

An Unforgettable Autumn: Bulgaria and Its Withdrawal from the First World War

di Daniel Cain

In 1918, the Bulgarian army had to face poor morale, a much more fearful enemy than the Entente. Poorly equipped and undernourished, Bulgarian soldiers were concerned about their beloved ones at home, who suffered because of a shortage of food and profiteering. The number of civilians killed by diseases and famine was so high that, in many towns, women took to the streets. In the summer of the same year, a new government came to power, hoping to keep the situation under control. The victory of the Entente's troops at Dobro Pole caused the collapse of the Bulgarian front. Thousands of rebelled soldiers marched towards Sofia. Withdrawing from the War was the only way out. On the same day when the rebelled troops were defeated in the suburbs of Sofia, an armistice was concluded at Salonika. Bulgaria was the first combatant in the camp of the Central Powers that exited from the Great War.

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Parole chiave: Bulgaria, Potenze centrali, Entente, Fronte interno, Prima guerra mondiale

Sofia, 30 September 1918. The early hours of that Monday held out little hope for the dwellers of the Bulgarian capital. Hardly anyone had been able to sleep a wink the night before because of the violent artillery and machine-gun fire that could be heard only a few kilometres away from the city centre. Their anxiety was also fuelled by the fear that they could at any moment be attacked and looted by thousands of rebellious soldiers who had left the Macedonian front, advancing towards Sofia¹. They demanded that their country withdraw from the war and punish those they considered responsible for the suffering of the troops and for the second military catastrophe in five years². Statistics explain the cause of their dissatisfaction. The death toll of the last three wars (1912-1913, 1915-1918) speaks volumes of the traumas that Bulgarian society experienced in less than a decade: almost 156,000 soldiers and officers died, while other 275,000 were wounded³. Only three years (1913-1915) were enough for the borders of the Bulgarian state to be remapped four times through peace treaties, the area of the country ranging between 96,346 and 180,000 sq. km⁴. The Bulgarian government's decision to enter the Great War in September 1915 was endorsed by the wish to expand its territorial borders. At the

¹ G. Lukov, D. Pencheva, *Spomenite na general Ivan Rachev Shkoynov za potushavaneto na Voynishkoto vustanie prez septemvri-oktomvri 1918 g.*, in «Izvestija na durzhavnite arhivi», n. 111-112, 2017, p. 514.

² R.C. Hall, *Balkan breakthrough: the battle of Dobro pole. 1918*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, p. 162.

³ R. Daskalov, *Bulgarskoto obshtesvo. 1878-1939*, v. 1, Gutenberg, Sofiya 2005, p. 142.

⁴ S.S. Popov, *Granitsite na Bulgarjia*, Khr.G.Danovü-OOD, Sofiya 1940, p. 83.

end of this conflict, Bulgaria was to find out whether its borders would be larger or narrower. It all depended on its final victory on the battlefield.

While the population of the Bulgarian capital was awaiting the denouement of the battles between loyal troops and insurgents on September 30, a much expected piece of news spread through the city: the War was over! The news published in the governmental press was terse: «The day before, September 29, late at night, an armistice was signed at Salonika between the Bulgarian delegation and the Commander of the Allied Army of the Orient. An order stipulated that military operations stop at once». The Bulgarian authorities urged the army and the population to remain absolutely calm and quiet, in order to give to the government the possibility to complete the peace process. Bulgarians were assured that «there is very little time until the day of a definite peace»⁵. A few tense days had passed since Bulgarian society found out about the government's decision to seek an armistice⁶. The idea of a separate peace had long been in place. The Russophile Bulgarians could not remain immune to the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of February 1917. Those who were in support of a separate peace became more and more vocal in Bulgarian society. The announcement of President Wilson's Fourteen Points in January 1918 intensified this feeling. Bulgaria was not at war with the USA, which many Bulgarians believed would look favourably on their country. Many of them asked the following legitimate question: If the US President wanted a peace based on ethnic principles, why not seek it immediately?⁷

The Malinov Cabinet was set up in June 1918 in a context in which it was even more evident that Germany (Bulgaria's major ally) was no longer able to win the war. At least this was the general impression shared by public opinion in Bulgaria: if Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria had not thought of a separate peace he would not have had any reason to replace the former premier Vasil Radoslavov with Aleksandur Malinov⁸. The rapid collapse of the Bulgarian army after the offensive launched by the Allied Army of the Orient on September 14 left few options to the Sofia authorities. On the same day, an Austro-Hungarian Peace Note was addressed to the governments of all the belligerent states. Its purpose was «to seek the basis for a compromise apt to make an end of the war, whose prolongation would mean nothing but suicide»⁹. The content of this note stirred the dissatisfaction of the government in Sofia. The Bulgarian PM Malinov informed the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Count István Burian, that his government, «though ardently desirous of peace», could not unconditionally support this diplomatic endeavour. Malinov was irritated by a paragraph from the Austro-Hungarian Peace Note, which stipulated

⁵ «Pryaporets», 30 September 1918.

⁶ «Pryaporets», 26 September 1918.

⁷ R.J. Crampton, *Aleksandur Stamboliiski. Bulgaria*, Haus Publishing, London 2009, pp. 59-60.

⁸ *Doklad ot parlamentarnata izpitatelna komisija za anketirane upravlenieto na bivshija kabinet Al. Malinov-Kosturkov*, red. ot Bŭlgariya Narodno sŭbranie, Sofiya 1923, p. 169.

⁹ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. 1918. Supplement I. The World War. Volume I*, eds. J.V. Fuller, T. Dennett, United States Government Printing Office, Washington 1933, p. 308.

that the Central Powers fought only for the territorial integrity of their member states: «Count Burian forgets that Bulgaria has also joined the world war in order to achieve its national unity»¹⁰.

This feeling of dissatisfaction was intensified by the fact that Bulgaria could not rely at that moment on the rapid military support offered by its allies. The war minister, General Sava Savov, became aware of the scale of the disaster: with a disintegrated army unable to fight, diplomacy was Bulgaria's last resort¹¹. «A catastrophe will befall us», premier Aleksandur Malinov telegraphs Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria, who was in Skopje. Malinov puts pressure on the Bulgarian sovereign to immediately accept the government's proposal to conclude an armistice. Upon his return from Sofia, Ferdinand summoned the Crown Council on September 24. No decision was made. They discussed about a potential reinforcement of the front line in order to increase Bulgaria's chances to obtain an honest peace¹². However, when the Crown Council ended, the first news about mutinous bands of deserters advancing towards Sofia was broken. When hearing the news, Tsar Ferdinand gave up his plan to arrest the Bulgarian ministers¹³. Consequently, the following day Malinov informed Ferdinand of Bulgaria that the war was lost and that asking for terms of peace was the only thing to do. «Only this way can the country be saved from ruin and from all the misfortunes that might be in store for Bulgaria if the enemy invaded its territory». Premier Malinov hoped that, «though forced to conclude peace under extremely unfavourable circumstances, the future international peace conference will acknowledge Bulgaria's rights»¹⁴. On the same day it was established that Andrei Lyapchev, the Minister of Finance, and General Ivan Lukov, army commander, should make for the front line to seek armistice terms from the Allies¹⁵. They had the authority and power to negotiate a separate armistice with the Entente on behalf of Bulgarian Government. The fate of Bulgaria rested with their efforts.

As soon as the success of their diplomatic mission was disclosed, the news was conveyed to the troops in the Sofia garrison¹⁶. A telegram was urgently sent off to the local authorities so as to inform the population that the armistice had been concluded¹⁷. At the same time, aircraft was used to drop flyers over the rebels' positions in order to destroy their morale, as they had been trying to enter the Bulgarian

¹⁰ *Diplomaticeski dokumenti po uchastieto na Bulgarija v evropeiskata vojna, v. 2, 1915-1918 g. (do Primirieto)*, red. ot Ministerstvo na vünshnite raboti i na izpovedaniyata, Derzhavna pechatnitsa, Sofiya 1921, p. 1025.

¹¹ S.V. Savov, K. Zhostov, *Intimnite prichini za pogromite na Bulgarija*, Evropresa, Sofiya 2000, pp. 80-81.

¹² *Doklad ot parlamentarnata izpitatelna komisija*, red. ot Bülgariya Narodno sübranie, cit., p. 207.

¹³ A. Malinov, *Pod znaka na ostrasteni i opasni politicheski borbi*, Izd-vo Khristo Botev, Sofiya 1991, p. 70.

¹⁴ *Doklad ot parlamentarnata izpitatelna komisija*, red. ot Bülgariya Narodno sübranie, cit., pp. 207-208.

¹⁵ Tsentralen Durzhaven Arhiv na Republika Bulgariia (TsDA), Fond 284k, o. 1, a.e. 3946, l. 1.

¹⁶ S. Moshanov, *Voynishkite buntove-24 septemvri do 3 oktombri 1918 g.*, in *Dokumentalen sbornik "Bulgarite i Golyamata vojna"*, eds. A. Alexandrova et al., Bülgarska Akademija na Naukite, Institut za istoricheski izsledvanija, Durzhavna Agentsia Arhivi, Sofiya 2016, p. 415.

¹⁷ *Ezhedneven byuletin na Blagotvoritelen komitet za grazhdanski grizhi*, in «Varna», 1 October 1918.

capital by force. The flyers read: «The armistice has already been concluded. The peace will also be signed today or tomorrow. Go home. What more do you need?»¹⁸.

These grave events determined the Bulgarian parliament to hold an extraordinary session on the afternoon of September 30. At that moment, decisive, bloody battles were taking place a few kilometres away between the governmental troops and the rebels¹⁹. There was one single point on the National Assembly's agenda: a statement made by PM Aleksandur Malinov about Bulgaria's withdrawal from the war. Malinov addressed to the deputies as follows: «I can only tell you that the government has been informed by the delegates who are now in Salonika that the armistice has been signed». Given the rapidly unfolding events, Malinov asked the deputies to postpone the meeting for a few days until a clear and updated report was drafted²⁰. 24 hours later, in a secret meeting of the government, the finance minister, Andrei Lyapchev, offered details about the armistice he had signed at Salonika. It took only 90 minutes for the government to approve the text of the convention signed by the Bulgarian delegates and French General Franchet d'Espèrey²¹.

On the afternoon of October 4, in a secret meeting, PM Malinov informed the Bulgarian deputies of the reasons which led up to the signing of the armistice. A few hours before, they had found out about the abdication of Tsar Ferdinand in favor of his son, Boris III. The new sovereign's first decision was to sign the Bulgarian's army demobilization decree. After a 31-year reign, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha was forced to leave Bulgaria for good. The information included in the report presented by the head of the government was not made public because of alleged superior state interests. «For us», declares Malinov, today it is more important «to know what we have to do than know in detail the causes of our catastrophe». During this secret meeting, the Bulgarian deputies passed the following resolution: «After having listened to the prime minister's presentation of the causes that led to the signing of the armistice with the states of the Entente, the General Assembly approves of the government's attitude and moves on to the items on their agenda»²².

¹⁸ L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie. 1918*, Nauka i izkustvo, Sofiya 1988, pp. 141-142.

¹⁹ During the communist regime, the Soldiers' Uprising was one of the most favored topics by Bulgarian historiography. According to the canons of Soviet historiography, Bulgarian historians tried to underline the important role of the events that occurred in September 1918 «for the further development of the revolutionary process in Bulgaria, for the involvement of the masses in the class struggle against the bourgeoisie, for the strengthening of the union between the working class and working peasants»: L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie. 1918*, cit., p. 214. Among the representative works of this period, we mention: H. Hristov, *Revoljutsionna kriza v Bulgarija. 1918-1919*, BKP, Sofiya 1957; id., *Voynishkoto vustanie. 1918*, Otechestven front, Sofiya 1961; 1918. *Voynishkoto vustanie. Sbornik ot dokumenti i spomeni*, red. ot D. Tisher et al., BKP, Sofia, 1968; L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie. 1918*, Nauka i izkustvo, Sofiya 1978 (2nd edition, Sofiya 1988). After 1989, Bulgarian historians have more or less evaded this subject because of its association with Marxist-Leninist historiography.

²⁰ *Dnevnik (stenografski) na XVII-to obiknoveno Narodno Subranie. Chetvurta izvunredna sesija*, red. ot Narodnoto sübranie, Sofiya 1931, p. 4, 30-9-1918.

²¹ TsDA, Fond 284k, o. 1, a.e. 3948, ll. 1-2.

²² *Dnevnik (stenografski) na XVII-to obiknoveno Narodno Subranie*, red. ot Narodnoto sübranie, cit., pp. 7-8, 4-10-1918.

While in Sofia, writer and officer Yordan Yovkov was an unexpected witness to these crucial events that marked the history of his country. Recently engaged, on October 2 he confessed to his fiancée who was in Varna:

A lot has happened these days! One day I will tell you everything in detail. Now it's over, thank God, or at least what was more dangerous and terrible is over! Peace! Peace! Peace! This sweet, so much expected and longed-for word is on everyone's lips. We are now living in peace. Is it real or just a dream? The word encompasses many hardships, much suffering and despair for us but, however, it brings comfort for those who were in pain and hoped for a moment of rest, it brings joy to mothers, it brings joy and hope for us too, my darling!²³

The Bulgarian population was seized with uncertainty and despair. Professor at the University of Sofia, Aleksandur Tsankov records the major change undergone by Bulgarians in the autumn of 1918: «In that period, Sofia resembled a mute desert». No one dared to criticize the armistice or to be willing to speak. With their heads bowed and deeply grieved, the crowd seemed silenced. For the 39-years-old Tsankov, these were the grimmest days of his life²⁴.

After the Salonika armistice was concluded, in the following months and years Bulgarian society tried to find an answer to two significant questions: Who is to blame for this national catastrophe? and why are we not victorious? The starting point was the year 1913. In our modern history, notes historian Georgi Markov, «1913 stands out as a really terrible year; the year when Bulgaria rose to the peak of its military glory and international recognition only to be pushed into the abyss of national ruin»²⁵. After the Second Balkan War, this country was perceived as a troublemaker and a potential threat for the stability in the peninsula. Defeated and subjected to international isolation, Bulgaria was in need both of political and financial support from the Great Powers.

In the autumn of 1913, the new Bulgarian Cabinet led by the Liberal Vasil Radoslavov was in urgent need of a substantial foreign loan meant to enable him to stabilize the country. The negotiations were the main focus of Bulgarian foreign policy, as they were hard and long. They were finished in the early summer of 1914 and turned out to be more of a political than economic importance. France was the first option. Traditionally, Bulgaria was a good client of the French *Paribas*. However, the negotiations failed because of Russia's opposition, which was France's ally. The political circles in Paris and St. Petersburg wanted to replace Radoslavov, given their dissatisfaction with the Bulgarian Cabinet's pro-Austrian orientation. For the Sofia government, finding other creditors was the only way out. The way to

²³ Y. Yovkov, *Arhiv, Iztok-Zapad*, Sofiya 2017, p. 40.

²⁴ A. Tsankov, *Moeto vreme. Memoari*, Prozorets, Sofiya 2002, p. 104.

²⁵ G. Markov, *The Great War and the Bulgarian sword over the Balkan knot, 1914-1919*, Zahari Stoyanov, Sofiya 2016, p. 57.

Berlin and Vienna was open²⁶. The set-up of an international consortium of 35 banks headed by German Disconto Gessellschaft agreed to lend 500 million Reich Marks to the Bulgarian government under the guarantee of the German cabinet. Financially, the loan was secured by some of Bulgaria's incomes. By the terms of this loan, Germany established its dominance upon the vital sectors of Bulgarian economy²⁷. The final details about this loan coincided with the last days of peace in Europe. The heated parliamentary debates revealed the consequences of this loan over the future foreign policy of Bulgaria. The moment when the deal with Disconto Gessellschaft was approved by the National Assembly, the war had not yet been proclaimed. Was this loan a purely economic operation or did it impose political obligations?

The finance minister, Dimitur Tonchev, believed that his country managed to keep its freedom to act even at the cost of sacrificing its own economic interests. Although the German loan did not represent a turning point in Bulgarian foreign policy, it indisputably was a factor in the predisposition of Tsar Ferdinand and Vasil Radoslavov for the Central Powers²⁸. The National Assembly's vote for this loan strengthened the governmental coalition's position. After the February 1914 elections, Radoslavov enjoyed a fragile Parliamentary majority that amounted to 13 votes. Moreover, these votes were cast by some ethnic Turks from the provinces that had been annexed just a few months after the signing of the Constantinople Peace Treaty between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. Almost all the Muslim MPs from the Western Thrace lived in the Ottoman Empire and travelled to Sofia only for key votes. Thus, the crucial decisions that the Sofia government were to make once with the outbreak of the Great War depended entirely on them²⁹.

Although Bulgaria declared its neutrality from the outset, the aim of achieving national unity remained the main topic on the agenda of the parliamentary parties' leaders. This project could not be put into execution without the support of any major European power. But who was this power? The members of the National Assembly had divergent opinions. The ruling Liberal Coalition (Liberals, People's Liberals and Young Liberals) sympathized with the Central Powers and was traditionally pro-Austro-Hungary. The traditionally pro-Russian parties (People's Party, Progressive Liberals and Democrats) backed the Entente. The left political parties (Broad Socialists, Narrow Socialists) and the big opposition group of the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union was deeply divided between the neutralists and pro-Entente stance³⁰.

The diplomatic negotiations between Sofia and the Central Powers and the Entente, on the other hand, lasted over a year³¹. Their success depended on both the

²⁶ S. Damjanov, *Bulgarija vuv frenskata politika. 1878-1918*, Nauka i Izkustvo, Sofiya 1985, pp. 393-414.

²⁷ V. Kolev, K. Grozev, "The Bulgarian Summer" of 1915: Sofia between the Entente and the Central Powers, in *Purvata svetovna vojna vek po-kusno*, ed. I. Baeva, Prof. Marin Drinov, Sofiya 2016, pp. 230-236.

²⁸ G. Markov, *Golyamata vojna i bulgarskijat kliuch za evropejskija pogreb, 1914-1916*, Prof. Marin Drinov, Sofiya 1995, pp. 23-42.

²⁹ N. Stanev, *Istorija na Nova Bulgarija, 1878-1941*, Ivan Vazov, Sofiya 1992, p. 247.

³⁰ V. Kolev, K. Grozev, "The Bulgarian Summer" of 1915, cit., pp. 234-235.

³¹ On the historical background of these negotiations, see: *Diplomaticheski dokumenti po uchastieto na Bulgarija v evropeiskata vojna, v. 1, 1913-1915 g.*, red. ot Ministerstvo na vünshnite raboti i na izpovedaniyata, Derzhavna

territorial promises made by the two main conflicting coalitions and the general situation on the major fronts in Europe. After Turkey had made the decision to join the Great War on the side of the Central Powers in the autumn of 1914, the Sofia authorities' position would become more prominent. Bulgaria turned into a valuable ally that held the "key" to the Balkans. The Radoslavov Cabinet could afford to wait until approached by both sides and then choose the one which offered the most. Bulgaria's freedom of manoeuvre was increased by the fact that, given its military strength and strategic location, both sides in the Great War would be prepared to tolerate its neutrality for fear of driving it into their opponents' camp³². Macedonia remained the main goal for the Bulgarian government. Unfortunately for the Entente, it was far easier for the Central Powers to promise Bulgaria what belonged to their enemy than it was for the Allies to promise what belonged to their friend, Serbia. Secret treaties were concluded between Bulgaria and Central Powers in August and September 1915. This offered Bulgaria a five-year alliance with a secret annex guaranteeing the immediate possession of the entire Macedonia. Shortly before the war declaration was made, the main opposition parties were summoned to audiences with the prime minister Radoslavov and Tsar Ferdinand. All the opposition party leaders insisted that the country should remain neutral. The most vocal was the leader of the Agrarians, Aleksandur Stamboliiski, who threatened Ferdinand that he would lose not only the crown, but also his life in case of another lost war. Shortly after this incident, Stamboliiski was deprived of his seat in parliament and sentenced to death for treason, though Ferdinand commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. Also, the leader of the Democrats, Aleksandur Malinov, was put under house arrest for his intensive contacts with the Entente diplomacy. Ferdinand and Radoslavov were free to pursue their war. On 1/14 October, 1915, Bulgaria declared war on Serbia, without Parliament's prior consent. A week later, Bulgaria was at war with Russia, Britain, France and Italy.

The costs of a modern war were much greater than Bulgaria could bear. On September 1, 1918, after three years of war, 855,175 men were under arms. This figure accounted for 17% of the country's population and 34% of the male population. It was an unparalleled mobilization in the modern history of Bulgaria. The homogenous Bulgarian army suffered because of the conscripts who had been brought on the front during that summer. Many of them came from territories that were Bulgarian administration. A Bulgarian officer sadly notes that they were «rather pernicious than useful», as «many of them do not feel Bulgarians»³³. The lack of military reinforcements caused the exhaustion of those fighting on the front. This explains

pechatnitsa, Sofiya 1920; I. Ilchev, *Bulgarija i Antanta prez Purvata svetovna vojna*, Nauka i Izkustvo, Sofiya 1990; T. Vlahov, *Otnoshenijata mezdju Bulgarija i Tsentalnite sili po vreme na vojnite. 1912-1918*, BKP, Sofiya 1957; G. Markov, *Golyamata vojna i bulgarskijat kliuch*, cit.; M.D. Lalkov, *Balkanskata politika na Avstro-Ungarija. 1914-1917*, Nauka i Izkustvo, Sofiya 1983.

³² R.J. Crampton, *Bulgaria*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, p. 207.

³³ K. Gecheva, *Iz dnevnika na d-r Petur Nedeovski za Purvata svetovna vojna*, in «Izvestija na durzhavnite arhivi», n. 111-112, 2018, p. 232.

the exponential increase in the number of the soldiers who passed away because of various diseases: from 1049 men in 1915 up to 13,076 men in 1918³⁴.

The long duration of the war brought the collapse of Bulgaria's economy. Agriculture was particularly badly hit, for the land was starved, not only of fertilizers and mechanical means of cultivation, but also of the able-bodied peasants who could gather the crops. Previously affected by the Balkan Wars, Bulgaria's public finance became dependent on German loans. At the end of the Great War, the budget deficit of Bulgaria had been over seven times higher compared to 1912. Inevitably, inflation grew rapidly, which led to the printing of new notes. In 1918, Bulgaria's monetary base was ten times higher compared to 1914³⁵. Up until the beginning of 1918, the price for basic products was, on average, five times higher compared to July 1914³⁶. No longer able to export its products to other countries, Bulgaria concurrently had to rely mainly on imports from the Central Powers. This dependency made the country extremely vulnerable, particularly because its industry was underdeveloped. Relying mostly on agriculture, the Bulgarian economy depended on manpower and animal traction.

The mobilization that occurred in the autumn of 1915 and military requisitions left their mark on Bulgaria's chances to redress its economy. In calm periods on the front lines, many soldiers had to go on leave in order to work in the fields. In only three years' time, the cereal and vegetable production was two times lower³⁷. It soon became clear that in this global war the final victory depended not only on military power, but also on the capacity of national economies to support the war effort on the long term. Every government's economic planning capacity became crucial. The Bulgarian authorities overlooked this aspect when the war began. They were convinced that this military campaign was not meant to last. Besides, they were accustomed to see resilient Bulgarian soldiers who were satisfied with a little. The lack of infrastructure and the poor intendance services shortly affected the quality of food and clothes for the soldiers fighting on the front lines³⁸. Additional difficulties emerged as a result of the fact that the Bulgarian troops fought outside the old borders. The administration of the territories occupied in the 1915 (Macedonia, Morava) and 1916 (Dobrudja) campaigns caused enough tension between Bulgaria and its allies. The extension of the front line implied the extension of supply lines, as well. In other words, more pressure was put on the shoulders of those behind the front line. Wartime conditions imply costs, worries, hard work and undernourishment. They are risk factors for a nation's health. Hunger, disease, death, corruption, injustice and revolt become part of Bulgarian society's daily life. Gradually, the civilians' frame of mind became even more relevant for the discipline of the troops

³⁴ V.N. Krapchanski et al., *Kratuk obzor na boynia sustav, organizatsiata, populvaneto i mobilizatsiata na bulgarskata armija ot 1878 do 1944 g.*, Dürzhavno voenno izdatelstvo, Sofiya 1961, p. 114.

³⁵ L. Spasov, D. Borisov, M. Marinova, *Stopanska istoriya na Bŭlgariya, Evropa i sveta XV - XX vek, chast 1 - Bŭlgariya*, İVRAY, Sofiya 2016, p. 140.

³⁶ L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie*, cit., p. 70.

³⁷ L. Spasov, D. Borisov, M. Marinova, *Stopanska istorija na Bulgarija*, cit., p. 141.

³⁸ D. Bankov, *Prichinite na pogroma*, Pechatnitsa na armeiškiia voen. izdatelski fond, Sofiya 1922, pp. 60-61, 94-96.

fighting on the front. Bulgarian generals would soon understand to what extent the state of affairs behind the front line might influence the army's combative spirit³⁹.

Ever since the army was mobilized many had warned the military and civil authorities about the manner in which to manage the situation behind the front line: «The last war's experience showed us that the state's ignorance towards the soldiers' families led both to a generalized state of mess and unrest among those who had been sent to the battlefield»⁴⁰. In a predominantly agrarian society such as the Bulgarian one, traditional family values shaped the psychology of the soldier who fought on the front lines. Statistics show that over half of the Bulgarian households had between 5 and 9 persons⁴¹. When the army got mobilized, every soldier left his savings to their large family. They were soon wasted because of inflation. Women and children had to fill in for their husbands and fathers (until then the main family providers). Farm labour had to be performed by women, children, elderly and disabled people. An officer on the Macedonian front observes the impact that this state of affairs has on his soldiers' morale: «If we set aside the many hardships occurring on the front lines, which are the result of fighting, persistent hunger and clothes shortage, the suffering of the families left behind the front lines had a bad effect on the soldier's mood. Bulgarians are good fathers who cannot silently bear with the troubles experienced by their dear ones, wives and children»⁴².

The difficulties their beloved ones went through became even more unbearable as soldiers were forced to wage a long defensive war. From the start, this war was not popular at all. Bulgarian soldiers went to the front without too much enthusiasm. The relatively easy victories won on the Serbian front at the beginning of the campaign gave them the impression that the war would soon end well. The vitality they showed in the battle against the Serbian army (in the autumn of 1915) and the Romanian army (in the autumn of 1916) was legitimated by the feeling of revenge for what had happened in the Second Balkan War. The subsequent events compelled Bulgarian soldiers to wage a different, defensive war against some enemies that grew in numbers⁴³. It was a tormenting war of attrition. Working in trenches 24 hours at permanent risk and fighting against the hardships of nature (be it winter or summer), the soldiers' physical and psychic energy finally wore out. To resist in such conditions Bulgarian soldiers had to be well fed and equipped⁴⁴. Fears that the soldiers would not be able to resist until the war ended emerged the moment when they were placed in a defensive position in Macedonia, Thracia and Dobrudja. It is this defensive position that played down the Bulgarian soldiers' biggest quality – their offensive spirit⁴⁵.

³⁹ S.V. Savov, K. Zhostov, *Intimnite prichini za pogromite na Bulgarija*, cit., p. 74.

⁴⁰ «Narod», n. 60, 03-09-1915.

⁴¹ G.T. Danailov, *Izsledvanija vurhu demografijata na Bulgarija*, Sbornik na BAN, Sofiya 1931, p. 178.

⁴² D. Azmanov, *Urokut ot Dobro pole*, Pечатnitsa Knipegraf, Sofiya 1935, p. 19.

⁴³ S. Noykov, *Zashto ne pobedihme*, Pечатnitsa na armeiskiiia voen. izdatelski fond, Sofiya 1922, p. 133.

⁴⁴ S. Omarchevski, *Bulgarskite upravniitsi prez svetovnata vojna. Fakti i dokumenti*, Dürzhavna pechatnitsa, Sofiya 1921, p. 207.

⁴⁵ D. Bankov, *Prichinite na pogroma*, cit., p. 74.

The chance of a final victory depended on both soldiers' bravery and Bulgarian ploughmen's industriousness. In a 7 June 1917 manifesto addressed to farmers, General Aleksandur Protogerov, the then head of the Directorate for Economic Affairs and Social Planning (DEASP), explains the importance of their labour: «After seeing that they cannot defeat our army on the battlefield, our enemies hope that famine will wear out our people's fighting spirit. From the battlefield, the war moved to the fields. The state that runs out of bread will have to admit its surrender, no matter how strong its army may be»⁴⁶. By law, DEASP was part of the Ministry of War, but it was also under the control of the Bulgarian government. Its main mission was to manage national economy to such an extent that the army and the population could be properly fed. «Ensuring the people's victory, peace and power» both on the front lines and behind them depended on the success of its mission⁴⁷.

The first signs of the food crisis appeared in May 1916. Premier Vasil Radoslavov was irked by the fact that the bread ration of the soldiers who fought on the front was diminished because of supply difficulties⁴⁸. The first urban women's revolts occurred during the same period. Passing through a small town, the national education minister, Petur Peshev, was forced to talk to a group of a few hundred women who were dissatisfied with the bad quality of bread, which began to be made of a mixture of corn flour and bread flour. «I answered them that this situation is necessary because there is not enough wheat to feed both the army and the people, and that things will be better when the new crops are harvested»⁴⁹.

Other conflicts emerged when the soldiers' wives were confronted with the heartless bureaucrats who delayed relief payments under the Law for Assistance to Needy Soldiers' Families. These problems got worse as the war extended. The food crisis was provoked by many factors: the badly organized home front, corruption, lawlessness, political mores and the increased supply of food to the allies in fulfillment of war conventions⁵⁰. Resorting to requisitions and setting of artificially low prices for agricultural products, the Radoslavov regime imposed severe hardships on the rural population and discouraged peasant families from producing for sale⁵¹. At the same time, the Bulgarian authorities also had to manage their economic relation with their allies, which was a delicate problem to attend to. The German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish troops wanted to be granted the right to purchase

⁴⁶ This manifesto stored in The State Archives of the Republic of North Macedonia is available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Economic_Care_and_Social_Foresight_Administration_Appeal_for_Sowing.jpg.

⁴⁷ TsDA, Fond 260k, o. 4, a.e. 111, l. 52.

⁴⁸ V. Radoslavov, *Dnevni belezhki. 1914-1916*, Univ. izd-vo Sv. Kliment Okhridski, Sofiya 1993, p. 184.

⁴⁹ P. Peshev, *Istorieskite subitija i dejateli. Ot navecherieto na Osvobozhdenieto ni do dnes. S belezhki za zhivota mi*, Pechatnitsa na Liberalni klub, Sofiya, 1929, p. 534.

⁵⁰ S. Dimitrova, "Not quiet on the front and not quiet in the rear": of social anger during the first World War (the bulgarian case), in «Bulgarian Historical Review», n. 3-4, 2017, p. 111.

⁵¹ J.D. Bell, *Peasants in Power. Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgaria Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1977, p. 123.

and sell any type all sorts of products without any restrictions imposed by the Bulgarian authorities⁵².

Price gouging widened the gap between “the poor and the rich” and enhanced the inequalities within Bulgarian society. Rumors of fortunes made overnight by speculation in vital commodities were a prime stimulus of social discontent. Coming on a short leave from the front line service, a Bulgarian doctor was outraged by the unprecedented spread of corruption across the country. He bitterly concludes as follows:

Larceny, dirty affairs, abominations, debauchery and luxury have never been at their best in Bulgaria. Everyone steals! Ministries steal, deputies steal, even the bailiff steals. Every hour bankers and merchants cook up all sorts of means to get rich and steal. They are robbing the state and the people. The notions of honour and civic respect are completely lost! This will bring Bulgaria to ruin⁵³.

The suffering and depravation endured by the troops, the peasantry, and the poor of the cities and towns sharply contrasted with the epidemic of speculation that swept through the upper class and included many members of the government⁵⁴. Radi Radev, the mayor of Sofia, is a well-known example. He had re-channelled 110,000 kg of sugar to the black market, thereby depriving needy soldiers’ families and local hospitals, and putting at risk the military victory. The facts were so outrageous that Radev lost his political influence shortly after the fall of the Radoslavov Cabinet. In July 1918, a military court sentenced him to three years in jail. Yet imprisonment did not deprive him of his illegally acquired wealth⁵⁵. The soldiers understood that the black market, war profiteering, and governmental inefficiency were major causes of the lack of food and material throughout Bulgaria. Laws designed to counter these problems had little effect⁵⁶. This period was dominated by a paradox. In times of peace, theft was lawfully punished for a term of 10 years imprisonment. In times of war, few people were sentenced for this crime. Moreover, “misfeasance,” rather than “theft,” was the term employed to describe these acts. All these aspects fuelled the hatred of those who fought on the front lines for the government and “the heroes” behind the front lines⁵⁷.

The soldiers’ everyday life in the trenches was unbearable. The lack of news from home because of irregular correspondence, the lack of food and clothes, the lack of leave and the government’s carelessness about the soldiers’ families were all a heavy spiritual burden⁵⁸. The soldiers soon became aware that the situation at

⁵² V. Georgiev, S. Trifonov, *Istorija na bulgarite (1878-1944) v dokumenti*, v. 2, Prosveta, Sofiya 1996, p. 466.

⁵³ K. Gecheva, *Iz dnevnika na d-r Petur Nedevski*, cit., pp. 231-232.

⁵⁴ J.D. Bell, *Peasants in Power*, cit., p. 123.

⁵⁵ S. Dimitrova, *Not quiet on the front and not quiet in the rear*, cit., p. 112.

⁵⁶ R.C. Hall, *Balkan breakthrough*, cit., p. 102.

⁵⁷ D. Bankov, *Prichinite na pogroma*, cit., p. 58.

⁵⁸ S. Dimitrova, *The soldier’s death sentence (1915–1918): trauma, archives, and witness (A case study of N. Iliev’s unpublished war plays and published war short stories)*, in «Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju», n. 1, 2009, pp. 26-27.

home was as bad as what they experienced at the front. Many soldiers came to believe that the real enemy was the one «behind us»⁵⁹. Apart from war stories, trench talk revolved around the same topic: who were those getting rich whereas ordinary people were getting poor and starving? Many of their questions left unanswered: Where was the wheat produced by the country? Where was Bulgaria's wool? Why didn't soldiers have tobacco?⁶⁰ To avoid giving the impression of being ignorant of his subordinates' concerns, a young captain in the Macedonian front asked his parents to keep him abreast of «the awfully expensive life in Bulgaria and its current problems»⁶¹.

The soldiers who managed to get shelter behind the front due to help provided by highly influential people became an equally unpleasant topic for the troops' morale. In his diary, an officer writes about the effect of this situation: Only peasant soldiers and those who are not connected to the military authorities or the political and governmental circles are fighting on the front lines⁶². The fact that the duty towards one's country is an ordeal and an obligation for «the illiterate, shepherds and cattlemen» gave birth to a wave of grievances⁶³. The soul of those in the trenches was gnawed by doubt: Who are we fighting for and for whom are we putting our life in danger?

The poor harvest of 1917 and the spring of 1918 worsened the crisis. The entire country faced famine. In October 1917, DEASP had clear image of the imminent disaster. 1918 was to be an extremely bad year for the country's agriculture. In the best-case scenario, only half of the amount of food produced by Bulgaria within a normal crop year could be obtained. There were only two solutions meant to cover the cereal deficit: a new reduction in rations and imports⁶⁴. In only a few months' time, the population's daily bread ration dropped by 500 to 200 grams. The reduction was even more visible in the case of soldiers fighting on the front lines – from 1000 to 300 grams⁶⁵. The authorities were irritated because the population, dissatisfied with the fixed ration, was trying «to get more and to consume more». Given the high consumption rate, DEASP warned in December 1917 that «the available food will hardly be sufficient until May 1, 1918»⁶⁶.

Requisitions witnessed an upsurge. Fixed food rations were established for both the population and household animals. Any surplus had to be requisitioned in order to satisfy the needs of the army and the population from the localities affected by famine. Thus, beginning August 1, 1917, the annual fixed flour ration for the

⁵⁹ S. Omarchevski, *Bulgarskite upravnitisi prez svetovната vojna*, cit., p. 213.

⁶⁰ D. Azmanov, *Urokut ot Dobro pole*, cit., pp. 19-20.

⁶¹ *General-leytenant Atanas Stefanov (1891-1944). Lichen arhiv*, ed. M. Cholakova, Abagar, Veliko Tŭrmovo 2011, p. 122.

⁶² K. Gecheva, *Iz dnevnika na d-r Petur Nedevski*, cit., p. 231.

⁶³ S. Javashv, *Moralnoto sustojanie na bulgarskata armija v zaklyuchitelniya period na Purvata svetovna vojna*, in «Voennoistoricheski sbornik», n. 2, 1999, p. 121.

⁶⁴ V. Georgiev, S. Trifonov, *Istoriya na bulgarite*, cit., pp. 661-663.

⁶⁵ L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie*, cit., pp. 70-71.

⁶⁶ TsDA, Fond 260k, o. 4, a.e. 20, l. 53.

active population (farmers and workers) amounted to 190 kg per capita. For the other people (children, the elderly, etc.), the fixed ration amounted to 140 kg of flour⁶⁷. As expected, the population's dissatisfaction was sparked by the activity of the requisition committees. The local authorities were advised to do the best they could to explain to people that such measures were absolutely necessary. The population had to be aware of the fact that «the situation is difficult and that it requires sacrifice from all of us». If farmers fail to reduce their food needs to the minimum, then «our army, who defends our country from an inimical invasion and destruction» will fall prey to hunger⁶⁸.

For a large part of the population, the sacrifice required by the authorities was unbearable. Toma Vasiliov, a former retired governmental servant, records the hardships of daily life in his diary: «Everything is a few times more expensive. Bread is the cheapest product, but it is four times more expensive compared to normal times. Other things are 5 to 50 times more expensive». Vasiliov noticed that his pension only allowed him to cover half of the current expenses. «Who knows what will happen if the war does not end soon?»⁶⁹.

The shortage of food and the uncontrolled rise in prices fuelled the outbreak of anti-government demonstrations. In spring, the “women's riots” for food spread rapidly across the Bulgarian localities. Crowds made up of women and children attacked the headquarters of some local authorities, voicing their grievances: «Give us our men back; we want peace, not requisitions». They voiced not only the shortage of food, but also the dissatisfaction of a part of the population with the continuation of the war⁷⁰. Soldiers on leave were also detained during the clashes between the authorities and protesters. This was a worrying sign for the Bulgarian authorities, namely that social unrest also spread among the soldiers who were at the front⁷¹. Being on leave, an officer noticed that life conditions behind the front became «impossible».

Many things are missing. One can particularly feel the lack of food products. Even here bread is bad and scarce and everything is awfully expensive. Besides, this year's crop is extremely poor. Never in my life – and elderly people say the same thing – have I seen such a poor crop. Sowings are compromised. They got dry because of the severe draught. Not a drop of rain has fallen since the onset of spring. [...] There is no food for people, nor is there any food for animals, either – no straw, no hay whatsoever. So people and animals are doomed to starvation. If we do not receive food from abroad we will starve⁷².

⁶⁷ V. Georgiev, S. Trifonov, *Istorija na bulgarite*, cit., p. 659.

⁶⁸ «Izvestija na Direktsiata za stopanski grizhi i obshtestvena predvidlivost», n. 34, 30 May 1918, p. 3.

⁶⁹ T. Vasiliov, *Moyat dnevnik*, BAN, Sofiya 1994, p. 74.

⁷⁰ V. Georgiev, S. Trifonov, *Istorija na bulgarite*, cit., pp. 712-715.

⁷¹ L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie*, cit., pp. 72-73.

⁷² K. Gecheva, *Iz dnevnika na d-r Petur Nedevski*, cit., p. 231.

It is therefore not surprising that during this year (1918), the number of persons who died of various diseases and hunger (182,000) was bigger than the total number of Bulgarian soldiers killed in the Great War⁷³.

By the summer of 1918, massive discontent emerged in the Bulgarian army. On inspecting the Macedonian front, General Nikola Zhekov, the commander-in-chief of the Bulgarian army, observed the highly demoralized soldiers who, famished and ill-dressed, were asked to die for their country. He warned Tsar Ferdinand: «Today it is impossible to have any illusions, since the spirit of the soldiers is the same as it was at the beginning of the war, or even last year». The front reality was worrying: «Food, especially low-quality bread, is not sufficient enough to satisfy those to whom the Homeland is asking supernatural efforts today. The army does not eat any meat, and this is why the soldiers are provided food with meat twice a week – in some units even once a week». General Zhekov noted that the soldiers' clothes were even worse than the rations⁷⁴.

To be able to go on leave, many soldiers had to borrow each other's clothes. The image of ragged soldiers was no longer a surprise. Some units had reported one quarter of their men with bare feet⁷⁵. In May 1918, the Bulgarian army could ensure between 5 and 10% of the demand for clothes and footwear⁷⁶. The lack of all these items sparked the outbreak of revolts in many military units. The number of deserters increased. They either fled to the enemy's camp or hid inside the country, where armed groups were formed. Tough measures were taken to keep military discipline in place. A few hundreds of soldiers were court-martialed, many of them being sentenced to death or imprisoned⁷⁷. Physical punishment, i.e. 25 baton strikes, was enforced as a disciplinary measure in May 1918⁷⁸. In late July, General Zhekov hoped that the situation could still be kept under control by means of efficient measures⁷⁹. However, the battles that broke out in the Macedonian front in late May showed that the Bulgarian troops had lost their defensive spirit.

This situation was to get worse as the Central Powers' prospect of losing the war became even more evident. On June 21, 1918, premier Vasil Radoslavov resigned after a 5-year term as head of the Bulgarian government. The manner in which Bulgaria was treated by its allies when the separate peace between Romania and the Central Powers was signed (on May 7) made public opinion lose its patience. The fact that Bulgaria received only a part of Dobrudja instead of the entire region,

⁷³ L. Ognjanov, *Voynishkoto vustanie*, cit., p. 86.

⁷⁴ S. Toshev, *Pobedeni bez da budem biti*, Pechatnitsa na armeiškiia voen. izdatelski fond, Sofiya 1924, pp. 217-218.

⁷⁵ S. Noykov, *Zashto ne pobedihme*, cit., p. 129.

⁷⁶ D. Tsankova-Gancheva, *Sustojanie na oblekoto v Bulgarskata armija prez Purvata svetovna vojna. 1915-1918 g.*, in «Elektronen vestnik za muzeologija i voenna istorija», n. 1, 2005, p. 12; available at http://www.military-museum.bg/Pages/Publications/Electronic%20journal/broeve/2015_01.pdf.

⁷⁷ Bulgarska Akademija na Naukite, *Istorija na Bulgaria*, n. 8, Dürž. izd-vo Nauka i izkustvo, Sofiya 1999, pp. 307-308.

⁷⁸ P. Petkov, *Bulgarskite voenni sudilishta prez Purvata svetovna vojna*, in «Istorichesko büdeshte», *Bulgarija-Germanija. Purvata svetovna vojna. Pouki za budeshoto*, n. 1-2, 2018, p. 192.

⁷⁹ N. Mushanov, *Dnevnik. Spomeni. Avtobiografija*, Iztok-Zapad, Sofiya 2017, p. 26.

as it wanted, weakened the Germanophile Radoslavov's position. The Bulgarians considered Dobrudja as one of their legitimate historic claims. Also, this was a rich grain-growing area and it had been hoped that its acquisition would help alleviate the ever worsening problem of food supply. The feeling that Bulgaria was abandoned by its allies materialized when Germany decided to withdraw a large part of its troops from the Macedonian front. They were needed for a decisive offensive on the Western Front. This decision was preceded by other equally painful ones. At the dawn of 1918, the Germans ended their financial subsidies to Bulgaria and reduced the supplies of arms and other military equipment. Thus, the Bulgarian army saw itself forced to face the unpredictable situation of fighting pretty much alone against a powerful coalition made up of French, British, Italian, Serbian and Greek troops. This is why, in the summer of 1918, many Bulgarians believed that they had more to fear from their supposed friends than enemies⁸⁰.

The new prime-minister, Aleksandur Malinov, was not as closely tied to German interests as was Radoslavov. He inspired some hope among Bulgarian soldiers that things would change for the better. The reaction which the Sofia government's change had on the soldier's morale was likened to the effects of alcohol consumption:

At the beginning it enlivened them, it filled them with hope for a peace that was soon to come, but after a while, it sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction and distrust in their souls. On the whole, the government followed in the footsteps of the previous cabinet and failed to solve the issues which the troops at the front were acutely concerned with: they continued to starve and be ragged at the front, the much wanted peace was put off and families were in distress⁸¹.

At the end of August 1918, the Bulgarian army was in a difficult position, with their morale utterly dampened. General Zhekov had to quash the rumours spread among the troops, according to which the alliance agreement with the Central Powers was valid for only three years and was about to lapse on September 15. Consequently, the government should have concluded the peace until mid-September. Otherwise, the Bulgarian soldiers would refuse to fight anymore. The Bulgarian commander-in-chief attributed these rumours to the propaganda among the soldiers, unfolded by "anarchist" parliamentary parties (agrarians and socialists).

Zhekov invoked the example of the civil war in Russia, claiming that Bulgarian soldiers would have a similar fate if they gave up fighting⁸². It was too late to deliver patriotic speeches. After almost three years of frustration in Macedonia, the Entente forces had the possibility to achieve a complete victory with a single successful operation. The conditions were propitious for such an action. Bulgarians' morale was down and the Germans, already in retreat in the west, were unlikely to provide significant assistance to their ally. The Entente's troops held supremacy of

⁸⁰ R.J. Crampton, *Aleksandur Stamboliiski*, cit., pp. 60-61.

⁸¹ D. Azmanov, *Urokat ot Dobro pole*, cit., p. 20.

⁸² *Doklad ot parlamentarnata izpitatelna komisija*, red. ot Bŭlgariya Narodno sŭbranie, cit., pp. 187-188.

infantry and artillery. They chose Dobro Pole as the fight site. The offensive was launched on the morning of September 14. Complete breakthrough the Bulgarian positions had taken only four days, from initially artillery barrage to collapse and retreat of the Bulgarian army. At no other time and at no other front did this occur in the Great War⁸³.

Events unfolded at a fast pace. The domestic situation in Bulgaria was getting dramatically worse, as parts of the retreating Bulgarian army mutinied. The Bulgarian army's headquarters situated in the town of Kyustendil was devastated by the riotous soldiers. Safeguarding solutions were sought for in the political circles in Sofia. The staggering influence of Stamboliiski of the demoralized soldiers could no longer be ignored. He was released from prison together with other leaders of the opposition and was asked to do what he could to calm the army. Stamboliiski agreed, but only on condition that Bulgaria must immediately accept whatever peace terms the enemy chose to dictate. Days of confusions followed. Whereas the Bulgarian delegates were trying to get to the headquarters of the Allied Army of Orient, a parliamentary delegation was sent to welcome the mutineers that were heading to Sofia. One of the Agrarian leaders, Raiko Daskalov, with the tacit consent of Stamboliiski, became the leader of the mutineers located in the station of the town of Radomir. Daskalov proclaimed the republic while the mutineers were heading to Sofia to overthrow the government. The danger of a civil war was more imminent than ever. The rebels' attack was suppressed by the government's loyal troops aided by German military units. A few thousand people were killed and another few thousand were taken to military courts⁸⁴. Stamboliiski, Daskalov and other agrarian leaders were forced to hide until the end of the year when they would be pardoned via an amnesty granted to those found guilty of political offences.

Bulgaria was the last country to join the grouping of the Central Powers and was to be the first to leave it. Through the Salonika Armistice signed on September 29, 1918, Bulgaria avoided foreign occupation and managed to maintain a small defensive force. The Bulgarian army had to immediately liberate the Greek and Serbian regions which had been occupied during the war. The Central Powers' troops were given four weeks to leave the Bulgarian territory. Except for three divisions, the remaining Bulgarian army had to be demobilized at once. The Bulgarian military units lying west of Skopje were considered as captives until further orders. This order stipulated by the Salonika Armistice sent nearly 80,000 Bulgarian soldiers to prison after September 29⁸⁵. It was also a secret convention that allowed for "a passage" of the Entente troops through the Bulgarian territory as well as the use of railways, roads and ports. Also, the allied troops could temporarily occupy a cer-

⁸³ R.C. Hall, *Balkan breakthrough*, cit., p. 144.

⁸⁴ See V. Yanchev, *Armija, obshtestven red i vutreshna sigurnost mezhdu vojnite i sled tiah (1913-1915 i 1918-1923)*, Univ. izd-vo Sv. Kliment Ohridski, Sofiya 2014, pp. 79-119.

⁸⁵ S. Nikolov, *Zabravenite geroi. Plennicheskiat vupros ot vojnite na Bulgarija. 1885-1918 g.*, Natsionalen voennoistoricheski muzej, Sofiya 2019, p. 222

tain number of strategic positions on the Bulgarian territory⁸⁶. On March 1, 1919, the presence of the Entente troops on the Bulgarian territory amounted to 22,716 soldiers and 812 officers. The Italians were the most numerous (9,269 soldiers and 434 officers)⁸⁷. The mission of these troops was to ensure internal order in Bulgaria until the final peace was signed and to avoid a revolutionary movement inspired by Bolshevism.

Re-employed in the local administration, Toma Vasiliov briefly took stock of Bulgaria's participation in the Great War in October 1918: «Unfortunately, the war ended tragically, not to say catastrophically, for the Bulgarian people. Three years of fighting, a series of heroic deeds, brilliant victories, magnificent dreams. It's all in vain. The armistice has been signed, but it is from now on that our fate will be decided»⁸⁸. Deputy Dimo Kyurchev draws a similar conclusion: «it is very difficult to be Bulgarian in these times!»⁸⁹.

The main purpose of the Bulgarian government was to prepare the country for a general election in August 1919 and to await the definitive terms of peace. On September 27, 1919, near Paris, Bulgaria had to sign a humiliating peace treaty containing terms that were directly opposed to its ambitious aims. In his capacity as a new prime minister, Aleksandur Stamboliiski was the one to sign this peace treaty as a representative of Bulgaria. The Treaty of Neuilly was to cause a severe trauma in Bulgarian society. The incurred territorial losses and the burdening economic clauses turned Bulgaria into an arena of political extremes during the interwar period.

⁸⁶ G. Markov, *The Great War and the Bulgarian sword*, cit., pp. 246-247.

⁸⁷ Durzhaven Voenno-Istoricheski Arhiv (Dvia), Fond 24, o. 3, a.e. 63, l. 145.

⁸⁸ T. Vasiliov, *Moyat dnevnik*, cit., p. 75.

⁸⁹ D. Kyurchev, *Vreme na nadezhdi i katastrofi (1905-1919)*, Bŭlgarski pisatel, Sofiya 1994, p. 51.