservative - 9882	Dr. Pantelei Minchovich	Conservative - 572
Mustafa Efendi	non-party - 9669	Tsanko Filchev	Conservative - 384
Tefik Bey	Conservative - 7450	Tefik Bey	Conservative - -
Todor Burmov	Conservative - 856	Todor Burmov	Conservative - 512
The Third Ordinary National Assembly		The Fourth Ordinary National Assembly	
December 10, 1882 December 25, 1883	Political Party	June 27, 1884 - September 6, 1886	Profession
Georgi Gerov	Conservative	Georgi R. Tsankov	Merchant
Dimitür Selveli	Conservative	Dervish Bey Mahmudov	-
Nuri Hadzhi Saliev	Conservative	Dragan Tsankov	-
Tefik Bey	Conservative	Emin Moameledzhi	Merchant
Toma Kürdkziev	Liberal	Ivan Stoianov	Merchant
		Konstantin Pomianov	Lawyer/Journalist
		Mehmed Hadzhitahirov	-
		Mutish Mustafa	Merchant
		Nikola Zhivkov	Teacher/Inspector/Journalist
		Osman Süleyman Kecheli	Merchant
		Taksim Bey	Merchant
		Toma Kürdkziev	Lawyer
		Filip Simidov	-
		Hatib Emin Idrizov	Merchant
		Hristo Ivanov	Lawyer
		Ianko Angelov	Pharmacist

Table 9: The Representatives of Ruse in the Ordinary National Assembly.⁶⁴⁹

The Ottoman electoral system, modified with minor changes under Russian rule, remained in place during the elections. The government could easily exercise influence over this multi-phase election. It was Muslims who now complained about abuses and corruption of the electoral system, just as Bulgarians had under Ottoman rule. The second Prime Minister, Kliment Branitski, the priest who met with Russians when they took over the city, also expressed his personal reticence towards party politics, and insisted that the

⁶⁴⁹ Source: Liubomir Zlatanov Zlatev and Rositsa Ivanova Stoianova, *Rusenskite Parlamentaristi 1878-1946*.

government should not pressure voters during a general election.⁶⁵⁰ According to the Bulgarian newspaper *Drevnia i Novaia Bŭlgaria (Old and New Bulgaria)* published in Ruse, in November 1879, a group of Turkish voters petitioned the court regarding elections in their village. They complained about a Bulgarian teacher, Marina Kŭsoglegova, whom they accused of misleading them into electing the local Bulgarian candidate. The court found her guilty, while acknowledging that her nationalist feelings, not self-interest, motivated her crime.⁶⁵¹ In the following years, Ottoman agents in the principality continued to report similar cases of corruption in elections.⁶⁵² Despite some corruption, Muslims in Ruse were able to elect their deputies for the national assembly under Bulgarian dominance.

Another concern of Muslims in Ruse was the new judicial system. In general, Muslims advocated for more equitable judicial practices. The official Bulgarian judicial regulations of 1880 restored the courts of non-Christian ethno-religious communities, for example, the sharia court for Muslim communities. Similar to the Ottoman *millet* system, the Bulgarian civil code allowed other religious communities to regulate themselves with respect to domestic matters such as religion, education, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Article 934 of the regulation, however, required that both parties involved in litigation had to agree to utilize Islamic courts. Article 935 also stated that that parties who rejected religious courts had the right to apply to the Bulgarian courts. In 1883, some Muslim members of the *Sŭbranie* (the Bulgarian National Assembly) requested changes

⁶⁵⁰ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 43.

⁶⁵¹ *Drevnia i Novaia Bŭlgaria*, Issue 1, November 10, 1879, 7.

⁶⁵² BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 304, Gŏmlek 1, s. 60/1.

in the Civil Code. As a result, in 1885, the parliament proposed repealing Article 934 and modifying of Article 935 by adding a requirement that the applicants must be adult. On January 27, 1885, the prince approved these changes and put them into practice.⁶⁵³ These changes improved the status of Muslims within the courts and demonstrate the negotiations between the new Bulgarian-state and the Muslim community. This shows how the new government was willing to pursue pragmatic policies to maintain stability and order in the principality, continuity from Ottoman rule.

Feret's report from August 1879 had already indicated that the Bulgarian government intended to recruit Muslims into the Bulgarian army. Another report from Feret in September 1879 confirms that the government ordered that the *muhtars* of Muslim neighborhoods provide lists of their young male members. The report mentions that the Muslim community, as a whole, refused conscription and sent a representative to the capital claiming that forced conscription would lead to mass emigration of the entire community.⁶⁵⁴ The Bulgarian Parliament, however, passed a law in 1880 mandating that all adult male citizens participate in the military service. Initially, Muslims refused, but the Parliament explicitly extended this policy to Muslim citizens in 1881 and began implementing it. The leaders of the Muslim community and the Porte found this obligation unfair, as they had not fully recovered from the war. According to Ömer Turan, despite Muslim protests, the Bulgarian government insisted on enlisting Muslims as a way to coerce them to leave the country. But he also notes that Muslims could be

⁶⁵³ Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria*, 168-69.

⁶⁵⁴ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turquie-Roustchouk 1876-1819, Vol III. ff. 452-453, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 459-460.

exempt from the military service if they paid a tax of 500 *levas*, which Turan argues that very few Muslims could afford.⁶⁵⁵ This number, however, seems attainable, especially compared with the 8,000 *gurush* price Muslims paid under Ottoman rule to buy military exemption in place of five years of army service (seven years for the Navy). Taxation in lieu of service, an option that was not available to Bulgarians, could even be considered a privilege as Muslims could avoid the “tax of blood” of military service.⁶⁵⁶

After the reform edict of 1856, the Ottoman government abolished the *Cizye* (poll) tax on the non-Muslims (a step towards equality), it required non-Muslims to join the army. Since non-Muslims were unwilling to serve in the military, the government imposed a tax called *Bedel-i Askeri* (Military Exemption Tax) for their exemption. Until the Russian occupation, this system remained intact and the Bulgarian government reestablished this policy for Muslims for the same reasons. This procedure was part of the continuation of Ottoman minority policies in Bulgaria, rather than revenge on the part of the new Bulgarian government.

The Treaty of Berlin left some issues unsettled between the Ottoman government and the Bulgarian principality such as the management of the property of the Ottoman state, the property of religious foundations, and the private property of Muslims in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government contested the property rights of the Porte on the grounds that the rental income from property owned by the Ottoman government and

⁶⁵⁵ Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria*, 152. Turan gives an average monthly salary of a *mufti* in Sofia as 3,000 *levas / francs* per month. However, it is likely that this was a yearly salary, based on reports of Russian officers earning approximately 2,400 *francs* per year and being criticized for inflated salaries. Even with the correct numbers, the military tax seems reasonable when compared with the Ottoman military tax.

⁶⁵⁶ St. Clair and Brophy use the term “the tax of blood” for the military exemption tax, St. Claire and Brophy, *Twelve Years’ Study of The Eastern Question in Bulgaria*, 125.

Muslim religious or charitable foundations, known as *vakıf*, was paid to the municipalities. Thus they argued that the property actually belonged to the municipalities, not the Ottoman government. It had always been the custom of the Ottoman government, however, to assign revenue from the rent of Ottoman government property that was owed to municipalities and other institutions. This was in place of dispersing a budget from the Ottoman central government to the municipalities.⁶⁵⁷

The Treaty of Berlin did not clearly define the position of Imperial Ottoman Commissioners in the principality, but in practice, much of their work was dedicated to the settlement of the property issues that a joint commission (mentioned in Article XII) was meant to settle.⁶⁵⁸ In many cases, Bulgarian and Ottoman delegates in the commission could not reach an agreement about property confiscation. The Ottoman delegates recognized that property destined for the benefit of the public, such as roads, bridges, fountains, and hospitals should be requisitioned by the new government. They declined, however, to accept the Bulgarian view that all *vakıf* property belonged to the Bulgarian government. The Ottoman delegates insisted that much of the *vakıf* actually belonged to individuals. It was a common practice among Muslims to consolidate private property into a foundation for financial security. Therefore, they argued that profits from the sale of *vakıf* must go to the descendants of the original owners. It appears, however, that Bulgarian peasants had either illegally seized foundation property, or that revenue

⁶⁵⁷ *Turkey No.53 (1878)*, Document 83, 73-72.

⁶⁵⁸ Mahir Aydın, "Bulgaristan Komiserliği" *Belgeler*, XVII/21(1997), 73-75. The Ottoman Commissioners in the Principality of Bulgaria were: Pertev Efendi 1878-1879; Nihad Pasha 1879-1885; Nikola Gadban Efendi 1885-1886 Kazım Beyefendi 1887-1896; Niyazi Beyefendi 1896-1897; Nasuhi Beyefendi 1897-1898; Necib Melhame Efendi 1898-1902; Ali Ferruh Beyefendi 1902-1904 and Sadık Pasha 1904-1908.

from the sale of the *vakıf had* been appropriated by the Bulgarian government for its own use, despite protests from the proper administrators. The Bulgarian government continued postponing equitable adjustments of Ottoman claims as long as possible because delaying settlement preserved its own interests. The British consular report, however, indicates that not all Bulgarian delegates agreed with the dilatory tactics of the Commission.⁶⁵⁹

Therefore, following the Treaty of Berlin, the Ottoman government put intense diplomatic pressure on the Bulgarian government to fulfill its obligations as stated by the treaty. This was a common problem throughout the country. In Sofia, many returning Muslims complained that Bulgarians had seized their property and refused to return it. In some cases, Bulgarians were selling *vakıf* property at public auctions. Later on, it became clear that the new government, not Bulgarians themselves, was confiscating and redistributing this common property. The Ottoman commissioner reported that the new government in Sofia tore down 1500 of the 2000 homes that belonged to Muslims and distributed the remaining property to ethnic Bulgarians. Then, the land was sold to Bulgarians for approximately five times more than the amount the government paid Muslims for their land, 40 *para* for one *mizrak* (40 *paras par pique*). The Muslims also had to pay 20 percent of the profit towards the reconstruction of the city. Bulgarians or Russians occupied the remaining 500 houses.⁶⁶⁰ Sofia, the new capital of Bulgaria in 1879, represents an extreme case of property laws that discriminated against Muslims, most likely because the government wanted to deter Muslim resettlement in the capital.

⁶⁵⁹ BOA, HR-SYS, Dosya 309, Gömlek 3, s. 38.

⁶⁶⁰ BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 304 Gömlek 1, s. 60/1.

In Ruse, however, Muslims did not suffer from large-scale property confiscation. According to Feret, on August 5, 1879, Ruse became the first district center to form a joint commission of Turks and Bulgarians to settle the property issues. His report indicates that the commission consisted of two Turkish members, Ali Bey and Nuri Efendi, elected by their community, and two Bulgarians, Servili Dimitraki and Gabrivali Yani, appointed by the government. He argues that creating the commission was an important step in negotiating complaints by Muslims, and other district centers should follow suite.⁶⁶¹ There were no reports from Ruse indicating problems of large-scale property confiscation or showing that the commission effectively resolved meaning that at least tensions caused by property disputes were not very extreme.

The municipality's new urban planning of Ruse did require some selective confiscation of property. The heavy Russian bombardment during the war left the city in ruins, and afterwards the new government began reconstruction in the following years. In 1881, the municipality issued an urban planning report that Muslim leaders criticized. They thought the government intended to destroy the mosques, Muslim schools, and the *vakıf* property. They complained about the reconstruction of the city, especially after the re-election of the mayor Mantof in 1887.⁶⁶² Deliberate property confiscation was consistent with the urban planning process enacted by Midhat Pasha in the 1860s, with wide streets and European architecture. Pasha approved the demolition of an entire neighborhood in accordance with the contemporary plans for the city.

⁶⁶¹ A.A.E.-C.P.C. Turquie-Roustchouk 1876-1879, Vol.III ff. 419-422, cited in Şimşir, *Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri*, 404.

⁶⁶² Aşkın Koyuncu, "Bulgaristan'da Osmanlı Maddi Kültür Mirasının Tasfiyesi (1878-1908)," *OTAM* 2 (2006), 228.

The Ottoman imperial commissioner, Nihat Pasha, reported on October 3, 1884 that the Bulgarian government in Ruse attempted to confiscate the Muslim school *Rüştiye*, a maneuver against the Treaty of Berlin.⁶⁶³ This confiscation, however, did not take place. Regarding the destruction of the *vakıf* property, the Ottoman commercial agency in Ruse sent a report to the Porte in 1888 with a list of foundations that were demolished:

1. Nine shops belonging to the foundation of Bayrakli Mosque, which included one big coffee shop, one barbershop, and several other shops including small grocery shops, selling fruits
2. One big bakery, which belonged to the foundation of Sadi Tekke
3. One store belonging to the foundation of Sazeli Tekke
4. Three stores belonging to the foundation of Hoca Hüseyin Mosque
5. One barbershop, three grocery shops, two coffee shops, three shoemakers' shops, and one green grocery belonging to the foundation of Cami-i Cedid and Hacı Ali Mosques
6. One barbershop belonging to the foundation of Tabasana Mosque⁶⁶⁴

After listing twenty-five stores and shops that were demolished, the author of the report explained that this decision was officially confirmed. He also mentions that some of the foundation managers, *mütevellis*, were uncooperative. They refused to give him a comprehensive list because some had made agreements with authorities regarding the

⁶⁶³ BOA. HR. SYS. Dosya 308, Gömlek 5, s. 10/1.

⁶⁶⁴ BOA, HR.SYS Dosya 309, Gömlek 1, s. 54/1. According to the yearbook of the Danube Province dated 1289 (1872-1873), there were 29 mosques and 7 *Tekkes* (Dervish lodges) in Ruse, mostly run by the religious foundations, Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria*, 192-193.

destruction of the foundations. Others feared being persecution if they filed a complaint or gave information.⁶⁶⁵ The Bulgarian government attempted to control sensitive property issues with pressure as the Porte tended to use them against the principality as a justification for their protests. Thus, this further demonstrates the pragmatic negotiation between local Muslim foundations and the Bulgarian state.

In the early post-Ottoman period, the Bulgarian government also reopened many of the Ottoman institutions established during the *Tanzimat*. Kliment Branitski became Prime Minister on December 7, 1879, taking office as a temporary replacement after Todor Burmov's government resigned. He served until the day before the national assembly opened on April 3, 1880. His government generally followed the policies of Burmov's administration while initiating a few new projects, such as the re-establishment of a model agricultural school near Ruse, *Obraztsov Chiflik*, and a relief program for the refugees from Macedonia that supplied grain in large quantities for distribution to those in need.⁶⁶⁶ On December 13, 1879, Kliment restored Midhat Pasha's model farm, *Numune Çiftliği*, for scientific research in agriculture.⁶⁶⁷ In 1883, it became an agricultural school that offered a three-year training program in modern farming.⁶⁶⁸ Pasha's agricultural bank already reorganized under Russian rule remained intact, and the Bulgarian authorities made minor procedural changes in the election of the bank's

⁶⁶⁵ BOA, HR.SYS Dosya 309, Gömlek 1, s. 54/1.

⁶⁶⁶ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, 43-44.

⁶⁶⁷ Kenderova, "Osmanoturski Dokumenti za «Numune Chiflik» (dnes 'Obraztsov Chiflik') Krai Ruse," 159.

⁶⁶⁸ <http://izs-ruse.org/en/istoria.php> accessed on August 7, 2013.

committee members and cashiers in 1883 and 1884. On February 28, 1886, the Agricultural Bank united with the Agricultural Bank of Eastern Rumelia.⁶⁶⁹

Publishing houses created under Ottoman modernization continued and expanded during this period, increasing the number of local Bulgarian language newspapers and periodicals (see Table 10).

Newspapers	Years
Bŭlgarin	1878-1887
Slaviansko Bratstvo	1878
Slavianin	1879-1929
Telegraf	1879-1881
Kŭrlesh	1879
Drevnia i Novaia Bŭlgaria	1879
Makedonets	1880-1885
Svetlina	1880
Gradina	1880-1881
Bratstvo	1881-1882
Diavolskoto Shilo	1881
Komar	1881
Rabotnik	1881
Puknuvane Zora	1881-1882
Sipnuvanie Zora	1882
Ruse	1884-1885
Naroden Uchitel	1883-1888
Zritel	1884
Rasheto	1884-1885
Uchitelski Vestnik	1885

Table 10: The Bulgarian Newspapers published in Ruse between 1878-1885.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁹ *Agricultural Bank of Bulgaria*, 13-16.

⁶⁷⁰ Ani Gergova, "Ruse Sled Osvobokzdenieto: Sledosvobokzdenkiiat Ruse i Bŭlgarskata Knikznina," in *Almanah: Za Istoriata na Ruse*, Tom II (Ruse: Dŭrkzaven Arhiv, 1997), 212.

Although the number of the Bulgarian language newspapers in Ruse had drastically increased in the early post-war period, Turkish language newspapers completely disappeared until 1895 when the newspapers such as *Ibret* and *Sebat* began publication.

Built upon Ottoman legacy, Bulgarians further established new institutions in Ruse, and continued the modernization process initiated by the *Tanzimat*. For instance, in 1881, Simeon Zlatev initiated a new financial institution named Girdap, which became the first private bank in Bulgaria. It began as a joint-stock company with a small capital investment of 1,380 *leva*, and then increased its capital to 4,000 *leva*, offering 400 shares at 10 *leva* each. *Slavianin* advertised the establishment of the bank and encouraged citizens to deposit their savings. Officially opened on January 1, 1882, the new bank increased its capital to 6,900 *leva* in its first year and 70,300 *leva* in 1886 when it constructed a new office building and hired its first fulltime clerk. In 1898, working with wealthy merchants and foreign investors, and receiving credit support from the Bulgarian National Bank and the Ottoman Bank, the capital of the bank reached 1.5 million *leva*, divided into 1,500 shares of 100 *leva* each. Although its initial goal was to fight usury and high interest rates, it lent money to shareholders at a rate of 15% and others at 18%, a much higher rate than Midhat Pasha's agricultural bank. In some cases, municipalities also borrowed money from Girdap with a 9% interest rate.⁶⁷¹ Unlike the government-supported Agricultural Bank, Girdap was a private enterprise, and kept its interest rates

⁶⁷¹ Magbule Sivri, "Niakoi aspekti ot razvitiето na Banka 'Girdap' do voñnite," *Sbornik Dokladi na Studentska Nauchna Sesiia-SNS'09* (Ruse: Rusenski Universitet Angel Künchev), 82-86. Also see Magbule Papazova's "Banka 'Girdap' kato tsentür na Bülgarskiia finansov kapital," *Nauchni Trudove na Rusenskiia Universitet*, 2009, Tom 48, Serii 6.2, 280-285 and "Kak se samorazrushi Banka Girdap," *Nauchni Trudove na Rusenskiia Universitet*, 2010, Tom 10, Serii 6.2, 146-150.

high, focused on profit, and achieved great financial success. The economic modernization started by the *Tanzimat* changed forms, but continued under the Bulgarian national government with similar goals.

Continuing Russian Influence and Military Assistance

In early July 1879, the German prince Alexander of Battenberg officially became the prince of Bulgaria after taking an oath in Tŭrnovo. Aligning himself with the wealthy Conservatives, he appointed the Conservative Bulgarian Todor Burmov as the first prime minister of Bulgaria. Liberals, however, appealed to the broader masses of voters and won a majority in elections for the National Assembly. The growing power of the Liberals in the executive branch compelled the prince to seek Russian support to maintain his power.

In 1881, with the support of Conservatives and the approval of Russia, Battenberg attempted a *coup d'état* by suspending the constitution. Battenberg's regime, however, failed to establish order and authority because of the lack of cooperation between his supporters, Conservative politicians, and the representatives of Russia. While Conservatives did not object on principle to Russian economic expansion in Bulgaria, they strongly opposed a Russian monopoly on investments, as illustrated by Russian attempts to construct a railroad from the Danube to Sofia. The *coup* did give more power to the Russians, and Russian generals Sobolev and Kaulbars became prime minister and the minister of war, respectively. Throughout the crisis, Russians focused on their national interests but came to support Liberal Party policies because of the Conservative Party's opposition to continued Russian intervention. Neither party, however, outright

supported Russian involvement in Bulgaria. Therefore, the Conservatives and the moderate wing of the Liberal party formed a coalition to free Bulgaria from Russian influence.⁶⁷²

During the post-liberation pattern of fluctuating international relations, the Bulgarian government maintained its military alliance with Russia. Ruse continued to receive military assistance from Russia, including arms, ammunition, and small warships. Some of the Russian officers also returned to Ruse to train Bulgarian troops. Ruse developed as the chief base for the Bulgarian army and navy on the Danube. Fearing the growth of a strong, Russian-backed Bulgarian army so close to their border, the Ottoman government contested the continuing Russian presence in Bulgaria and their support for the Bulgarian army, insisting on the implementation of the Treaty of Berlin. Major disputes included the demolition of the fortresses, importation of arms, and the employment of Russian officers in the principality.

On July 14, 1879, the Bulgarian newspaper *Slavianin* announced that the Bulgarian government actively demolished Turkish fortifications in and around the town.⁶⁷³ The Ottoman government, however, published a report on October 3, 1880, two years after the Treaty of Berlin, detailing the condition of the fortresses in Vidin, Nikopol, Ruse, and Silistra. The report stated that the fortifications on the Danube were well preserved, and the situation had not changed since the war ended. The only exception was Ruse, where the new government had only demolished the Istanbul tower

⁶⁷²About the party politics of the early post-Ottoman period, see Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria*, and Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*.

⁶⁷³ *Slavianin*, Issue 13, July 14 1879, 104.

and two small walls but had also repaired other parts of the fortresses, particularly the Levent Tabya, for military use. The report also mentioned that the materials removed from the fortifications were used in the construction of new government buildings or public works projects, as mentioned in the court case (see Chapter 5). The Porte, then, pressed the Bulgarian government and the other signatory powers to pay attention to the violations of the articles of the Treaty of Berlin in regard to these fortresses.⁶⁷⁴

On February 28, 1881, the British government confirmed that Danubian fortresses had not been razed and some of the casemates in the detached fort of Levent Tabya in Ruse had been fitted with doors to store dynamite and gunpowder.⁶⁷⁵ In 1883, the Porte continued communicating with the signatory powers, in an attempt to force the Bulgarian government to carry out the stipulations of Article XI. Britain and Italy expressed their readiness for a joint action on the subject, but they did not think that individual remonstrance would be likely to produce a satisfactory result. France and Russia defended Bulgaria, emphasizing the financial burden of the demolition. While openly supporting the Porte, Austria also agreed with France and Russia because the principality could not afford to raze these fortifications.⁶⁷⁶ According to Russian engineers, the cost of demolition per meter would be six *francs* along with 1.25-*franc* labor cost. The cost for the fortresses with ports would be even higher.⁶⁷⁷ After realizing the Bulgarian government's unwillingness to raze the fortresses, the Porte requested

⁶⁷⁴ BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 344, Gömlek 2, s. 41/1,2,3,4,5,6.

⁶⁷⁵ *The Times*, February 28, 1881, in BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 344, Gömlek 2, s. 39.

⁶⁷⁶ BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 344, Gömlek 2, s. 4.

⁶⁷⁷ BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 344, Gömlek 2, s. 41/3.

demolition of specific fortifications, which concerned the Ottoman government.⁶⁷⁸ The fortress in Ruse took priority, particularly because the new government used the Levent Tabya to store a large quantity of arms supplied by Russians.

Diplomacy failed to resolve the conflicts over the fortresses and Bulgarian military fortification in Ruse. As for Ottoman fortresses, the Bulgarian government demolished only a few towers and walls and preserved the remaining parts of the Levent Tabya. In 1883 the Bulgarian military was reorganized in four infantry brigades stationed in Ruse, Shumen, Sofia and Pleven, creating its own Quadrilateral in which Ruse maintained the crucial role it had in the Ottoman Quadrilateral.⁶⁷⁹

Supporting the Bulgarian national army, Russia sent a large amount of military supplies to Ruse through the Danube. There were two incidents, in 1879 and 1880, in which flotillas loaded with arms and Russian military officers arrived in Ruse from Odessa. The Ottoman government protested these actions because they ignored Article LII of the Berlin Treaty, which stated “no vessel of war shall navigate the Danube below the Iron Gates with the exception of vessels of light tonnage in the service of the river police and Customs.”⁶⁸⁰ Although it was clearly stated in the treaty, Bulgarians did not execute this aspect of the agreement. Despite some support from other powers, the Ottoman government failed to force the Bulgarian government to fulfill this stipulation.

⁶⁷⁸ BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 344, Gömlek 2, s. 4.

⁶⁷⁹ The fortress survived intact until the communist government demolished some parts of the fortresses in 1975 in order to construct a satellite television tower.

⁶⁸⁰ *The Great European Treaties of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Sir Augustus Henry Oakes and R.B. Mowat (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1921), 356.

The first flotilla crisis took place right after the withdrawal of Russian troops, on August 25, 1879. The Ottoman government received news from Safvet Pasha in Vienna that a flotilla had arrived in Ruse from Odessa. On September 13, 1879, the Ottoman consul in Giurgiu, Dimitraki Efendi, received an order to go to Ruse and verify these actions. He reported that in the last days of their departure from Ruse, the Russians gave the Bulgarians three steamboats; more tugboats than war boats as they had only two cannons with a small caliber, and two half-armored patrol boats. He confirmed the arrival of the flotilla that Safvet Pasha reported. He also mentioned that Russia gave this flotilla to Bulgaria, and it was currently anchored in the bay of Lom while under repair.⁶⁸¹

The Russians delivered this flotilla in a solemn ceremony. The Bulgarian clergy sang on one of the boats with Russian officers, the Metropolitan gave a speech, and when the Bulgarian flag was hoisted, several rounds were fired from cannons (see Figure 24). As this event took place at the same time as the departure of the Russians, Ottoman spies thought at first it was part of the withdrawal ceremony and did not initially inform Dimitraki Efendi about it. Dimitraki also reported that the Bulgarian government paid Russian officers double or triple what the Russian government paid them. Bulgarians already wondered about how to afford the maintenance of the flotilla, which was in bad shape, given the fact that the captain alone received 2400 *francs* per year along with free lodging.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸¹ BOA, HR-SYS, Dosya 313, Gömlek 1, s. 15/1 and 8/1.

⁶⁸² Ibid.



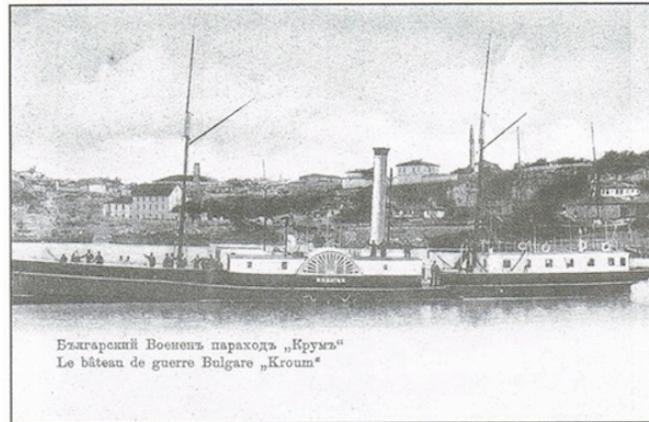
Вдигане на българските военно-морски знамена на подарените от Русия кораби в Русе на 12. 08. 1879 г. (худ. Христо Нейков)

Figure 24: The Ceremony for the Bulgarian Fleet.⁶⁸³

The second flotilla crisis occurred in June 1880. British Vice-Consul Dalziel in Ruse reported that a large quantity of arms, about 60,000 rifles of various types (Chassepots, Remingtons, and Berdans), ammunition, picks, and shovels, had been imported to Ruse from Reni (a small town near Odessa). The flotilla flew a new flag that depicted a lion on a large red square patch in the upper left-hand corner, resembling the new Austro-Hungarian flag. This flag helped deflect attention from the Russian identity of the flotilla. According to the report, the Russian military also transferred a large amount of existing arms to Ruse from Pleven, consisting of three Krupp cannons, and 8,000 percussion muzzle-loaders. The Bulgarian government took most of these weapons to Levent Tabya. At that time, Razgrad housed the largest depot of arms and ammunition in the principality, and the Bulgarian government intended to transport it to Ruse.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸³ Bŭrcheva, *Prekzivelitsite na edin Rusnak*, 78.

⁶⁸⁴ *Turkey No.11 (1880) Correspondence Respecting the Reported Arrival of Russian Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers in Bulgaria and the Importation of Arms from Russia*, Inclosure in Document 3 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1880), 2, in BOA, HR-SYS Dosya 313, Gŏmlek 2.



Военният параход "Голубчик" ("Крум")

Figure 25: The Flotilla Golubchik.⁶⁸⁵

The British government communicated with Russian Prince Lobanov regarding the issue, but he only promised to telegraph St. Petersburg for information about these reports. Several Austrian newspapers also made sensational statements that Russian volunteers in uniform were being transported from Ismail to Ruse in the Danube flotilla, which belonged to the prince for the purpose of joining the Bulgarian army.⁶⁸⁶ The Bulgarian government responded to the Austrian rumors, stating that any arms that the Russian army left were out of date and only for the protection of the new government.

On the termination of the war, several Russian officers and privates were sent to Bulgaria, as military instructors. After some time had elapsed, the Bulgarian government, not having further need of their services, allowed them to return to Russia. Later on, however, finding out that the Bulgarian army suffered greatly from the loss of these efficient military instructors, it was compelled to ask the Russian government to allow them to resume

⁶⁸⁵ Bŭrcheva, *Prekzivelitsite na edin Rusnak*, 83.

⁶⁸⁶ *Turkey No.11 (1880)*, Document 8, 3.

their duties in the military service of the Principality, and this request having been granted, 150 Russian soldiers returned to Bulgaria.⁶⁸⁷

The Bulgarian government confirmed and justified the arrival of the Russian officers, emphasizing the need to improve the national army.

With regard to the arms, Prince Lobanow said that 8000 rifles of a good modern pattern had, at the request of the Prince, been sold to Bulgaria by the Russian government, with an arrangement that the payment for them should be spread over a certain number of years. The muskets, which had been formerly left in Bulgaria by the Russians, were of an old pattern.⁶⁸⁸

In their statement, the government officials also pointed out the need for modernizing the existing arms in the principality and thus justified the importation of Russian arms.

Russian military aid aimed not only to advance the experience of the Bulgarian army but also to support Russian sympathizers in Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Ruse, with its strategic position on the Danube, could easily send supplies through Serbia to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Russian government closely followed the changing political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and continued to send arms and officers to Ruse in 1881. The order sent to the Russian consul in Ruse on September 5, 1881, indicates that the Russian government authorized its consul to send

⁶⁸⁷ *Turkey No.11 (1880)*, Documents 9 and 11, 4.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

some of the arms preserved in the depots of Ruse to those in need in Bosnia-Herzegovina to support their struggle against the Austro-Hungarian occupation.⁶⁸⁹

Conclusion

After the Armistice of Edirne, the war refugees began to return to Ruse mostly from Shumen and surrounding towns, based on the promises that the Russian provisional government would respect their lives, honor, and property. Russians, however, attempted to disarm non-Bulgarians in order to establish their authority in the Bulgarian principality, fearing Muslim uprisings. Russian and Bulgarian officers forcefully conducted the search for arms, and even hired Bulgarian women and young boys to search female refugees. Although this process was violent in Razgrad, Eski-Dzhuma, and Osman-Bazar, it was relatively mild in Ruse because of the presence of foreigners in large numbers and the non-Bulgarian majority in the city. The Russian government in Ruse did not wish to trigger resistance from non-Bulgarians.

In the return of war refugees, the Provisional government particularly targeted the wealthy Muslim elites those who fought against the Russians during the war, calling them “unreliable.” They were forced to leave the principality, as the main goal of the Russians was to challenge Muslim dominance and prepare Bulgarians for self-rule. Ruse preserved much of its diverse population. The majority of refugees returned to their homes, but they were mostly in miserable conditions, needing food and clothing. The British

⁶⁸⁹ R. Leonoff, *Documents Secrets de la Politique Russe en Orient 1881-1890* (Berlin: Richard Wilhelmi, 1893), 24-25.

humanitarian organization Turkish Compassionate Fund and British consuls continued providing aid to Muslims, just as it had during the war.

During the early post-war period, foreign residents of Ruse, merchants, diplomats, consuls and religious missionaries, also began to return. They attempted to assume their position in the city, investing in the economy, establishing diplomatic relations and conducting religious missions. They, however, often complained that the Russians did not respect the rights given to them through the previous commercial treaties, imposed higher taxes, and sometimes arrested them without consulting their consuls. The departure of Russians eased the pressure on foreigners, who then enjoyed the Bulgarian government's relative tolerance.

The first Bulgarian governor Ivanov prioritized collaboration between ethno-religious groups, and, at least in the short term, made efforts to normalize relations. Muslims received better political representation than under Russian rule. While some Muslims ran in elections as independent candidates, many were members of the Conservative Party, cooperating with the Bulgarian elites, and representing themselves in the National Assembly. Despite growing Bulgarian dominance in the higher administrative positions, non-Bulgarians continued to work in mid- and lower-level offices.

In managing diverse populations, the Bulgarian government employed many Ottoman practices such as granting religious autonomy and issuing the military exemption tax. In the early national rule, issues involving ethnic minorities were settled through pragmatic negotiation. Similar to the *millet* system, the Bulgarian government

allowed Muslims to maintain their religious institutions, courts and schools. Forced conscription became an issue of contention, but the Bulgarian government attempted to resolve tensions by reinstating the Ottoman system of the military exemption tax for minorities. Confiscation of Muslim property did occur in Ruse, but generally for urban planning and civic goals, rather than as a policy to stimulate mass emigration as in cities such as Sofia. Despite some degree of violence against Muslims in other Bulgarian towns, Ruse still proved safer and preserved its plural society. Ruse retained much of its Ottoman institutions and continued to be the site of many “firsts” in the region, such as the first private bank and the pharmacy association.

Conclusion

The transition from Ottoman rule to Bulgarian nation-state in Ruse took place through a gradual process by which governments and ethno-religious communities pragmatically negotiated. Starting with the Danube province in 1864, the Ottoman government extended its modernization and political integration to the provinces through various socio-political reforms and economic investments. Midhat Pasha's reforms promoted the notion of Ottomanism to create a cohesive Ottoman identity among the empire's ethnically mixed populations, an alternative to Bulgarian nationalism and Russian Pan-Slavism. In the Danube province, the Ottoman government attempted to integrate subjects, primarily non-Muslims, into the socio-political fabric of the Empire.

Unlike the Islamism of Abdülhamid II after 1876, Ottomanism in the 1860s and 1870s was more secular and inclusive. After 1864, Midhat Pasha established a representative administrative system in which elected Muslims and non-Muslims made their voices heard in local affairs. Ruse accommodated the general provincial assembly, an early form of a local parliament, as well as various administrative, judicial and municipal councils. The provincial assembly generally served as a body in which both governor and representatives submitted and discussed proposals for the government, allowing negotiation between the state and locals. Even though governor had the authority to make final decisions, which were then to be approved by the central government, non-Muslims had considerable input in the decision-making process. The Ottoman government also established secular courts and municipal administration composed of Muslim and non-Muslim representatives as well as the Bulgarian National

Church Municipality, a form of self-government for Bulgarians. Due to opposition from conservative Muslims and nationalist Bulgarians, Midhat Pasha worked to create an elite class supportive of his reforms and Ottomanist vision. Thus, he increasingly recruited locals into new institutions and offices based on trustworthiness and competency.

The Ottoman government also initiated an education campaign, encouraging families to send their children to new modernized schools, including the *Islahhane*, which offered secular primary education and training. The government also encouraged students to go to Europe for their education and funded some students' education. During this period, many Bulgarians attended the agricultural school in Tabor, the Ottoman imperial school in Paris or Robert College in Istanbul. Educational reforms were also meant to unify Bulgarian and Turkish schools. Numerous books, school materials and bi-lingual provincial newspapers were published at the state publishing house. The Bulgarian community also opened *chitalishte*, a public library, where people could read foreign language books, newspapers, and periodicals and organize cultural events.

The large-scale economic investments by the Ottoman Empire and Western countries accompanied socio-political reform. Ruse received extensive telegraph lines and a transportation network with the Ruse-Varna Railways, the Steam Navigation Company, paved roads and a number of bridges. The Ottomans mobilized all the manpower and resources of the province to carry out these projects, and in which both Bulgarians and Turks invested. Midhat Pasha also established a model farm to introduce modern farming and agricultural credit cooperatives to provide farmers with loans, seeds,

and farming tools. This was to develop an agriculture-based rural economy and solve the problems of peasants.

During this period, Ruse developed as an international port city, well connected with Central Europe and other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Many foreign merchants invested in the city, opening their local branches and offices, and running businesses such as hotels, silk factories, and grain export agencies. With a large number of foreigners and diverse populations, Ruse became a site of plural society tolerant of ethnic diversity. In the growing economy, Turks and Bulgarians created new economic relations, establishing joint-stock companies and carrying out commercial deals with each other and foreigners as well as within their local communities. The socio-political reforms and growing material prosperity provided an alternative to Bulgarian nationalism and Pan-Slavism, and improved interethnic relations to a degree in which Turks and Bulgarians lived on good terms. Thus Bulgarians, on the verge of integration, came to oppose revolutionary violence, and continued to cooperate with the Ottoman government.

The war with Russia in 1877 interrupted the political stability and economic progress the Ottoman reforms achieved. During the course of the war, Russia heavily bombarded Ruse, but failed to invade the city. The war, however, did not change interethnic relations in Ruse, and most people continued with their daily life. All ethnic and religious communities, including Bulgarians, suffered from the Russian attacks, which produced anti-Russian sentiment, while the sultan's armies fought to protect Ottoman citizens. Muslim Bulgarians and *chorbaci*, which included many wealthy merchants, Bulgarian bureaucrats and pro-Ottoman elites, continued to support the

Ottoman Empire. Russian propaganda did not elicit mass support from Bulgarians; instead they pragmatically waited to see the outcome of the war. The peaceful surrender of the Ottoman garrisons in Ruse on February 8, 1878, prevented large-scale violence. In the early days of Russian occupation, all ethnic and religious communities participated in the Russian celebrations, a sensible act either to protect their communities or benefit from the opportunities the invaders offered.

The Russian provisional government preserved the Ottoman administrative structure with minor changes, but replaced the high-ranking officials with Russians and their Bulgarian supporters. They cooperated only with the local notables rather than the Bulgarian population as a whole. Thus, the elites of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* found themselves in a desirable position with their education and experience in the existing system, though Russians approached them with suspicion as to whether they sympathized with the Ottomans, and selectively incorporated them into the government. Similar to Midhat Pasha's recruitment based on trustworthiness and competency, Russians also tried to employ and train young Bulgarians to fill the administrative offices. This created a debate among Bulgarians on who should have the upper hand in the new government, either the old-experienced or young-inexperienced. Many Bulgarians criticized the way Russians formed the new government and accused new officials of being incompetent. They also opposed the new taxes and the appointment of Russian priests in some of the Bulgarian churches.

Under Russian rule, many non-Muslims were allowed to maintain their positions at middle and lower level offices, but the wealthy were forced to leave the principality.

The refugees who left the city during the war had difficulties upon their return, as the Russian government was concerned about the prospect of the principality being populated by non-Bulgarians. Ruse, however, preserved its non-Bulgarian majority while urbanizing Bulgarians gradually changed the demographics in favour of their community. At the Constituent Assembly in Tŭrnovo to draft the first Bulgarian constitution, Rashid Aga was the Muslim representative appointed by the Russian governor. Other sizeable communities such as Armenians and Jews were not represented at all.

The departure of Russians significantly eased ethnic tensions in Ruse, and cooperation between Bulgarian and Muslim elites during the *Tanzimat* reflected itself in the paternalistic Conservative party, and Ruse became a stronghold for this party. During this period, many of the modernized institutions of the *Tanzimat* continued to function and the representative system changed to a constitutional monarchy. Turkish elites such as Tevfik Bey and Niyazi Bey even served as Conservative deputies in the national assembly along with Bulgarians such as Midhat Pasha's supporter Ivan Hadzhipenchovich, the priest of Ruse, Kliment Branitski, and the first Bulgarian Prime Minister Todor Burmov. The political representation of Muslims improved drastically under Bulgarian government and they were even overrepresented in some elections.

The establishment of a Bulgarian national government placed Bulgarians in a privileged position and reversed the existing Ottoman system against the Muslims. Complaints of Muslims in Ruse show similarities to those of Bulgarians during the *Tanzimat*. They also complained about corruption, pressure from authorities in the elections, mandatory military service, and confiscation of property. The Bulgarian

government also used the Ottoman examples to solve these problems. The military exemption tax, for example, was brought back for non-Bulgarians, who were then able to buy their exemption. The Bulgarian municipality justified the confiscation and destruction of property belonging to non-Bulgarians with the urban reconstruction similar to that of Midhat Pasha in the 1860s. The Ottoman *millet* system continued in the Bulgarian principality, providing religious communities with a degree of autonomy within the nation-state.

Pragmatism played a key role in interethnic relations, and local elites negotiated with the Ottoman, Russian and Bulgarian governments to protect their own interests. Instead of adopting a coherent Ottoman, Bulgarian or Pan-Slav identities, rather they benefitted from the opportunities of each political system offered. Dragan Tsankov, for example, worked for the Ottoman government in Istanbul in the early 1860s. He established close connections with Roman Catholic Church and took a leading role in the short-lived Bulgarian Uniate Movement to unify Bulgarian Church with Rome. In the mid-1860s, he came to Ruse and Midhat Pasha appointed him as the director of the state publishing house. Later he was promoted to higher offices in the Ottoman administration and even served as deputy governor in some towns. He eventually came to oppose the April Uprising in 1876, but after the Russian victory he became a Bulgarian nationalist and the leader of the Liberal party that sought support from Russia against the Conservatives. In 1880 and 1884, he became the Prime Minister of the Bulgarian principality.

Similarly, Ivan Hadzhipenchovich, Nikola Mikhailovski, and Kostaki Marinovich closely cooperated with the Ottoman and Bulgarian governments and maintained their political power within the changing political systems. These elites played an intermediary role between two communities. While defending Bulgarian education under Ottoman rule, Nikola Mikhailovski also defended the educational rights of the Turkish minority in the Bulgarian national assembly.

Toma Kürdzhiev can be considered as another pragmatic figure of the transitional period. He attended the new Ottoman school of *Islahhane* and worked for the Ottoman municipality. He took part in the local revolutionary organizations *Karan* and *Kubrat*, the Ottoman government then briefly imprisoned him. During the war of 1877-8, he served in the Russian army, and the Russian provisional government appointed him as a secretary of the Court of Appeals. During the political turmoil of the early years of the Bulgarian government, Kürdzhiev continued his pro-Russian stand and led an uprising in support of Russia, for which the Bulgarian government executed him in 1887.

The establishment of the Bulgarian national state was not a result of a successful revolutionary movement, but an outcome of the war with Russia. Despite some shortcomings, the reforms effectively enacted fundamental changes in the provincial administration, and made the Danube province, in particular Ruse, one of the most prosperous regions in the empire. The *Tanzimat* with all new institutions and development projects had a lasting legacy in social, economic, and political life in Ruse.

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