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The Impact of 1918 on Bulgaria

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Abstract

Among the states that participated in World War I, Bulgaria is an interesting case, being the only Slavic and the only small state allied with the Central Powers. In addition, Bulgaria was the first member of the Quadruple Alliance that admitted their defeat with the Armistice of Thessaloniki (16/29 Sep 1918). The armistice signed in the Greek Macedonia capital ended not just Bulgaria's three years involvement in the Great War, alongside Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, but also a longer period of violent confrontations if we include the two Balkan Wars too (1912-1913). After the implication in these successive conflicts, the small Slavic state had seen significant human and material losses (155,000 deaths on the battlefields, 400,000 wounded, and over 155,000 deaths due to diseases). One in six men aged 20 to 50 lost their lives during the period October 1912 to September 1918. The hereby study deals with the effects of these losses, sufferings and deprivations (doubled by the bitterness of defeat but also by hopes of winning the victor's benevolence) at different layers: the army, the civilian population, the political life and the diplomacy. The study does not lack references to the "Dobrudjan Issue", which dominated the Romanian-Bulgarian relations for almost the entire period 1878-1940. The bibliography includes contributions by prestigious specialists in Bulgarian and Balkan history, written or translated in Bulgarian, Romanian, English, French or Italian, completed with Romanian military documents.

Keywords: social framework, political programs, war, loses, rebellions, peace conditions.

1. Introduction

At the start of the 20th century, Bulgaria (an independent kingdom since October 1908) was a small state in Southeastern Europe, weakly urbanized, with an undeveloped industry and inhabited by a large mass of landowners with small properties. Unlike neighboring Romania, Tsarist Russia, or the Hungarian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there were no major social cleavages, although the efforts towards the development of cities, industry, railways and the army had led to an excessive taxation for the peasantry. Compared with the neighboring Christian-Orthodox states, Bulgaria displayed a higher rate of literacy, a more pronounced tendency of the peasantry to associate within cooperatives, as well as a lower degree of religiosity. The Bulgarian state's surface at the beginning of the First World War was about 114,000 km², compared to 96,345 km², before the First Balkan War (1912).

In the last year, according to Bulgarian statistics, reproduced in a Romanian military document (a synthesis report of the Romanian military attaché in Sofia, Captain Florea Ţenescu,

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from 1915), Bulgaria's population was 4,742,000, of which 3,794,794 were ethnic Bulgarians, about 500,000 Turks (over 10%), 120,000 Gypsies (2,5%), 79,897 Romanians, 43,000 Greeks and 40,000 Jews. The share of urban population was 19.2%.[1]

After the Balkan Wars, Bulgaria gained a small part of the Historic Macedonia (The Pirin area) and Western Thrace from the Ottoman Empire, and, implicitly, an exit to the Aegean Sea, but lost Southern Dobrudja to Romania. These territorial changes did not substantially affect the ethnic structure of the Bulgarian population, because Western Thrace and Southern Dobrudja had a similar ethnic composition (a mixture between Turkish Muslims and Bulgarians).

The Romanian ethnics were concentrated in the northwest of the country (Vidin – Vratsa – Pleven), very few were lived in Southern Dobrudja, lost in 1913, while the Greeks lived mostly in the Plovdiv area and on the Black Sea coast, and the Jews formed an eminently urban community.[2]

From a political perspective, the modern Bulgarian national state was organized as a constitutional monarchy, like the neighboring Christian states, Romania, Greece and Serbia. The Constitution of Turnovo, adopted in 1879 and revised in favor of the monarch in 1893 and 1911, stated the principles of separation of powers in the state, political pluralism, respect for citizens' rights and freedoms, communal autonomy and universal male vote.[3] These generous constitutional provisions did not prevent authoritarian manifestations, instability and acts of violence, which translated into a series of political assassinations.

The post-Ottoman Bulgaria was marked by the antagonism between Russophiles and Russophobes, the two orientations being rather equal as popular support.

2. Years of war

After one year of neutrality, in the autumn of 1915, after a secret treaty of alliance with the Central Powers and the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria entered the Great War on their side. The decision was made by King Ferdinand I of Saxe Coburg – Gotha (1861-1948, reigning between 1887-1918, until 1908 prince/*knyaz*) and by the P.M. Vasil Radoslavov (1854-1929), leader of a Russophobe liberal party. The motivation for this option is very well presented by the historian Simeon Damjanov: "The biggest concession made by the Powers of Entente to Bulgaria was to promise that, after the end of the war, in the context of an enlargement of Serbia over Austro-Hungary and of Greece over the Ottoman Empire, they would exert pressures on the two countries for territorial compensation in favor of Bulgaria, while Bulgarians wanted the immediate occupation of the claimed areas."[4]

The prospect of substantial and rapid territorial gains had proved decisive for the Sofia governors and a part of public opinion. Indeed, on entering the great conflagration on the side of Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire ("the secular enemy" until 1913), Bulgaria immediately gained 160 villages and towns (including the Adrianople) from Eastern Thrace, up to the Enos-Midia line, ceded by the Ottoman state. In the following weeks, after the defeat of the

[1] The Romanian Military Archives of Pitesti (hereinafter referred to as R.M.A..-P.), Fond *The General Staff - the Military Attaché Bureau*, dossier no. crt. 75/1915, f. 61-63.

[2] Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Istoria Balcanilor: 1804-1945* [The history of the Balkans: 1804-1945], translated by Andreea Doica, Iasi, Polirom Publishing House, 2002, p. 231.

[3] Barbara Jelavich, *Istoria Balcanilor. Secolele XVIII – XIX* [The history of the Balkans. XVIII - XIX centuries], translation by Eugen Mihai Avădanei, Iaşi, European Institute, 2000, p. 326.

[4] Simeon Damjanov, *Le Traitée de Neuilly et ses repercussions sur les relations interbalkaniques (1919-1923)*, in "Etudes Balkaniques", Sofia, 16, nr. 2/1980, p. 57-58.

Serbian troops, they managed to occupy Vardarian Macedonia and Pomoravia (the Western Timok Valley). Other territorial aspirations concerned the entire Dobrudja (not only the territory lost in 1913) and the Aegean Macedonia.[5]

The Sofia governors ignored the ethno-demographic realities and, in the case of Macedonia, the identity of those from the claimed territories, starting from their own vision on the history of the Balkans. In addition, they did not correctly assess the global balance of power and the winning chances of the two confronting camps as well as the military and economic potential of their own country in the event of prolonged hostilities.

As a result, in September 1918, about 40% of Bulgaria's entire male population was under arms. The Bulgarian army's losses during the three years of involvement in World War I amounted to about 100,000 dead and 200,000 injured, in addition to the human sacrifices of the Balkan Wars (58,000 dead and 105,000 injured), resulting a total of about 160,000 dead and 300,000 injured for a population of nearly 5 million.[6] Grain production dropped by half in three years (1915-1918), from 2.7 million tons to 1.4 million tons[7], and the price index for basic products, with the reference year 1914 (= 100), increased continuously to 200 (1916), 500 (January 1918) to reach the level of 870[8] in July 1918. Bulgarian exports also recorded a sharp decline from 184 million *lev* in 1911 to 44 million in 1918; malnutrition caused daily deaths in cities and the national currency was affected by an unstoppable inflation.[9]

In this context, the Bulgarian hopes were related to the extension of jurisdiction over Northern Dobrudja (in the autumn of 1916, the Quadruple Alliance had occupied the entire Dobrudja, but only the southern part was entrusted to Bulgaria). This territory was seen as a possible supplementary source of food and other supplies.[10] The Bulgarian aspirations over Northern Dobrudja involved expelling Romania from the Black Sea, went beyond the 1915 treaty, and were confronted with the objections of other members of the Quadruple Alliance. The most transparent opposition came from the representatives of the Ottoman Empire, followed by a series of political and especially military German notabilities (Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Mackensen etc.), invoking geopolitical reasons and the danger of a Russian-Bulgarian (or, possibly, Ukrainian-Bulgarian) territorial junction.[11]

The geopolitical realities and the Slavophobia of some decision-makers from Berlin and Vienna were speculated by the Romanian politician Alexandru Marghiloman (1854-1925), a

[5] Ivan Ilčev, *Bălgarija i Antantata prez părvata svetovna vojna* [Bulgaria and Entente during the First World War], Sofia, Publishing House for Science and Art, 1990.

[6] John D. Bell, *Peasants in power. Alexander Stamboliiski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union 1899-1923*, Princetown University Press, Princetown-New Jersy, 1977, p. 122.

[7] Barbara Jelavich, *Istoria Balcanilor. Secolul XX: 1887-1982* [The history of the Balkans. 20th Century: 1887-1982], translation by Eugen Mihai Avădanei, Iaşi, European Institute, 2000, p. 155.

[8] Richard J. Crampton, *Aleksandur Stamboliiski and Bulgaria*, London, House Publishing Ltd, 2009, p. 641.

[9] Alberto Basciani, *L`illusione della modernità. Il sud-est dell` Europa tra le due guerre mondiali*, Roma, Rubbettino, 2016, p. 62-63.

[10] R.J. Crampton, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[11] See the memoirs of Vasil Radoslavov, *Bălgarija v svetovna kriza* [Bulgaria in the context of the global crisis], editor: Milen Kumanov, Sofia, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Publishing House, 1993, p. 207 and the works of Georgi Markov, *Goljamata vojna i bălgarskăta straža meždu Sredna Evropa i Orienta 1916-1919* [The Great War and the Bulgarian Guard between Central Europe and the Orient: 1916-1919, Sofia], Academic Publishing House "Professor Marin Drinov", Sofia, 2006, p. 168 and Žeko Popov, *Dobrudža: okupirana, osvobodena, otneta (1913-1918)* [Dobrudja: Occupied, liberated, stolen (1913-1918)], self-editing, Velbužd, 2008, p. 244.

conservative and a Germanophile. This is clearly shown by the basic text of the memo submitted by him at the beginning of March 1918 to the representatives of the Central Powers, a document centered on the problem of Dobrudja.[12]

Some German officials, including the Foreign Minister Richard von Kühlmann, presented the idea that Northern Dobrudja would be redeemed (in its own right) by Romania from Bulgaria, by paying a sum of money to help the Bulgarian economy.[13]

The Bulgarian attempts to obtain the entire Dobrudja ended in three consecutive failures in the first months of 1918: Brest-Litovsk (19 February/4 March 1918, Buftea 20 February/5 March and Bucharest 24 April/7 May 1918). The first treaty did not include any reference to Dobrudja and other Bulgarian territorial aspirations,[14] and the other two granted Bulgaria only the territory lost in 1913 and a strip from the Constanţa County; the rest of Dobrudja would be run by a *condominium* of the Quadruple Alliance and Romania's access to the Black Sea would be assured by the Cernavoda-Constanţa corridor.[15]

The failure in the Dobrudjan issue was followed by a series of local defeats with major psychological impact, on the Macedonian front[16]. The Radoslavov government quickly lost its parliamentary majority and, after unsuccessful reconciliation attempts with the Agrarians and Democrats, who had opposed the 1915 decision, it resigned on 15 June 1918.[17]

The causal relationship between the failure of the Dobrudjan problem, in the context of the repercussions of the war, and the fall of the Vasil Radoslavov government is noted by many Bulgarian and Balkans Western historians.[18] Alexandur Malinov, born in 1867, in a Bulgarian village in Southern Bessarabia, the leader of the Democratic Party, and known as an Ententophil,[19] became the leader of the government.

The new government included eight Democrats and two Radicals, no clear majority in The *Săbranje* (Parliament) and was viewed with suspicion by the king.[20] Without ever summoning the Parliament, the new P.M. received some tacit support from *The Bulgarian National Agrarian Union* (BANU), led by Al. Stamboliiski (born 1879 - d. 1923), imprisoned in 1915 for an offense to the monarch. However, it was not possible to attract all the Agrarians to the government, because

[12] R.M.A.-P., Fond of *the General Head-Quarter*, dossier no. crt. 2583, f. 131-132.

[13] Ž. Popov, *op. cit.,* p. 245; Al. Marghiloman, *Note politice* [Political notes], ed. By Stelian Neagoe, vol. III (1918-1924), Bucharest, Ed. Machiavelli, 1995, p. 150, note from 10/23 May 1918.

[14] Constantin Iordan, *Dobrogea (1878-1940) în istoriografia bulgară post-comunistă* [Dobrudja (1878-1940) in the post-communist Bulgarian historiography], Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2013, p. 150.

[15] *Istoria politicii externe româneşti în date* [The history of Romanian foreign policy in data], coord. Ion Calafeteanu, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2003, p. 218-223.

[16] *Bălgarskata armija prez părvata svetovna vojna (1915-1918*) [The Bulgarian Army during the First World War (1915-1918)], Sofia, Military Publishing House, 2015, p. 288-291.

[17] Elena Statelova, Stojčo Grănčarov, *Istorija na nova Bălgarija (1887-1944)* [The history of new Bulgaria (1878-1944], Sofia, "Anubis" Publishing House, 1999, p. 321-322.

[18] Ex: I. Ilčev, *op. cit*., p. 248, Ž. Popov, *op. cit*., p. 252, and L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963, p. 578; B. Jelavich, *Istoria Balcanilor în secolul XX…* [The history of the Balkans in the 20th century…], p. 116, 155; St. K. Pavlowitch, *op. cit*., p. 209.

[19] Tašo V. Tašev, *Ministrite na Bălgarija: 1879-1999. Encikloedičen spravočnik* [The Ministers of Bulgaria (1879-1999)], Sofia, Academic Publishing House "Professor Marin Drinov" & Defense Ministry Publishing House "Saint George the Bearer of Victory", 1999, p. 274-275.

[20] Stefan Ančev, *Dobrudžanskijat văpros v političeskijat život na Bălgarija (1918-1923)* [The Dobrodjan problem in the political life of Bulgaria (1918-1923)], Veliko-Tarnovo, f.ed., 1994, p. 32; E. Statelova, St. Grănčarov, *op. cit*., p. 323, G. Markov, *op. cit*., p. 247.

the conditions imposed by Stamboliiski (initially, the release of all his imprisoned comrades and then, also, an immediate armistice) were unacceptable to the king.[21]

The appointment of Malinov as P.M. was more a gesture of pressure on the Central Powers than a real move away from them. "The new government was not alien to certain contacts with The Entente, but it wanted the country to keep Dobrudja, Macedonia, Thrace and Pomoravia, and therefore continued the cooperation with Germany", wrote the Bulgarian historian Krăstjo Mančev.[22]

In some Bulgarian circles, *The 14 Points*, declared by President W. Wilson on 26 December/8 January 1918, had led to some hopes, due to ambiguous and prolix formulations in the document, in particular, *Article XI*, on the Balkans[23] (*Romania, Serbia and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into*). Moreover, the U.S. were not at war with Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.

In the spring of 1918, when Romania had become lost to the Entente, several ideas circulated in several French newspapers regarding a separate peace with Bulgaria, which got Southern Dobrudja, a greater access to the Aegean Sea and even a part of Macedonia. David Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour agreed to the project of unification and federalization of historic Macedonia, under Anglo-American protection, initiated by some socialist circles, but disapproved by Eleftherios Venizelos and Nikola Pašić.[24] Other Bulgarian hopes were linked to Ukraine, by virtue of the common Slavic origin and the adversity of both states towards Romania in Dobrudja and Bessarabia respectively.[25]

Meanwhile, in June, the energetic and ambitious general Franchet d'Esperay became the commander of the military forces of the Entente in the Balkans (the front of Thessaloniki), replacing general Guillaume, who had replaced himself, at the end of 1917, another French general, Maurice Sarraill.[26]

During the second half of July 1918, the decisive and irreversible change of the course of war took place on the Franco-Belgian and Italian fronts, in favor of the Entente Powers.[27] At that time, the bread ration of the Bulgarian soldier was 600 grams, containing 80-90% flour, and even corncobs, less of wheat, and about half of them lacked the appropriate footwear.[28] The riots of women in different cities (May 1918) were followed by a steady increase in the rate of desertions, the fugitives often seeking to establish ties with Agrarians or other radical parties.[29]

[21] John D. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 128-130.

[22] *Apud* C-tin Iordan, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[23] R.J. Crampton, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[24] Ivan Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 254-255.

[25] Oleh S. Fedyshyn, *Germany `s Drive to East and the Ukrainian Revolution: 1917-1918*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1971, p. 130, 171-173.

[26] *The Bulgarian Army ...,* p. 289-292

[27] Mircea N. Popa, *Primul Război Mondial (1914-1918)* [The First World War (1914-1918)], Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1979, pp. 408-412, 511-515.

[28] *Bălgaskata armija...,* [The Bulgarian Army ...], p. 289-292.

[29] R.J. Crampton, *op. cit.*, p. 65-66.

Under these conditions, at the beginning of August, Al. Malinov drew the king's attention to the political-military evolution, raising the issue of pulling out of the war.[30] A period of probing with the Entente Powers was initiated, with an important role being played by former Prime Minister Ivan Ev. Gešov (1859-1924), the head of the Bulgarian Red Cross, who was in neutral Switzerland for treatment.[31] Moreover, in the summer of 1918, in the context of the *de facto* rupture of the alliance with the Romanian state, in Paris, London and Washington prevailed the conviction that Southern Dobrudja should be returned to Bulgaria, with the possible exception of Silistra, a solution considered in accordance with the ethnic principle.[32]

In September, events were precipitating. At the middle of the month, Franchet d'Esperay's army, comprising of 28 divisions, including 9 Greek, 8 French, 6 Serbian, 4 British and one Italian,[33] started the offensive. As Leften S. Stavrianos noted, the two camps on the Macedonian front were roughly equal in numbers and as artillery power, but the Bulgarians were clearly inferior in regards to aviation and their morale was strongly shaken by material shortcomings.[34] We will not insist on the details of the battles, but the Bulgarians were clearly on the losing side. On 25 September 1918, the Entente troops reached the Bitola-Prilep-Veles line.[35]

The degradation of the situation on the Macedonian front had three immediate consequences.

Thus, the Bulgarian government accepted the Ottoman Empire's claim to return the territory obtained from it three years before in exchange for the Ottoman agreement concerning the incorporation of Northern Dobrudja into Bulgaria. After this, *Protocol No. 21* was signed in Berlin, in the evening of 25 September 1918; through this act, Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire recognized Bulgaria's "rights" over the entire Dobrudja.[36]

A second consequence was the decision to initiate the negotiations with the Entente in order to sign the armistice, a decision also made on 25 September 1918. Mediated by the Americans, the armistice was signed on 29 September in Thessaloniki and provided, among other things, the demobilization of the Bulgarian army, with some exceptions, including some units destined for Dobrudja. Temporarily, the Entente accepted the Bulgarian administration of Dobrudja[37]. The Romanian historian Constantin Iordan explains this decision of the Entente through the imperative of mobilizing its own forces against the Central Powers and the Ottoman Empire, on one hand, and, on the other hand, by the fact that Romania was still governed by the Germanophile cabinet headed by Al. Marghiloman.[38]

A third consequence was the beginning of an agrarian-republican military rebellion, with its epicenter in the Radomir area, at 40 km (25 miles) N-W from Sofia. Still, the revolt was finally defeated. In the opinion of R. J. Crampton, the main causes for this conclusion were:

- The lack of organization and operability of the rebels, which allowed rapid regrouping of the monarch's loyal forces (fanatical Macedonians led by Al.

[30] E. Statelova, St. Grănčarov, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

[31] Ivan Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

[32] George Ungureanu, *Problema Cadrilaterului în contextul relaţiilor româno-bulgare: 1919-194*0 [The problem of the Quadrilateral in the context of the Romanian-Bulgarian relations: 1919-1940], Braila, Istros Publishing House, 2009, p. 63.

[33] A. Basciani, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[34] L.S. Stavrianos, *op. cit.*, p. 568-569, details in *Bălgarskata armija…* [The Bulgarian Army …], p. 292-293.

[35] Ivan Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

[36] G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 300, Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

[37] St. Ančev, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22.

[38] Constantin Iordan, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

Protogerov) and the German 217th Division, equipped with machine guns and heavy artillery;

- The passive attitude of the *Tesnjaks* (the radical socialists, the future Communists), who considered agrarianism a petite bourgeoisie, reactionary doctrine;
- The hesitations and oscillations of agrarian leader Al. Stamboliiski, who, on 25 September, agreed to contribute to the calming of the rebels in return for his release from prison, then declared himself the President of the Republic, and finally disavowed the rebels who were on the verge of being defeated;
- The impending completion of the main demands of the participants in the uprising: the signing of the ceasefire, on 25 September, and the abdication of Ferdinand I on 3 October.[39]

By agreeing with the ceasefire, Ferdinand I of Bulgaria lost the support of the Central Powers, but without gaining favor with the Entente. Thus, his presence on the throne was no longer desired by either of the two (still) belligerent camps. The new sovereign, Boris III (1894 - 1943, 1918-1943), after taking the oath, on the first day of the reign, 4 October 1918, issued the *Royal Decree no. 1*, on the general demobilization, until 15 October 1918, with the exception of three infantry divisions, including the 4th Preslav Division, stationed in Dobrudja, in the Hârşova - Cernavoda - Medgidia - Silistra area[40]. In parallel, Serbian troops entered Niš on 12 October and on 1 November they arrived in Belgrade[41].

On 17 October, the government underwent a substantial change and gained a much wider membership: 4 Democrats, 1 Radical, 1 Social Democrat, 1 Agrarian and 1 Popular, in the person of the new Foreign Minister, Teodor Teodorov.[42] The Agrarians, freshly entangled in government, and the *Tesnjaks*, hostile to any collaboration with bourgeois parties, demanded the immediate amnesty for all political offenses during 1915-1918 and the punishment of those guilty for the "national catastrophe".[43]

In this context, on 20 November 1918, The Entente demanded on Bulgaria to evacuate the administration and all the military forces from Dobrudja (up to the border line established in 1913), until the Peace Conference would decide the status of this province. The return of the Romanian civil administration in Dobrudja would be met with violent protests by the ethnic Bulgarians from the province, at the turn of 1918-1919.[44] The immediate effect of General Paul Chrétien's note is the resignation of the Malinov II government, but not Bulgaria's fall to bolshevism, as the American consul Dominic Murphy feared.[45]

On 29 November, a new coalition government is formed, led by Teodor Teodorov, bringing together six political parties (the Liberal-Progressives also took part), with a more consistent representation of the Agrarians. The new government granted a general political amnesty, which came into force on January 1, 1919, when the Agrarian leader Al. Stamboliiski took

[39] R.J. Crampton, *op. cit.*, p. 66-67; also see John D. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 130-139.

[40] G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

[41] L.S. Stavrianos, *op. cit.*, p. 569.

[42] E. Statelova, St. Grănčarov, *op. cit.*, p. 324-327; T.V. Tašev, *op. cit.*, p. 457-459.

[43] Dimitrina Petrova, *Samostojatelnoto upravlenie na BZNS 1920-1923* [The independent government of BANU: 1920-1923], Sofia, State Publishing House for Science and Art, 1988, p. 16.

[44] R.M.A.-P., Fond of the *General Head-Quarter*, dossiers no. 2091, 2103, 2897, 2954; for the Bulgarian point of view, see St. Ančev,*op. cit.*, p. 44 and Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 262-265.

[45] St. Ančev, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

over the minister seat reserved for him.[46] At the end of 1918, Stamboliiski's BANU was the most powerful political party in the country, with 77,298 members grouped in about 2,000 local organizations (*družbi*), half of whom had been set up at the end of the war. Of the party members, 84% owned less than 10 hectares of arable land, and only 0.5%, over 50 hectares.[47]

3. Epilogue

The systematic and tenacious attempts of some Bulgarian politicians and propaganda to gain the goodwill of Entente, although not without a certain echo, have remained, however, ultimately without any practical effect within the Peace Conference in Paris. The Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine of 27 November 1919 is considered by the Bulgarians to be the "second national catastrophe", only a few years after the first, namely the Treaty of Bucharest (28 July/10 August 1913) following the Balkan Wars. Under the leadership of Al. Stamboliiski, the Agrarian Union would become the main, then the only political governing force after the parliamentary elections of 17 August 1919 and 28 March 1920 respectively. The government's authoritarianism and the radicalism of its reforms would deeply divide the Bulgarian society, culminating with a bloody *coup d etat* in June 1923. Finally, King Boris would overcome the period of uncertainty of the first five years of the Interwar period, after which he would gradually become a very capable actor, both in the domestic and in the foreign policy.

4. Conclusions

For Bulgaria, 1918 was the end of a series of wars that began in autumn of 1912 and resulted in heavy human and material losses. The last war, like the previous one, ended with the defeat of the country, but after the Armistice in Thessaloniki (29 September 1918) the military losses and, to a certain extent, the deprivation of the civilian population, ended. The maturity for the 1915 political option was postponed by 14 months, until the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine was signed. Also postponed, by about 20 months, was the very predictable revolution following the lost war, if we indeed consider the measures taken by the single party government led by Stamboliiski (21 May 1920 – 9 June 1923) as a "peasant revolution". Finally, the year 1918 marked the uncertain beginning of the reign of the most capable Bulgarian monarch after 1878, Boris III.

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[46] E. Statelova, St. Grănčarov, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

[47] D. Petrova, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

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