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Bulgarian Political Action during the Crimean War (1853–1856)

Abstract

The article discusses the issue of the political activity of Bulgarians during the Crimean War, which was a breakthrough moment in the national liberation movement in the era of the National Revival (1762–1878). During this conflict, the Bulgarians exercised the widest efforts for liberation so far, which was manifested by the functioning of as many as three emigration centres. The first one, represented by Georgi Rakovski, focused on the preparations for the uprising and disappeared quite quickly. After that, the priority in conducting political action was taken over by the Bulgarian émigré elites on the Romanian lands and in Russia, which in the first period of the war (1853–1854) developed a far-reaching activity, promoting the Bulgarian issue and organising recruitment to volunteer troops. The political action of the Bulgarians was not effective but the political concepts they established were used and developed in the forthcoming years.

Keywords: Crimean war, Bulgarian national liberation movement, Bulgarian emigration in the 19th century, Bulgarians in Romania, Bulgarians in Russia

The outbreak of the Crimean War (1853–1856), also known as the “Eastern War”, as the previous Russo-Turkish conflicts in the 19th century, stimulated once again the Bulgarian national liberation activists. As in the preceding years¹, the Bulgarians hoped that the Russian army would eventually make a decisive march to the lands south of the Danube River and, by making concessions to the enslaved population in a victorious peace treaty with the authorities in Constantinople, would lead to the restoration of the Bulgarian statehood in the Balkans². At the same time, it was obvious that in the face of the escalating crisis one

¹ On the political and military involvement of Bulgarians in earlier Russo-Turkish conflicts, cf, i.a.: С. Дойнов, *Българите и руско-турските войни 1774–1856*, София 1987, pp. 5–159; Ц. Генев, *Българите и руско-турските войни XVIII–XIX век*, София 1987, pp. 23–90; П. Чолов, *Българските въоръжени чети и отряди през XIX в.*, София 2003, pp. 11–41; K. Popek, B. Rusin, *Uchodźcy, czyli goście Boga. Studia z dziejów migracji bałkańskich w XIX wieku – przypadek Bulgarii i Serbii*, Kraków 2022, pp. 191–225.

² К. Велики, *Румъния и българското революционно движение за национално освобождение (1850–1878)*, София 1982, p. 11.



could not remain inactive, thus Bulgarian activists undertook a wide-ranging political and military action, both within the borders of the Turkish state and in exile. Because of the limitations imposed on them by the conditions of functioning within the Ottoman Empire, the leading role in this undertaking was quickly taken over by emigration centres, headed by Bucharest and Odessa, although the first impulse to act came from Constantinople through Georgi Rakovski and his “Secret Society”.

While preparing for war, the authorities in St. Petersburg considered the possibility of using the Bulgarians and other Balkan nations for their purposes. The original plans were to suddenly conquer the Black Sea straits and Constantinople or the march of the Russian army by land through the Balkans, additionally blowing up the naval landings at Varna and Burgas, which would then head to Adrianople and ultimately to the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Balkan Front Marshal, Ivan Paskevich, who considered the number of Russian troops insufficient, proposed the idea of appointing 10,000 volunteers from the Danube principalities and another 10,000 from the Bulgarians and Serbs living on the lands south of the Danube. He ordered to store additional 30 thousand rifles in the warehouses of the garrison in Izmail in case of the outbreak of war³. The Russians also had similar plans to provoke national uprisings in relation to other Balkan nations, but due to the unfavourable development of the international situation (isolation of the Empire) and the war, they had to resign from them⁴. These plans were not implemented by the Russian command, but in the peak period, the volunteer units consisted of about 4,000 soldiers, composed of Bulgarians and the representatives of other Balkan nations⁵. In addition, over a dozen small Bulgarian chets were formed spontaneously⁶. The text focuses primarily on the discussion of the Bulgarian political action during the conflict, which was inseparably accompanied by the agitation for the voluntary recruitment carried out on Romanian lands and in Russia. Nevertheless, the thread of the fate of these units during the conflict was generally omitted. We wrote about this issue more in another place⁷.

As we have already mentioned, the war did not go well for Russia. After the initial successes in the form of the takeover of the territory of Moldova and Wallachia in the second half of 1853 and the victory of the fleet under the command of Pavel Nakhimov in the Battle of Synopa at the end of November, the next year was not so fruitful. In fact, already in the first half of 1854 the Russians entered the Bulgarian lands and began a siege of the fortress at Silistra⁸, but due to the formation of an alliance between Turkey, England and France, which had already supported Constantinople in the resistance, the Russian troops were withdrawn. Then, they retreated to their native lands in a short time, due to the allied nations’ landing near Yevpatoria on the Crimean Peninsula in September 1854. Soon

³ Е. Белова, *Българският въпрос в кримската война (1853–1856)*, in: *Българите в северното причерноморие. Изследвания и материали*, т. 10, ред. А. Дермеджиев и др., Одеса – Велико Търново 2009, pp. 55–56.

⁴ И. Чуркина, *К вопросу об организации восстания славян во время Крымской войны 1853–1856 гг.*, in: *Славяне и Россия: проблемы войны и мира на Балканах XVIII–XXI вв. К 100-летию со дня рождения академика Ю.А. Писарева*, ред. С.И. Данченко и др., Москва 2017, pp. 47–64.

⁵ М. Тодорова, *Българските доброволци в кримската война*, “Известия на Българското Историческо Дружество” 1985, т. XXXVII, pp. 391–439.

⁶ П. Чолов, *Българските въоръжени...*, pp. 41–53.

⁷ К. Ропек, В. Rusin, *Uchodźcy, czyli goście Woga...*, pp. 225–235.

⁸ С. Димитрова, *Силистра през кримската война (1853–1856 г.)*, “Известия на народния музей – Варна” 1980, т. 17, pp. 47–65.

after, the war turned into a defensive conflict for the Russians, with the main point of resistance being the fortress in Sevastopol. Eventually, it fell in the autumn of the following year, and Petersburg was forced to initiate peace negotiations. They concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 30 March 1856⁹. A weakened Russia lost one of its main assets in foreign policy, which was its armed forces, looking for other tools to influence the situation in the Balkans, among others, by developing a network of consular posts and animating the Slavophilic movement¹⁰.

The first attempts to organise the Bulgarian population came from the capital of the empire, where at that time one of the greatest Bulgarian revolutionaries of the 19th century – Georgi S. Rakovski – stayed¹¹. Most probably, at the end of 1852 or at the beginning of 1853, he established the so-called Secret Association (“Тайно общество”)¹², which determined its goal of collecting funds for equipping and arming volunteers for the planned uprising and conducting pro-insurrection agitation on Bulgarian lands. For this purpose, an action was taken to organise insurgent groups in the various parts of the Bulgarian lands, headed by Vidin, which, due to its proximity to the Serbian and Romanian lands, would constitute the central point of the revolt. What was also significant was the fact that the revolutionary atmosphere prevailing on these areas was still in the air after the unsuccessful uprising in 1850¹³. The task was facilitated by Rakovski becoming the chief translator (dragoman) of the Turkish Danube army, allowing free travel on the native lands. He was accompanied by a group of collaborators, headed by Ivan Bacov, who contacted the Russian diplomatic representatives on Serbian lands and was the main animator of the insurgent centre in Vidin. In Svishtov, in turn, the preparations were led by the Apostol Konkovic, who in earlier years had raised an official protest to Russia about the forcible suppression of the uprising in the district of Vidin in 1850; in July 1853, together with a group of his collaborators, he sent a request to the Russian authorities to free the Bulgarian population from the Turkish captivity. Rakovski highly regarded Konkovic, calling him, in one of his letters, “a patriot recognised by all”¹⁴.

⁹ The Crimean War is described vastly in literature, in Polish see, inter alia: E. Tarle, *Wojna krymska*, vol. 1–2, Warszawa 1953; M. Klimecki, *Krym 1854–1855*, Warszawa 2006; idem, *Wojna krymska 1853–1856. Jak wywołano pierwszą wojnę globalną w Europie?*, Warszawa 2014; O. Figes, *Wojna krymska 1853–1856. Ostatnia krucjata*, Oświęcim 2019.

¹⁰ Cf. K. Popok, B. Rusin, *Uchodźcy, czyli goście Boga...*, pp. 115–129; М.М. Фролова, *К вопросу о деятельности дипломатических представительств России в болгарских землях Османской империи и их деятельность в период с 1856 по 1866 гг.*, in: *Славянский мир в третьем тысячелетии. Славянская идентичность – новые факторы консолидации*, ред. Е.И. Узенева, С.И. Данченко и др., Москва 2008, p. 173–193; А. Андреев, *Руските славянски комитети българското възрожденско общество (1857–1878)*, Велико Търново 2014; Ц. Генов, *Славянските комитети в Русия и българското освободително дело (1858–1878)*, София 1986.

¹¹ It was not the first time that the Bulgarian colony was in the city. Cf. П. Божинов, *Раковски сред цариградските българи*, “Българско Възраждане. Идеи – личности – събития” 2002, т. 4, pp. 311–315; С. Киселков, *Из живота на Раковски в Цариград*, “Списание на БАН” 1923, т. XXVI, pp. 71–117.

¹² There is a difference of opinion among historians as to when exactly the “Secret Society” was established. Rakovsky’s biographer cites the versions of the establishment of the organisation in April or May 1853, claiming that its beginnings may be as far back as the end of 1852. Vide В. Трайков, *Георги Стойков Раковски. Биография*, София 1974, p. 105. Cf.: В. Конобеев, *Българското националноосвободително движение. Идеология, програма, развитие*, София 1972, pp. 290–291.

¹³ Cf. С. Димитров, *Въстанието от 1850 година в България*, София 1972.

¹⁴ Д. Савова, *Георги Стойков Раковски и Свищов*, “Анамнеза” 2021, год. XVI, кн. 5, p. 81.

During this period, Rakovski still believed in the decisive importance of the Russian factor in the liberation of his nation. An integral part of this concept was – as we have already said – the preparation and initiation of an uprising with the aim of supporting the Russian military effort and ultimately liberate the Bulgarian lands from the Turkish domination. It was not a new idea; the Bulgarians had already organised their own armed forces at the time of the previous Russo-Turkish conflicts. This time, however, Rakovski introduced several new elements to the national liberation movement. Above all, organisational efforts were transferred from abroad to the Bulgarian lands, where the revolutionary tried to create a network of insurgent cells (the continuator of this line of action will be in later years Vasil Levski). The idea of creating a single political centre to coordinate all the activities and represent all the Bulgarians was also something new. In historiography, it is underlined that the “Secret Society” was the first nationwide organisation with the ambition to gather around itself all the forces aiming at national liberation¹⁵.

As the course of events demonstrated, what seemed to be a strong point of association, turned out to be its greatest weakness, as well. Namely, relying the whole movement on one person, the leader who was the only one able to subordinate his surroundings and animate all the preparations, failed when Rakovski was arrested in Calafat. After being imprisoned in the capital of the Turkish empire, where he stayed for several months, the revolutionary leaves Constantinople, taking command of a dozen men’s insurgent cheta¹⁶. This action stopped over time, and Rakovski decided to break up the unit and hid himself in the family village of Kotel. These events coincided with the Russian failures. Firstly, the Russians withdrew from the Bulgarian lands in the middle of 1854, after which they also left the previously occupied territories of Moldova and Wallachia. This was undoubtedly a blow to him and a sign of the failure of his own political concepts. As he wrote himself: “It broke my heart and made me despair”¹⁷. Rakovski hid in Kotel for several months, still believing in the possibility of Russia’s victory in the war. Faced with the threat of arrest, he decided to flee to Wallachia, as it was supposed to turn out, becoming an emigrant forever¹⁸. In the following years, the Bulgarian revolutionary also revalued his attitude and concepts from the Crimean War and earlier years, preparing in 1858 the first of several plans for the liberation of Bulgaria, where the element decisive for the victory was to be primarily the

¹⁵ В. Трайков, *Георги Стойков Раковски...*, pp. 103, 106; idem, *Идеологически течения и програми в национално-освободителните движения на Балканите до 1878 година*, София 1978, p. 253. Furthermore, some researchers nowadays indicate that Rakovski’s organisation may be treated as a prototype of the Bulgarian military intelligence. Cf. М. Мирчев, “Тайното общество” на Раковски като първообраз на съвременното българско военно разузнаване, in: *Георги Стойков Раковски – 200 години безсмъртие. Сборник доклади от научна конференция с международно участие 12–13 април 2021 г.*, ред. Д. Данчева, К. Антонова, София 2021, pp. 58–62. More information about Rakovski’s insurgent plans is provided in В. Конобеев, *Българското националноосвободително...*, pp. 292–314.

¹⁶ М. Арнаудов, *Няколко тъмни епизода от живота на Раковски в 1853–54 г.*, “Годишник на Софийския университет. Историко-филологически факултет” 1936–1937, т. XXXIII, pp. 46–64. In the quoted text, the author extensively discusses and compares the memories of various people related to Rakovski’s person and his activity during this period, not only in relation to the Crimean War, but also years earlier from his stay in Constantinople.

¹⁷ М. Арнаудов, *Георги Стойков Раковски. Живот – дело – идеи*, София 1969, p. 52; В. Трайков, *Георги Стойков Раковски...*, p. 112.

¹⁸ М. Арнаудов, *Георги Стойков Раковски...*, pp. 53–56; В. Трайков, *Георги Стойков Раковски...*, p. 115.

preparation of the nation's own forces (both in exile and native lands), and not just putting all hope in Russia¹⁹. He assessed the latter quite negatively, criticising decisively (like almost the entire Bulgarian emigration) the resettlement action of the early 60's of the 19th century, which in historiography is known as the so-called Vidin resettlement²⁰.

More extensive activity was undertaken by the Bulgarian emigration centres outside the Ottoman Empire. In the first place, Epitropia (renamed in March 1854 as the Central Care Committee «Средоточното попечителство» and recognised officially by Russia) was established, which was initially represented by four representatives of the Bulgarian elite in Bucharest: Christo Georgiev (the younger brother of the largest merchant from Galati and also the revival activist, Evlogi Georgiev), Christo Mustakov, Ivan Bakaloglu and Dr. Vasil Beron²¹. In the period under discussion, a significant group of Bulgarians lived in the Romanian lands, emigrating in earlier decades due to the successive Russo-Turkish wars, but also seeking a better place to live and develop. Some authors assume that in the 19th century (until 1878) there lived at least 10,000 Bulgarians in Bucharest alone²², performing various professions and having a positive contribution to the overall development of the city. In this context, the aforementioned Georgiev brothers are often referred to as the most distinguished and richest representatives of the Bulgarian people on Romanian lands. Their department store was supposed to play a significant role until the 90's of the 19th century throughout South-Eastern Europe. However, the representatives of other well-known Bulgarian families also lived in the city²³.

The two brothers observed the course of events in the period leading up to the outbreak of the war, correctly predicting that the differences between Constantinople and St. Petersburg would lead to a military clash between the two sides. However, as some researchers point out, Bulgarian emigration in the Romanian principalities was not politically prepared for the upcoming conflict, which did not prevent them from establishing the aforementioned organisation in early 1853²⁴. They also made contact with the representatives of the diaspora living in Odessa, led by Nikolay Hristoforovich Palauzov²⁵, to whom we will

¹⁹ План на Г.С. Раковски от 1858 г. за освобождение на България, in: *Българската държавност в актове и документи*, съст. В. Гюзелев, София 1981, pp. 142–145.

²⁰ This topic is approached more extensively in K. Popek, B. Rusin, *Uchodźcy, czyli goście Boga...*, pp. 129–152.

²¹ Finally, already after the official constitution of the committee in March 1854, it consisted of 7 people: Konstantin Chokan, Christo Mustakov, Ivan Bakaloglu, Georgi Anastasyevich, Aleksandr Haji, Christo Georgiev and Petar Protic. Cf. А. Бурмов, *Кога и от кого е основана "Добродетелната дружина"*, in: *idem, Избрани произведения*, т. 2, София 1974, pp. 15–16.

²² Л.И. Керчова-Пъцан, Л.П. Велчов, *Букурещ – места и личности на българската емиграция през Възраждането. Научнопопулярен очерк и документи*, Златарица 2007, s. 19. The number of 10,000 Bulgarian inhabitants of Bucharest is also indicated in the monograph by V. Trajkov and N. Zhechev, but they refer to the data provided by Yuriy Venelin and relating to the years 1830–1831, when he himself stayed in the city. Cf. В. Трайков, Н. Жечев, *Българската емиграция в Румъния XIV век – 1878 година и участието ѝ в стопанския, обществено-политическия и културния живот на румънския народ*, София 1986, p. 128. Therefore, the total number of Bulgarians in this city during the Crimean War must have been larger.

²³ В. Трайков, Н. Жечев, *Българската емиграция в Румъния XIV век...*, pp. 194–203.

²⁴ Х. Глушков, *Евлоги и Христо Георгиеви. Живот и дейност*, София 1982, p. 63. In the opinion of some historians, the organisation was established before 20 January 1853 and it was a kind of the renewal of the operations of the Bulgarian association in Bucharest from 1848. Vide П. Коледаров, *Към предисторията на "Добродетелната дружина"*, "Известия на Института за История" 1966, т. 16–17, pp. 397–398.

²⁵ Ц. Антова, *Николай Христофорович Палаузов*, "Списание на БАН" 1972, кн. 1, pp. 57–62.

devote more attention later in the text. In his letters addressed to Bulgarians in the principalities, Palauzov encouraged to send official appeals to Russia for help, highlighting the hardships of the existence of the population in the Ottoman Empire. And in fact, on the inspiration of Odessa, the representatives of the Bulgarian people in Wallachia and Moldavia addressed a special letter to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, in which it was underlined that all the legal acts issued by Constantinople, starting with the so-called Tanzimat reforms in 1839, remained only on paper, not making life easier for Bulgarians in any aspect. They were to face constant violence, pressure and assault by fanatical Turks, seeking salvation in the Tsar of Russia. At the end of the letter, the authors expressed their hope of obtaining a form of autonomy and the possibility of creating a separate national authority and having their own archpastor, which indicated the growing importance of the struggle for the establishment of an independent Bulgarian Orthodox church, which entered a decisive phase after the war²⁶. The special letter to the Tsar of Russia was signed by a total of 37 people, headed by the Episcopate Polycarp Patarski of Kotel, Evlogi Georgiev, W. Mikhailovich and Ivan Seliminski, another prominent representative of the Bulgarian elite on Romanian lands, the main organiser of the resettlement of the population from the Bulgarian territories in the spring of 1830²⁷. Similar requests were also made by the inhabitants of the Bulgarian lands. The figure of Dimitar Panov-Ginin can serve as an example here, one of the leaders of the 1850 uprising, on whose initiative a similar letter was issued by the inhabitants of the northern-west Bulgarian lands. Panov personally headed a delegation that stopped in Bucharest on the way to Russia. Here he met with General Mikhail Gorchakov, whom he tried to convince to surrender the Bulgarians to the Russian Tsar and start recruiting volunteers. Due to the unfavourable course of the war, the deputation joined the retreating Russians and most likely met with Nicholas I in Kishinev. Bulgarians were disappointed by the attitude of the ruler, who did not make any binding declarations, urging the delegates to establish schools and promote education, as well as devote more attention to the struggle for the establishment of an independent Orthodox church. Panov-Ginin remained in Russia until the conflict ended²⁸.

After the official recognition of the Committee in Bucharest by the Russian side, the branches of the organisation also started to be established in other Romanian cities, e.g., Braila, Ploeshti or Galati. Evlogi Georgiev confirmed this in his correspondence to his brother Christo, writing from the latter city in March 1854, that in connection with the arrival of the Russians in the city there was a noticeable improvement in mood and joy among emigrants. Various people offered financial support to the benefit of the organised volunteer units, and Georgiev declared to donate 100 cents for this purpose²⁹. The activity carried out by the Bucharest Committee and the local subsidiaries was focused on this

²⁶ Vide В. Бонева, *Българското църковнонационално движение 1856–1870*, София 2010.

²⁷ Ц. Кристанов, С. Маслев, И. Пеканов, *Д-р Иван Селимински като учител, лекар и общественик*, София 1962, pp. 191–192. More information about the resettlement of 1830 is provided in К. Велики, *Емигрирането на българите от Сливен във Влахия през 1830 год.*, in: idem, *Страници от миналото на българския народ*, София 1987, pp. 77–111.

²⁸ С. Дамянов, *Димитър Панов Гинин (към историята на руско-българската война дружба през третата четвърт на XIX в.)*, in: *В памет на академик Михаил Димитров. Изследвания върху Българското възрождане*, ред. Е. Стоянова, София 1974, pp. 608–611.

²⁹ П. Коледаров, *Към предисторията...*, p. 401.

aspect in the initial period. In this work, Dr. Ivan Seliminski, cooperating with Epitropia, had significant merit, and in November 1853 he was called to Bucharest and appeared before general Gorchakov. Almost immediately, he conducted an initial survey campaign (which consisted in sending a series of letters to well-known activists in various places, while recommending the preservation of discretion), and then travelled twice around many towns, agitating for the joining of volunteers to the newly formed troop. During his first mission, Seliminski visited, among others, Giurgiu, Zimnicea, Alexandria, Ploeshti, Buzău, Fokshani, Galati and Braila, appointing special commissioners in each of these places. After obtaining the official mandate for his actions from the Russian side, in January 1854, Seliminski undertook a second tour of the Romanian lands, organising recruitment offices in all the major points for the recruitment of volunteers. The latter, from the beginning, achieved the best results in Bucharest and Braila, which became the second Bulgarians' activity centre after the Romanian capital³⁰.

Bulgarians living in Romanian cities also set themselves other goals. One of them was the establishment of a special Commission, composed of competent and authoritative members of the diaspora, who were to remain in constant contact with the Russian headquarters. Their task was to inform the Russians (which was undoubtedly facilitated by the developed network of trade contacts) about the mood of the population on the right bank of the Danube, the Turkish preparations for war, as well as to represent the Bulgarian people before the command and the Russian authorities. They hoped that at the right moment during the peace talks, it would be possible to present their own position supported by the strength of the victorious power (there was a common belief about the future triumph of Russia), which would ultimately lead to the improvement of the living conditions of the Bulgarians and would also allow to obtain certain religious, cultural and political privileges³¹.

At that moment, at the beginning of 1854, the Odessa Bulgarians³² joined more extensively in the political action for the liberation of their native lands, led by Nikola Palauzov. Despite the fact that it was Palauzov who was one of the first to take far-fetching actions in relation to the Russians, informing them widely and promoting the Bulgarian issue, and came into contact with the Bulgarian emigration in the principalities, inspiring its activities, at first he did not have the support in the form of his own organisation. The Odessa Committee (Българско одеско настоятелство) was established only on 2 (14) February 1854 in this city, at a meeting convened by Palauzov³³. The invitation was accepted and the members of the new group were, among others, Stefan Dimitrievich Toshkovich, Nikola Mironovich Toshkov, Konstantin Nikolaevich Palauzov and Nikolay Hristoforovich Palauzov himself. Its existence was also confirmed almost immediately

³⁰ Ц. Кристанов, С. Маслев, И. Пеканов, *Д-р Иван Селимински...*, pp. 210–216; X. Глушков, *Дейността на българската емиграция във Влашко и Молдова през Кримската война 1853–1856 г.*, “Известия на Института за Военна История” 1979, т. 28, pp. 101–104. This article is also available in Russian, see *idem*, *Деятельность болгарской эмиграции в Придунайских княжествах во время Крымской войны (1853–1856 гг.)*, “Bulgarian Historical Review” 1979, no. 4, pp. 59–70. In the text, we cite only the text in Bulgarian.

³¹ X. Глушков, *Евлоги и Христо Георгиеви...*, pp. 67–68.

³² The information concerning the establishment of the Bulgarian colony in Odessa, see H. Генчев, *Одеското българско настоятелство*, София 1972, pp. 5–128.

³³ Yet, he claimed that the idea of appointing such a committee had already existed among the Odessa activists and it was clarified after the commencement of the occupation of Romania principalities by the Russian army. Vide *ibidem*, p. 135.

by Tsar Nicholas I. In the protocol, in addition to the appeal to the help of the Russian ruler in the work of liberation of Bulgaria (point 1), the members committed themselves to collect funds that were to be paid for the development of education (purchase of textbooks, opening of new schools) and other needs of the community. Members agreed to make decisions only in a larger group (at least three people), it was excluded that any arrangements be made by a single member of the organisation. The money from the donors was to be kept in a commercial bank in Odessa, and each donor had the right to inspect the books, where all decisions made by the Council and all the sums donated by the individual donors³⁴ were entered. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Nayden Gerov took part in the meeting, but he certainly knew about its decisions. On the next day, in his letter to Christo Georgiev in Galati, he wrote about the establishment of the Odessa Committee, at the same time informing about the sum of 5,400 rubles, collected for the organisation and equipment of the volunteer unit³⁵.

The occurrence of two competitive centres almost immediately led to clashes among activists since everyone claimed a right to be a leader of the national liberation movement. This problem was only aggravated by the staff of the Danube army, which favoured the already known Palauzov, who – as a Russian official – earned more trust. While visiting Braila and Galati, he tried to persuade the local communities of Bulgarians to donate for Odessa, and also attempting to win Christo Georgiev, a secretary and cashier of the Bucharest Committee and its chairperson, Constantine Shokan. It was the younger of the Georgiev brothers who endeavoured the most to maintain the independence of his own centre, which eventually resulted in their separate operations, thus clearly weakening the prestige of both committees and the outcomes of their work. According to some historians, Palauzov acted with the full awareness of the consequences of his actions³⁶.

The situation of the Romanian Bulgarians improved in March 1854 when Nayden Gerov arrived in Bucharest. According to some accounts, he was to fulfil his duties at the Russian staff, thus improving the possibility of communication between them and Georgiev brothers. At the same time, Gerov corresponded a lot with the younger Christo, who was staying in Galati, and he informed him about the sums of money collected in Moscow for the needs of the committee. He was persuading him to send all the contributions to Bucharest, arguing that in this place (and not in distant Odessa), due to the proximity of the front and the headquarters of the Tsarist Army, an intensified political campaign must be conducted, which needs as many funds as possible. He also asked for being discreet because he did not want to disclose that he supported Bucharest in his actions and not Odessa, to which he was unquestionably more related in terms of organisation. In his letters, Gerov also frequently referred to the information concerning the war and the progress of the Russian Army; he went to the Danube in order to observe closely the position of the Turkish

³⁴ С. Славова, *Участие на преселници българи в Бесарабия и южна Русия в борбата за освобождението на българите от турско иго (1841–1876)*, “Известия на Държавните Архиви” 1968, т. 15, pp. 230–232. The complete text of the minutes of the meeting held by the Odessa Bulgarians is presented on the indicated pages. Cf.: Н. Барсов, *Тридцатилетие деятельности Одесского болгарского настоятельства (1854–1884 гг.) и материалы для истории освобождения Болгарии*, Одесса 1895, pp. 8–11.

³⁵ Е. Лаптев, *Российский дипломат Найден Геров и российско-болгарские связи (1853–1877)*, Уфа 2011, p. 47.

³⁶ Х. Глушков, *Дейността на българската емиграция във Влашко и Молдова...*, p. 110.

forces³⁷. Since the terrains on the right bank of the river were seized and the Turkish troops and local authorities fled, he recommended that Bulgarians take control of reinstating the order because Russians did not want to tackle this issue³⁸. Hence, Gerov knew well that the distant political centre in Odessa would not have proper funds and opportunities to actively animate the Bulgarian national liberation campaign. In his opinion, that mission belonged to Bucharest which was to collect funds for subsequent tasks connected with the Russians' seizure of a part of Bulgarian territories. Nevertheless, in his analyses he did not go beyond the issues of current activities³⁹.

Unquestionably the most complete (although still vague) action plan and post-war arrangement of Bulgaria was presented by Christo Palauzov in his letters. Nevertheless, the ideas and views he demonstrated in his actions were not expressed in any specific document, they are dispersed in the various places of notes and correspondence. Plamen Mitev researched Palauzov's concepts most comprehensively in the Bulgarian historiography. In the historian's opinion, he expressed his fundamental thoughts in the "Note concerning the current situation of Bulgarians in the European Turkey"⁴⁰: 1. The only possible saviour of the Bulgarians may be Russia, from which the Bulgarians should also take over the monarchical regime, to which they were naturally inclined, remembering that "[...] Bulgaria was once a famous and powerful kingdom"; 2. Bulgarians should aim to gain autonomy like other nations in the region (he did not take into account the example of Greece), with the support of a stronger state, preferably an Orthodox one (another nod towards Russia), which basically indicated the lack of an alternative vision also among other activists during this period; 3. The necessary condition for the success of the whole action was the establishment of a special representation at the Russian staff, owing to which it would be easier for the Russians to communicate various Bulgarian requests or complaints (the representatives were to facilitate contacts with the civilians by following the orders of the headquarters); 4. It was also necessary to gain broad support among the nation, and a properly directed propaganda was to serve this purpose; 5. Palauzov was the only one who outlined the boundaries in which the Bulgarian nation was supposed to function. According to him, the Bulgarians inhabited territories stretching between the Danube in the north and the cities of Solun (Thessaloniki) and Kavala in the south, and between the Black Sea in the east and reaching to the west as far as the Timok River and the city of Ohrid. Within these borders he was supposed to see a rebuilt Bulgarian state, defending the historical rights of the Bulgarians to these lands against the Russian command. All these concepts were to be developed and concretised by Palauzov during the ongoing war⁴¹.

³⁷ Some historians suggest that both Nadyen Gerov and Sawa Radulov, who also came to Odessa at that time, fulfilled the intelligence tasks for the Russian Army. Vide P. Боев, *Още за участието на българи в Кримската война (1853–1856)*, "Исторически Преглед" 1968, кн. 1, p. 92.

³⁸ Е. Лагтев, *Российский дипломат Найдан Геров...*, pp. 50–53.

³⁹ After the end of the war, Gerov was resent to Bucharest to persuade local Bulgarians to provide financial aid for the nationwide needs. In his letter to S. Toshkowitz, he complained that he had not received any help and that the local diaspora had an ambition to act completely independently and not to be subject to anyone, especially the committee in Odessa. Vide Н. Генчев, *Одеското българско...*, p. 151.

⁴⁰ The full text of the document is provided in Н. Барсов, *Тридцатилетие деятельности...*, pp. 31–46. At the same time, Mitev made a mistake by specifying the date of preparing the letter as July 1853. The last page clearly shows the date of 20 January 1854. Vide *ibidem*, p. 46.

⁴¹ П. Митев, "Дано господ ни сподоби да видим отечеството си освободено..." или за кримската война, Николай Палаузов и българските въжделения от средата на XIX в., in: *130 години модерна българска*

The Odessa activist also came up with the idea of establishing a press body, in which the information and propaganda campaign was to be conducted among the population⁴². In the end, the Bulgarians were not able to create a newspaper, but the foreign press representatives widely informed about the events of the Crimean war, and about the events and moods in the Balkans, which were within the interest of the Russians, also the Russian press informed through its envoys (often reprinted in the West, e.g. in Prussia). Russian periodicals informed the public about various issues even at the beginning of the occupation of the Danubian Principalities, for instance, in articles about the history and contemporary times of the Ottoman Empire and its armed forces. After the outbreak of the war and crossing the Danube River, the materials appeared describing subsequent engagements and movements of individual armies. The press reported on the pro-insurgency spirits among the population and the bloody pacification actions carried out by the Turks. As some authors claim, they were to execute (e.g. 16 people in Shumen in February 1854) or send rebellious Bulgarians to exile. Therefore, the population willingly joined the partisan units and helped in fights, accepting the arrival of the Russians with joy as the long-awaited salvation. Similarly, more space was devoted to the wave of emigration from the Bulgarian lands after the departure of the Russian troops, informing the readers that this population had already resettled in the past to Romanian lands and to Russia. Later, when the fights moved mainly to the Crimean Peninsula, the press continued to publish the material about Bulgaria and Bulgarians, e.g. its history or the national character of the population living there and the Turkish oppression under which they were forced to live. The Russian press also published materials provided by Palauzov, for instance, his correspondence with Nayden Gerov. To some extent, it certainly helped to promote the Bulgarian issue abroad, especially when it did not have its own newspaper⁴³.

A separate problem faced by Bulgarian activists from Bucharest and Odessa was another wave of displacement from the lands south of the Danube connected with the decision to withdraw the Russian troops. We have discussed this issue extensively in another place⁴⁴, and there is no need to recall all the information provided there once again, therefore, we will only quote the figures specifying this emigration (and subsequent remigration). According to the data most frequently repeated in various studies, in the first wave, together with the retreating Russian Army, about 6–7 thousand people accompanied by a portion of their possessions went to the Romanian lands. Stephan Doynov claims that in the first two years of the conflict, a total of over 7,000 people left the Bulgarian lands, in several waves, to which he also added individual families or in-

държавност. Иван Стоянов 60 години, отдадени на историята и висшето образование, ред. М. Палангурски, П. Тодоров, Х. Глушков, В. Лечев, А. Андреев, Велико Търново 2009, pp. 35–36. Cf.: В. Конобеев, *Българското националноосвободително...*, pp. 314–320.

⁴² Н. Барсов, *Тридцатилетие деятельности...*, p. 48.

⁴³ А.А. Улунян, *Русская периодическая печать времен крымской войны 1853–1856 гг. о Болгарии и Болгарах*, in: *Россия и Балканы. Из истории общественно-политических и культурных связей (XVIII в. – 1878 г.)*, ред. И.С. Достян, Москва 1995, pp. 163–207. The “Constantinopolitan Newspaper” also informed about the fortunes of the Bulgarian people during the Crimean War. Vide П. Митев, “Цариградски вестник”, *Кримската война и българите*, in: *Българската журналистика 160 години. Минало – настояще – перспективи. Научни студии, статии, съобщения*, ред. З. Константинова, М. Петров, М. Дееничина, София 2006, pp. 180–187.

⁴⁴ К. Popek, В. Rusin, *Uchodźcy, czyli goście Boga...*, pp. 86–98.

dividuals⁴⁵. Most of them returned to their native lands after the end of the war with a significant contribution of the active Turkish immigration policy implemented during that period⁴⁶. Nevertheless, some of the refugees were forced to provide food and shelter for their stay outside their own habitats. An example here may be the inhabitants of the northern part of Dobrudja town of Măcin, who in the years 1854–1856 stayed in Bessarabia⁴⁷. A separate group consisted of several hundred former volunteers who decided to stay in Russia after the end of the military action, out of concern for the possible adverse consequences of their activities during the war. The Russian authorities were to help them materially⁴⁸. Some of the inhabitants of southern Bessarabia (the so-called Budjak), which under the Treaty of Paris of 30 March 1856 was included in the borders of the Romanian principalities⁴⁹, were resettled to Russia.

Along with the population, some of the most significant emigrant activists also emigrated. Together with the Tsarist troops heading the north-east, the following individuals, among others, went: Ivan Seliminski, Aleksandr Haji, Kostaki Popovich, Sava Radulov and Nayden Gerov. What is quite understandable, the main motive in this case was their help provided to Russia before the outbreak of the conflict and in the first period of the conflict. At this moment, the political action of the Bulgarians significantly lost its dynamics, but this was not the end of the troubles and mutual rancour was reported by some activists. They included some accusations of abuse connected with the use of the funds held, whose victims were, in the first place, Seliminski, Popovitz and Ch. Georgiev. In at least some cases, they were motivated by personal reluctance and had nothing to do with the truth, nevertheless, they further wallowed individual activists and were detrimental to the consolidation of the Bulgarian emigration⁵⁰. The similar allegations as regards financial abuse were put forward after the war by Odessa activists against Nayden Gerov. As they claimed, as early as in March 1854, Gerov was to receive 600 rubles to cover the costs of travel on the Bulgarian lands and collect information on the spirits of the population and the war preparations of Turkey. It is not clear whether he in fact fulfilled the task commissioned by the Odessa Committee, nevertheless, in the light of the call for reimbursement (in the end, half of this amount was ordered) this seems doubtful. During the war, Gerov explained himself with other duties, among other things, printing his dictionary in St. Petersburg, which infuriated Nikola Palauzov, and he rebuked him for not devoting to his

⁴⁵ С. Дойнов, *Българите в Украйна и Молдова през Възраждането (1751–1878)*, София 2005, р. 124.

⁴⁶ В. Мучинов, *Миграционната политика на Османската империя в българските земи през XIX век (до 1878)*, София 2013, pp. 126–135.

⁴⁷ *Извори за историята на Добруджа 1853–1878. Български документи*, т. 3, ред. В. Тонев, Н. Запрянова-Пенева, София 2001, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁸ *Русия и българското национално-освободително движение 1856–1876. Документи и материали*, т. 1, ч. 1 (февруари 1856 – декември 1860), ред. Х. Христов, М.А. Бирман и др., София 1987, pp. 36–37; А.А. Улунян, *Документи об участии болгар в крымской войне и национально-освободительной борьбе в 60-е годы XIX в.*, in: *В памет на академик Михаил Димитров...*, pp. 735–739.

⁴⁹ С. Дойнов, *Българите в Украйна и Молдова...*, pp. 124–137; И. Грек, *Преселването на българи от бесарабската част на Молдовското княжество в Приазовието (края на 50-те – началото на 60-те години на XIX в.)*, in: *Българите в Северното причерноморие. Изследвания и материали*, т. 2, ред. П. Тодоров, П. Павлов, Велико Търново 1993, pp. 129–142.

⁵⁰ Х. Глушков, *Дейността на българската емиграция във Влашко и Молдова...*, р. 113.

homeland at such an important moment⁵¹. The Bulgarian activist arrived at his native lands no sooner than after the war, taking the position of a Russian consul in Plovdiv⁵².

One of the last initiatives of the activists in Kishinev in February 1856 was to send a request to Tsar Alexander II to intercede for the Bulgarian nation concerning the peace negotiations held in Paris. In their letter, the Bulgarians complained about the oppression of the Turks, which forced them to emigrate to the Romanian lands, Bessarabia and Russia from the middle of the 18th century. They also reminded about the continued support given to the Russian side in subsequent Russo-Turkish conflicts and requests addressed to previous rulers, which for various reasons could not be fulfilled. Finally, they once again expressed their hope that this time Russia would intercede for the Bulgarian nation, which would help in obtaining certain rights. The document was signed by a total of 10 Bulgarian activists, headed by Ivan Seliminski⁵³. Their request was not left without response. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karl Nesselrode, in his draft response to the Bulgarians, advised the Tsar to confirm that the adversity of the Bulgarians was never indifferent to his country and that, if circumstances were favourable, he would do his best to help improve their fortune and living conditions in the Ottoman Empire⁵⁴.

Unfortunately, taking this justifiable and important initiative in the face of the actual failure of the Bulgarian activists, did not improve the mutual relations between rival groups after the conflict was finished. At the request of the authorities, Nikolay Palauzov prepared a list of the names of activists who helped in the Russian efforts during the war, for which they were to receive awards. The list of dozens of names⁵⁵ was opposed by some people, which resulted in their refusal to accept the proposed commendations. Sava Radulov and Christo Georgiev were among those who refused the orders and motivated their decision with the love to their homeland and their readiness to make sacrifices. Georgiev added in his letter to Nayden Gerov that in the future, he and other Bucharest activists are ready “[...] if need be and in the future with a pure heart [to act for the good of the homeland – B.R.], without thinking of any remuneration”⁵⁶. Another issue was the fact that in his census, Palauzov assigned to Christo Mustakov and Seliminski, who undoubtedly had the greatest merit in the recruitment campaign, a lower-level commendations than those that were to be received by the members of the Odessa Committee associated with him. This issue continued for several years, and the tenacious Seliminski finally received the desired medal for his participation in the Crimean War in June 1863⁵⁷.

According to Plamen Mitev, it was only during the Crimean War that political centres (Odessa, Bucharest) and the circles of activists gathered around them were established, which can be said to have initiated an organised Bulgarian national liberation movement⁵⁸.

⁵¹ Е. Лаптев, *Найден Геров и българското политическо движение в годы крымской войны (1853–1856 гг.)*, “Вестник Башкирского Университета” 2014, т. 19, no. 3, pp. 1081–1082.

⁵² А. Кирилова, *Откриване на руското консулско агентство в Пловдив през 1857 година*, “Исторически Преглед” 2009, кн. 1–2, pp. 48–76.

⁵³ *Русия и българското национално-освободително движение...*, т. 1, ч. 1, pp. 29–30.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ For a full list of names of persons to be honoured with orders and medals from Russia, see А.А. Улуния, *Документы об участии болгар в крымской войне...*, pp. 739–742.

⁵⁶ Х. Глушков, *Дейността на българската емиграция във Влашко и Молдова...*, pp. 114–115.

⁵⁷ Ц. Кристанов, С. Маслев, И. Пеканов, *Д-р Иван Селимински...*, pp. 221–222.

⁵⁸ П. Митев, “Дано господ ни сподоби...”, p. 32.

It is characteristic that this researcher excluded the “Secret Association” from this collection, which, however, was an organisation so unstable that after the departure of its main animator, that is Rakovski, it actually disappeared, leaving no deeper plans or demands for the organisation of the Bulgarian national life after the end of the conflict⁵⁹. Nonetheless, the association established by the revolutionary existed from the very beginning in the conditions which were the most politically unfavourable for the Bulgarians, being a virtual competitive centre against the central authorities and in the very capital of the collapsing empire. Under such conditions, it had no chance of surviving, and Constantinople remained chiefly a centre of the economic emigration in Bulgaria. This was the specificity of the Bulgarian colony until the restoration of statehood in 1878⁶⁰.

The actions taken by the Bulgarian emigration had an incomparably greater extent than during the previous Russo-Turkish conflicts in the 19th century. Each of the described organisations consisted of at least several members of the top management, around whom other representatives of emigration were involved, for instance, supporting the Bulgarian action with some form of financial aid for the volunteer units. Thus, it was a political action much more numerous than the one undertaken at the beginning of the 19th century by Bishop Sophronius of Vratsa and a small group of emigrants, still weak economically and organisationally⁶¹.

The Bulgarian activists, notwithstanding the centre they represented, did not have any complete and clearly defined political plans, both before the outbreak of the war and in the first phase of the war, when Russian troops were stationed on the Danube. However, it does not mean that they did not have any views or intuitions as regards the direction and type of actions that everyone considered necessary to take – in connection with the opportunity that emerged for the Bulgarians. Undoubtedly, the most important aspect of their actions was the desire to involve in military activities on the side of Russia. Rakovski’s organisation aimed to provoke an uprising on the Bulgarian lands, as well as a recruitment campaign conducted in exile by activists from Bucharest and other branches on Romanian lands and in Odessa. Yet, due to the unfavourable course of Russia’s military operations, these units were not used, except for the few ones that reached the Crimea and fought later⁶².

The Bulgarians did not create a comprehensive document that would contain any detailed provisions concerning the form of the future regime of their own state or the degree of its dependence on Constantinople. It is not possible to state unequivocally whether and how many of them believed in the possibility of a full revival of Bulgaria as an independent political entity in the Balkans. It rather appears that they were hoping to create an entity similar to other nations of the region, which managed to gain some form of autonomy already in

⁵⁹ V. Konobiyev, on the other hand, wrote that two wings appeared in the Bulgarian national liberation movement during the Crimean War: revolutionary – represented by the Rakovski’s organisation and liberal, whose emanation were the committees in Bucharest and Odessa (and their subsidiaries). Vide V. Конобеев, *Българското националноосвободително...*, p. 344.

⁶⁰ П. Божинов, *Цариградските българи между реформите и революцията (1875–1877)*, София 2013, pp. 32–33.

⁶¹ Vide В. Златарски, *Политическа роля на Софроний Врачански през руско-турската война 1806–1812 г.*, “Годишник на Софийския Университет. Исторически Факултет” 1923, год. XIX, кн. 3, pp. 1–85; idem, *Първите “български депутати” в Русия*, “Българска историческа библиотека” 1928, кн. 3, pp. 109–129.

⁶² *Българска военна история. Подбрани извори и документи*, т. 1, ред. Д. Ангелов, София 1977, p. 443.

the earlier decades of the 19th century. These ideas were expressed most fully by Nikolay Palauzov, who was thus imagining the post-war shape of the reborn Bulgaria, supported by one of the great powers. In his opinion, as a Russophile, the only such state could be the Russian Empire. We also indicated that among other emigrant activists, despite the defeat suffered by this country, the idea of Russia as the main factor that could help in the liberation of their homeland remained alive and still popular. Palauzov also was the only one (at least as far as we know) to leave a record on the territorial extent of Bulgarian claims. They reached the terrains inhabited by other Balkan nationalities, which was a clear signal that in the future there must be a conflict between these groups over disputed territories. The weakness of the whole Bulgarian movement was also seen by some historians as the lack of any reference to agrarian issue and the prevailing Turkish oppression in this matter, especially in the context of the significant role that the population was supposed to play during the conflict. Some, like Rakovski, hoped to attract them to the uprising, while Palauzov made plans to gain public support through skilful agitation. However, there were no appropriate plans and official declarations regarding the improvement of the economic situation of this group⁶³.

The position of the Bulgarians was further undermined by the mutual grievances and ambitions of individual activists. They led to conflicts and rivalries between centres, whose goals were largely convergent. Nevertheless, it also reflected the increasing political awareness of the growing part of the diaspora, which, after consolidating its presence in exile and economic consolidation, drew attention to the fate of native lands, trying to support the inhabitants living there and care for their spiritual and intellectual development. In the subsequent years, they also undertook a number of new initiatives in various spheres, contributing to the overall development of the native culture and economy. The Bulgarian political action after the end of the Crimean War entered a new stage, which in the following years manifested itself in the improvement of forms of political and revolutionary activity, continued by the representatives of all the mentioned centres⁶⁴, who during the conflict often gained their first experience related to the national liberation movement. This practice brought in tangible results in the upcoming decades and helped to restore the Bulgarian statehood in the Balkans in 1878.

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⁶³ В. Конобеев, *Българското националноосвободително...*, p. 345.

⁶⁴ Nikolay Genchev mentions Constantinople as the most significant centre of the Bulgarian emigration after the Crimean War. The next places, according to him, were Bucharest, followed by Bolgrad (where the first Bulgarian gymnasium was opened in 1862) and Belgrade. Vide Н. Генчев, *Одеското българско...*, pp. 150–151.

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