

## Revisions of the Greek Great Idea and Reinterpretations of the National Other (1878-1885)

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The purpose of this study is to present the revisions that were made to the Greek Great Idea in two specific periods: the first was with the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, while the second, was seven years later, in 1885, with the annexation of the province of Eastern Rumelia by Bulgaria. The research investigates Greek newspaper articles written during this period, which make the amendments to the Greek Great Idea more apparent. They are based on three main aspects: a) the perception of the Greeks regarding the position of their nation in the Balkan Peninsula, b) the construction and reconstruction of stereotypes about the national enemy, and c) the nationalist rhetoric that served to legitimize Greek supremacy in Macedonia and Thrace. By categorizing the content of the Greek newspaper articles, an attempt is made, not only to present the main changes in Greek irredentism, but also to show how the vacillations determined what constituted the “*National Self*” and the “*National Other*” in these two chronological periods. By analyzing the reactions of the Greek press<sup>1</sup>, my aim is, on the one hand, to contribute to a better understanding of the dominant ideological tendencies at that time and, on the other, to offer an objective look at Greek foreign policy convictions which promoted the view that it was in the common interests of both Greece and the Ottoman Empire to curb Bulgarian nationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> The newspapers have been used in the present paper represent different political spectrums in Greece the time span 1878-1885. Notwithstanding, the Greek press expressed a unified stance regarding the image of the Bulgarians as the “*National Other*”. On the contrary, more divergences and controversies have been noticed regarding the image of the Turks as the “*National Other*”, however, by 1885 the idea of a Greek-Turkish collaboration had prevailed.

Departing from the doctrine of religious unity  
The Bulgarian Revolution and the Threat of Pan-Slavism (1875-1876)

To better understand the continual ideological and political transitions and revisions of the Greek Great Idea in regards to the Treaty of San Stefano which was signed in 1878, a brief reference needs to be made to the events of the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-78, and the notion of religious unity that was still prevalent in Greek society<sup>2</sup>. Initially, Greece had not taken a negative attitude towards the Balkan crisis, because, it seems that it had not yet become aware of any pan-Slavic influences. The uprisings that had started in Bosnia and Herzegovina were dealt with as local rebellions, with the Greek press reporting the events in a detached manner and with a certain amount of indifference<sup>3</sup>. Even when the insurrections spread throughout the region, drawing in Serbia and Montenegro, at the same time providing favorable conditions for the Bulgarian national revolution (the April Revolution, April 19[O.S] May 1, 1876)<sup>4</sup>, the Greek press continued their positive, almost sympathetic consideration of the revolutionaries.

There was a particularly intense climate of support for the revolution of the Balkan people in Greek society, which correspondingly put pressure on the Greek government to take a military stance against the Ottoman Empire, with the aim of liberating the Greek populations still in the Ottoman occupied provinces of Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, Thrace and Crete<sup>5</sup>. Greatly influenced by the idea of religious unity, the Greek press, almost unanimously published articles based on the eternal conflict between the two opposing

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<sup>2</sup>Prior to the rise of the national movements in the Balkans, the ethnic groups that made up the Christian Orthodox millet identified themselves in religious terms. The Ecumenical Patriarchate as the legitimizing authority of the Rum millet played a cohesive role for the various ethnic groups. This “*Balkan Orthodox Christianity*”, as Kitromilidis identifies it, began to decline with the gradual prevalence of nationalism, Raymond Detrez, Pre-National Identities in the Balkans. In: Daskalov R. & T. Marinov (ed.), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans, Volume One: National Ideologies and Language Policies*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2013, 13-66, p. 13. See also Eleonora Naxidou, O orthodoxos kosmos ton valkanion se ‘krisi’: i anadisi ton ethnikon koinotiton kai i idea tis valkanikis synergias. In: Vasileios Sabatakakis (ed.), *The Greek World in Periods of Crisis and Recovery, 1204-2018, Proceedings, 6<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Modern Greek Studies, Lund 4-7 October 2018, Vol 4*, Evropaiki Etaireia Neoellinikon Spoudon, Athina, 2020, 355-377, [Ελεονώρα Ναξίδου, Ο ορθόδοξος κόσμος των Βαλκανίων σε ‘κρίση’: η ανάδυση των εθνικών κοινοτήτων και η ιδέα της βαλκανικής συνεργασίας, σε Βασίλειος Σαμπατακάκης (επιμ.), Ο ελληνικός κόσμος σε περιόδους κρίσης και ανάκαμψης, 1204-2018, Πρακτικά, Στ’ Ευρωπαϊκό Συνέδριο Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών, Ευρωπαϊκή Εταιρεία Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών, Λουντ, 4-7 Οκτωβρίου 2018, Τόμος Δ’, Ευρωπαϊκή Εταιρεία Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών, Αθήνα 2020, 355-377], & George G. Arnakis, The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism. In: Charles & Barbara Jelavich (ed.), *The Balkans in Transition, Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics Since the Eighteenth Century*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1963, 115-144.

<sup>3</sup>“*For nine months now there has been revolution in Herzegovina and it has not inspired a single idea for action in Greece, either in the governments or in public opinion and its Press*”, Efimeris ton Syzitiseon, May 5, 1876, no. sheet 575, sheet 1.

<sup>4</sup>Barbara Jelavich, *Istoria ton Valkanion I, 18os-19os aionas*, Athina, Polytropon, 2006, 554, [Barbara Jelavich, *Ιστορία των Βαλκανίων I, 18<sup>ος</sup> – 19<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας*, Αθήνα, Πολύτροπον, 2006, 554].

<sup>5</sup>“*To offer a helping hand to improve the fate of our compatriots in Turkey*”, Aggelos, May 8, 1876, no. sheet 37, sheet 1 & Aggelos, May 15, 1876, no. sheet 39, sheet 1.

forces of the “*crescent moon*” of Islam and Christianity; reproducing, in their writings, the familiar stereotypes of the “*Ottoman yoke*” and the “*enslaved Christians*”<sup>6</sup>.

The idea of a religious war still seemed to hold a special power over Greek society, and was presented by the press as being of the utmost imperative. Declaring war on the Ottoman Empire would not only serve the implementation of the Great Idea, in pursuit of the territorial expansion of Greece, but would at the same time strengthen the religious struggle against the Moslem Turks. This was in stark contrast to Greece’s foreign policy at the time, based on moderation and Greek-Turkish cooperation, which, the Greek press presented as a sign of weakness and betrayal<sup>7</sup>. The tone of the articles commenting on developments was clearly anti-Ottoman, stressing the sacrifices and the struggles of the “*oppressed*” Christians, who resisted the Ottoman yoke and the tyranny of the sultan<sup>8</sup>.

Although Greek public sentiment was highly in favor of a conflict with the Ottoman Empire, the reality was that Greek foreign policy was not in consonance with this popular view. However strong was the pressure for Greek participation in a Balkan coalition against the Ottoman Empire, the reasons which forced Greece to take a neutral stance in the crisis were associated to Great Britain’s insistence on maintaining the status quo in Europe. What Greek foreign policy essentially sought was for the Great Powers to become involved in resolving the crisis, so that Greece could extricate itself from the stance of neutrality. And thus doing, under the right circumstances, the state could act on its ultimate goal of territorial expansion by intervening in order to protect the Greek populations in the Ottoman Empire<sup>9</sup>.

Although the Greek press took a positive stance towards the Slavic liberation struggles, a potential intervention in the Balkan crisis by the Russians was viewed with great concern. From the onset it had expressed a distrust in Russian intentions<sup>10</sup>, claiming

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<sup>6</sup>Characteristic is the position of the newspaper *Aggelos*, which refers to the revolution in a positive light, emphasizing the eternal polarity of the Ottoman yoke and the enslaved Christians, “*The revolutionaries who took up arms and for a long time have maintained the revolution with great sacrifices and still have not succeeded in yet again cutting the throat of the Turkish yoke .... [the revolutionaries] do not trust the Turks, and rightly so*”, *Aggelos*, May 8, 1876, no. sheet 37, sheet 1. Complementary to the above is the article in the newspaper *Ethnofylax* which states, “*the great events in the East absorb the concern of all the public of Greece and very rightly so for us, because it is about the fate of brothers, to whom we are connected with the closest of ties, religion*”, *Ethnofylax*, May 3, 1876, no. sheet 3431, sheet 1.

<sup>7</sup>The journalist from the newspaper *Aggelos* in the article entitled “*The Eastern Question and Greece*”, claimed that the abandonment of the Great Idea after the Crimean War, led Greece to invest in Greek-Turkish relations as it was too weak and unprotected to seek to fulfill its expansionist aspirations, *Aggelos*, May 22, 1876, no. sheet 41, sheet 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Aggelos* April 24, 1876, no. sheet 33, sheet 1.

<sup>9</sup>“*Greece’s interest is, on the one hand, on the side of peace to promote prosperity, and, on the other, to convince Europe that the notorious reforms in Turkey are a useless Charter*”, *Efimeris ton Syzitizeon*, April 29, 1876, no. sheet 573, sheet 1.

<sup>10</sup>In general, the period of the Crimean War raised the Greeks’ suspicion of Russian intentions. The prevailing view was that since then, Greece had been encountered by Europe as an instrument of Russian aspirations, when in fact it was itself a victim of pan-Slavism, which was a tool of Russian foreign policy. In essence, the general assumption was that Russia’s foreign policy had succeeded in falsely portraying the Greeks as a Russian mouthpiece “*so that Europe accuses us of being a Russian instrument of this policy, punishing the Greek populations*”. In reality, however, Russia had been dealing behind the scenes, by preparing the Slavic nations to

that these would be detrimental to Greek interests<sup>11</sup>. Only if the Greeks still under the Ottoman Empire were to benefit along with the Slavs, would Russia's involvement in the Balkan Peninsula be welcome. The rapid diplomatic developments and the inability of Greece to adopt a widely accepted national policy further complicated the position that it would take in the near future. Although militarily unsuccessful, the political impact of the Bulgarian revolution was decisive on a European scale, and it predetermined the outcome of the Bulgarian Question. The violent suppression of the Bulgarian movement by the Ottoman irregular forces (the Bashi-Bazuks) became a concern for the Great Powers, generating a wave of support for Bulgaria in European public opinion<sup>12</sup>. The small town of Batak became a symbol of Ottoman barbarism, arousing the sympathy of the Europeans.

In response to the public outcry against Ottoman brutality, it was necessary for the Great Powers to react. Greece's longed for intervention by the Great Powers led to the Constantinople Conference in December 1876. Even though it was generally believed that the outcome of the Conference would compel the High Porte to implement a series of reforms that would be favorable for the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire, this did not happen. In accordance with the proposal put forward by the Russian delegation at the Conference, the national territory of Bulgaria was to include the Ottoman provinces of Macedonia and Thrace. This, essentially, was the first trigger that activated Greece's disposition towards Greek-Bulgarian rivalry. In short, the Bulgarian Question became the determining factor for the first transformation of Greece's image and position in the Balkans in relation to its neighbors.

#### The Treaty of San Stefano and the creation of Greater Bulgaria The consolidation of Bulgarians as the "National Other"

The diplomatic failure of the Constantinople Conference led to the Russo-Turkish War and Russia's victory over the Ottomans, culminating in the signing of the bilateral Treaty of San Stefano in the spring of 1878 (19 February [O.S.], 3 March). The treaty created an immensely enlarged Bulgarian principality, stretching from the Danube to the Aegean, which thwarted Greece's territorial expansion into Macedonia and Thrace. These developments caused both an ideological and political disorientation in Greece, abolishing views and political approaches that had become outdated concepts promoted by religious unity. The image of the Bulgarian as a "*Christian Orthodox brother*" was replaced by that of

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serve their plans, "*those ethnic groups that would resist Greek influence, to blindly submit to the cue given by Moscow*", Alithia, December 24, 1876, no. sheet 2789, sheet 1.

<sup>11</sup> "*We do not hate, we do not envy the Romanians, the Serbs, the Montenegrins, on the one hand, free, on the other subordinates, nor the other Slavs and Bulgarians, who are seeking to be liberated from the slavery of the Turks; on the contrary we rejoice with any improvement in their fortunes, and success in their desires. We only grieve, when we see instruments of harmful politics, which deliberately sowed the seed of division in people who have undergone the same ordeals, who have the same interests and desires*", Avgi, May 1, 1876, no. sheet 4141, sheet 1.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923, A Study in International Relations*, Macmillan, London, St Martin's Press, 1968, 184. See also Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 167.

*“national rival”*. Although the Treaty of San Stefano was never implemented, lasting as it did for only a few months, this was sufficient for the Greek press to create the ideological construction of the *“vicious, barbaric Bulgarian who plundered the historical heritage of the Greeks in Macedonia”*.

It is at this point that the first ideological and political opposition becomes apparent. Even though during the Balkan crisis, the Greek press, in a strong anti-Ottoman tone, had expressed its support for the rebellious Slavs, holding them up as a religious symbol, suddenly, there is a tactical change, focusing exclusively on Bulgaria’s independence. The Greek reporting of the news, and by extension the influence it had on public opinion, separated the Bulgarian Question and set the Bulgarians apart from the other Slavs. Thus, began the construction of a new adverse perspective of the Bulgarian people, the aim of which was to keep unaltered Greek irredentism and the national aspirations in Macedonia and Thrace.

Overall, in the regions where there was little or no ethnic homogeneity, as was the case in Macedonia and Thrace, the established practice for each rival nationality was to form a national ideology, whose objective was to present opposing national aspirations in the contested region as invasive policies with an assimilative nature. This approach was essentially an attempt at political manipulation of the wider society, having a twofold purpose: on the one hand, to increase the sense of a national threat on the domestic front, and on the other, to adopt and reproduce a nationalist rhetoric based on stereotypes about the national rival. In the Greek case, these attempts were the tools for producing negative national stereotypes of the Bulgarian people. In conjunction to this, the Greeks stressed the profound importance that the factors of historical continuity, national consciousness, and cultural superiority played in proving the indisputable presumption of the Greekness of Macedonia and Thrace, and correspondingly, to challenge Bulgarian territorial claims as non-existent<sup>13</sup>.

With this rationale, the Greek press indulged in articles which reproduced combinations of ancient Greek history, cultural superiority, religious domination, and the continuous Greek presence in the region. They avoided, however, criteria of national cohesion, such as the dominant language spoken, or numerical superiority, as these were the ‘Achilles’ heel’ of the Greek claims. Linguistic fragmentation and the extensive use of the Bulgarian language diminished the power of Greek aspirations in the region, and for this reason the Greek side downplayed its importance, claiming language to be an invalid

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<sup>13</sup>The ideological mechanism instrumentalized the strong presence of Greek culture in Macedonia and Thrace, as well as the expression of national consciousness by the inhabitants of these regions. As early as the decade of the 1870s, it seems that Greek nationalism was dominant, as it preceded Bulgarian nationalism and was at an advantage due to historical events, and its cultural past in the region. Greece was able to present stronger evidence against the Bulgarian claims, which was based on the Greek-language church, community organization, the establishment of Greek schools, the sophisticated written Greek language, and the well-established urban middle class that promoted Greek education as a sign of culture. Sophia Vouri, *Ekpedeusi kai Ethnikismos sta Valkania, i Periptosi tis Voriodutikis Makedonias (1870-1904)*, Paraskinio, Athina, 1992, 21, [Σοφία Βούρη, *Εκπαίδευση και Εθνικισμός στα Βαλκάνια, η Περίπτωση της Βορειοδυτικής Μακεδονίας (1870-1904)*, Παρασκήνιο, Αθήνα, 1992, 21].

criterion of national distinction. Without doubt, the linguistic argument was more easily understood and accepted by Europe, a fact that had been perceived by the Greek side, which is why it treated the Bulgarian language as a Slavic dialect -the vernacular of the area- which was unrelated to national identity<sup>14</sup>. As a counter-argument, the Greeks sought to minimize or eliminate the link between national consciousness and language, and to highlight the predominance of Greek culture as proof of the Greekness of the inhabitants<sup>15</sup>.

The Greek press essentially focused on forming an ideological dogmatism of cultural and national superiority, against a nation that, after so many sacrifices, had recently claimed its entitlement to independence. The Bulgarian presence in Macedonia and Thrace was treated by the Greeks as illegitimate, based on the logic that it had resulted from the “*barbaric*” Bulgarian invasions over the centuries. According to the newspaper articles of the time, this was the reason why the Bulgarians had no right to make territorial claims to the region.

Greek newspaper articles wrote about a nation that was late in awakening to claim its independence, and which was in fact instigated by Russian interests, essentially retracting their earlier statements about the rights of the Bulgarians to national self-determination. The main tools for achieving such an approach, was to create contradictions and conflicts between the “*national self*” and the “*national other*”, accentuating the always unorthodox tactics used by the opposing side. The promotion of this image was the driving force behind the emergence of the Bulgarians as a national rival, who had engaged in a series of assimilationist practices with the aim of absorbing the Greek population. In short, the image of the Ottomans as oppressors was soon replaced by that of the Bulgarians<sup>16</sup>.

Greek society was not the only recipient of this approach. Newspaper articles often called on the West to recognize the economic, cultural and educational superiority of the Greeks in Macedonia and Thrace. The press of that time, invoking the “*brilliance*” that characterized Hellenism, in conjunction with the cultural and linguistic superiority of the Greeks, attempted to dismiss the Bulgarian claims as “*non-existent and ludicrous*”<sup>17</sup>. With this reasoning, every time the Greeks presented themselves as “*perceptive, intelligent, energetic and enlightened*” the Bulgarians were portrayed as a “*dumb and malleable*” race<sup>18</sup>. Bulgarian history was interpreted by the Greeks as evidence of the barbaric nature

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<sup>14</sup>Characteristic is the article in the newspaper Ora, in which even the existence of the Bulgarian language was disputed. According to the journalist, the Bulgarian language was among the many local idioms and Slavic dialects “*because there is no one who speaks Bulgarian. There is a language, or rather there are Slavic dialects, but the Bulgarian language does not exist anywhere in Europe. The language spoken by the so-called Bulgarians is a Slavic dialect*”, Ora, May 9, 1878, no. sheet 181, sheet 2.

<sup>15</sup>By the same token, taking consciousness as the determining factor, the fact that the populations of Macedonia and Thrace use the Bulgarian language but their nationality is Greek should not be considered paradoxical.

<sup>16</sup>Alitheia, February 20, 1878, no. sheet 3066, sheet 1-2.

<sup>17</sup>Ethnikon Pnevma, April 27, 1878, no. sheet 1004, sheet 1.

<sup>18</sup>Article of the newspaper Klious republished in the newspaper Laos in 18 March, 1878. Of particular interest is Daskalov’s approach, who noted that the Greek attitude is evident in its discrediting of Bulgarian culture from the frequent use of the word “*race*” instead of “*nation*”, Rumenski Daskalov, Bulgarian – Greek

of the Bulgarian people, as both testimonies and reports were saturated with acts of plunder, murder, pillage, and raids, coupled with unbelievable animosity towards Hellenism<sup>19</sup>. In this context, the Greek national narrative of “*Bulgarian inferiority*” was formed with frequent references to the polarity of the “*advanced Greek*” and the “*mentally handicapped Bulgarian*”; this antithesis was often put as a rhetorical question to the West [quote]: “*Ultimately, would the west support the only civilized nation in the Balkans or the ‘nomadic peasants?’*”<sup>20</sup>.

As the image of the Bulgarian began to emerge as the greatest threat to Hellenism, that of the Ottoman Turk began to recede. Of course, it would be incorrect to imply that normalization in relations between the Ottomans and the Greeks was direct and easily discernible. The Turk as an eternal enemy had been ingrained in the social consciousness for decades and was so distinct, both culturally and religiously, that it made the process of normalizing the image of the Ottomans even more difficult. However, under the fear of the creation of a Greater Bulgaria, Greece was forced to review its relations with the Ottoman Empire in its quest for new ideological associations that would serve its irredentist ideas.

If one considers that the Constantinople Conference was decisive in completely turning Greece away from the idea of religious unity, by the same logic, the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano and the creation of a Greater Bulgaria was the basis for reassessing the relations between Greece and the Ottoman Empire. Reports from the special correspondents in Philippopolis (present day Plovdiv), particularly from the newspaper *Ora*, played a decisive role in forming the perception that Greek society had of the Bulgarians. The change of administration in the region from Ottoman to Russian-Bulgarian was a point of comparison<sup>21</sup>, where it was argued that although the Ottoman administration had undoubtedly restricted the citizens’ financial prosperity, the Bulgarians and Russians – despite being of the same cultural and religious origin - were the real oppressors of the Greeks’ intellectual prosperity<sup>22</sup>.

The diplomatic developments that caused the Greeks to again shift their ideological and political stance, had to do with the changes to the status quo in the Balkans, which

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Dis/Entanglements. In: Daskalov R. & T. Marinov (eds.), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans, Volume One: National Ideologies and Language Policies*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2013, 149-239, p. 209.

<sup>19</sup>Incidents of immorality and ill-treatment are also cited by the newspaper *Ora*, which reports on unjustified killings and incidents reminiscent of barbarians raiding Philippopolis, “*The Bulgarians killed at the train station two unarmed Ottomans ... Russians entering the city leading herds of oxen and whole flocks, snatching them from the Greek villages of the province*”, *Ora*, May 3, 1878, no. sheet 175, sheet 1.

<sup>20</sup>*Alitheia*, February 23, 1878, no. sheet 3068, sheet 1-2.

<sup>21</sup>“*We, victims of great suffering to the bitter end under the Turks, would always accept with open arms those who come to save us, should the savior show even the slightest sympathy and friendship to our nation*”, *Ora*, April 4, 1878, no. sheet 146, sheet 1.

<sup>22</sup>“*Under Turkish mismanagement, we Greeks lived a life of slavery, but we kept alive our nationality, our honor, our religion and our property. Already under the rule of the patrons of Christianity, the Russians, our nationality is threatened, our honor is slandered, our religion is endangered and our property is plundered; and this we suffer, because we insist on admitting that we are Greeks at heart, Greeks in nationality, Greeks in spirit*”, *Ora*, May 3, 1878, no. sheet 175, sheet 1. See also: “*The Turk tolerates the existence of the Greek, as long as he purchases his life for a year for thirty kuruşlar’ but the Russian and the Bulgarian, the latter relying on the former’s clout, no longer tolerate the existence of the Greek. They demand that we cease to exist as Greeks, to renounce our homeland, origin and name*”, *Ora*, May 1, 1878, no. sheet 173, sheet 1-2.

were to the detriment of European interests. This led the Great Powers of Europe to the Congress of Berlin in the summer of 1878. The new treaty reduced the territory of the Bulgarian principality by a third, giving control to the Ottoman Empire of Eastern Rumelia which, now, however, as a new province would have administrative autonomy. Although it was obvious that the Berlin Treaty tried to rectify the biggest of the problems brought about by the Treaty of San Stefano, it was impossible to nullify it entirely. In fact, the most important Articles of the San Stefano Treaty were retained as was, but in a milder form<sup>23</sup>.

The decisions of the Congress may at first have seemed to limit the Greek expansionist policy in the north, with meager territorial concessions having been made on the Greek-Turkish border, but it did restore a relative balance of power between Greece and Bulgaria<sup>24</sup>. The territorial space of the Bulgarian Principality was drastically reduced, Eastern Rumelia was placed again under the control of the Sublime Porte with administrative autonomy, while Ottoman rule was restored in Macedonia and the region of Thrace south of the Rhodope Mountains. One effect of the Berlin Treaty, however, was to perpetuate the conviction in the national and cultural superiority of the Greeks over the Bulgarians. This image was held by Greek society until the next change of events in Greek-Bulgarian affairs, with the unexpected annexation of Eastern Rumelia by the Bulgarians in 1885.

#### The Great Idea in Crisis

##### The annexation of Eastern Rumelia by the Bulgarians and the Possibility of a Greek-Turkish Alliance

The Bulgarians considered the decisions of the Berlin Congress to be a blatant historical injustice, in a sense predetermining the national policy that the newly formed Bulgarian Principality would follow. In terms of Bulgarian nationalism, the Greater Bulgaria of the San Stefano Treaty corresponded to reality, and reflected the true boundaries of the Bulgarian nation. A primary concern of the Bulgarian expansionist policy was, therefore, the unification of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria, which was proclaimed on September 6, 1885<sup>25</sup>.

The rapid political developments and the Bulgarian “*coup*”, as it was referred to by the Greek press, provoked a new ideological crisis, reshaping the established image of the Bulgarian nation. Even though it had become a natural state for rivalry to exist between the

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<sup>23</sup>Robert W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli Gladstone & the Eastern Question, A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1971, 461.

<sup>24</sup>Treaty between Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Turkey, for the Settlement of the Affairs of the East. Signed at Berlin, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1878, in Edward Hertslet, *The map of Europe by treaty*, London: Butterworths [etc.], 1875-91. Electronic reproduction. v. 4 New York, Columbia University Libraries, 2009, 2759-2798.

<sup>25</sup>Spiridon Sfetas, *Ellinovoulgarikes Anataraxeis, 1880-1908, anamesa sti ritoriki tis dimerous sunergasias kai kai stin praktiki ton ethnikon antagonismon*, Epikentro, Thessaloniki, 2008, 83-86. [Σπυρίδων Σφέτας, *Ελληνο-βουλγαρικές αναταράξεις, 1880-1908, ανάμεσα στη ρητορική της διμερούς συνεργασίας και στην πρακτική των εθνικών ανταγωνισμών*, Επίκεντρο, Θεσσαλονίκη 2008, 83-86].



Greeks and the Bulgarians -as is the case between two areas, where the prosperity of one affects the progress of the other- the unification of the Bulgarian Principality with Eastern Rumelia, however, meant a lot more to the Greek Great Idea. Undeniably, the Bulgarian undertaking had disastrous consequences for Greece's expansionist policy in Macedonia and Thrace, but more importantly, it had the effect of creating doubts about the actual "fervor" of the Great Idea.

The effect of the Bulgarian initiative was to arouse the fear that Greece's misguided foreign policy of recent decades had expedited a national adversary in fulfilling its own Great Idea, while the equivalent Greek Great Idea showed worrying signs of decadence and weariness. The press strongly reminded the Greek people that a nation with an insignificant historical presence, had [quote]"within eight years [managed to] build an army much bigger than what Greece has been attempting to do in 50 years", the message that was hammered home was that Greece had remained stagnant. In short, the viewpoint that was being reiterated was that, had the Greek government acted decisively in the same way that the Bulgarians had after the Berlin Congress, the events in Eastern Rumelia could have been avoided. Instead, the Greek press sarcastically commented that the Greek leadership [quote] "dreamed of buying cheaper cigarettes", mocking the Deligiannis' government tax cuts<sup>26</sup>. This bleak parallelism illustrates the near certain demise of the Greek Great Idea, in contrast to its counterpart which was accomplishing big feats and achieving great successes that raised the morale of the Bulgarians<sup>27</sup>.

As was to be expected, the image of the Bulgarians, who defied the decisions of the Berlin Congress, provoked the contempt of the Greeks<sup>28</sup>. Almost immediately, reports in the Greek press began to point to the reversal of roles in Greek-Bulgarian relations. On one side were the Bulgarians who were presented as determined to impose their expansionist ambitions with an iron fist<sup>29</sup>, and on the other, were the Greeks who resting on the decisions of the Berlin Treaty, had sunk into "national" inertia<sup>30</sup>.

Greek articles began to refer to Bulgaria as an "enviable nation" which in a mere decade had succeeded in becoming a protagonist in Balkan events, and had very quickly replaced the influence and legacy of the Greeks in Europe<sup>31</sup>. However, besides the justified concerns about Bulgarian expansion into Macedonia<sup>32</sup>, the Greeks seem to have been

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<sup>26</sup>Paligenesia, September 24, 1885, no. sheet 6411, sheet 1.

<sup>27</sup>O Xronos ton Athinon, September 10, 1885, no. sheet 183, sheet 1.

<sup>28</sup>"The Treaty of Berlin has been torn up. And it was torn up, under the condition to be replaced by the Treaty of San Stefano", Ora, September 9, 1885, no. sheet 303, sheet 1.

<sup>29</sup>Ephimeris, September 24, 1885, no. sheet 267, sheet 1.

<sup>30</sup>Characteristic is the article in the newspaper Ora entitled "Is Greece asleep?" which refers to the "bloodless" annexation of Eastern Rumelia by the Bulgarians with Greece being too slow to react, Ora, September 9, 1885, no. sheet 303, sheet 1.

<sup>31</sup>"[The Bulgarians] tear down our glorious history!", "They seize the monopoly of bravery, heroism, sacrifices! They scorn our sword and our rifle", "Disgrace of the highest order in the Greek name!", Acropolis, September 10, 1885, no. sheet 1192, sheet 1.

<sup>32</sup>The union of Bulgaria and Rumelia does not only have territorial implications for doubling the size of Bulgaria, but the worst of it is that it increases the political and moral power of the Bulgarians tenfold, which implies the immediate danger to Macedonia and Thrace and the "defeat of the Greek nation", Efimeris, September 9, 1885, no. sheet 232, sheet 1.

more worried about the prestige they had lost in Europe, frequently expressing the national humiliation they felt for being overshadowed by a nation they had previously considered culturally and intellectually inferior<sup>33</sup>.

From the comparative analysis of the Greek newspapers for the years 1878 and 1885, we can conclude that, so long as the Bulgarian expansionist aspirations remained unfulfilled, they considered it an easy task to uphold the ideological dogma of Greece's cultural and national superiority which they had established in 1878. Under these circumstances, the image of the inferior Bulgarian was reproduced in the Greek press until 1885, but with interpretive adjustments. Although the image of the Bulgarians as a people who were culturally subordinate to the Greeks remained unchanged<sup>34</sup>, the image of the Bulgarians as a nation unworthy of political independence was erased.

In their attempt to arouse the Greek state, and the society at large, into claiming territories in the north, newspaper journalists cited the expansionist policy of the Bulgarians as an example to be emulated by Greece. The following quote is characteristic of this position: *"Their Chimerical dream is threateningly close to being fulfilled, and Greek existence [in the region] will be but a dream in our memory... They will invade Macedonia ... We are ashamed to say it but imitate the Bulgarians"*. One can say with certainty that there is a form of admiration for the Bulgarians who present themselves as negators of the European treaty and dare to stand up to the Great Powers [quote]: *"Honor and glory to the Bulgarians who, still suffering from the battle [of independence] and without the support of the Great Powers, painted [i.e., secured] with their blood their kingdom in the future"* and he continues, *"we congratulate our enemy. We recognize their daring as a heroic act, we involuntarily shake their hand, which deals us a deadly blow. Do you hear Greeks? We congratulate them because they act as Greeks"*<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup>*"[The Bulgarians] tore our holy Greek flag, trampled it, spat on it! We are robbed of our churches, schools, property, honor! They mock the Greek name, which until now, only that would attract the attention of the whole of Europe! We are being replaced!"*, Acropolis, September 10, 1885, no. sheet 1192, sheet 1.

<sup>34</sup>*"A people completely unknown, ignorant, brutal, without history, with no achievements in the civilization of mankind, originating only in the fields, who gained a majority by slaughtering and expelling the Greeks and replacing them with Bulgarians"*. Moreover, in Acropolis article entitled *"The Vandals of the 19th Century"* the Bulgarians are described as follows: *"[The Bulgarians] appeared before the societies of our century as a savage people, rising up suddenly from the tombs of the wild hordes of the Middle Ages ... with the fury of rabid wolves, relentless, cowardly, ambushing unsuspecting populations of Turks and Greeks!! .... They are killing today those who do not want to receive the ultimate dishonor of being called Bulgarian! They steal the money and the goods of the Greeks and the Turks of Rumelia. They set Greek schools and churches on fire! They grab the animals of the villagers! They forcibly recruit children, men and the elderly... and place on them the dreadful dishonor of fighting in the ranks of the Bulgarian hordes! What an abominable punishment! These monsters of humanity, the disgrace of man, the shame of the earth"*, Acropolis, September 18, 1885, no. sheet 1200, sheet 2.

<sup>35</sup>Acropolis, September 10, 1885, no. sheet 1192, sheet 1.

Greece without allies  
A realistic approach to a Greek-Turkish alliance

Although the Greek Great Idea was based on the fundamental conviction of the Greek kingdom expanding its borders to encompass areas with large Greek populations, including Eastern Rumelia, these aspirations were greatly thwarted by Bulgarian expansionism. Greek-Bulgarian rivalry compelled both the Greek state and the society to critically review its Great Idea, and to redefine its goals. The outcome of this “*soul-searching*” was the proposal for a Greek-Turkish alliance. The possibility of cooperation with the Ottoman Empire, which was once synonymous with Greek degradation and oppression, began to gain momentum. According to these views, the insistence of the Greeks to treat their neighbors as enemies, and the diplomatic rigidity that came as a result of this attitude, hampered the implementation of a national policy that could make the Greek Great Idea a reality.

The belief which was clearly stated in the Greek press that the Greek side’s strong reaction was directly related to the union of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia, could be considered partly wrong. The real apprehension of the Greeks was related more to the possibility of the Bulgarian deluge engulfing Macedonia, as well as putting an end to the vision of a Greater Greece<sup>36</sup>. The voluntary abandonment of Eastern Rumelia becoming a future Greek territory clearly shows that Greek foreign policy had focused on Macedonia as an achievable national aspiration. According to the press: “*the Greek government may have been accused of sacrificing the Greek population in Eastern Rumelia, but experience has shown that it is better to aim at what is possible rather than the impossible, even if it means the shrinkage of the Great Idea and its restriction to Macedonia*”<sup>37</sup>.

In this context, and in order for Greek irredentism to be able to survive, the Greek press systematically portrayed that an alliance with “*the sick man of Europe*” was the only realistic policy that could secure Greek interests in neighboring regions. Of course, the need for the normalization of relations between Greece and Turkey was, to a large extent, the result of Greece’s disappointment in the conciliative manner adopted by the Great Powers toward the Bulgarian Question. Taking a brief look at Greece’s relations with the West, it can be seen that due to the political changes in the Balkan Peninsula in the 19th century, and the rise of the pan-Slavic movement after the Crimean War, Greece was left with little choice but to adopt a pro-Western policy in exchange for its interests being defended against Bulgarian nationalism. This gradually created the belief in Greek society that in any conflict with the pro-Russian Bulgarians, the Western European powers, and especially Great Britain, had an obligation to support the Greek positions. That is why when

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<sup>36</sup>“*They grabbed Eastern Rumelia, which is most Greek, with the ultimate goal of invading Macedonia in a few days*”, Acropolis, September 10, 1885, no. sheet 1192, sheet 1.

<sup>37</sup>“*Greece’s case today concerns exclusively the defense and securing of the Greek claims in Macedonia*”, Paligenesia, October 3, 1885, no. sheet 6419, sheet 1.

the West reacted favorably to Bulgarian aspirations, the Greeks felt it to be a betrayal<sup>38</sup>. In the Greek consciousness, Europe had abandoned a cultural ally with whom it had shared common values for centuries, only to satisfy the desires of a barbaric people with whom they had nothing in common<sup>39</sup>.

In one sense, the idea of a Greek-Turkish alliance was formulated at the onset of Greek-Bulgarian rivalry in the 1870s, however, it was in the context of maintaining good relations with the High Porte for the welfare of the Greek populations still under the Ottoman Empire, and not as an official political position. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, these collaborative views were not very popular with Greek society, which in every international crisis sought conflict with the Ottomans with the intention of gaining territory.

Greek public sentiment regarding a Greek-Turkish alliance was completely transformed in 1885, and the “voices” calling for support of a bi-lateral friendship began to grow in number. The general opinion was that the diplomatic isolation that Greece found itself in was caused by the misinterpretation of “Others” of the Great Idea, gradually establishing the perception that all other nations were Greece’s “enemy”, thus, obstructing any possibility of Greek irredentism becoming a realistically feasible political program. Notwithstanding, as Greek journalists pointed out, had Greek society as a whole, sought to alter this assumption, foreign policy would have gained a certain amount of tactical flexibility, which would have already guaranteed a Greek-Turkish friendship. Greece, they claimed, would not have found itself in such a solitary position seeking transitory alliances as a way to counter the Bulgarian claims<sup>40</sup>. Conversely, they had better get used to the idea that there would be limited expansion to Greece’s borders, which would mean that [quote]: “not only will we never be able to claim our national interests that are at stake, but the very existence of little Greece will be problematic and short-lived”<sup>41</sup>.

Greece sought to ally itself with a force that would defend the restoration of the Balkan status quo, and as it failed to get a response from the Great Powers, the only solution was the Ottoman Empire<sup>42</sup>. Indeed, when Greece began military preparations to invade Macedonia, the press reaffirmed the Ottoman government’s consent, emphasizing

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<sup>38</sup> “[Greece] fought on their side, in favor of civilization and true freedom, [The British] do not hesitate to misappropriate the rights of Hellenism for the conquering appetites of a barbaric marauding people”, Paligenesia, October 4, 1885, no. sheet 6420, sheet 1.

<sup>39</sup> “Europe’s laughing stock ... Who? For God’s sake. Who? The Bulgarians!! Shame on the Greek name”, “We grieve that Europe rejects the great traditions of history, and violates on the law of the East, which it legislated and Greece respected. We grieve that Greece is forced to fight alone because Europe chose to sell its rights to the Bulgarians. Our ancestors shed their blood in places where this someone was then non-existent, and now he comes to claim them. Were our intellectual leaders and the leaders of the church today beheaded just so that the Bulgarians can today seize the rights of those for whom lives were sacrificed?”, Paligenesia, September 25, 1885, no. sheet 6412, sheet 1.

<sup>40</sup> Nea Efimeris, September 10, 1885, no. sheet 253, sheet 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Acropolis, October 24, 1885, no. sheet 1234, sheet 1.

<sup>42</sup> Paligenesia, October 9, 1885, no. sheet 6424, sheet. 1 & O Ellin Tipos, November 15, 1885, no. sheet 1540, sheet 1-2.

the friendly intentions<sup>43</sup> of Greece towards Ottoman interests [quote] *“Greece’s desire is to convince the neighboring power that our interests are in line with its own, as long as they are harmless to the general Greek interests, and as long as Turkey pays due attention to Greek interests with the restoration of the former situation in Eastern Rumelia and the restoration of the state of affairs imposed by the provisions of the Berlin Congress”*<sup>44</sup>.

The Greek press increasingly referred to the convergence of interests between Greece and the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the concept of a Greek-Turkish alliance was presented in the newspapers as a *fait accompli*, which blamed the Turkish side and its obsession with its *“hating the Greeks out of habit”* as an impediment to the alliance, claiming that [quote]: *“... the hatred of the Turks towards us is incomprehensible and detrimental to us and to them”*<sup>45</sup>. Nevertheless, the newspapers asserted that the position of the Ottomans would remain irrevocable; the Turks, they claimed, had difficulty in seeing the bigger picture of the problem; to quote: *“if the Turks had an in-depth understanding of their interests, and if they did not instinctively have a hatred for the Greeks, they would themselves want the enlargement of Greece, which would be their natural ally against the Russians and the Bulgarians, who would [be prevented from] taking a single step beyond their borders”*<sup>46</sup>.

The question that was thus put forward by the press, and which begged an answer, was whether Greece would expedite the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which it had always pursued, or whether it should intervene to stop it. The only certainty was that at that particular time, the interests of Greece could be better served solely by strengthening the Ottoman Empire<sup>47</sup>. Such an alliance could benefit both sides by maintaining the territorial status as stipulated by the Berlin Treaty, that is, for Eastern Rumelia and Macedonia to remain as territories of the Ottoman Empire<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup>*“Greek-Turkish relations have never been friendlier than today”*, Vyzantis October 3, 1885, no. sheet 3020, sheet 2.

<sup>44</sup>Paligenesia, October 5, 1885, no. sheet 6421, sheet 1.

<sup>45</sup>Paligenesia, October 2, 1885, no. sheet 6418, sheet 1.

<sup>46</sup>Acropolis, October 3, 1885, no. sheet 1214, sheet 1-2.

<sup>47</sup>*“We ought to enlighten the Ottoman Empire that our salvation is also theirs; ... our expansion and strengthening with relative concessions of lands, which had belonged to the Greeks for centuries, is the safest guarantee of keeping Turkey in Europe against the unbridled ferocity of the Russian-Bulgarians”*, Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup>Paligenesia, October 3, 1885, no. sheet 6419, sheet 1.

## Conclusions

In attempting to identify the national and ideological transitions that Greek society underwent within a ten-year period - from the beginning of the Balkan crisis in 1875 until the annexation of Eastern Rumelia by Bulgaria in 1885- it can be safely concluded that the national ideology, and consequently, the expansionist aspirations of the Greeks were decisively influenced by Bulgarian nationalism, which were modified in relation to the actions taken by Bulgaria. The Treaty of San Stefano and the emergence of Bulgarian hegemony in the Balkans resulted in Greece making extensive political and ideological revisions, as was perhaps to be expected. In fact, it was this gradual emergence of a new adversary, one who had hitherto been identified as a Christian Orthodox brother within the context of the common need and desire to drive out the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans, which forced Greece to redefine its ideological and political approaches; both in terms of the Greek Great Idea and the *"National Other"*.

In this context, the image of the fellow Orthodox Christians and suffering people of Bulgaria was steadily replaced by that of the barbaric tribe that had plundered the historical heritage of the Greeks. The Bulgarians, who until then had been fighting to throw off the shackles of the sultan's tyranny were themselves turned into being an unbearable yoke for the Greek populations still under Ottoman rule. In addition, another consequence of Greek-Bulgarian national rivalry was the need to reinterpret the image and the role of the Ottomans. Images of the *"Ottoman yoke"* disappeared from the Greek press, to be replaced by notions of *"friendship"* and *"cooperation"*. In a nutshell, it was the dynamic emergence of the Bulgarians as a national threat to the Greeks, which created the conditions for a Greek-Turkish alliance to be considered a necessity. In 1885, this became a political imperative in the form of national policy, in order to prevent the union of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria, and to defend Greek interests in Macedonia and Thrace.