

The Balkan wars 1912 – 1913 through the hellenic and rumanian press of that time

At the beginning of the previous century nationalistic tendencies and views began to develop between the neighbouring Christian States of the Balkan Peninsula. This increase in nationalism was accompanied by the inability of the Ottoman Empire that was rocked by internal unrest to maintain its territorial presence in the area of the Balkans. The lands – mainly those of Macedonia and Thrace- were the bones of contention for the enslaved Balkan States which will attempt to claim them in order to satisfy their own national interests, especially against the large and compact dominating Greek element.

The intense confrontation between the countries of the Balkan Peninsula was alleviated and put aside temporarily after the disclaimer of their hopes for equality between the nationalities of the Ottoman Empire, in accordance with the declarations and promises of the Young Turks.

On 5th October 1912 Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro dedared war against Turkey, known as the First Balkan War. The Allied countries, without having signed a mutual defensive pact and without having drawn up a common plan of operations, acted at the same time from different regions against a common enemy. The propitious development of the Allied operations along the Macedonian, Thrace and Epirus Front Lines forced Turkey to capitulate and to sign the Peace Treaty of London on 17th May 1913.

The common actions by the Christian Nations did not mean the end of the seeds of competition and confrontation. The expansionist aspirations of Bulgaria -as specified in the Treaty of San Stefano (1878)- and the refusal of Greece and Serbia to “sell out” their rights to the lands freed from Turkish domination, triggered the beginning of the Second Balkan War (16th/17th June 1913). The deterrence of the Bulgarian Army and the subsequent counterattack by Hellenic forces that peaked with the three-day battle at Kilkis-Lachana, created the conditions for the liberating of the Greek regions in Central and Eastern Macedonia. On 27th June 1913 Rumania, wanting to benefit from the impending defeat of the Bulgarian Army, entered the war on the side of Greece and Serbia. Turkey was quick to follow this action in order to reoccupy part of the lands it had lost. The final defeats of the Bulgarian forces following the decisive successes of the Hellenic and Serbian forces forced Bulgaria to sign the “Peace Treaty of Bucharest” in Bucharest on 18th July of that year, and thus ending the war.

One of the primary and accessible sources of information of the events that took place during that period –as well as for every other period- was the Press. The military –and not only- events were recorded and brought to life in the daily political newspapers, which in Athens numbered fifteen: “Αθήναι” (Athine), “Ακρόπολις” (Acropolis), “Αστήρ” (Astir), “Αστραπή” (Astrapi), “Εμπρό” (Embros), “Εσπερινή” (Esperini), “Εστία” (Estia), “Εφημερίς” (Efimeris), “Καιροί” (Keri), “Νέα Ημέρα” (Nea Imera), “Νέον Άστυ” (Neon Asty), “Πατρίς” (Patri), “Πρωϊνή” (Proini), “Σκριπ” (Skrip) and “Χρόνος” (Chronos), while two newspapers circulated in Piraeus: “Χρονογράφος” (Chronografos) and “Σφαίρα” (Sfera). Their distribution was undertaken by the news agencies and newspaper sellers, while a subscription system was also in operation. The size of the pages was very large and was therefore ironically called “sheet”. Each newspaper had 4 sheets, except for the “Νέα

Ημέρα” (Nea Imera) which ranged from 10-12 sheets. The price of each newspaper was 5 lepta.

Other than newspapers there were also magazines and diaries. During the Balkan Wars over 90 magazines were being distributed, with the more well-known being “Ελληνομνημών” (Ellinomnimon), “Μελέτη” (Meleti), “Ρωμιός” (Romios), etc, as well as 15 diaries, of which “Εθνικόν Ημερολόγιον” (Ethnikon Imerologion) and “Εγκυκλοπαιδικόν Ημερολόγιον” (Engkiklopedikon Imerologion) stood out. There were also 2 diaries that referred exclusively to the war. The writers in the magazines used pseudonyms which underlined the rash of patriotism that had arisen, such as “Αήττητος Εύζων” (Aittitos Evzon = Undefeated Evzone), “Δοξασμένο 1912” (Doxasmeno 1912 = Glorified 1912), “Βουλγαρομάχος Ελλάς” (Voulgaromachos Ellas = Bulgarian fighting Greece), “Ηρωσ του Κιλκίς” (Iroas tou Kilkis = Kilkis Hero), etc.

Sources of information that were used by the newspapers to cover the military events were dispatches sent by correspondents who were at the various war fronts, telegrams received from abroad (London, Vienna, Paris, etc), as well as basic interviews of the wounded or those who were on a few days leave. Also utilized were the military announcements from the Ministry of the Army and announcements from the Ministry of External Affairs.

The Press during the Balkan Wars contributed to the raising and cultivation of the national morale and for the Greek people to act in unity. The front pages of the newspapers accentuated the victorious advances and achievements of the Hellenic Army and Navy throughout all the war fronts. Main titles such as “Ο Ελληνικός Στρατός Κατέλαβε τα Σέρβια” (=The Hellenic Army Occupied Serbia), “Η Ανατίναξις του Τουρκικού Θωρηκτού εν Θεσσαλονίκη / Κατάληψις της Νήσου Σαμοθράκης” (= Blowing-up the Turkish Battleship / Occupying the Island of Samothrace), “Η Τουρκική Πανωλεθρία εις τα Γιαννιτσά” (Turkish Rout in Giannitsa), “Ο Ελληνικός Στρατός Θριαμβεύων εις Κιλκίς” (Hellenic Army Triumphs in Kilkis), “Η Κατάληψις υπό του Στρατού μας της Ξάνθης” (Occupation of Xanthi by our Army), etc. helped to maintain the high morale of the civilians. On many occasions they were accompanied by a coloured lithograph which usually depicted a significant event, such as when the Hellenic Forces entered Thessaloniki or a battle with high casualties or even the portrait of the future King Konstantinos as a symbol of national renaissance. In addition, the front page as well as the inside pages included narrations, scenes, impressions and episodes with details from significant battles, such as the Battle of Sarantaporo, the Occupation of Limnos, the Occupation of Ioannina, etc, as these were dispatched by the war correspondents.

Readers could inform themselves as to the conditions that prevailed in the war zones and the list of dead, wounded and hospitalized soldiers that was published regularly and which concerned them directly, while at the same time they re-lived the emotions and experiences of the residents of the liberated regions.

The articles, comments, news and analyses from the Foreign Press -mainly English, French and Austrian- were reprinted in an attempt to present to their readers the position and situation of the Europeans with respect to the rapid developments in the area of the Balkans. Significant events such as the occupation of Thessaloniki and Ioannina by the

Hellenic Army attracted the interest in the Foreign Press while also provoking the admiration of the Europeans. An indicative example is the case of the Italian correspondent of the newspaper "TRIMBOUNA-", Fausto Martini, who was following the operations of the Hellenic Army in the Second Balkan War.

The military events were those that interested every member of the press and comprised the bulk of every issue, without however the material being exhausted in these issues. Daily life was also developed together with the military news, and it was always present in the newspapers. Poems and chronograms that related to the war, stories presented in episodes, social and cultural activities, etc. all supplemented the material. Readers could learn about the plays that were being performed in theatres, such as those of Kyveli at the Attikon and the Eden, the times when the post office was open, the steamship lines, etc. In addition, always present were personal ads concerning the renting or buying of houses, searching for employment, foreign language lessons, etc. Other news that was also printed related directly to the war but concerned a specific group of people, such as the requisitioning of animals and vehicles, etc. The news that related to general daily life was not printed in specific pages (as is the case today), but was rather scattered throughout the newspaper, in between war news.

Of course advertisements were always present, exploiting the war climate of that time, and included findings and even phrases borrowed from the war front in order to better present their products. The drums of war reverberated through the pages of the newspapers and the pages of the magazines. The following is a characteristic example:

NEW WEAPONS OF WAR

In order to win the war it is not enough for you to have good weapons, you must also have good boots.

The Japanese owe their great victory to their boots. Special campaign boots with English waterproof leather and gaiters and can be found at GEORGATOS, 33 Stadiou St.

WAR HAS BEEN DECLARED IN THE BOOKSTORE OF

IASONAS N. GIANNITSI

177 Eolou St.

Since we are selling Books, Notebooks, Pencils, Pen-holders and other stationary very cheap, war has been declared on us which we gladly accept

We have won Fellow Citizens

We Greet You

The Runner from Marathon

Fell dead possibly because he did not think of protecting himself with a truss.

For this reason the armies of all the Nations wear campaign trusses.

The Bulgarians are running like rabbits.

Whether you are chasing rabbits or Bulgarians, the only danger you face is a hernia.

You can relieve yourself of this danger if you protect yourself with Propona elastic trusses.

The Press of that time usually printed small reports on the progress of the operations of Greece's Allies in both wars. However, there were instances where the newspapers devoted their front pages to the successes of the Allies, as can be seen by the headlines: "Οι Βούλγαροι εις τα πρόθυρα της Ανδριανουπόλεως" (=The Bulgarians on the outskirts of Andrianoupoleos), "Η Προέλασις των Σέρβων και των Βουλγάρων" (=The Advancement of the Serbs and the Bulgarians) during the First Balkan War and "Νέαι Νίκαι Ελλήνων και Σέρβων" (=New Victories by Greeks and Serbs) during the Second Balkan War.

During the First Balkan War reports on Rumania were limited due to the fact that it did not participate in the war. Therefore only significant events were published, such as a note from King Carol or when relations with Bulgaria deteriorated.

In contrast, reports were more frequent during the Second Balkan War, when Rumania entered the war on the side of Greece. The reader was informed through short, concise announcements on the military mobilization of Rumania and on the operations of the Rumanian Army against Bulgaria, as seen in the headlines: "Η Ρουμανική Κινητοποίησης" (=Rumanian Mobilisation), "Οι Ρουμάνοι Εισήλασαν εις το Βουλγαρικό Έδαφος" (=The Rumanians Entered Bulgarian Land") etc. The Press showed more interest in Rumania following the impending peace treaty in Bucharest, presenting the climate of the negotiations through continuous and detailed dispatches. At the same time the editors published analyses of the position Rumania will take and what it expected during the negotiations. Characteristic of the times were the front pages and their headlines: "Τα Παρασκήνια των Διαπραγματεύσεων εν Βουκουρεστίω" (=Behind the Stages of the Negotiations in Bucharest), "Τα Πάντα εκ της Ρουμανίας" (=Everything about Rumania), "Τι γράφει ο Ρουμανικός Τύπος" (=What the Rumanian Press is Writing), etc.

The Press with the power of the pen managed not only to contribute to increasing and maintaining patriotism, which was necessary in order to achieve the national goals, but also to present and together to stamp the era of the Balkan Wars.