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De-Ottomanisation of Land. Muslim Migrations and Ownership in the Bulgarian Countryside after 1878¹

ABSTRACT

The turn of the 19th and 20th c. brought about deep changes in the Bulgarian ownership structure: what the Russians labeled the Agrarian Revolution, related to all processes of land changing hands from Muslim to Bulgarian ones. The basis for most activities related to seizures of Muslim estates were migrations and the abandonment of property during the war in 1877–1878. During the period of the Provisional Russian Administration in Bulgaria (March 1878–June 1879) the Agrarian Revolution was one of the most important tasks that the Tsar's representatives addressed in Bulgaria. Bulgarian control over land was to be the foundation of Christian domination in the state, which the Russians also saw as a guarantee of their continued influence in the Eastern Balkans. This involved both dispossessions and lotting out *chiftliks* among the agrarian workers who cultivated the land, as well as taking control over properties abandoned by war refugees (so-called *muhajirs*). The article is focused on the Muslim medium and small peasants, the cases of owners of *chiftliks* will not be considered, according to a large range of the topic.

KEYWORDS

Muslims Minority in Bulgaria, Agrarian Revolution in Bulgaria, Bulgarian History, 19th Century, Balkans

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The land was of crucial importance to the Bulgarian society, which until the mid-20th century primarily inhabited rural areas, and was mainly occupied with livestock rearing and farming.² When the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) broke out, which led to the establishment of the modern Bulgarian state, as much as 70 percent of agricultural land was owned by Muslims, who made up ca. 50 percent of the population of these areas. They included both *beys*—owners of large farms (so-called *chiftliks* and *gospodarluks*³), and medium and small peasants. The turn of the 19th and 20th c. brought about deep changes in the Bulgarian ownership structure: what the Russians labeled the Agrarian Revolution, related to all processes of land changing hands from Muslim to Bulgarian ones. During the period of the Provisional Russian Administration in Bulgaria (March 1878–June 1879) this was one of the most important tasks that the Tsar’s representatives addressed in Bulgaria. Bulgarian control over land was to be the foundation of Christian domination in the state, which the Russians also saw as a guarantee of their continued influence in the Eastern Balkans. This involved both dispossessions and lotting out *chiftliks* among the agrarian workers who cultivated the land, as well as taking control over properties abandoned by war refugees (so-called *muhajirs*).

The article is focused on the Muslim medium and small peasants (the cases of owners of *chiftliks* will not be considered, according to a large range of the topic). The article’s goal is to present that after the creation of the Bulgarian state not only the situation of the Muslim beys deteriorated markedly. The Muslim medium and small peasants were victims of the transformation as well. Contrary to Bulgarian claims, popular especially during the communist regime, that only “Turkish feudalists” lost out as a result of the Agrarian Revolution and that it was not aimed against the ordinary Muslim population, a whole host of Islamic small farmers suffered, and entire settlements were sometimes bought out as a result.⁴ The process was not exclusively anti-feu-

² M. Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria*, Ithaca-London 2004, p. 170.

³ The difference between these terms is unclear. In Ottoman-Turkish sources, they are used inconsistently, often interchangeably. Formally, a *chiftlik* was a large private estate, while in the case of *gospodarluks* ownership rights were limited, e.g. with regard to collecting rent. С. Драганова, *Кюстендилски регион 1864–1919. Етнодемографско и социалноикономическо изследване*, София 1996, pp. 26–29, 87.

⁴ *От Варненския губернатор до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, Варна 20.11. 1879*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 30–31; Д. Косев, Х. Христов, Ж. Натан, В. Хаджиниколов, К. Василев, *История на България*, Т. 2, София 1955, pp. 26–29; М. Палангурски, *Нова история на България*, Т. I: Княжество (1879–1911), София 2013, p. 64.

dalist (if it is even possible to talk about feudalism in the case of the Ottoman Empire), but also ethnicity-related.⁵

Muslims were not a homogenous group in the Bulgarian lands—among them, there were Turks, Slavophone people (Pomaks), Roma, Tatars, Circasians, etc. It is worth pointing out that in the 19th century most members of the Muslim population identified themselves through the prism of religion (as *ummah*) and membership of local communities (except for the Albanians). National identity based on language and ethnic origin was not a widespread concept in the Balkan Peninsula at that time, especially among Muslims. In the sources, both administrative and diplomatic, which are the methodological basis of the text, the term “Muslim” is usually alternative to “Turk.” That phenomenon is linked to the biggest problem with the researches of the migrations and ownership in the Bulgarian lands until the 20th century. There was the mix-up linked to the different civil, national, religious, and ethnic terms, using in the different contexts and without the uniform definitions.⁶ The term ‘Turk’ was used as the ethnic or national, religious (means Muslim), even civil (a subject of the sultan).⁷ The statistic data are full of the manipulations, defects, and false information. The best example is the Ottoman censuses. According to the different Turkish sources, in the 1870s, Bulgarians were 24–39% of the whole Balkans inhabitants, Greeks—9–16%, and Muslims—11–24%.⁸ Justin McCarthy claimed that the Ottoman Empire in the turn of the 19th and 20th century is “a nightmare for demographer”—the same problem is linked to Bulgaria in that time.⁹ That is why it is important to confront the sources of the different provenance: the internal one (as the recourses from the Balkan state’s or Ottoman archives), but also the external (for example, the diplomatic materials from the British archives are full of the interesting information).

The basis for most activities related to seizures of Muslim estates were migrations and the abandonment of property during the war in 1877–1878. Justin McCarthy estimates that ca. 500,000 Muslims were forced to flee from Bulgaria

⁵ И. Ялъмов, *История на турската общност в България*, София 2002, pp. 78–79.

⁶ V. Mutafchieva, *The Turk, the Jew and the Gypsy*, [in:] *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, eds. A. Zhelyazkova, J. S. Nielsen, J. Kepell, Sofia 1994, p. 25.

⁷ М. Сарафов, *Населението в градовете: Русе, Варна и Шумен*, „Периодическо списание” 1882, кн. 3, pp. 44–45; В. Арденски, *Загаснали огнища. Изселническите процеси сред българите мохамедани в периода 1878–1944 г.*, София 2005, p. 10.

⁸ K. Karpát, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914. Demographic and Social Characteristic*, London 1985, p. 45.

⁹ J. McCarthy, *Muslim in Ottoman Europe: Population from 1880 to 1912*, “Nationalities Papers” 2000, No. 1 (28), p. 29.

during the conflict, and up to 250,000 died as a result of military operations, hunger, disease, and cold.¹⁰ The Agrarian Revolution was most often related to preventing the recovery of the land left behind as a result of fleeing for refuge—during the owner's absence, the Bulgarians disposed of it freely, disregarding ownership rights. The Muslims who did not decide to leave during the war found themselves in a much better position, although their ownership rights were also sometimes violated.¹¹ This is why seizures of Muslim estates were much more limited in the north-eastern regions of Bulgaria, where fighting did not break out on such a large scale, and Muslim emigration did not become a mass phenomenon.¹²

In February (O.S. January) 1878 in San Stefano, a peace treaty was signed by the fighting sides, which also included provisions regulating the issue of the *muhajirs*. Article 11 of the treaty guaranteed the ownership rights of the Muslim refugees, including the possibility to manage their land from outside the borders of the Principality of Bulgaria. Mixed Bulgarian and Turkish commissions under Russian supervision were announced, which were supposed to regulate the refugees' property issues within two years. After this period, all land with an unregulated status was going to be put up for auction, and the revenue was to benefit war widows and orphans.¹³ The Treaty of Berlin signed in July 1878 kept the majority of the provisions of Article 11 of the Treaty of San Stefano, with the exception that the Bulgarian-Turkish commissions for refugee land were described in less specific terms. Additional guarantees were introduced, concerning the need to regulate all matters related to lands legally owned by the Sublime Porte (state-owned land and *waqfs*).¹⁴

Initially, the majority of these guarantees seemed to be fiction. From the early stages of the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–1878, the Russians encouraged the local Christians to settle on the land abandoned by the *muhajirs*, and after the Bulgarian state was established, they sent Bulgarians from Macedonia, Thrace and mountain regions to the abandoned settlements. The *muhajirs'* lands and estates were first leased out, with the rent going to the state treasury or local authorities (although theoretically it should have been sent to the for-

¹⁰ Дж. Маккарти, *Смърт и изгнание: Етническото прочистване на османските мюсюлмани (1821–1922)*, прев. К. Панайотова, София 2010, pp. 126–129.

¹¹ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sophia 20.06.1879*, FO 78/2838/87–89.

¹² R. Crampton, *The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878–1944*, [in:] *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority*, ed. K. Karpat, Istanbul 1990, p. 46.

¹³ *Traktat pokojowy zawarty przez Rosję i Turcję w San Stefano (19.02/3.03.1878)*, [in:] *Historia Bułgarii 1870–1915. Materiały źródłowe z komentarzami*, t. 1: *Polityka międzynarodowa*, red. J. Rubacha, A. Malinowski, A. Giza, Warszawa 2006, pp. 26–27.

¹⁴ *Traktat berliński (13.07.1878)*, [in:] *Historia Bułgarii 1870–1915...*, op. cit., t. 1, p. 41.

mer owners).¹⁵ This was justified by practical reasons—arable land could not be allowed to lie fallow indefinitely, and the owner's fate was unknown.¹⁶ In this situation, after returning, the *muhajirs* frequently did not even attempt to sell their property, discouraged by the prospect of arguing with the new tenants and the hostility of the local authorities. They either left for the Ottoman Empire again or moved to another area of the Principality and established new settlements.¹⁷ It was even more difficult to recover nationalized property, such as estates which were first under the control of the Russian army and then the Ministry of War.¹⁸

Following a wave of criticism from the Sublime Porte and the great powers, in the end, the Russian authorities decided to regulate the issue of repatriates repossessing the land. The regulation of the Board of the Russian Imperial Commissioner in Bulgaria regarding Turkish refugees of 14 (2) August 1878 guaranteed that the Muslim émigrés from the period of the Liberation War would repossess their estates or, if this were impossible, receive compensation equivalent to their value. This was conditional on proving one's ownership before a court. The exception was the Muslims guilty of crimes against the Bulgarians during the Great Eastern Crisis, Circassians, and persons who refused to give up weapons.¹⁹ On 1 September (20 August) 1878, the Ottoman authori-

¹⁵ *От Министерство на вътрешните дела до Министерство на финансите*, 29.09.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 190 л. 4; *От Бургарска окръжна постоянна комисия до Бургарско окръжно управление*, 28.09.1890, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 190 л. 23; *Журналъ совета императорского Российского Комисара в България*, 23.12.1878, ДА-Варна ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 11 л. 1; *От Севлиево окръжен началник до Министерство на финансите*, 02.1880, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 37 л. 41; *Преписка между окръжния началник и Градски управителен съвет в Самоков*, Самоков 25.11.1878, [in:] *Миграционни движения на българите 1878–1941*, Т. 1: 1878–1912, съст. В. Василиева, В. Гигов, Г. Стоянова, К. Георгиева, К. Недевска, София 1993, pp. 40–44; *Изложение за състояние на Севлиево окръжие през 1890–1891*, Севлиево 1891, pp. 7–8; „Държавен вестник“ 1882, год. IV, бр. 3 (12 януари), p. 7; „Държавен вестник“ 1882, год. IV, бр. 4 (14 януари), p. 8; „Държавен вестник“ 1882, год. IV, бр. 5 (21 януари), pp. 7–8; А. М. Mirkova, „Population Politics“ at the End of Empire: Migration and Sovereignty in Ottoman Eastern Rumelia, 1877–1886, „Comparative Studies in Society and History“ 2013, No. 55 (4), p. 964.

¹⁶ *Прошение от жителите на Балчишка околия до Народно събрание*, 22.11.1880, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 56–58; Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава и нейните малцинства 1879–1885*, София 1999, p. 151; R. Crampton, op. cit., pp. 45–46.

¹⁷ *Преселвания и изселвания в Старозагорски окръг през 1881–1883 г.*, [in:] *История на българите 1878–1944 в документи*, Т. 1: 1878–1912, ч. 1: *Възстановяване и развитие на българската държава*, ред. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1994, pp. 83–84

¹⁸ *Прошение от Исмаил Хакки Рашидоглу из Русе до Дипломатически агент в Цариград*, Цариград 18.03.1881, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 2.

¹⁹ *Журналъ императорского Российского Комисара в България*, 2.08.1878, ДА-Варна ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 1 л. 1–6.

ties issued an official protest against the August regulation as a document which severely infringed the rights of the refugees.²⁰ Under this pressure, the Russian occupation authorities decided to make further concessions and changed the procedures of returning the repatriates' land. Instead of court proceedings, which were often long and problematic, in indisputable cases, it was sufficient to present the deed to the property issued in the Ottoman times (*tapu*).²¹

The regulation of August 1878 did not expedite the process of returning to the *muhajirs* the estates which had been leased out during their absence from the country. Due to the generality of the regulation, there was a lot of confusion surrounding this problem. In 1878, the Governor of Sofia directed a series of questions to the Ministry of Finance, concerning the procedures of returning land and estates to the Muslim refugees. The answer to the document only tells us that the repatriates were not allowed to enter the estate before all procedures related to proving their ownership had been completed.²² In this situation, the local authorities simply did not know how to act when a Muslim repatriate turned to them asking to repossess their estate.²³ The Varna gubernatorial authorities which had the lease of abandoned estates under their jurisdiction returned the land and estates if the lease contract had come to an end.²⁴ If it was still ongoing, the owner had to wait. In such cases, another land was often leased out to the owner and support in the form of food supplies was offered, to buy time for deciding the issue of ownership before a court.²⁵ The matter was additionally complicated by the fact that during the process of

²⁰ O. Köse, *The Policies of the Bulgarian State towards the Minorities (1878–1914)*, „Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi” 2012, 3(6), pp. 229–230.

²¹ Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика в Източна Румелия (1879–1885)*, [in:] *Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите и в България*, Т. 1, ред. А. Желязкова, София 1997, p. 122.

²² *Рапорт от Софийски губернатор до Министерство на финансите, 3.10.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 33 л. 5, 8.

²³ *От Софийски губернатор до Финансовия отделение на Руската императорски комисар, София 6.12.1878*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 1; *От Софийски губернатор до Финансовия отдел на Руската императорски комисар, София 13.02.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 3; *От Министерство на правосъдието до Министерство на финансите, 6.10.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 24; *Протокол на Министерския съвет от 11 юни 1880 г.*, ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 24–26.

²⁴ *Рапорт от Варненски губернатор до Министерство на финансите, 3.10.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 33 л. 1–2; *Рапорт от Варненски губернатор до Министерство на финансите, 8.10.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 33 л. 3.

²⁵ *От Софийски губернатор до Министерство на финансите, София 19.09.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 22; *От Министерство на финансите до Софийски губернатор, 26.09.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 23.

leasing the land out to refugees all sorts of mistakes and irregularities occurred, e.g. a piece of land was leased out to two persons at the same time.²⁶ On the other hand, after the war ended, the refugees frequently ignored the laws passed by the Russians and the Bulgarians and did not attempt to prove their ownership to anyone. Unless their land was being used at the moment of their return, they simply reoccupied it, regardless of the regulations. However, the local authorities decided that unless they proved their ownership of the estate, they would be evicted and moved to replacement housing.²⁷

In virtually all parts of the country, there were a number of complaints about violating the *muhajirs'* land rights with regard to selling, buying, and leasing. In the regions near Varna, the number of such cases was especially high. The Foreign Minister, Marko Balabanov, explained to representatives of Turkey and the great powers that such situations were not caused by ill will, but by a great number of cases and by the offices being overburdened. He emphasized that the problem of returning property after emigration did not affect only Muslims, but Christians as well. He pointed out that most often the local authorities were guilty of irregularities and those specific clerks would be held responsible. The Bulgarian head of diplomacy promised to appoint special commissions, which would examine the cases described in petitions.²⁸

Indeed, to regulate the problem of returning estates to the Muslim refugees, and at the same time to implement Article 12 of the Treaty of Berlin, on 4 August (23 July) 1879 commissions for refugees were appointed. Their main task was to analyze the deeds presented by the *muhajirs* returning to Bulgaria, to check their authenticity, and to make a decision about returning the estate or, if this was impossible, estimating the compensation in the form of money or another estate. The commissions dealt only with indisputable cases, and if more persons were claiming the ownership of a property, the dispute was to be settled by a court. The governor of a given district, as well as two Bulgarians and two Muslims appointed by the Prince, were to sit on the commissions. The meetings of these bodies were to be held every day until all cases of war refugees were resolved. Appeals against the commission's decisions were to be heard by appellate courts. Initially, it was assumed that all cases related to regulating the status of refugee estates would be resolved within three years.²⁹

²⁶ Изложение на Коста Темелкова с Балчишкия окръжен съвет, Балчик 13.09.1879, ДА-Варна ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 30 л. 2–5.

²⁷ Из протокол нр. 1 от заседание на Министерски съвет с постановление за начина на връщане на недвижимите имоти на избягалите турци (София, 28 април 1880), [in:] *Русия и възстановяването на българската държавност (1878–1885 г.)*, ред. кол., София 2008, pp. 311–312.

²⁸ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 26.07.1879*, FO 195/1246/21–22.

²⁹ Указ на княза Александър I, София 23.07.1879, ДА-Варна ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 25 л. 1.

In Sofia, a superior commission was appointed, on which the president of the National Assembly and the governors of Varna and Sofia sat (these were the two regions from which the most complaints were lodged). The commission coordinated work on the restitution of estates of the war refugees across the country.³⁰ There were great numbers of cases to be heard—by May 1881, as many as 1,300 cases concerning the *muhajirs*'s ownership rights had been submitted.³¹ As a result, the waiting time for decisions could be very long, especially if the dissatisfied parties lodged an appeal³² or because of the negligence of the Bulgarian institutions (e.g. in 1881, when the district court was moved from Sevlievo to Tarnovo, a number of documents concerning ownership cases were lost).³³ The commission's efficiency was also negatively impacted by frequent changes in the makeup of the central commission in Sofia.³⁴

Commissions for refugees were appointed with the approval of the Ottoman authorities, which declared their willingness to cooperate and to provide all the necessary documents.³⁵ On the other hand, the decision was criticized not only by the Bulgarian liberals, who were in the opposition at the time but also by the ruling conservatives. The Minister of Finance, Grigor Nachovich, was attacked for this project in January 1880 at a meeting of the Council of Ministers. The other members of the government believed that Muslims should not be given any privileges and their cases should be heard according to the same rules as all the other ones, by common courts.³⁶

³⁰ *Lascales to Earl Granville, Sofia 9.07.1880*, no. 107, FO 195/1312 (no pages); *Lascales to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 13.04.1880*, no. 59, FO 195/1311 (no pages); *Lascales to Earl Granville, Sofia, 24.07.1880*, no. 118, FO 195/1312 (no pages); Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., pp. 155–156.

³¹ *Решение но. 5600, 13 май 1881 г.*, НБКМ-БИА ф. 11 а.е. 38 л. 3–4.

³² *Превод от прошение на Ахмед Мехмед Девлетоглу и Мусулан оглу Хабибулах до председател на Пловдивско окръжно гражданско съдилище, 3.11.1884*, ЦДА ф. 565к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 7–8; *Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 2.07.1880*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 30 л. 163.

³³ *Прокурор на Търновски окръжен съд до Министерство на правосъдието, Търново 20.09.1881*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 170; *Прожение от Мустафа Дебнелята из Севлиево до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, Цариград 10.12.1880*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 174.

³⁴ *Протокол на Министерския съвет от 11 юни 1880 г.*, ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 24–26; *Протокол на Министерския съвет от 1 септември 1880 г.*, ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 94–96.

³⁵ *Mr. Palgrave to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sophia 31.10.1879*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities in the Balkan States 1860–1971*, vol. 1: 1860–1885, ed. B. Destani, Cambridge 2003, p. 429.

³⁶ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 7.01.1880*, copy no. 1, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

The main problem at the early stages of the commissions' work was that their decisions depended on Bulgarian mayors. Each deed, according to the procedures, had to be authenticated by the local communal council, which led to situations where the mayor could decide arbitrarily who would recover their land and who would not. There were even claims that for the first two months of the commissions' operation, this regulation obstructed their work.³⁷ The Muslim repatriates accused the commissions of checking the land rights of the returning Muslims in a chaotic and subjective manner.³⁸ As a result of Grigor Nachevich's efforts, the procedure of authenticating deeds by mayors was abandoned in March 1880, which met with the resistance of commissions for refugees.³⁹ The decision was influenced by the British Consul in Sofia, John Ashburgham, who later received two petitions of thanks from the Muslims.⁴⁰

The fundamental problem related to the work of the commissions was the fact that the Bulgarian side naturally was not invested in the *muhajirs* repossessing their estates, and Nachevich's position cannot be regarded as a common one. The minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers of 10 May (28 April) 1880 read that returning land in the region of Lom Palanka was to be based only on documents issued by the Russian occupation authorities after 14 (2) August 1878, while all deeds dated earlier than that were to be rejected.⁴¹ The minutes show that the local authorities and commissions for refugees were not the only ones to act against the interests of the returning *muhajirs*; the government, by ordering to break the regulations it had introduced, did so as well. This kind of selective approval of documents was against the law on commissions for refugees. Just after the war, the authorities in Sofia did not even have any scruples about lying to the Sublime Porte and the great powers on the subject of procedures related to refugees recovering the property. Bulgarian politicians frequently said one thing and did another.

The Ottoman Commissioner in Sofia, Nidhat Pasha, after expressing an initial approval, later frequently criticized the work of commissions for refugees, e.g. for isolating and marginalizing their Muslim members.⁴² The Bulgarians were accused of driving out *muhajirs* and forcibly seizing their property—

³⁷ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 20.01.1880*, copy no. 13, FO 195/1311 (no pages); *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 3.03.1880*, no. 38, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

³⁸ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 8.02.1880*, no. 24, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

³⁹ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 3.03.1880*, no. 38, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

⁴⁰ *Lasalles to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 9.04.1880*, no. 58, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

⁴¹ *Протокол на Министерския съвет от 28 Април 1880 г.*, ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 1–2.

⁴² *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 27.01.1880*, no. [16], FO 195/1311 (no pages); Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., p. 157.

such information was given to the Ottoman authorities by the refugees in Constantinople, who had been prevented from repossessing their estates.⁴³ Many complaints came from Sofia and its vicinity, where there was discontent about mass dispossessions, forcing the owners to sell their property at undervalued prices, and a lack of support from the authorities when their house or land was illegally taken.⁴⁴ The account of the former wealthiest man in Sofia, Halil Bey, included accusations that the Bulgarians unnecessarily kept the repatriates in suspense for months on end, during which the latter wasted time and money, only to find out that what was legally theirs would be taken away from them.⁴⁵ He accused the mayor of Sofia of issuing certificates of ownership on a whim. At the same time, the Sublime Porte proposed alternative ways of returning the property to refugees, which were repeatedly rejected by the Bulgarian side.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the authorities in Sofia claimed that the majority of the problems related to the procedures of returning the property to the *muhajirs* resulted from the Sublime Porte's activities, such as issuing fake deeds.⁴⁷ The Muslims were also accused of not showing any respect for Bulgarian court sentences and not accepting testimonies of Christian witnesses.⁴⁸

There were also voices which showed that the lives of the refugees gradually improved after the war ended. Already in November 1878, two delegations visited the Bulgarian government: a Jewish and a Muslim one, which expressed their gratitude for respecting their ownership rights, especially in comparison to the events during the conflict.⁴⁹ William Palgrave, who traveled to Samokov, Dupnitsa, and Kyustendil in September 1879, praised the Principality's authorities for making progress with regard to respecting the rights of the Muslims, including the return of property to war refugees and the work of the commissions.⁵⁰ However, opinions like this were drowned out by an avalanche of com-

⁴³ *Протокол на Министерския съвет от 11 юни 1880 г.*, ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 24–26; „Витоша” 1879, год. I, бр. 10 (30 юни), р. 1.

⁴⁴ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 22.12.1879*, FO 195/1246/275–279; *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 22.03.1880*, no. 46, FO 195/1311 (no pages); *Lascalles to Earl Granville, Sofia 24.07.1880*, no. 118, FO 195/1312 (no pages); *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sophia 20.06.1879*, FO 78/2838/87–89; *Протокол на Министерския съвет от 14 май 1880 г.*, ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 10–12; *От Министерството на финансите до Софийски губернатор, София 19(29).09.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 22; *От Министерството на финансите до Софийски губернатор, София 26.09.1879*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 23.

⁴⁵ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 29.12.1879*, FO 195/1246/284.

⁴⁶ *Draft of W. Eshburham, 31.12.1879*, FO 78/3116/2–3.

⁴⁷ *Lascalles to Earl Granville, Sofia, 24.07.1880*, no. 118, FO 195/1312 (no pages).

⁴⁸ „Витоша” 1879, год. I, бр. 10 (30 юни), р. 1.

⁴⁹ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sophia 28.11.1878*, FO 78/2838/114.

⁵⁰ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 28.09.1879*, FO 195/1246/109–110.

plaints from the Muslim refugees concerning violations of their ownership rights, which were brought to Sofia, Constantinople, and representatives of the great powers.

The omnipresent criticism and the willingness to make the work of courts and commissions more efficient led to further concessions on the part of the authorities in Sofia with regard to returning the property to the *muhajirs*.⁵¹ In April 1880, during a session of the Council of Ministers, it was decided that the provisions of the August regulation would be abandoned. From that moment on, all persons forced to take refuge during the war and later would receive a guarantee of their ownership rights. Special funds were allocated to compensations for the illegal lease of mills belonging to the Muslims who would prove their rights.⁵² In June, 100,000 francs were allocated to helping Islamic refugees who found Christians living in their houses after their return.⁵³ Then, in September 1880 Prince Alexander Battenberg issued a decree which said that Bulgarian refugees were to repossess their land without going to court. Woodlands, mills, shops, and land which was not cultivated by them personally or only rented out were excluded—in these cases, they had to complete all the formalities before a commission for refugees.⁵⁴ In October, the monarch issued another decree, which gave the same rights to the *muhajirs*.⁵⁵

Bulgarian historian Zhorzheta Nezarska concluded that the monarch's edict of October 1880 was not caused by the willingness to resolve the refugee problem, but was meant to help Alexander Battenberg gain political capital by posing as a protector of Muslims in the Principality.⁵⁶ As a result, the document did not have much of an influence on the recovery of the Muslim estates abandoned during the war. They continued to have to prove their rights before commissions for refugees or, in contentious cases, before the court. The local authorities did not follow the regulations; they refused to pay out the sums

⁵¹ Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., p. 156.

⁵² *Из протокол нр. 1 от заседание на Министерски съвет с постановление за начина на връщане на недвижимите имоти на избягалите турци (София, 28 април 1880)*, [in:] *Русия и възстановяването...*, op. cit., pp. 311–312.

⁵³ *Указ за отпускане на средства за настаняване и подпомагане на бежанците, София 11.06.1880*, [in:] *Миграционни движения на българите...*, op. cit., Т. 1, p. 92.

⁵⁴ *Указ нр. 428 на княз Александър I за българите бежанци (17 септември 1880)*, [in:] *История на българите...*, op. cit., Т. 1, ч. 1, p. 419; *Протокол нр. 47 от заседанието на министерски съвет с постановление за реда за връщане на имотите на завърналите се в България турски бежанци (София 15 септември 1880)*, [in:] *Русия и възстановяването...*, op. cit., pp. 315–316

⁵⁵ *Указ нр. 544 на княз Александър I за бежанците турци (11 октомври 1880)*, [in:] *История на българите...*, op. cit., Т. 1, ч. 1, p. 420.

⁵⁶ Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., p. 156.

awarded for illegally leasing out the *muhajirs'* property during their absence, and if the land was returned, they sometimes gave back only some parts of it, while the other ones went into the hands of Bulgarian settlers. In the face of an increasing number of Bulgarians flowing in from Macedonia and Thrace, there were still cases of illegal dispossessions. There are accounts of cases where a *muhajir* received a sum calculated by the local authorities and was informed that he had sold his estate. Writing complaints often resulted in repressions against the author by the authorities or the police.⁵⁷ The local Christians often decided to take matters of ownership in their own hands. In 1880, the Bulgarian residents of Teteven and its vicinity turned to the Ministry of Finance for an approval of seizing the lands of the local Turks—"the most bloodthirsty brigands and fanatics." The Bulgarians reasoned that the Muslims' grazing lands belonged to them because earlier, during the Turkish period, the pastures had been illegally taken away from them.⁵⁸

Seeing that the edict of October 1880 remained only on paper, in February 1881, in order to control the situation, the government announced a ban on selling Muslim lands, including areas under the jurisdiction of Islamic religious communities (mainly *waqfs*). This was supposed to put the process of the turnover of lands belonging to the war refugees under the government's strict control. The protests of the Sublime Porte and the Western great powers, who found the regulation to mainly negatively affect the Muslims in Bulgaria, led to the government rescinding it in May 1881.⁵⁹

In early 1881, it was emphasized that the problem of regulating the issue of the refugees' lands was resolved in the case of the majority of the people who returned to the country. The more complicated cases involved the Muslims who remained abroad and claimed their ownership rights through attorneys. It was they who were accused of using lies and fake documents, and curious situations were described where three different representatives appeared with documents concerning one property. Such cases were considerably delayed due to the constant waiting for correspondence from the owners in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁰ Therefore, the principle was adopted that a party in court proceedings who resided abroad had four months, counting from the moment of a court subpoena being issued, to prepare the appropriate letters of attorney

⁵⁷ *Brophy to Lascales, Varna 9.10.1880*, no. 31, FO 195/1312 (no pages); Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., pp. 156–158.

⁵⁸ *Прошение от жителите на Тетевен и околии до Министерството на финансите, [1880]*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 100–103.

⁵⁹ Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., p. 164.

⁶⁰ *Представление от Търновско окръжен управител до Министерство на правосъдието, Търново 5.02.1881*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 4 л. 36–37.

or to appear personally in Bulgaria.⁶¹ There were also suggestions to restrict the activity of attorneys: to definitively eliminate those representing the owners who had lost their ownership rights on the basis of the August regulation and to require attorneys to have letters from the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bulgarian Diplomatic Agency in Constantinople alongside letters from their clients.⁶²

Dispossessions of war refugees were often justified by the fact that due payments were not made during the owners' absence from the country. These included overdue state taxes, usually calculated on the basis of the old Ottoman rates, but also the costs of repairs completed by the temporary inhabitants.⁶³ The land was taken away from the refugees on the basis of outstanding debts, run up before the war, which remained unpaid because the debtor had emigrated. When interests reached a certain sum, the land was given to the creditor.⁶⁴ If the creditor was not interested in the estate and wanted to reclaim the debt in cash, an auction was organized to sell the property left by the refugee.⁶⁵ Bulgarian banks and agricultural credit banks offered preferential loans to peasants, which allowed them to buy out the land on their own—the lowest interest rate was 5–6 percent per year.⁶⁶

The transfer of the *muhajirs'* land sometimes did not go according to the law or was close to violating it. Husein Kara Mustafov from the village of Isunja Alahan (the district of Tarnovo) returned to Bulgaria from his emigration dur-

⁶¹ *От Министерство на правосъстието до Министерство на външните работи, София 24.08.1881, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 64.*

⁶² *От Търновско окръжен управител до Прокурор при Търновски окръжен съд, Търново 29.01.1881, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 4 л. 38.*

⁶³ *Lascalles to Earl Granville, Sofia 24.07.1880, no. 118, FO 195/1312 (no pages); Протокол на Министерския съвет от 8 май 1880 г., ЦДА ф. 284 оп. 1 а.е. 1 л. 8–9; Журналъ съвета императорского Российского Коммисара в България, 23.12.1878, ДА-Варна ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 11 л. 1; Рапорт от Земеделската каса в Балчик до Началник на Балчишкия окръг, Балчик 7.08.1879, ЦДА ф. 176к оп. 1 а.е. 35 л. 37–38.*

⁶⁴ *Препис, Русе 16.07.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 111; Рапорт на Земеделската каса до Русенски окръжен управител, Русе 5.11.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 114–115; „Витоша” 1880, год. I, бр. 72 (27 февруари), р. 4.*

⁶⁵ „Витоша” 1880, год. I, бр. 74 (5 март), р. 4; „Витоша” 1880, год. I, бр. 84 (12 април), р. 4; Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., р. 164.

⁶⁶ *Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis 12.12.1879, [in:] Ethnic Minorities...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 416–417; *Opinia nr 2992 ministra spraw wewnętrznych na temat zakupu i sprzedaży ziemi, skierowana do Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości (10.09.1879), [in:] Historia Bułgarii 1870–1915. Materiały źródłowe z komentarzami, t. 3: Polityka wewnętrzna, red. J. Rubacha, A. Malinowski, Warszawa 2009, pp. 96–97; Продаване и купуване на недвижими имоти в Старозагорски окръг през 1881–1883 г., [in:] *История на българите...*, op. cit., Т. 1, ч. 1, pp. 85–86.*

ing the war in 1882. In April 1883 he regained his ownership by a court decision, but straight after the sentence was announced, he left the country again, without giving the land into anyone's care. The mayor concluded that the estate had been abandoned and took it over for the benefit of the local commune. It was not until 1888 that the heirs of Kara Mustafov issued a demand to reclaim the property. However, the local authorities decided that they had exceeded the deadline given to the war refugees to return and therefore lost their ownership rights.⁶⁷

After the Bulgarian state was established, the government regularly resettled Bulgarians from Macedonia and Thrace on lands abandoned by the Muslims, which led to multiple disputes. Mustafa Ismailov from the settlement of Hodja Mahle, near Kesarevo, left Bulgaria in 1882, having leased out his property. However, during his absence, the land fell under the state's control and, on the basis of the law on settling empty lands of May 1880, given to Bulgarian settlers. From 1883 Mustafa Ismailov tried to reclaim his property, not through official channels, however, but by directly contacting the Macedonian settler living there, Stoimen Nastanov. The Muslim offered to buy the land back from the settler several times, but the latter refused, emphasizing that he had received it from the government. In early 1885, the district authorities decided that Mustafa Ismailov had not completed the procedure for repossessing his estate before the deadline, so the land was granted to Nastanov.⁶⁸ Similar disputes happened between other *muhajirs* and the local population which had taken over their lands during the war.⁶⁹

With a view to quickly regulating the problem of the empty houses and land left behind by the Muslim war refugees, auctions were organized. The principle which was adopted was that the farmers had the right of pre-emption with regard to arable land. The goal was to avoid these areas being bought out by speculators, who would then resell them at inflated prices. For instance, after the war the price of land soared in Varna—while during the Turkish period a house could be bought there for ca. 10,000 kurush, in 1881 the price ranged from 40,000 to 50,000 kurush.⁷⁰ In the case of houses, the leaseholders had the right of pre-emption if they did not have any outstanding payments. At the same time, village mayors could make a requisition for land for the peasants

⁶⁷ От Търновско окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 15.06.1890, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 195 л. 27.

⁶⁸ От Търновско окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 11.04.1890, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 195 л. 22–23.

⁶⁹ Прошение от Павел Пенчов от ок. Оряхово от 6 февруари 1883 г., ЦДА ф. 708к оп. 1 а.е. 390 л. 1–2.

⁷⁰ „Свободна България“ 1881, бр. 1 (15 януари), р. 3.

who were “in the greatest need and the most trustworthy,” which would be granted without an auction.⁷¹

The issue of the Muslim refugees repossessing their estates was different in southern Bulgaria, where an Ottoman Empire autonomous province, controlled by the Bulgarians, was created. For the Russian occupation authorities, the transfer of Muslim land to Christians in Eastern Rumelia was of particular importance—its aim was also to give the province a Bulgarian character. It was not until the Organic Statute was introduced on 26 (14) April 1879 that the uncontrolled transfer of land from Muslim to Christian hands was restricted. The entire chapter XIV of Eastern Rumelia’s constitution regulated the problem of unused land, large estates, and *waqfs*, which was introduced under the pressure from the Western great powers and the Sublime Porte.⁷² After the Russian occupation ended, the lot of the refugees attempting to repossess their estates was easier in comparison to the Principality, and the law was by and large observed. The province’s courts kept to the decisions of the Treaty of Berlin and chapter XIV of the Organic Statute. When it was noticed that the implementation of court sentences pertaining to the return of property was dependent on the whim of the local authorities dominated by the Bulgarians, it was decided to put these cases under the jurisdiction of mixed Bulgarian and Turkish commissions.⁷³ According to the data collected by the Plovdiv commission for refugees, during the period when the autonomous territory existed 1,946 decisions were issued concerning *muhajir* estates, with 865 going in favor of the former owners and ordering that their land should be returned. The results of the work of the commissions operating in other cities were similar.⁷⁴ Plovdiv’s policy with regard to this problem frequently led to the dissatisfaction of Bulgarian peasants; e.g. agitation was caused by the case of the inhabitants of Shipka, where one of the most important battles of the Liberation War had taken place, and which was, therefore, a symbolic place. The local Bulgarians were evicted from the Turkish houses they had appropriated in the settlement of Sheynovo.⁷⁵

In the Principality of Bulgaria, the deadline given to the *muhajirs* to return while retaining their full land rights to the abandoned property was set to

⁷¹ *Постановление на Ловчанската окъжна постоянна комисия, 29.04.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 68–69.

⁷² Е. Стателова, *Източна Румелия. Икономика, политика, култура 1879-1885*, София 1983, pp. 126–127.

⁷³ R. Crampton, op. cit., p. 48.

⁷⁴ А. М. Mirkova, op. cit., pp. 969–970.

⁷⁵ R. Crampton, op. cit., p. 48.

13 (1) January 1885.⁷⁶ After this date, all land with unregulated status was seized by the state.⁷⁷ However, this was the case only on the territory of the Principality, and in Eastern Rumelia, it was not made specific. After 1885, when Eastern Rumelia was united with Bulgaria, in the formerly autonomous province, the land with unregulated status continued to be in the hands of leaseholders.⁷⁸ The rent collected from this land went to the state treasury, which was justified by the fact that the Muslim émigrés who remained abroad did not pay taxes.⁷⁹ After the unification, both in the south and in the north, some matters concerning refugees taking back possession of their land remained unregulated, and disputes and court trials continued until the turn of the 1880s and 1890s. This was a result of negligence on the part of the local authorities and the Ministry of Finance, as well as a lack of straight forward and clear procedures regarding the *muhajirs'* empty estates.⁸⁰ Protracted court trials also followed from the fact that many of them did not start until 1884, and were additionally prolonged by appeals.⁸¹ Examining land rights cases after 1885

⁷⁶ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 20.01.1880*, copy no. 13, FO 195/1311 (no pages); К. Иречек, *Български дневник*, Т. 2: 1881–1884, съст. Е. Стателова, София 1995, pp. 51, 75.

⁷⁷ The local authorities tried to set their own deadlines for the returning Muslims. In November 1881, Sofia's district court gave the war refugees two years to return while retaining their right to the abandoned property. Following complaints from the Sublime Porte that the decision was illegal, the court responded that a similar practice was employed in the Ottoman Empire. After the two-year period the land in the Sofia district was to be nationalised. Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., pp. 164–165.

⁷⁸ *От Министерство на финансите до Началник на Отделението за Държавните имоти, 13.05.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 145 л. 25.

⁷⁹ *От Бургарски окръжен управител до Министерство на финансите, 20.08.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 146 л. 14–15; *От Бургарски окръжен управител до Началник на IV Отделението на Министерство на финансите, 21.10.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 146 л. 20; *Постановление no. 93, 10.03.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 146 л. 27; *Протокол на Общински комитет на Дунав-Ювай, 25.03.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 147 л. 239; *Писмо от окръжно управление Старозагорско до м. на финансите, 27 юни 1890 г.*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 192 л. 13.

⁸⁰ *От Централно съкровищничество (Министерство на финансите) до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 6.02.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 29; *От Министерство на вътрешните дела до Министерство на финансите, 15.03.1890*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 189 л. 340; *Доклад до Министерство на финансите*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 62; *От Бургарско окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 29.03.1890*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 190 л. 269; *От Бургарско окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 11.01.1890*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 190 л. 263–264.

⁸¹ *От Ловчанското окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 1.11.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 18–19.

was also justified by special circumstances. If the heir of an estate was a child during their residence abroad, they could return and start proceedings to reclaim their possession after coming of age.⁸² The Bulgarian authorities, the Sublime Porte, and representatives of the great powers were inundated by complaints from the Bulgarian *muhajirs*, who protested against the violation of their land rights already in 1882.⁸³ Individual complaints continued to be lodged until the end of the 1880s and in the 1890s; they included not only complaints about holdbacks from the refugees reclaiming their property but also cases of Bulgarian neighbors appropriating parts of their arable land by gradually moving the boundary strip.⁸⁴

Bulgarian courts acknowledged the arguments of Muslim repatriates about illegal use of their land by the state or about groundless dispossession usually years later.⁸⁵ The later attitude of the Bulgarian authorities towards the Muslim repatriates and their reclaiming of land was much more lenient. For instance, Mehmed Ahprazov from Karnobat fled during the war and his estate, i.e. a house, 860 ha of arable land and 70 ha of meadows, was taken over by the Burgas district authorities and leased out. In 1882 Ahprazov returned to Eastern Rumelia, repossessed his land and found a new leaseholder. Later, his sisters were in charge of managing the estate, while he permanently moved to Constantinople. The court trial against the local authorities for the return of the rent collected in 1878–1882, in the amount of 148 leva, went on for seven long years. In the end, Ahprazov won the case.⁸⁶ During the tenure of Stefan Stambolov as Prime Minister (1886–1894), a number of regulations were introduced which were meant to encourage Muslim émigrés to return; e.g. in March 1892 some measures were introduced to facilitate the recovery of debts from the Principality's citizens by persons who had left for Turkey

⁸² *Постановление на Ловчанската окръжна постоянна комисия, 19.04.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 15–16; Решение бр. 258 на Варненски окръжен съд, Варна 11.06.1895, ДА-Варна ф. 112к оп. 3 а.е. 177 л. 21–22.*

⁸³ *Draft by Lascelles, 16.06.1882, FO 78/3412/6.*

⁸⁴ *Списък на нотите на агентството адресувани до разните турски министерва от начало на 1888 год. до днес и останали без одговор, Цариград, 9.11.1889, НБКМ-БИА ф. 290 а.е. 164 л. 11–21; Решение бр. 131 на Варненски окръжен съд, Варна 15.03.1897, ДА-Варна ф. 112к оп. 3 а.е. 181 л. 15–17; Решение бр. 176 на Варненски окръжен съд, Варна 24.03.1897, ДА-Варна ф. 112к оп. 3 а.е. 182 л. 16–18.*

⁸⁵ *Решение но. 163 в името на Негово Царско Височество Фердинанд I княз българский, 11 април 1890, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 192 л. 31–34.*

⁸⁶ *От Бургарски окръжен управител до Началник на IV Отделението на Министерство на финансите, 23.08.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 146 л. 16; Решение в името на Негово Царско Височество Фердинанд I Княз България, 19.07.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 146 л. 17–18.*

(or their heirs). To this end, special sub-units of agricultural credit banks were established, which were supposed to deal with such liabilities.⁸⁷

Another problem related to the land of war refugees were speculators, who either bought out the land abandoned by the Muslims *en masse*, or gave usurious loans to Bulgarian farmers to buy out the land.⁸⁸ Almost all farmers were interested in buying post-Turkish land, so prices were inflated. Additionally, peasants were unaccustomed to using money, so they were easy to swindle. The annual interest rate of usurious loans was rarely below 50 or 60 percent. As a result, as Petar Gabe pointed out already in the early 20th century, in the Varna district it was difficult to find a farmer who did not have a difficult credit situation. He also quoted a somewhat anecdotal story of a peasant who took out a loan to buy an ox and soon after had to sell two oxen and a few cows and sheep to pay back the loan.⁸⁹ Already in September 1879, efforts were made to overcome this phenomenon, mainly by means of stricter control over transactions involving the Muslims who were leaving. It was recommended that any deed which raised any doubts whatsoever be refused, that only local peasants be allowed to buy out land and that any outsiders be forbidden to do it, that farmers be supported with cheap loans for buying out land, and that the size of bought plots be limited to 250 ha per person.⁹⁰ The problem reappeared when influential people became involved in the business. In 1889, the mayor of Bistrovica, Pene Dimitrov, was disciplinarily dismissed and charged with offenses. In 1885, he had sold refugees' estates and *waqfs*, such as arable land and a mill, at deflated prices, without having obtained the permission of the district

⁸⁷ Решение на Министерство на Търговия и Земеделието, 21.03.1892, НБКМ-БИА ф. 272 а.е. 4274 л. 19–20.

⁸⁸ От Министерство на правосъдието и вероизповеданията до Главен управител на Източна Румелия, 7.12.1884, ЦДА ф. 565к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 18; От Ловчанския окръжен началник до Министерството на финансите, 17.07.1880, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 25; „Варненски общински вестник” 1888, год. 1, бр. 2 (14 новември), р. 1; Т. Карайотов, *Мухаджирският (бежанският) въпрос в Одрински вилает в края на XIX век, 1909*, [in:] *История на българите 1878–1944 в документи*, Т. 1: 1878–1912, ч. 2: *Българите в Македония, Тракия и Добруджа*, ред. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1996, р. 16; J. Rubacha, *Gospodarka Bułgarii na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, „*Słupskie Studia Historyczne*” 2011, nr 17, р. 146.

⁸⁹ П. Габе, *Значението на новите заселвания и нови капитали за икономическото развитие на България*, Добрич 1903, pp. 40–43.

⁹⁰ Препис от едно писмо изпратено от Министерство на правосъдието до Министерството на вътрешните дела, София 20.09.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 26–27; Препис от едно окръжно писмо до губернаторите изпратено от министъра на вътрешните дела, 2.10.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 28.

authorities and the Ministry of Finance.⁹¹ Another important politician of the National-Liberal Party during Stambolov's regime, Ivan Andonov, also made his fortune in the same way.⁹²

One of the main problems related to the land abandoned by the *muhajirs* was the circulation of fake deeds, which continued to plague the country until the end of the 19th century.⁹³ What contributed to the spread of this problem was the fact that the fine in the case of proven forgery was only 6 percent of the value of the property to which the document pertained. As a result, forgers felt they could act with impunity, even if the offense was detected.⁹⁴ Using forged documents, the Muslims sold many properties which did not belong to them, which naturally caused a lot of disorder. There were also cases where there were several deeds to one estate or piece of land.⁹⁵

The business of forging documents was related to the fact that a large amount of local documentation was destroyed during the war, and receiving a suitable certificate from Constantinople was a very difficult task.⁹⁶ The organs of the Bulgarian state refused to cooperate on this matter. When in the late 1880s the Ottoman authorities turned to the Bulgarian side requesting to verify the fate of the property belonging to a group of refugees, the Bulgarians only answered that the given name did not figure in their real-estate registers and that they did not have current information about the estate in question.⁹⁷

⁹¹ *От Министерство на финансите до Министерство на вътрешните дела*, 02.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 166; *Продавателен запис, Бистрица 19.04.1885*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 167; *Продавателен запис, Бистрица (no date)*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 168; *Продавателен запис, Бистрица 19.04.1885*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 169; *Продавателен запис, Бистрица 25.04.1885*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 170; *Продавателен запис, Бистрица 25.04.1885*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 150 л. 171.

⁹² „Балканска зора” 1893, год. IV, бр. 938 (17 юни), pp. 2–3; „Балканска зора” 1893, год. IV, бр. 940 (19 юни), p. 3.

⁹³ „Балканска зора” 1892, год. II, бр. 552 (7 февруари), p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Lascalles to Earl Granville, Sofia, 24.07.1880*, no. 118, FO 195/1312 (no pages); *От Ловчански окръжен управител до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, Ловеч 24.09.1881*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 177; *Прошение от Али Пехливан Мехмедоглу, жител от Бласничево (Ловчанско), до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, Цариград 2.09.1881*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 26 л. 178; *Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 29.04.1880*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 30 л. 69; *Прошение на Сеид Али от Каменица, Никополски окръжие, Цариград 22.08.1883*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 51 л. 77; К. Иречек, *Български дневник...*, Т. 2, p. 51.

⁹⁶ А. М. Mirkova, *op. cit.*, p. 970.

⁹⁷ *Превод на писмото от Адиеето до Българско агентство, 2.05.1888*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 81; *От Ловчанското окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 10.03.1889*, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 96.

This led to many complications, e.g. in a situation where it was uncertain what the status of the land in question was: had it been private property or *waqf*?⁹⁸ The refugees simply did not have the appropriate documents confirming their land ownership, and in any given local commune everyone just knew to whom the land belonged.⁹⁹

Initially, the Sublime Porte itself participated in the business of forging documents pertaining to the estates abandoned in Bulgaria. In 1882, governor of Eastern Rumelia Aleko Bogoridi asked for copies of deed registers kept in Constantinople, which would be a basis for more efficient verification of land rights of the refugees returning to Eastern Rumelia. However, the materials he received turned out to be partly modified to the advantage of some Muslims who had not possessed land before the war.¹⁰⁰

The circulation of forged documents was not exclusively a problem for the Bulgarians, but for the repatriates as well. As soon as 1889, Ahmed Ilyazoolu from Giozeken (the district of Anhialo) attempted to reclaim his mill in the settlement of Eni Kioy and the three adjacent fields, which he had inherited from his late wife. After he had left the country during the war, the estate was seized by two Turks: Husein Feradov and Oman Hamzoolu. The trial went on for many years due to the fact that both sides had deeds written in Turkish—most likely one of the *tapu* was a forgery.¹⁰¹

Organized crime developed around the business of forging deeds. In 1891, the Plovdiv daily “Балканска зора” reported that a forger of Bulgarian deeds was arrested in Constantinople. The arrest led to an entire crime ring. In October, a big trial of the persons involved in this procedure was held in the capital of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰²

Already in 1889, it was postulated that external translations should be forbidden and that clear rules should be established with regard to the institutions which would be allowed to provide official translations of documents from

⁹⁸ *От Вакуфска комисия до Министерство на финансите, 24.01.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 154 л. 40; От Софийско окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 11.02.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 154 л. 47.*

⁹⁹ *От Финансовия отделение на Руската императорски комисар до Софийски губернатор, 16.03.1879, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 6 л. 4.*

¹⁰⁰ *От Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 24.12.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 7 л. 62; А. М. Mirkova, op. cit., p. 970.*

¹⁰¹ *От Бургарски окръжен управител до Министерство на финансите, 30.03.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 146 л. 6–7.*

¹⁰² „Балканска зора” 1891, год. 1, бр. 278 (17 февруари), p. 3; „Балканска зора” 1891, год. II, бр. 478 (29 октомври), p. 3.

Turkish to Bulgarian.¹⁰³ It seemed that the problem of forged deeds would be eliminated in 1892 when it was officially announced that Ottoman *tapus* would not be accepted and would be fully replaced by Bulgarian deeds within five years, which local communal authorities were obligated to enforce.¹⁰⁴ The process took much longer and continued until the first decade of the 20th century.¹⁰⁵ At the stage of replacing these documents, there were irregularities as a result of which some new deeds ended up in the hands of persons who did not, in fact, had rights to a given property.¹⁰⁶ However, until 1910, during court trials, it sometimes happened that the sides presented documents in Turkish.¹⁰⁷ Even during that period, the Sublime Porte issued *tapus* pertaining to lands on the Bulgarian territory.¹⁰⁸

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Migrations and the transfer of land from Muslim to Christian hands were of key importance for the political, social and economic change on the Balkan Peninsula in the 19th c.: the collapse of the Ottoman socio-economic system and the birth of new forms of functioning, characteristic of the 20th c.¹⁰⁹ The Agrarian Revolution brought about beneficial changes for Bulgarian agriculture, stabilized the situation and created conditions for production growth. Towards the end of the first decade of the 20th c., Bulgaria found itself among the top

¹⁰³ *От Ловчанското окръжно управление до IV Отделение на Министерство на финансите, 1.11.1889, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 151 л. 18–19; От Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 8.05.1885, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 57 л. 78.*

¹⁰⁴ *Протоколна книга на Провадийския градски общински съвет, 1893, ДА-Варна ф. 87к оп. 1 а.е. 9 л. 39–47; Протоколна книга на Провадийския градски общински съвет, 1893, ДА-Варна ф. 87к оп. 1 а.е. 10 л. 1, 7–8; „Варненски общински вестник” 1903, год. 16, бр. 16 (19 юли), pp. 1–2; „Варненски общински вестник” 1903, год. 16, бр. 17–18 (21 август), pp. 2–3; „Варненски общински вестник” 1903, год. 16, бр. 19–20 (30 септември), pp. 1–2.*

¹⁰⁵ *Протоколна книга на Козлуджашки селски общински съвет, 1904, ДА-Варна ф. 484к оп. 1 а.е. 2 л. 1–4, 13–14, 20–23, 28–33.*

¹⁰⁶ *Решение бр. 199 на Варненски окръжен съд, Варна 19.04.1897, ДА-Варна ф. 112к оп. 3 а.е. 183 л. 19–21.*

¹⁰⁷ „Балканска зора” 1892, год. II, бр. 552 (7 февруари), p. 1; J. Rubacha, *Gospodarka Bułgarii...*, op. cit., p. 146.

¹⁰⁸ М. Сарафов, *Дипломатически дневник 1909–1912. България и Турция в навечерието на Балканските войни*, съст. Ц. И. Величкова, София 2008, p. 125.

¹⁰⁹ К. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, Leiden–Boston–Koln 2002, pp. 354–355, 376.

countries in the region in terms of cattle and swine breeding and was even second in the world in sheep farming. The development of grain, fruit, tobacco, as well as famous rose oil production, is assessed similarly. Agriculture determined almost half of the revenues of the state. As a result, the position of peasants in Bulgaria improved, especially in the case of the dominant group of small farmers, who cultivated farms smaller than 5 ha. Right after the war, the Bulgarians came to own a total of 450,000 ha of post-Turkish land, which amounted to ca. 10 percent of the entire area of the country. It is estimated that by 1900 Christians had taken over a total of ca. 607,000 ha of land.¹¹⁰ In 1880, 25 percent of agricultural land in the Principality and in Eastern Rumelia remained in Muslim hands; in 1900 this percentage dropped to 15 percent.¹¹¹ The strengthening of the ownership of Bulgarian peasants as a result of the Muslim *exodus* was the basis for the increase of their political importance, which was later related to the creation of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the regime of Aleksandar Stamboliyski after World War I.¹¹²

Some historians estimate that after 1878 the Bulgarians made an effort to create difficult economic conditions for the Muslims, to drive them into debt, to force them into selling out their estates. The Bulgarian policy supposedly focused on “strengthening the Bulgarian national element” by means of disposessions which hit the Muslims in the first place.¹¹³ After the state was established, there were voices which claimed that the Slavs would attempt to completely dispossess the Muslims and the Greeks and divide their land among themselves.¹¹⁴ Konstantin Jireček wrote that “the Bulgarian nation was possessed with a great desire to seize all property.”¹¹⁵ It was claimed that this was supposed to be the Bulgarians’ revenge for the repressions following the April Uprising, which also involved mass disposessions of its partici-

¹¹⁰ „Витоша” 1879, год. I, бр. 47 (14 ноември), р. 2; M. Neuburger, op. cit., pp. 174–175; V. Şimşir, *The Turks of Bulgaria (1878–1985)*, London 1988, pp. 6–7; Б. Лори, *Съдбата на османското наследство. Българската градска култура 1878–1900*, прев. Л. Янакиева, София 2002, р. 81; J. Rubacha, *Bułgaria na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Bułgarskie metamorfozy w publikacjach „Świata Słowiańskiego” 1904–1914*, Olsztyn 2012, pp. 386–387.

¹¹¹ S. K. Pavlowitch, *Historia Bałkanów (1804–1945)*, tłum. J. Polak, Warszawa 2009, p. 174.

¹¹² M. Tanty, *Bałkany w XX wieku. Dzieje polityczne*, Warszawa 2003, p. 57; M. Dymarski, *Recepcja osmańskiego systemu rządów w państwach bałkańskich w XIX–XX wieku*, „Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia” 2014, t. 21, p. 142.

¹¹³ Ж. Назърска, *Българската държава...*, op. cit., р. 63.

¹¹⁴ Mr. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, *Constantinople 17.04.1878*, FO 881/3574/97–99.

¹¹⁵ К. Иречек, *Княжество България. Негова повърхнина, природа, население, духовна култура, управление и новейша история*, ч. I: *Българска държава*, Пловдив 1899, р. 223.

pants.¹¹⁶ In Turkish historiography, there is an opinion that due to the brutality with which Muslim possessions were appropriated in Bulgaria after 1878, the Agrarian Revolution should be treated as a civil war.¹¹⁷

However, it cannot be concluded that the Bulgarian authorities expressly and uncompromisingly acted so that Muslim property would transfer to Bulgarian hands. The Bulgarian historian Dimitar Sazdov has identified three stages of the Agrarian Revolution:

1. From the war's outbreak until the spring of 1878, when the Bulgarians were acting cautiously, not yet knowing the outcome of the war or the provisions of the peace treaty;
2. From the spring of 1878 until the end of the Russian occupation, when there were mass and uncontrolled seizures of Muslim lands, while the Russians made the first general attempt to legally regulate the process;
3. Following the end of the Russian occupation, when the regulations pertaining to the process of dispossession were fully adopted and Muslim ownership rights were taken into consideration in a broader manner.¹¹⁸

The policy of the Agrarian Revolution became clearly more moderate from the mid-1880s onwards, which followed from the fact that it was considered essentially implemented. An illustration of this greater moderation is a situation which occurred in 1894 near Razgrad. When there was a crop failure in the Muslim-dominated settlements of Balbunar, Kisli Kioy, Drianovo, and Balbunar Indje, the government in Sofia decided to grant the affected farmers considerable tax exemptions.¹¹⁹ The tax reliefs ranged from 25 percent to complete exemption. If such a situation had occurred at the turn of the 1870s and 1880s, the Bulgarians would probably have had no scruples to take it as an opportunity to seize the Islamic peasants' land.

¹¹⁶ *Brophy to Layard, Bourgas 12.09.1877*, FO 195/1144/74.

¹¹⁷ В. Şimşir, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹¹⁸ Д. Саздов, М. Лалков, Т. Митев, Р. Мишев, В. Мигев, *История на Третата българска държава*, София 1992, pp. 23–26.

¹¹⁹ „Държавен вестник” 1894, год. XVI, бр. 9 (14 януари), pp. 1–2.

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