

WITH LOVE TOWARDS THE TRUTH

GJORGJI LAZAREVSKI¹

Abstract: *The paper presents numerous reports of the Russian and Austrian consuls in Bitola that reflect the state of these areas in the period before and after the Ilinden Uprising. That period was filled with stormy events that were the subject of observation by foreign consuls.*

The consuls in Bitola received official reports from the valia in Bitola, which did not show the real situation of the events that took place during that period.

The Russian and Austrian consuls in their reports to their superiors presented the real situation for all the developments in Macedonia. They often performed together in front of the Bitola valia in order to protect the peaceful population. Their love for the truth was great. Russian consul Rostkovsky paid for that love of truth with his life.

Key words: *Consuls of Bitola, Rostkovski, August Kral, Pogacher, Oskar Prohaska.*

The imperialist interests of the great capitalist superpowers collided mainly in Macedonia, as the central strategic area of the Ottoman Empire, whose continuous internal weakening was evident already in the 19th century, especially after several wars with other countries, which ended with the territorial losses of the Sultanate empire. The great European states were interested in the final fate of the Bosphorus, and that is why they wanted to follow the internal events from the closest proximity to the hotspots in Macedonia, on which many eyes were directed, and for this purpose they asked the High Porte for permission to open their own diplomatic missions in Macedonia. The Ottoman central authorities, aware of their internal position and their dependence on some European industrialized countries, did not oppose those demands, but satisfied them.

Based on such attitude of the High Porte, some European countries started to open their consulates, in addition to Skopje and Thessaloniki, also in Bitola - the heart of ethnic-geographic Macedonia.

This is how the Consulate of Austria-Hungary was opened in 1851 in Bitola². Ten years later, the Russian consulate was opened, and the first consul was appointed, Mihail Aleksandrović Hitrovo, who was warmly welcomed by the citizens of Bitola. Other diplomats followed him.

With the opening of foreign consulates in Bitola, Macedonians already had the opportunity to complain about the numerous injustices inflicted on them by various thugs.

The foreign consuls of the great states, in addition to their numerous economic, political and other interests, often acted as protectors of the Macedonian people, intervening before the relevant Ottoman authorities in the city, mostly before the valia, and demanded that the Christians be protected from various bullies both in the city and outside in the district.

Consuls often submitted reports to their embassies in Constantinople, and through them to the ministries of foreign affairs of their governments..

The subject of this paper are the reports of the Russian and Austrian consuls in Bitola in the period before and after the Ilinden Uprising. I chose this period because it is full of

¹Gjorgji Lazarevski, a retired professor, lives in the village of Kravari - Bitola, RM

E-mail address: gorgi.lazarevski@yahoo.com

² Nikola Minovski, Konzulska Bitola, p. 9, Bitola: 2002.

numerous events related to our national history, and all the consuls from Bitola regularly reported on all the events that happened in these areas.

In his numerous reports, in which the truth about all the events in Macedonia is presented, among those that are most often mentioned are the names of Aleksandar Arkadijević Rostkovski - Russian consul, Pogacher - Austrian consul in Bitola (1890), August Kral - Austrian consul (1903- 1905), Oskar Prohaska – Austrian vice-consul in Bitola (1904-1906) as well as numerous other vice-consuls and officials in the Russian and Austrian consulates in Bitola.

Analyzing the reports of the Bitola consuls, one can observe a reliable representation of the life of the Macedonian people in Bitola and beyond. In order to obtain reliable data about everything that was happening in this turbulent time in these areas, the consuls in Bitola entered into friendly relations with prominent citizens of Bitola such as: doctors, professors, teachers, etc. After the strengthening of the Bitola Committee, the Macedonian revolutionaries engaged several capable people from their ranks so that they could communicate with the public and provide them with verified information with specific indicators. From the diplomats' reports, information was also supplied to certain reputable journalists who published their information in the world press. This is how the truth about Macedonia and everything that happened around it spread.

Foreign diplomatic representatives regularly received information from the service of the valia in Bitola, but that information was "adjusted" according to the needs of the current government and was essentially incorrect and did not reflect the real situation on the ground.

From the numerous reports of the Austrian consuls, I singled out a small part that I thought would give a modest picture of the events of the relevant period.

Pogacher to Count Calnoki, Bitola, August 29, 1890

In this extensive report, Consul Pogacher reports on the influence of the Greek and Bulgarian churches on the local population and the transition of a large number of churches from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate to the Exarchate. It also reports the approximate number of believers: 64,860 believers were adherents of the Patriarchate, and 153,700 believers were adherents of the Exarchate. He mentions that the Greek metropolitan of Debar ran out of believers and moved to Veles. Among other things, Pogacher concludes: "The emancipation of the Macedonian Slavs from the Greek Church is carried out by joining the Bulgarian Church and the Bulgarian nationalism carried by it. It is too late to turn this development on another track"³.

Aleksandar Arkadievich Rostkovski, Russian consul in Bitola

Report of the Russian Consul to his superior⁴

„...The entire population was waiting with trepidation for July 20, which, however, passed peacefully, but on the night of the 21st, the insurgents cut all telegraph connections, both state and railway, and detachments attacked the Muslim villages of Lera, Dolenci, Pribilci, whose inhabitants enjoy always just a bad reputation...

Roads are destroyed, bridges blown up, and insurgents do not allow passage. Many houses on the roads have been burned, and - also - they report about the numerous fires in the villages, the houses of the Muslims - chiflixaybii - are burning...

The railway telegraph does not work, that it is damaged every night, notwithstanding that it is guarded, very carefully, by the soldiers“.

³ Documents from the Vienna archive for Macedonia from 1879-1903, Tomo Tomoski, p.33, Skopje 1955

⁴ Dusan H. Konstantinov, Bitola 1903, Bitola Museum, p. 92, Bitola: 1983.

August Kral, Austrian consul in Bitola
To Count Agenor von Goluchowski, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary, Bitola, July 31, 1903
No. 86⁵

In this extensive report, details of numerous events that the Consul Kral learned personally are presented. Among other things, he points out that cruel measures are applied to the innocent population, such as: beatings and torture by the Turkish military squads who searched the villages. The worst cases of this category occurred in the following villages: Orle, Makovo, Rapesh, Meglenci, Novaci, Crnicani, Dedebalci, Puturus, Podmol, Trap, Aglarci, Paralovo, Klepach, Dobrushevo, Radobor, Ribarci, Sakulevo, Bach, Vrbyani, Asanovo Selo, Ljubojno, Drmeni, Krusje, Gjavato, Tsapari and numerous villages in Lerinsko and Kostursko. "In Rapesh, the Mohammedan Poles (3 brothers) accused the villagers: 45 men were tortured. One of them was laid down and an ember was put on his chest, so that he could not show his wounds, he had to go to prison besides".

Seven villages from Kosturska kaza, 36 from Demir-Hisar, collectively sent their representatives to the Austrian and Russian consulates, to beg for protection against the violence of the soldiers and Bashibozuk, which interfere with their Polish work. The rural population finds itself in a terrible dilemma: on the one hand, they are threatened with torture, imprisonment, all kinds of torture if they do not hand over their weapons, and on the other hand, reprisals from the troops for betraying the committee! This terrible situation for the population can only accelerate the uprising.

The arrests are endless and not a day goes by without them. From the 20 last month, they brought, among others, 22 people from Zelenich (Lerin), 30 from Zhvan, 12 from Lerin, 7 from Bach, 4 from Vrbjani together with the priest, the deacon and the secretary of the Ohrid bishop, 32 respectable people from Prilep, etc..

Almost all the offenses and abuses I and my Russian colleague, either together or at least in agreement, brought to the attention of the valia; we intervene constantly, we demand that the culprits be punished, that the abuses be abolished. On the part of the Valia, promises are always made with beautiful words, but nothing is ever fulfilled from what was promised. All this points to some violent solution, which heralds the Ilinden Uprising.

Report no. 87, Bitola, August 1, 1903.

In this report, the consul August Kral reports that in Mariovo the companies twice ambushed military columns. Once 11 soldiers were disarmed, another time a certain number of soldiers were mortally wounded.

On the eve of the Ilinden Uprising, the revolutionary teachers were given the task of embroidering a large battle flag for the Headquarters. The teachers accepted this task. They were joined by the revolutionary flag embroiderers: Karanova Biljana, Karadzova Vasilka and Lazeva Vasilka⁶.

In this regard, Consul Kral reports: "In the near future, it is expected that banners and flags (which are said to have been exported by the teachers from Bitola) will be distributed, which would correspond to an official announcement of the uprising".

... In some areas (Kicevo, Demir-Hisar) the troops pass through the villages in broad daylight with bagpipes and zurli and the patriotic enthusiasm of the rural population is on the rise.

⁵ Reports from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, selection Dancho Zografski, INI, p. 54, Skopje:1955

⁶ Dusan Hr. Konstantinov, Bitola 1903, p. 73, Bitola:1983.

In general, a certain effort can be observed from the leaders of the movement, a swarming similar to that of ants is observed and it is indicated that the decisive hour is approaching“.

Report no. 107, Bitola, August 27, 1903

In this report, Consul Kral reports on the Ilinden Uprising and adds: "It is not just the work of individual agitators and criminals, as many newspapers claim; it is an outpouring of discontent of an entire nation. It did not arise from a desire for adventure on the part of a few unemployed people, but is a call for help to a deeply oppressed population fighting for freedom and fair opportunities“.

„ About the development of the uprising in the Bitola province, the most false news is spreading in the world. **Love for the truth**, not partiality in favor of Christians or any nationality... **the action of the insurgents was humane and loyal, and the action of the Turks barbaric, ferocious, Asiatic.**

..., The Turks, on the contrary, too weak and too cowardly to engage in combat with the insurgents on the mountains, but also sometimes enraged by the failure suffered, rush into the places and after plundering their houses, killing many of the inhabitants, dishonoring the women and girls, they raze them to the ground... The massacred are presented as if they fell in the fight, which should - as they say - justify the possible violations... The so-called brutal acts of the comites, because of which so much noise is being made, at the present moment are a story, and since the beginning of the war there has also not been a revenge killing“.

Report no. 110, Bitola, September 1, 1903⁷

In this report, the consul August Kral reports on the situation with the insurgents in the remaining regions. It reports on the fortifications of the insurgents in difficult-to-access rocky areas, they raise their flags, and often pass through settlements led by a bayraktar.

In one part of his report he states the following: **“IN KRUSEVO, SMILEVO, KLISURA, NEVESKA, HATTEN SIE PROVISORISCH REGIRUNG EINGERICHTET”**.

According to diplomatic practice, King delivered a copy of the report to the Austrian embassies in Athens, Belgrade, Berlin, Bucharest, London, Paris, Rome, Sofia, St. Petersburg and Cetinje. If we analyze King's sentence, two important conclusions emerge: 1. The Macedonian revolutionaries-insurgents ("they") established temporary governments in the exactly named places (Krushevo, Smilevo, Klisura, Neveska), using the word (Regirung) with which they denote governments of each state. He did not use a synonym for the term administration (Direktion, Leitung, Verwaltung) or a similar word.

The tireless Austrian consul August Kral regularly sent exhaustive reports on the new developments in Bitola and the Vilayet. He never stopped reporting on the terrible crimes that were repeated in Bitola only in different places.

Report no. 111, Bitola, September 3 1903.

In this report, among other things, it is highlighted: "The vandalism with which the Turkish soldiers and bashibuzuks razed so many settlements to the ground, has resulted in the impoverishment of many thousands of inhabitants, who are now without protection and livelihood to face the winter." According to the information available so far, 80-90 places have been burned... The claim is meaningless; that the insurgents burned the villages because in that way they would be deprived of all their shelters, their food stores, all their base of

⁷ Reports from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, selected by Dancho Zografski. INI, p. 95, Skopje: 1955.

operations, all their living conditions. But it is true that the troops, precisely to spare the villages, never fight there, but always in the mountains, which serve as their natural fortresses.

The action of the insurgents cannot even be compared with the Turkish devastations, because they, as I have had the honor to point out several times, are generally more intent on destroying the Turkish towers, the fortified country houses of the hated landowners, than whole villages." Furthermore, an overview of the burnt villages in Resenska nahija, Prespanska, Krushevska, Smilevska, Bitolska, Lerinska, Kosturska, Debarca nahija and Kichevska nahija is given..

Augustus Kral was a favorite consul among the Macedonians. They trusted his honesty a lot and in the most difficult moments they looked to him for salvation. Here is a letter sent by Duke Tole Pasha on October 26, 1903 to August Kral.

Report no. 43 of April 22, 1904.

„Greetings from me, Tole Pasha, Duke of Mariovo! I am sending my son and entrusting him to You. You will be both father and mother to him. I will not surrender to the Turks, I do not submit. Would it be possible to find a way and not surrender directly to the Turks? I surrender to You only, but never to the Turks and the Pasha.

I am asking you to send me a letter and tell me in it what I should do. There are many spies here, which is why it is not possible to live in the villages, because they would betray us. The villagers are scattered and do not want to accept us. I would be very happy if it would be possible to find a place for my son in Bitola, because the Turks in Prilep would kill him because of me.

Greetings from me, Tole Pasha."

Written by Secretary Krste⁸

Report no. 116, Bitola, September 6 1903

This report is a continuation of the previous day's report. Here are presented data about military clashes between the Turkish army and the insurgents and the numerous crimes committed by the regular army and the bashibuzuk against the unprotected Christian population.

In the village of Neokazi, the Turks from Voshtarani (Ovcharani) noticed several villagers returning from the mountain, after which on August 13 the village was searched by the soldiers and the Bashibuzuk. Although the people admitted their escape and surrendered to mercy, they still took 70 people to Lerin as prisoners, but on the way tortured them mercilessly to the last man. Their corpses remained unburied for 10 days in an open field. It should be pointed out that the people who returned were all unarmed, so in no case should they have been treated like comites. After the destruction of the men, the Turks attacked the village, looted and set it on fire, during which two women and 5 children were beaten, and one villager was cut into pieces.

In relation to the desire for robbery and in general the intentions of the Turkish population, it is characteristic that the Turks from the village of Kenali (Kremenica), which is 15 km away, participated among others in the mourning of Neokazi.

A similar event, but in its details much more terrible, happened the following day when 400 insurgents clashed between Armensko and Pisoderi with a superior army... The details of the atrocities committed cannot be described at all. There are women whose stomachs were cut open, others had their eyes gouged out or their breasts cut off, the heads and bodies of small children were inhumanely pierced with pocket knives, infants could be

⁸ Krste Germov – Shakir, later Duke of Mariovska

seen dismembered and thrown to the dogs, 19 women were dishonored, 3 girls horribly butchered. After a long effort, the French Sisters of Mercy from Bitola managed to get permission from Hilmi-Pasha to travel to Lerin, where, accompanied by a local doctor, they provided help to the victims for several days.

The Greek consul there and elsewhere visited the hard-hit Greek partisans and distributed monetary relief – presumably to soothe his bitterly disappointed people at the bloody evidence of Turkish friendship!

A special difficulty was the action of the Greek and Bulgarian troops in Macedonia who terrorized the peaceful population. The majority of the population decided to belong to the Exarchate, most likely due to the closeness of the Macedonian and Bulgarian languages. This could not be acceptable to the adherents of the Patriarchate. So it happened that in several villages, due to the division, there were two churches, one Greek and the other Bulgarian.

The rulers of each church had hired their own armed companies who wanted to ensure their presence in the field by force of arms. Such a situation is very explicitly discussed in the report of

**Oskar Prohaska, the Austrian vice-consul
Report no. 50, Bitola, October 10 1906.**

The report talks about the attack on the Mariovo village of Zhiovo in the night between the 7th and 8th of this month. The village was attacked by a Greek company. In this attack, 18 people were killed, one was wounded, while two people disappeared. A total of 40 buildings were burnt down. Now there are 4 Greek companies operating in Mariovo, that of the Cretan Panagioti, that of Doncho, then of Perdikas and finally a company that is led by the Greek naval officer Melas, brother of the Greek MP beaten in Lerin and leader of the company.

Each of these companies has an effective composition of about 30-40 people, which can easily be increased even to 150 or more people if needed.

Apart from these four Greek companies, two more companies are now operating in Mariovo, one of Krste Germov known as Shakir and that of Jovan Đurov (Đurovčeto). Their effective strength is 7-8 people, but in case of need they can easily increase.

Consul August Kral, one of the most intelligent, educated and cultured Bitola consuls of those times, also noticed the process of enrichment of Macedonian folk creativity during the Ilinden Revolution, because new conditions were created in the epic events to show the creativity, the genius of the anonymous folk creator. Kral presents an accurate perception about the creators themselves, and the new battle songs (Komite-Ilinden) songs: "Many events are glorified in songs; the people glorify them, and that is why teachers who participate in the Uprising are especially concerned".

..., Numerous written communications from company leaders to the leadership of the Committee and to foreign consuls should publicize their successes and create a mood for them“.

The uprising has already been suppressed, but the reality was completely different, although the revolutionary companies from offensive tactics and strategy were forced to the defensive. Realizing the historical truth, the consul Kral informs his government: "Despite the military persecution, it is very difficult for the Turks to dominate the troops that have already gained momentum“.

The Macedonian people, like many other nations in the world, showed an extremely high consciousness, and the Macedonian revolutionaries a fighting spirit that can always be shown as a shining example to future generations, not only for the fighting spirit and morality, but also for the heroism and self-sacrifice of the whole people.

In the name of truth, the Russian and Austrian consuls, through their governments, honestly and regularly reported to the world the just struggle of an enslaved people. The love for the truth cost the Russian consul Aleksandar Arkadievich Rostkovski dearly, who was assassinated in an insidious manner on August 8, 1903 in Bitola. The gendarmes, who did not have the courage to enter into an open conflict with the insurgent companies, shot the unarmed Russian consul Rostkovsky. All of Bitola mourned the murder of this popular consul. But the newly appointed Valia of Bitola Husein Hilmi Pasha skilfully tried to turn the sending of Rostkovski's dead body into a demonstration against the Ottoman Empire.

The love of truth is the highest feeling of man. The Russian and Austrian consuls were aware that their reports full of truth about an enslaved people were not in the spirit of building trust between their countries and the Ottoman Empire. Although their position and authority had strictly delineated paths, they decided on the truth that was to come to light. Love for the truth, not bias in favor of Christians or any nationality.

Summary

The opening of foreign consulates in Bitola created an opportunity for Macedonians to raise up the numerous injustices inflicted by various rapists in the period before and after the Ilinden Uprising.

Foreign consuls, despite their numerous economic and political interests, often acted as protectors of Macedonians, influencing the appropriate Ottoman authorities in the city, mostly in front of the valia, demanding protection for Christians in the city and in the surrounding area.

Macedonians trusted the Russian and Austrian consuls the most. The protective role of the Russian consul Alexander Arkadievich Rostkovsky was of great importance; he made big efforts to protect the Christians in Macedonia. He paid for his love of the truth with his life.

Unforgettable are the memories of many citizens who sought protection from the Austrian consuls. The favourite one was Augusto Kraal, who stood on the side of truth and justice in the most difficult periods.

With unhidden sympathy, Augusto Kraal announced the news that the rebels formed their own governments in Krusevo, Smilevo, Neveska and Klisura.

Thanks to the numerous realistic, and not "fabricated", reports of Russian and Austrian consuls, the truth about Macedonia has gradually penetrated in the world.

LITERATURE

Archives of Macedonia, Austrian documents on the history of the Macedonian people 1905 – 1906, volume I, editorial, translation and commentary Dancho Zografski, Skopje: 1977

Dusan Hr. Konstantinov, Bitola 1903, Bitola: 1983.

Institute of National History, Documents from the Vienna Archives for Macedonia from 1879 – 1903, selection and commentary Tomo Tomoski, Skopje: 1955.

Institute of National History, Reports from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, translation, editing and commentary by Dancho Zografski, Skopje: 1955.

Nikola Minovski, Consulate Bitola, Bitola: 2002.

Translation from Macedonian to English: Simona Joveska, MSc.