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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EMERGENCE OF  
THE SERBIAN *CHETNIK* MOVEMENT IN MACEDONIA  
DURING THE LAST PERIOD OF OTTOMAN RULE\*\*

**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is to research when and how the first organized Serbian armed bands in the Ottoman Empire appeared. Various historical sources have provided contrasting information, but it was obvious that the Serbian national movement in Macedonia became an organized and efficient force in 1904. Also, that is testified in documents of foreign provenance, primarily Bulgarian and Greek. Serbian Defense Organization consisted of several various groups of national workers: the "Private Initiative" from Belgrade, Serbian inhabitants of Macedonia, and the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Chetnik Movement, Serbian Defense, comitadji, Macedonia, Macedonian Question, Ottoman Empire*

### 1. Introduction

The topic of the organisation of Serbian *chetniks* is neither recent nor neglected in historiography. Still, there are a few discrepancies on the subject of the Chetnik movement's establishment in its first year, as a formal organisation. The theme of this paper centres around activities of the Serbian Revolutionary Organisation (later called the Serbian Chetnik Organisation), formally known as the Serbian Defence (*Srpska Odbrana*), in the regions of southern Old Serbia and northern Macedonia in 1904.<sup>1</sup> Namely, the organi-

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<sup>1</sup> The historical region of Macedonia in the Ottoman Empire was situated in the southern part of

sation was created from several centres, which caused many disagreements and misunderstandings during its early development.

Many contemporary historians from neighbouring Balkan countries have considered the events in Macedonia at the beginning of twentieth century from different aspects, mostly as a part of the “Eastern Question” in general or within the “Macedonian Question” more specifically, or as a diplomatic issue. Especially productive is the Bulgarian historiography, which has dealt with the topic of Bulgarian as well as of Serbian propaganda in the Ottoman Empire after the Congress of Berlin.<sup>2</sup> Documents regarding politics in Macedonia have been published in numerous collections.<sup>3</sup> Serbian and Bulgarian, as well as Yugoslav and Macedonian historiographies have often presented this subject from the opposite points of view.<sup>4</sup>

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Balkan peninsula. In the nineteenth century, it was divided into three *vilayets*: Salonika, Monastir, and Kosovo. The territories which are called “Turkish Serbia” in the contemporary Serbian diplomatic and scientific sources, encompassed Old Serbia and Macedonia. By the end of the nineteenth century, Old Serbia was marked as the area north of the line Ohrid – Prilep – Štip, and Macedonia stretched south of that line. In this paper, the term Macedonia is used according to definition made by Serbian geographer and ethnologist Jovan Cvijić, since his works have had a profound impact on contemporaries as well as on generations of historiographers. In 1906 Cvijić wrote that the Macedonian border started south from Skoplje and included the lower course of the Vardar river, the west stretch from the lake, and east to the Struma. Kosovo and Metohija and areas in the south to Prilep and Debar were part of Old Serbia; J. Цвијић, *Основе за географију и геологију Македоније и Старе Србије*, Београд 1995, 52–64; С. Терзић, *Стара Србија, настанак имена и знања о њој до 1912*, *Историјски часопис XLII–XLII* (1995–1996) 91–110; У. Шешум, *Друштво против Срба 1897–1902. Методи и мере бугарске дипломатије, Егзархије и Бугарско-македонско одринске револуционарне организације против ширења српског утицаја у Јужној Старој Србији и Македонији 1897–1902*, *Српске Студије/Serbian Studies* 4 (2013) 73 – 74.

<sup>2</sup> We shall refer only to a few selected studies and papers relevant to this particular subject: P. Божилова, *Србија и Българското националноосвободително движение в Македония в началото на XX в.*, *Изследвания по Българска История* 8 (1986); С. Елдъров, *Начало на Србската въоръжена пропаганда в Македония*, *Военноисторически сборник*, 1984, No. 1; Idem, *Србската въоръжена пропаганда и българското националноосвободително движение в Македония след Илинденско-Преображенското въстание (1903–1904)*, *Военноисторически сборник* No. 3 (1984); Idem, *Българското правителство и ВМОРО в борба срещу србската въоръжена пропаганда в Македония (1903–1908г.)*, *Известия на военносторическото научно дружество*, 44 (1987); Idem, *Србската въоръжена пропаганда в Македония 1901–1912*, София 1993; and N. Simeonov, *Structure, Methods and Victims of the Serbian Propaganda in Macedonia (1904–1908)*, <http://anamnesis.info/broi2/Simeonov.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The following cited collections are a few among many published historical sources, documents, and memoirs on the subject: *История на Българите (1878–1944) в Документи (1878–1912)* eds. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1994; *Гръцката и србската пропаганди в Македония/Краят на XIX-началото на XX век/*. *Нови документи*, eds. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1995; *Дипломатически документи за разорение на Българите в Македония и Одринско по време на реформите 1904–1908*, София 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Г. Тодоровски, *Српската четничка организација и нејзината активност во Македо-*

Despite the existence of numerous documents of different provenance, this research primarily focused on recently published Serbian historical sources and literature.<sup>5</sup> This paper represents part of a forthcoming monograph on the life of Serbs under Ottoman rule in the early twentieth century, and their ties with the Kingdom of Serbia and other nations living in the Ottoman Empire.

Serbia had been making efforts to influence the Slavic inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire by cultural means—solely through schools and the church—since the 1880s. The aim was to awaken the national consciousness of the Serbs in Turkey through opening schools, printing and distributing books in the Serbian language, deploying teachers, and appointing Serbs to the metropolitanate seats in Macedonia and Old Serbia. In these efforts, the Serbian and the Bulgarian propaganda entered into conflict, with the latter having been in the lead for a long time thanks to the existence of the Bulgarian exarchate and the support of Russia.

Bulgarians were the first to form the Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, in 1893, in Thessaloniki. This organization, known by the name Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee, or Internal Revolutionary Committee, was led by Dame Gruev, who set their goal to the autonomy of Macedonia, and the continuous strengthening of the Bulgarian element in the Ottoman Empire. In 1895, Bulgarians who originated from Macedonia had set up Sofia-based Supreme Committee (the Vrhovist Committee), which served the

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нија, Гласник на институтот за национална Историја 1 (1968), 181–204; *Историја на македонскиот народ II*, од почетокот на XIX век до крајот на Првата светска војна, Скопје 1969; М. Пандевски, *Националното прашање во македонското ослободителното движење (1893–1903)*, Скопје 1974; Г. Тодоровски, *Србија и реформите во Македонија: средината на XIX век до Младотурската револуција 1908*, Скопје 1987. The accounts of the Serbian Chetnik actions are in: В. Илић, *Српска четничка акција 1903–1912*, Београд 2006; Б. Вучетић, *Српска револуционарна организација у Османском царству на почетку 20. века, Историјски часопис LIII (2006) 359–374*; М. Јагодић, *Српско албански односи у косовском вилаету (1878–1912)*, Београд 2009. У. Шешум, *Српска четничка организација у Старој Србији 1903–1908*. Теренска организација, *Српске Студије/Serbian Studies* v. 2 (2011) 239–258; М. Јагодић, *Српске чете у Македонији 1897–1901 године, Зборник радова са научног скупа Устанци и побуне Срба у Турској у XIX веку (поводом 170. година од избијања Нишке буне)*, Ниш 2012, 111–130; У. Шешум, *Друштво против Срба 1897–1902, Српске Студије/Serbian Studies* 4 (2013) 73 – 103; У. Шешум, *Четничка организација у Скопској Црној Гори 1903–1908. године, Зборник Матице српске за историју* 93 (2016), 55–70.

<sup>5</sup> Б. Вучетић, Сећања Антонија Тодоровића на Револуционарну акцију српскога народа у Турској 1904–1914. године, *Miscellanea* 28 (2007), 265–307; *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије: 1903–1914*, Књ. 2, дод. 2, *Организација Српска одбрана 1906. године*, eds. Љ. Алексић Пејковић and Ж. Анић, Београд 2007; *Ibid*. Књ. 2, додатак 3, *Организација Српска Одбрана 1907. године*, eds. Љ. Алексић Пејковић and Ж. Анић, Београд 2008; *Ibid*, Књ. 2, додатак 1, *Организација Српска одбрана 1903–1905. године*, ed. Љ. Алексић Пејковић and В. Крстић, Београд 2008.

Bulgarian state interests in Macedonia. The revolutionary committees were organized in order to awaken the Bulgarian consciousness of the Slav-Macedonian population, and to make preparations for revolution. The Greeks acted in similar way, and in the spring of 1894. a group of low-ranking officers in Athens founded the *Ethnike Etaireia* (National Society), with the purpose to “rejuvenate the national sensibility”. Soon, the politicians and distinguished citizens joined the Etaireia and formed the first armed bands in 1896, in Thessaly. The Bulgarian Committees have spread their zone of interest in 1897. to the north of Monastir (Bitola), Strumica and Melnik, where they were contested by the Greeks. Reinforced by the support of the Ex-archate Metropolitan in Monastir, the Bulgarian ad bands called the *comitadji*, started a campaign of executions of the leading members of the Greek camp, known as *Grecomans*.<sup>6</sup>

The recent Serbian historiography has ascertained that the very beginnings of the organisation of the Serbian armed action in Macedonia could be traced during the period from 1897 to 1901.<sup>7</sup> The small Serbian bands (the largest had 10 people) were organized by Rista Bademlić, the chief of police of the city of Belgrade, and consisted of persons originating from Macedonia. They were transferred each year at the end of the spring, into the regions of Poreče *nahiya* and Kičevo *kaza*, with the task of protecting of the Serbian population from Albanian outlaws and pro-Bulgarian revolutionary bands. It is supposed that the action of these bands stopped in 1901, due to the change of Government in Serbia, and because of the diplomatic conflict, the Affair in Ibarski Kolašin.

Evidently, an awareness of the need for the planned organisation of the Serbian defense movement in the Ottoman Empire matured in several centres, i.e., in several locations. The Serbian Chetnik organisation, the Serbian Defence came into existence through the unification of five different groups.<sup>8</sup> The Central Committee in Belgrade was the first formed group, with their logistical capabilities, enterprising spirit, and initiative.<sup>9</sup> The second group was

<sup>6</sup> B. C. Gounaris, National Claims, Conflicts and Developments in Macedonia, 1870-1912, *The History of Macedonia*, ed. Ioannis Koliopoulos, Thessaloniki: Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, 2007, 189.

<sup>7</sup> М. Јагодић, *Српске чете у Македонији 1897–1901 године*, 111–130.

<sup>8</sup> У. Шешум, *Српска четничка организација у Старој Србији 1903–1908*, 243–244.

<sup>9</sup> In the beginning, the Serbian Revolutionary Organisation was known as the Serbian Organisation for the Defence of Serbian People in Old Serbia and Macedonia (Српска организација за одбрану интереса српског народа у Старој Србији и Македонији). Starting in 1904, committees and subcommittees were formed, and the organization became official in July 1905, when its central committee was established in Belgrade. The members of the committee were Jovan Atanacković, Milorad Godjevac, Luka Čelović, Ljubomir Davidović, Petar Pešić, Milutin Stepanović, Ljubomir Kovačević, Ljubomir Jovanović, Jaša Prodanović, and Dragutin Dimitrijević-Apis, who joined the committee in 1904.

formed in the Serbian southern town of Vranje, by the local revolutionary committee, headed by captain Živojin Rafailović. The intellectual support came from the third group of prominent Serbian politicians, professors and members of various patriotic societies. Fourth were the officers of the Serbian Army, who played an important role in the political life after the assassination of King Aleksandar Obrenović and exerted pressure on the authorities. Finally, but not least, the fifth group consisted of the Serbian national workers in Macedonia, who gradually ascended to key positions.

## 2. Private Initiative

After the failure of the Ilinden Uprising, the so-called Private Initiative from Serbia decided to stand up to the Bulgarian action in the territory of Macedonia. The main driving force behind the Private Initiative was Dr. Milorad Godjevac, head of the medical corps in the municipality of Belgrade, who was joined by a merchant, Luka Čelović, and General Jovan Atanacković. The documents that relate to the beginnings of the Chetnik action mostly state that the organisation was formed at Godjevac's initiative, in contact with many Serb refugees from Old Serbia and Macedonia who told him of the suffering of peoples exposed to Bulgarian, Turkish, and Albanian terror.<sup>10</sup> According to Hristo Silyanov, a Bulgarian revolutionary and a member of the IMRO, the idea of Serbian (armed bands) *chetas* was brought up by Dr. Milorad Godjevac, even before the Ilinden Uprising. He was joined by distinguished officers, industrialist and respected citizens of Belgrade.<sup>11</sup> This group of private and prominent citizens were known as the Macedonian Committee,<sup>12</sup> which sent material and financial support to the Serbian people in Turkey. Another humanitarian society was the Circle of Serbian Sisters, also founded in 1903, at the initiative of painter Nadežda Petrović. Many associations of refugees from the Ottoman Empire later formed a larger association called the Serbian Brothers.

An Executive Chetnik Committee, headed by Officer Živojin Rafajlović and funded by the Macedonian Committee from Belgrade, was formed in

<sup>10</sup> М. Миленовић, *Четничка акција*, Енциклопедија СХС, Београд 1928, 945–48. В. Илић, *Српска влада и почеци српског комитског покрета у Старој Србији и Македонији (1903–1905)*, Србија и ослобођење српског народа у Турској 1804–1912, Зборник радова са научног скупа одржаног 2. и 3. децембра 1999. године, Београд 2003, 227–36.

<sup>11</sup> Хр. Сиљанов, *Освободителнитџ борби на Македонија*, том II, Следџ Илинденското вџзстание, Софија 1943, 276.

<sup>12</sup> The complete text of the statute of this committee is known as *Срџо-Македонско удружење* (Serbian-Macedonian Association), dated August/September 1903, and can be found in: *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, 2 додаток 1, doc. no. 13.

Vranje in 1904.<sup>13</sup> Various authors and participants have dated the beginnings of the Serbian Chetnik action in Macedonia differently. Rafajlović writes that the Vranje Executive Committee dispatched a first armed band (*cheta*) headed by *vojvoda* Arsa Gavrilović to the Ottoman Empire in summer 1903; it penetrated as far as Mount Kozjak.<sup>14</sup> According to Vasilije Trbić, it was he himself that formed the first unit in Turkey—in the villages of Jablanica and Starac—with guns received from Rafajlović in Vranje in 1903.<sup>15</sup> At the end of August 1903 the Serbian consul in Skoplje reported a band of six to seven armed men who crossed border, fought with the Turkish *asker* in the vicinity of Kumanovo, and returned to Serbia. They claimed to be sent from Vranje by Rafajlović. Still, the consul from Skoplje assumed that it might be a deceit made by the Bulgarian Committee in order to compromise Serbia.<sup>16</sup>

According to Greek sources, after the arrest of Bulgarian headman Alexis in April 1904, followed the immediate reprisals. Brigand and other gangs have terrorized the countryside with their uncontrolled action. Therefore, Bulgarian pressure against the Serb communities has significantly increased.<sup>17</sup> Aleksa Jovanović-Kodža<sup>18</sup> writes that Chetnik action started in early April 1904 by dispatch of *vojvoda* Micko Krstić-Pavlovski to lead the first company in Poreč.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Administrative and executive boards functioned at the beginning in Vranje. However, due to operational problems, both were disbanded in December 1905 and instead only one—the executive board—in Vranje was formed. Г. Тодоровски, Српската четничка организација и нејзината активност во Македонија, 181–204.

<sup>14</sup> Živojin Rafajlović (1871–1953) was an officer, and later a politician and industrialist. In the period 1903–05 he acted as a president of the executive board in Vranje, with a duty to transfer Serbian bands to and from the Ottoman Empire. He was one of the founders of the National Defence (Народна одбрана), which succeeded the Serbian Defence. Ж. Рафајловић, Наша прва чета, *Јужни преглед* 6–7 (1930) 263–72.

<sup>15</sup> Vasilije Trbić (1881–1962) was born in Austria-Hungary and as a young boy went to Mount Athos as a neophyte. After he was accused for killing three Greek monks, he fled to Serbia, and later joined the Chetnik movement. He went on to become one of the most prominent *vojvodas* on the right bank of the Vardar River, and a capable organizer and agitator—although not very successful in combat. Василије Трбић, *Мемоари*, Београд 1996, 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 2, додатак 1, doc. no.10; Б. Вучетић, *Српска револуционарна организација у Османском царству*, 361–363.

<sup>17</sup> Kallergis to Romanos, Monastir, 14 April 1904, S.Alexandridou ed., *The Struggle for Macedonia. The Early years (1903-1904). 100 Documents from the Greek Foreign Ministry archives*, Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, Thessaloniki 2009, 182–186.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksa Jovanović-Kodža (1875–1943) was born in Debar County, and graduated from the Science and Mathematics Department of the Belgrade High Lyceum. He began to work as a professor at the Serbian Lyceum in Bitola in 1900; however, upon the outbreak of the scandal involving arms and secret documents in 1905, he was arrested and expelled from Bitola—and the Ottoman Empire. He returned to Skoplje after World War I. He wrote a few books about the Serbian *Chetnik* action.

<sup>19</sup> А. Јовановић, Војвода Саватије. Почетак српске четничке акције у Македонији, *Летопис Матице српске* 326 (1930) 128; С. А. Јовановић, Почетак српског четничког покрета у Јужној Србији и Македонији, *Књижевни Југ* 1 (1929) 14–19.

Jovanović ascribes the credit for arming the company to the board from Bitolj (Bitola) established by residents, young people, and teachers in late March 1904. He stresses the differences between the boards in Belgrade and Bitola, for the latter “executed a meticulous organisation of the movement on its terrain,” while the organisers from Belgrade “did not even bother to visit the field as inquisitive travellers in order to meet the popular representatives, and most importantly, to direct their movement to the urgent popular need.”<sup>20</sup>

Jovan Hadži Vasiljević<sup>21</sup> denotes as the first Serbian band that of Andjelko Aleksić, armed by the Central Committee from Belgrade, which crossed into Turkey in May 1904. The majority of contemporaries agreed with this.<sup>22</sup> Jovanović blames the failure of Andjelko’s unit on the Belgrade Committee, which cared only about arming and sending it across the border, neglecting to establish in advance conditions for safe movement, reception by the people, and operation on enemy territory.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Stevan Simić<sup>24</sup> in his recollections about the Serbian revolutionary action blames the death of Andjelko Aleksić at Četirac<sup>25</sup> on the Serbs in Kumanovo and Kumanovo County, who did not make adequate arrangements.

### 3. Local Organisation of Serbs in Macedonia

The sources mostly speak of the establishment of a Serbian Revolutionary Organisation in Macedonia under the influence of Belgrade. The

<sup>20</sup> A. Јовановић, Српске школе и четнички покрет, *Споменица двадесетпетогодишњице ослобођења Јужне Србије 1912–1937*, Београд 1937, 279–80.

<sup>21</sup> Јован Hadži-Vasiljević (1866–1948) was a historian and held a PhD in philosophy. He worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1898–1904), and as a secretary of the St. Sava Society (*Друштво Светог Саве*). His numerous works were based on field research of history, geography, and ethnography of South Serbia and Macedonia.

<sup>22</sup> Ј. Хаџи Васиљевић, *Четничка акција у Старој Србији и Македонији*, Београд 1928, 18; С. Краков, *Пламен четништва*, Београд 1930, 136; К. Пећанац, *Четничка акција 1903–1912*, Београд 1933, 8–9, 14; И. Ж. Трифуновић, *Трновитим стазама*, Београд 1933, 52; С. Симић, *Српска револуционарна организација, комитско четовање у Старој Србији и Македонији 1903–1912*, Београд 1998, 61–64.

<sup>23</sup> А. Јовановић, *Српске школе и четнички покрет*, 280.

<sup>24</sup> Stevan Simić (1882–1962) was born in Kratovo. He enrolled in studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in 1902. Upon his arrival in Belgrade he met Godjevac, Atanacković, and Dr V. Jovanović and became a member of the revolutionary board. Having completed his studies, he returned to Old Serbia, where he taught in Serbian lyceums in Bitola, Pljevlje, Thessaloniki, and Skoplje, cooperating with the Serbian Intelligence Service. After World War I, he worked as a principal of the lyceum in Veles. The end of World War II found him in Skoplje, where he started writing his memoirs about the people and events in Old Serbia and Macedonia, and fell into disfavour with the new authorities. In addition to his recollections about the Serbian Revolutionary Organisation published in 1998, he left some 200 manuscripts that were never published.

<sup>25</sup> С. Симић, *op. cit.*, 140.

*Varia* collection in the Archives of Serbia contains memoirs of Antonije Todorović, entitled *Revolutionary Action of the Serbian Peoples in Turkey 1904–1912*.<sup>26</sup> Our attention is drawn to the author's description of developments among Serbs under Turkish rule in the period 1904–12, from which very few memoirs have been preserved.<sup>27</sup> In view of that fact, this source is even more significant in providing insight into developments in the field in Macedonia. Todorović uses the following words to describe the necessity of the revolutionary organisation of Serbs:

Opening primary and secondary schools allowed Serbian peoples to establish themselves as a national educational organisation in Turkey. This paved the way for pushing back Bulgarians south of Kačanik, where they had already begun to take root. In the beginning, this work occurred only in the area of education and the church. Feeling they would not be able to endure this fight on a purely cultural level, the Bulgarians took to other means to suppress us. They tried to take leadership of the Christian state in the Balkans for the liberation of Christians in the Balkans. The Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organisation, which promoted liberation from the Turks with armed illegal units, was established in Sofia in 1893. Naturally, the Christian population was delighted with this idea and acceded to the organisation irrespective of its ethnic traits.<sup>28</sup>

On several occasions from March until August 1903 Serbian teachers from Macedonia (the Poreč area) asked consulates in Bitola and Skoplje to allow local villagers to form armed bands in order to protect the population from Turkish reprisal and the pressure from Bulgarian *comitadji*.<sup>29</sup>

Todorović writes about the creation of the Serbian Revolutionary Organisation:

It is at that time that Savatije Milošević<sup>30</sup>—a prolific revolutionary—

<sup>26</sup> Б. Вучетић, *Сећања Антонија Тодоровића*, 265–307; Б. Вучетић, *Српска револуционарна организација*, 360, 364.

<sup>27</sup> The few contemporary works relate to the Serbian *Chetnik* action in Turkey, 1904–12: J. Хаџи Васиљевић, *Четничка акција у Старој Србији и Македонији*, Београд 1928; С. Краков, *Пламен четништва*, Београд 1930; И. Ж.Трифунковић, *Трновитим стазама*, Београд 1933; К. Пећанац, *Четничка акција 1903–1912*, Београд 1933; А. Јовановић, *Српске школе и четнички покрет*, Споменница двадесетпетогодишњице ослобођења Јужне Србије 1912–1937, Београд 1937; *Споменница прославе тридесетпетогодишњице четничког покрета у Јужној Србији*, Београд 1938. Memoirs published in recent years: Василије Трбић, *Мемоари*, Београд 1996, ed. А. Драшковић; С. Симић, *Српска револуционарна организација, комитско четовање у Старој Србији и Македонији 1903–1912*, Београд 1998.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 26.

<sup>29</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књига 2, додаток 1, дос.но 3, 7, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Savatije Milošević (1876–1905), *Chetnik vojvoda* and national worker. In Serbia, he was proclaimed a *haiduk*, and thus hid for a long time in Kosovo with Mula Zeka, also staying

arrived as notary of the Consulate in Bitola. On seeing the desperate situation, he formed in Bitola the first embryo of the revolutionary organisation together with Jova Mihajlović, a teacher working at a consulate and later a head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Aleksa Jovanović-Kodža, a professor; Jovan Ćirković, an officer for education; Mateja Šumenković; Lazar Kujundžić; and a few others. They swore they would ask the Serbian government to arm the Serbs in Turkey to ensure they can defend themselves and take revenge. When Savatije completed this work in Bitola, he proceeded to Skoplje. There again, spirits were miserable. Bogdan Radenković<sup>31</sup> was in Skoplje at the same time by sheer whim of fate. He was a true revolutionary by blood and all characteristics, and later became head of the entire revolutionary organisation. However, at that time he was a lyceum professor and a secretary of the Skoplje metropolitanate. When we learnt of what had been done in Bitola, all of us who heard it unanimously embraced it. Rarely in life is such a consensus possible, but this is understandable as it was a matter of life and death. Death was the option. Death in this way or death in defence or retaliation. It is only natural that the latter would be preferred. A certain number of us, reputable administrators and teachers, were organised and sworn in. We then informed the Consul General of Serbia in Skoplje, the late Mihailo Ristić, of our decision.<sup>32</sup> Mr Ristić took it as a wish, an opinion or a suggestion. However, when we stressed that we would not give up on it, Ristić said: "But you are presenting Serbia with some kind of ultimatum." Someone, I think the now-deceased David Dimitrijević, then the administrator of schools in Veles, replied: "Either what we are asking for will be adopted, or Serbia should abdicate to Old Serbia and Macedonia, and we shall die in the

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in Montenegro for a short period. He made contact with conspirators in Serbia in 1903 and volunteered to assassinate King Aleksandar and Draga Obrenović. He was not directly involved in the assassination, but was pardoned after the *coup d'état* in May 1903 and appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He worked as diurnist in the consulate in Bitola under the name of Sava Milićević. He was one of the most prominent organisers of Chetnik action in Macedonia.

<sup>31</sup> Bogdan Radenković (1874–1917), reputable Serbian national worker in Old Serbia and Macedonia. He graduated from the Turkish Lyceum Galata Saraj and worked as a teacher in Serbian schools in Constantinople and Skoplje. A secretary of the Skoplje metropolitanate as of 1905, he was also one of the organisers of the Serbian Chetnik movement in Macedonia. He was a chairman of the Serbian Democratic League in Turkey beginning in 1908. He was an advisor at the consulate in Athens and was appointed a viceconsul in Korča in 1916. One of the founders of the secret society Unification or Death, he was convicted in the Thessaloniki trial and died in prison.

<sup>32</sup> Mihailo G. Ristić (1864–1925) began his career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia in 1884. He was twice a consul in Skoplje: 1896–98 and 1904–06. His activity was dedicated to national propaganda and the awakening of national consciousness in Old Serbia and Macedonia. He focused on ecclesiastical and educational independence of Serbs in Turkey, and also participated in conducting Chetnik actions.

only way we Serbs know.” Having heard this firm stand, the deceased Ristić took the first train to Belgrade to convey this message to the government.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. Official View from Belgrade

In the period 1901–03, the Serbian propaganda in Macedonia lost momentum.<sup>34</sup> This was mostly a consequence of the situation in Serbia: King Aleksandar Obrenović did not enjoy the trust of his people, and his marriage not only had a negative effect on the climate in the army but also on Serbia’s international status. It is understandable that the internal changes in Serbia affected foreign policy and the policy of the Serbian consulate in Turkey. The official Austria-favouring policy that Serbia had embraced since 1897 changed in 1900, when Serbia enlisted the support of Russia from the moment the Russian tsar became best man at the wedding of King Aleksandar Obrenović and Draga Mašin. The death of King Milan in February 1901 gave way to changes in Serbia. The new government was taking this approach to Russia ever more seriously. As for the action in the European part of Turkey, it tried to resolve the issues of appointment of Firmilijan for the metropolitanate of Skoplje, opening new ecclesiastical and educational institutions as well as improvement of the position of the Serbian population in Old Serbia and Macedonia. Serbia expected support from Russia in its aspirations in Macedonia. However, a more serious conflict between the *chetniks* from Bulgaria and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (VMRO) with the Turkish *Asker* in Macedonia took place in February 1901. With the approval of Russia, France, England, and Germany, the Sublime Porte immediately mounted a fight against the insurgents in Macedonia. Bulgaria responded by intensifying activities for implementation of reforms in Macedonia through the press, and in diplomatic contacts with the Great Powers.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See footnote 26.

<sup>34</sup> J. M. Јовановић, *Јужна Србија од краја XVIII века до ослобођења*, Београд 1990, 85.

<sup>35</sup> The reform program, known as the Müzzsteg Agreement, was a joint memorandum of Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire which proposed to the Ottoman Empire political reforms for the three Macedonian vilayets – Salonika, Kosovo, and Monastir. The program’s priorities were establishing stability and ensuring the security of the inhabitants. It also included the financial and judicial reforms. The Great Powers considered the reorganization of the gendarmerie as their primary focus. The Müzzsteg Agreement was signed in October 1903, after the difficulty of persuading the Ottoman government to agree to the plan. On the reform program in Macedonia see N. Lange-Akhund, *The Macedonian Question 1893-1908, from Western Sources*, East European Monographs, New York 1998; İ. K. Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence, and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878–1908*, Ithaca and London 2014, M. Војводић, *Србија у међународним односима крајем XIX и почетком XX века*, Београд 1988, 318–23.

In the spring of 1903 the Bulgarian comitadji units combed through Macedonia. In their reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Serbian diplomacy representatives in Turkey often posed questions as to whether the Serbian government should also send its units. The letter of the consul from Skoplje of two peasants who came to him with coded messages and a question about what they were to do next is interesting. Since the consul did not manage to decode the text on the basis of the codebook he had, he instructed them to go to a Bulgarian agency. The perplexed peasants replied: "But you too are with us, our golden brothers."<sup>36</sup> Sava Grujić,<sup>37</sup> Serbian emissary in Constantinople, warned that intervention by European powers in Macedonia should be advocated, and that the incursion of bands from Serbia into Turkey should be prevented, for this would "be detrimental for Serbia and very dangerous for our people in Turkey."<sup>38</sup> At the end of April 1903, the Serbian General Consulate in Skoplje spread the word to people under its jurisdiction that they were not to join revolutionary bands.<sup>39</sup>

The Minister of Foreign Affairs himself, Ljubomir Kaljević,<sup>40</sup> admitted after the Ilinden Uprising that though "we see nothing in supporting the Bulgarian uprising that started and was incited without our knowledge and approval, only to extort such concessions that would suit Bulgaria," in Serbia there existed "a patriotic movement among the domicile Macedonians" that had formed a secret association, armed themselves, and were preparing to head for Old Serbia. The minister believed that it was only a negligible number of Macedonians who were crossing into Old Serbia—not in order to help the comitadji, but to "protect their brothers both against themselves and the attacks of Turkish oppressors."<sup>41</sup> The main assignment of the policy of the Serbian government was to insist on the recognition of the Serbian ethnicity in Turkey.

The first official note directing armed action was the instruction of Andra Nikolić,<sup>42</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the consul general in Bi-

<sup>36</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 1, св. 1, 29. мај/11. јун 1903–14/27. фебруар 1904; ed. А. Раденић, Београд 1991, doc.no. 152, 159.

<sup>37</sup> Sava Grujić (1840–1913), member of the Radical party, served as a prime minister during the following periods: 1887–88, 1889–90, 1890–91, 1893–94, 1903–1904, and 1906, and was a Serbian emissary in Constantinople in 1903.

<sup>38</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 1, св. 1, doc.no. 203.

<sup>39</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 2, додатак 1, doc.no 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ljubomir Kaljević (1841–1907) was prime minister (1875–76) and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1903.

<sup>41</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 1, св. 1, doc.no. 222.

<sup>42</sup> Andra Nikolić (1853–1918), professor and member of the Radical party, was Minister of Foreign Affairs from September 1903 to January 1904, and Minister of Education on several occasions (1890–92, 1896–97, 1904–05, 1906–09).

tola in November 1903 to establish a liaison with the Serbian unit operating in the Poreč area.<sup>43</sup> In December 1903, at a meeting held by King Petar Karadjordjević, Prime Minister Sava Grujić, Minister of Foreign Affairs Andra Nikolić, Serbian diplomatic agent in Bulgaria Svetislav Simić, General Jovan Atanacković (see p.7), and Mihailo G. Ristić and Mihailo Marković, Serbian consuls in Skoplje and Priština, the mode of action in Turkey was agreed upon. However, in February 1904 Consul Ristić complained to the new Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Pašić that General Atanacković was not observing the agreement, and that he was undertaking actions on his own accord.<sup>44</sup> Marković, the consul in Priština, also writes “that there was someone in Serbia” who was organising bands independently of the government.<sup>45</sup> It is highly probable that the Central Committee from Belgrade wanted to influence the Serbian committees in Turkey, which were subordinated and could operate only with the approval of the Serbian consuls. Bulgarian *comitadji* Hristo Silyanov claimed that “the dark and malicious general Atanacković” with his close associates, Simić, Godjevac and others, tried to establish Serbian sphere of influence south of Šara Mountain.<sup>46</sup>

Several commissions were formed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deal with propaganda as advisory bodies. However, they were short-lived for the simple reason that they did not bear any tangible fruit. According to Svetislav Simić,<sup>47</sup> continuity and tradition are required for propaganda, and interruptions in this area were a consequence of frequent changes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, who neither had experience nor cared for what had already been achieved or planned. Simić believed that a consistent programme of Serbian foreign policy could not be developed as it depended on volatile events, but that it was key to clearly define the national interests of Serbia. Diplomatic action was to be conducted through the press and publication of reports on the situation in Old Serbia so as to enable Serbian diplomats to secure assistance from the Great Powers. A note to the Sublime Porte would ensue, requesting that Turkey take measures against the anarchy and protect its subjects in Old Serbia. If these efforts failed, Simić pro-

<sup>43</sup> Љ. Лапе, *Неколку нови документи за 1903. година*, Годишен зборник 6, (1953) 237–302.

<sup>44</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. I, св. 2, 15./28. фебруар 1904–31. децембар 1904/13. јануар 1905, ed. А. Раденић, Београд 1998, doc. no 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. I, св. 1, doc. no 426.

<sup>46</sup> Хр. Сиљанов, *Освободителнитџ борби на Македонија*, 286.

<sup>47</sup> Svetislav Simić (1865–1911) was an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, secretary of the Political–Educational Department, and from 1903 a Serbian diplomatic agent in Bulgaria. He worked on propaganda issues and contributed to the Serbian–Bulgarian convergence. See: В. Јовановић, Светислав Симић и македонски комитети, *Вардарски зборник* 1 (1999) 53–67.

posed sending appeals to the Great Powers and publishing a book on Albanian terror.<sup>48</sup>

Svetislav Simić explains the emergence of the Chetnik movement in Macedonia by the need of Serbs for self-organization, for after the Ilinden Uprising, Macedonian committees became an instrument of the exarchate and began terrorizing the population. The organization Serbian Defence was not created under the influence of Serbia, and when Serbia started to assist it was already well established and the assistance was thus natural and justified. Simić is convinced that the Serbian organization in Macedonia had already achieved successes: it had stripped the Bulgarian movement of power, pacified the situation in a large number of villages, and become a legend thanks to its courageous clashes with the Turkish army. Therefore, Simić concludes, it would be an enormous pity for it not to develop further and show that Serbs do exist in Macedonia and they must be reckoned with. He proposed that aid be organized from Serbia, but without the direct interference of the government. The organization was to be managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but all the assignments would be conducted by trustworthy individuals not employed at the ministry.<sup>49</sup>

In the prominent early twentieth-century magazine *Српски Књижевни Гласник* (*Serbian Literary Gazette*), Simić describes the difficult position of Serbs in Macedonia, who were “between the hammer and the anvil,” driven to leave by the narrow-mindedness of the patriarchate, while the exarchists “drove on them comitadji units in order to make them convert to the exarchate by blackmails and murders.” The opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated that Serbs “had taken the right attitude” to the Ilinden Uprising—that their attitude to the revolutionaries was one of “sympathetic reservation.” The task of Bulgarian chetniks was to “force Serb-loving villages to take the side of exarchate.”<sup>50</sup> From their side, the Bulgarians wrote on intensive *srbotanska* (referring to “Serb-lovers”) pressure on the Bulgarian villages in Macedonia.<sup>51</sup>

There was a lull during that winter and in the spring of 1904. However, the districts of Novi Pazar, Peć, Prizren, and Priština were excluded from the reforms in spite of being the areas with the largest number of incidents. A massive movement of Albanians in the Kosovo vilayet was recorded in 1904, as a negative response to the introduction of any novelties or implementation

<sup>48</sup> *Тайната срѣбска политика (споредъ срѣбски автентични документи)* София 1917, 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Тайната срѣбска политика*, 22–23.

<sup>50</sup> Св., *Национална борба у Маѣдонији*, Српски књижевни гласник, 1904, XII, св. 4, 954; Serbian and Bulgarian propaganda in the field used derogatory terms for their opponents: *Srbotani* and *Bugarashi*.

<sup>51</sup> *Гръцката и срѣбската пропаганди в Македония*, doc.no. 53.

of reforms. Nikola Pašić, Minister of Foreign Affairs, faced the grave problem of protecting the Serbian population in Turkey in 1904. The Great Powers were not in favour of opening up and resolving the Ilinden issue by drastic measures. Therefore, Serbia could not take military action publicly.<sup>52</sup>

The justification for the necessity of armed action in Macedonia was offered by Pašić in June of that year. He commented on the situation of the population in Macedonia, “for whom the statement that they are between the hammer and the anvil truly holds: the patriarchate forces them to leave by its narrow-mindedness, while the exarchists have turned the comitadji units on them to convert them to the exarchate by blackmails and murders.” The main task was proclaimed to be the fight against Bulgarian educational and ecclesiastical institutions using the same means that the Bulgarian committees were using.<sup>53</sup> The precise principles of Serbian policy were set out at a conference of Serb consuls in Macedonia and Bulgaria held under the chairmanship of Pašić in October 1904.

The service of the Educational-Propaganda Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs closely monitored the situation in Macedonia in mid-1904. The greatest attention was attracted by the events in the Skoplje *sanjak*; in the Kosovo vilayet; and in the Drimkol, Debar, Kičevo, and Prilep *kazas* in the Bitola vilayet. This is where the consequences of the failed uprising were felt the most. The Serbian officials assessed their attitude to the 1903 uprising as “correct,” which had a positive impact on the attitude of the population in this region towards Serbia. Mistrust to Serbia and its representatives began to wane in the Skoplje *sanjak*. Reports of the Serbian emissaries indicated the multiplication of comitadji units organised by the exarchate of Bulgaria in order to stop the Serbian propaganda in the northern and northwestern parts of the territory of Bitola. In order to spread its influence in Macedonia, the Bulgarian government in 1904 also educated Macedonians in Bulgaria and sent them back to Turkey, to their places of birth or into the cities. The Bulgarian propaganda educated people who spoke Turkish and who had the potential of becoming Turkish clerks. It was priming doctors, engineers, pharmacists—all learned people—for departure to Macedonia. It appointed Macedonians who supported the Bulgarian influence as inspectors of exarchate schools and secretaries of the metropolitanate. Consul Ristić describes the situation in Macedonia: “The Turks against the Christians in general, the Bulgarians against Serbs, and the latter against Bulgarians.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> М. Војводић, *Србија, српско питање и Турска крајем 19. и почетком 20. века*, Путеви српске дипломатије, Београд 1999, 144–46.

<sup>53</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. I, св. 2, doc.no. 247.

<sup>54</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. I, св. 2, doc.no. 625.

## 5. Establishing Organisation

At the beginning of September 1903, Mihailo G. Ristić, the consul in Skoplje, was surprised to learn that the Serbian bands were crossing into Turkey, organised and escorted by Dr. Godjevac, and receiving a welcome reception in Vranje by Captain Živojin Rafailović; that along with arms and equipment, *chetniks* were given money and were headed by retired officers; and that they were transported to a Vranje spa in third class coaches with sealed windows—with the full knowledge of the Turkish Consul in Niš. Ristić was convinced that Serbia must have units in Turkey but that they should be manned with Serbs—inhabitants of Turkey—with the aim that they stay there and remove the pressure of Bulgarian units by their presence. Assessing that Chetnik action was headed by individuals who had little understanding of these affairs, he openly and publicly warned of the danger of compromising Serbia on the issue of reforms in Turkey, while at the same time stating the opinion that it would be most beneficial for Serbs in Turkey if foreign policy were to be conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not the patriotic associations.<sup>55</sup> The Austro-Hungarian consul in Belgrade had also informed his government of Serbia's decision to follow Bulgaria in efforts to form *Chetnik* bands.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning in February 1904, the number of Serbian accounts of intensified propaganda activities in the Ottoman Empire begins to grow. In view of the situation in Macedonia, the Serbian Government issued the following statement in late 1904: do not provoke and do not attack anyone; defend against anyone, be it a Turk, an Arnaut, [or] a Bulgarian, as required and agree on whether to respond immediately and how to attack the enemy; resort to negotiations with the exarchists in the field but exercise the utmost distrust; and persist in continuous equipping for defence from foreign attacks. Skoplje was pronounced the centre for propaganda activities.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the Greek consul in Monastir, Kallergis reported that Serbian bands were set up in the northern districts of the vilayet of Monastir. Also, Serbian bands defeated Bulgarian comitadjis in several occasions.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. I, св. 1, doc.no. 212.

<sup>56</sup> Reports sent to Vienna from August to December 1903 had plenty of data on the Serbian *Chetnik* movement. While they seem to be excessive, considering the financial and other resources of Serbia, they nevertheless represented the general public opinion in Belgrade, and the agitation and restlessness of the Austrian consul; *Аустро-Угарска и Србија 1903–1918. Документи из бечких архива I*, ed. А. Раденић, Београд 1973, doc.no. 101, 104, 105, 125, 128, 169.

<sup>57</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 1, св. 1, doc.no 37.

<sup>58</sup> Kallergis to Romanos, Monastir, 21 September 1904, *The Struggle for Macedonia. The*

At a July 1905 conference, the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussed the future actions of Serbian foreign policy, whether to pursue the policy of actions in Macedonia, and which solutions of the Macedonian problem should be embraced. The problem in Macedonia was further complicated as the reforms did not yield results. The Serbian government faced the problem of whether to continue assisting the units or ban them in view of the general situation in the Balkans, i.e., the potential consequences of their activities. Svetislav Simić stated that the Serbian Chetnik organisation was not initiated from Serbia, but that the population there was spurred to defence by “the self-preservation instinct born out of terror”; Serbia helped only when it had already been established, and that “this aid was natural and justified.” As for the cultural and educational work in Macedonia, the participants of the conference insisted on classes to be held in schools and the additional expansion of educational activities in villages with a small number of Serbian houses.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, the secret association Serbian Defence was founded in Macedonia in early 1905. Bogdan Radenković is assumed to have written the first rule book of this association. The Serbs organised defence by forming an association aiming, according to the writings of Jovan M. Jovanović, to employ the same defensive means and methods used by enemies when attacking the Serbs. In addition to concerns related to defence, the association prepared the population for liberation “through evolution,” i.e., helped conduct reforms, and worked towards cultural and economic empowerment of the Serbian population in Turkey. The association stated it expected the Sultan and the Great Powers to improve the situation. In the absence of their ensuring a peaceful life and unimpeded progress, revolution would have to serve as a last resort for liberation.<sup>60</sup> “The Serbian revolutionary organisation has emerged as a natural consequence of self-defence. It defends the Serbian population from all enemies without distinction; it works towards its liberation; it does not mask this work; it is not a phoney supporter of the principle ‘Macedonia for Macedonians,’ as many Macedonian revolutionaries in Bul-

*Early years (1903-1904), 266 – 267.*

<sup>59</sup> *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, Књ. 1, св. 1, doc.no. 212. The conference held 22–25 July 1905 was attended by J. Žujović, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Lj. Stojanović, Prime Minister; former ministers S. Grujić and A. Nikolić; Dj. Simić; M. Vujić; M. Milovanović; and diplomatic representatives M. Vesnić and S. Simić. They discussed the situation in Old Serbia and Macedonia, relations with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and England, as well as attitudes with respect to the Crete, Dečani, and Hilandar issues.

<sup>60</sup> The rules of the secret association the Serbian Defence read: “The Serbs in Old Serbia and Macedonia, and concretely from the *sanjak* of Skoplje and Debar and *kazas* of Kičevo, Prilep, Ohrid and other parts of the Bitola and Thessaloniki region, establish a secret society ‘Serbian Defence.’” J. M. Јовановић, *Јужна Србија*, 156–66.

garia are; it attacks no one, excludes no one from the fight to liberate the oppressed. And if anyone from Serbia came to assistance, it is only natural—blood is not water.”<sup>61</sup>

As a result of actions by Serbian national workers among people, local armed bands were formed. However, when official Serbian policy was not in favour of military action, representatives of Serbia in Turkey behaved accordingly. This situation lasted till 1905, when the policy changed, resulting in support to armed bands, as well as financing actions from the state’s budget and resources in manpower and weapons. Consequently, the secret organisation Serbian Defence was formed with an aim to work on the defence of the Serbian people in Old Serbia and Macedonia, and prepare the people for liberation by responding to enemy attacks in the same manner and with same means as the enemy. Similar to Serbian, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents on band’s activities also present a number of inherent differences. The consulates in Macedonia were not the exclusive foci of Greek struggle. It seems that the Greek movement in Macedonia had also the overlapping centers of decision.<sup>62</sup>

Leaving aside different interpretations by various authors, it is clear that national and revolutionary actions were realized in a synergy of Serbian national and political workers from Serbia and the Ottoman Empire. Regardless of the geographical distance between Serbian Chetnik committees and the frequent divergence between organisers from Serbia and those from Macedonia and Old Serbia, the government’s support of the Chetnik movement resulted in Serbian success in the Balkan Wars. The Serbian revolutionary organisation in Macedonia was founded by an intellectual and political elite, including teachers, professors, priests, and diplomatic servants. On the other hand, the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperated with national and humanitarian associations in order to ensure support to the Serbian national movement in the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>61</sup> Иностранци, *Српске чете*, Српски књижевни гласник 5 XV(1) (1905): 69–70.

<sup>62</sup> B. Gounaris, Introduction, *The Struggle for Macedonia. The Greek Counter-offensive (1905-1906). One hundred documents from the Archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry*, Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, Thessaloniki 2009, 55–56.

Biljana VUČETIĆ

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EMERGENCE OF THE SERBIAN  
CHETNIK MOVEMENT IN MACEDONIA DURING THE LAST  
PERIOD OF OTTOMAN RULE

*Summary*

The topic of the organisation of Bulgarian *komitadji*, Greek *andartes* and Serbian *chetniks* is neither recent nor neglected in historiography. Bulgarian, Greek as well as Yugoslav and Serbian historiographies have often presented this subject from the opposite points of view, considering it mostly as a part of the “Eastern Question” in general or within the “Macedonian Question” more specifically, or as a diplomatic issue. The theme of this paper centres around activities of the Serbian Organisation for Defense of the Interests of the Serbian People (later called the Serbian Chetnik Organisation), formally known as the Serbian Defence (*Srpska Odbrana*), in the regions of southern Old Serbia and northern Macedonia in 1904. The secret organisation Serbian Defence was formed with an aim to work on the defence of the Serbian people in Old Serbia and Macedonia, and prepare the people for liberation by responding to enemy attacks in the same manner and with same means as the enemy. The recent Serbian historiography has ascertained that the very beginnings of the organisation of the Serbian armed action in Macedonia could be traced during the period from 1897 to 1901. Evidently, an awareness of the need for the planned organisation of the Serbian defense movement in the Ottoman Empire matured in several centres, i.e., in several locations. The Serbian Chetnik organisation, the Serbian Defence came into existence through the unification of five different groups. It is interesting that the Greek movement in Macedonia had also the overlapping centers of decision. Leaving aside different interpretations by various authors, it is clear that national and revolutionary actions were realized in a synergy of Serbian national and political workers from Serbia and the Ottoman Empire. Regardless of the geographical distance between Serbian Chetnik committees and the frequent divergence between organisers from Serbia and those from Macedonia and Old Serbia, the government’s support of the Chetnik movement resulted in Serbian success in the Balkan Wars.