

The Bulgarian Education in the Ottoman Empire – a gigantic democratic movement, guided and skillfully directed by the Exarchate in Constantinople. Let us remember and cherish the work and the heritage of the Enlighteners. This work combined the national upheaval, the struggle for Church independence with the eternal strive for knowledge and light of our people. Under the foreign Ottoman rule, constantly pressured by the propaganda and sabotage of the Greek Patriarchate, challenged by diverse foes, this work left monumental legacy. The educational work of the Exarchate helped to bring closer the civilizational level of all Bulgarians, living divided by country boundaries.

Vassil Popvassilev

Part 4 – Conclusion

The Exarchate showed concern for children of pre-school age. In many cities and larger villages kindergartens and nursery schools were opened. Towards 1900 over 9,000 children attended these kindergartens and nursery schools in Macedonia and Thrace. In 1892, the Educational Department sent out instructions concerning the training schedules in the kindergartens.

It should be specially noted that no word was mentioned in this instruction concerning the religious education of the children. It stressed that the children should receive the necessary knowledge concerning subjects and objects of their environment. The main means of training these children, according to the instructions, were different games, alongside of which they were to be taught songs, stories and proverbs. The training in these kindergartens and nursery schools was carried out according to the popular Froebel's Method.

The written organ of the Exarchate, the newspaper *Novini* (later on renamed *Vesti*) regularly printed articles and other materials concerning the life and activities of the schools in the "vilayets," as well as educational news from abroad. The main contributors to the newspaper were the Exarchate teachers. They discussed and gave their opinions on various problems on education, etc. The newspaper also inserted reports on commencement day ceremonies in the various schools of the vilayets. It also reported on the official celebrations of the day in honor of the brothers Sts. Cyril and Methodius, founders of the Bulgarian alphabet and culture.

The pages of this newspaper, which was published for nearly two decades, are still a very rich treasure of a still largely uninvestigated part of the history of Bulgarian pedagogical thought and educational practice. The newspaper also published many articles, in translation, from distinguished Russian and West European pedagogues.

Many of the graduates of the Exarchate schools took up the hard and dangerous road of revolutionary struggle against Ottoman enslavement. At the gymnasium in Salonica, as well as at many other schools, regular revolutionary circles and groups were organized under the direct guidance of the Central Committee of the Secret Macedonian and Adrianople Organization. This revolutionary organization, founded in 1893, by five teachers of the Exarchate schools (Dame Grouev, Ivan Hadjinikolov, Peter Poparsov, Dr. Anton Dimitrov and Hristo Vatandjiev), was very active both in Macedonia and Thrace. Exarchate teachers were also the legendary apostle of the national liberation movement Gotse Delchev, Gyorche Petrov, Hristo Ouzounov, Hristo Matov, Dimo Hadjidimov, Dimiter Stefanov, Toushe Deliivanov, Lazar Dimitrov, Nikola Poushkarov, Hristo Kotsev, Georgi Bazhdarov, Lazar Tomov, Georgi Skrizhovski, Paraskev Tsvetkov and scores of other revolutionaries. The greater part is graduates of the gymnasium in Salonica.

Generally, the relations between the Exarchate and the revolutionary organizations were normal. The variances that existed between them were largely due to the fact that the Exarchate insisted firmly on

the right to provide centralized guidance regarding all educational activities in the two vilayets. According to Georgi Bazhdarov, one of the distinguished revolutionary workers, the Exarchate was not a conservative establishment¹, because in respect to the political regime in the Ottoman Empire and the situation of the national groups in its composition, it too desired changes, but believed that they were to be brought about through evolution. In respect to the organization of education, however (still according to Bazhdarov), the Exarchate remained on conservative positions. And indeed, during the first several years after the War of Liberation (1878) centralized guidance of the schools in Macedonia and Thrace was absolutely necessary. Later on, however, such guidance hampered their successful establishment and development. The positive relation of the Revolutionary Organization towards the Exarchate, in its capacity of supporter of the Bulgarians in Macedonia and Thrace is quite evident by the following facts: when the question rose to transfer the Exarchate from Constantinople, the Central Committee of the Organization strongly supported the demand of the Exarch for it to remain in the Turkish capital. In connection with this question, Gyorche Petrov states the following in his memoirs: "We wholeheartedly accepted this, because we were convinced that the Exarchate as an establishment should continue to exist in Constantinople. If on certain occasions we have had variances with it, our conflicts were in respect to the activities of the Exarchate in connection with our own ideas."² He believed, that the discontent in respect to the Exarchate had been; "simply a reaction against the aspirations of the Exarchate, in the course of many years, to centralize and concentrate in its hands the leading role of social and public life"³.

After the Young Turk Revolution (The Houriet) in 1908, the Exarchate made concessions in respect to the centralized guidance of the schools, restored the Mixed Council and gave greater autonomy to the communal councils in respect to the educational work.

Through its educational activity from 1878 to 1912, the Exarchate contributed a great deal towards the cultural and educational upswing of the Bulgarian population in Macedonia and Thrace, which craved for learning and knowledge. In spite of the fact that it had to work in extremely difficult conditions — hampered by the Ottoman authorities (we should mention here, however, that in many places certain Ottoman officials had a favorable attitude in respect to the educational activity of the Exarchate), by Greek and Serbian propaganda, the Exarchate upheld the national consciousness of the Bulgarian population, which had remained under foreign domination. The Balkan Wars put an end to this noble endeavor of the Exarchate. After the ill-fated end of the wars, many men and women teachers, most of them educated in the Exarchate schools in Macedonia and Thrace, were forced to flee from their native lands and were separated from their beloved students. After their arrival in the liberated territories of Bulgaria, they devoted themselves to the teacher's profession anew, with the same love and aspiration, helped by the rich experience and knowledge gained in their work as teachers in Macedonia and Thrace.

Adapted from:

Educational Work of the Bulgarian Exarchate, Dimiter Donchev, Balkanika, Volume VI, number 2, 1972

1. G. Bazhdarov, "To Take Heed from the Past". An article published in the magazine Macedonia, I. p.2, 1922

2. L. Miletich. Memoirs of Gyorche Petrov, Sofia, 1927, p. 33. 2/*idem*, p. 2.

3. Quotation from the booklet The Macedonian Problem —Historic and Political Reference, issued by the Historic Institute with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Sofia, p. 47, 1968.