

**Modern History Sourcebook:
Edward Dicey:
Bulgarian Political Attitudes, 1894**

From: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1894bulgaria1.html>

It is very difficult to understand the national policy of any country except your own. Nor is it always easy to understand that. It is, therefore, with some hesitation I venture to explain what, in my view is the national policy of Bulgaria, in as far as she has at present any definite policy, other than that of waiting the course of events. Putting together the many different opinions I have heard from natives and foreign residents in the country, and after making due allowance for the bias of my informants, I have arrived at one or two conclusions which, if not quite the truth, are, I fancy, very near the truth.

I am convinced that for the time being the national ambition of the country is confined within very reasonable limits. There may be Bulgarian enthusiasts who, inspired by the traditions of the doubtful glories of a somewhat hypothetical past, look forward to the day when a Bulgarian empire might be re-established with Constantinople as its capital. But I do not believe that any such aspirations are entertained by the great mass of the people. Amongst the Bulgarians there is no dominant sentiment analogous to the *grandee idée* of the Greeks. Every Bulgarian entertains the belief that within the lifetime of the generation now growing into manhood the Ottoman Empire in Europe will become a thing of the past. There is a very general desire that the ultimate solution of the Eastern Question should prove such as to secure the independence of Bulgaria, but there is no desire that Bulgaria should succeed to the inheritance of the Ottoman Empire. I quite admit that such an aspiration would be even more unreasonable in the case of the Bulgarians than it is in that of the Greeks. The Hellenic nation has a great past, a grand literature, and has also large colonies of fellow-Greeks settled over the whole face of the Levant. Bulgaria can put forward no pretensions of any equal value. Her people have not—and, I think know that they have not—the qualities of a ruling race. No more for that matter have the Greeks, but they fancy that they have, which makes all the differences.

The Bulgars are brave soldiers but they are not—which is by no means the same thing—a military nation. A peasant State of small proprietors can never, as a community, be actuated by a blind desire of conquest. By character, by custom, and by tradition, the interests of Bulgaria are confined pretty well within her own borders; and the prospect of ruling over foreign countries and alien races, even if such a prospect were realizable would have little attraction for the sober, matter-of-fact Bulgarian character.

Thus it is a mistake to imagine that the Bulgarians, as a nation, have any particular desire to bring about the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In common with all the Rayah races, which have been subject to Turkish domination, they have an hereditary antipathy, partly racial, partly theological, to the rule of Islam. Whenever the Cross replaces the Crescent over the mosque of St. Sophia, the sympathies of the Bulgars will be with the victors, not

with the vanquished. But, as I have already remarked, fanaticism of creed is far less marked amidst the Bulgarians than amidst other Slavonic races. They are in no particular hurry to see their own faith rendered triumphant by the fall of Islam, and they are perfectly content that the Turks should remain at Constantinople so long as their presence there affords any protection to Bulgaria against Russian aggression. Whatever may be the real truth about the Bulgarian atrocities, it is obvious that they have left behind no such bitter resentment in the minds of a people, slow to forgive or forget injuries, as to render the idea of cooperation with Turkey distasteful to the national sentiment.

In my opinion the aspirations of Bulgarian statesmanship look rather towards the Aegean than towards the Bosphorus, that is, towards the formation of a Slav State, composed of Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bulgaria, rather than towards any reconstitution of the Byzantine Empire. But even this aspiration is not, I gather, very widely or very seriously entertained. No doubt, the Bulgarians, if they had to merge their individual existence in any larger community, would prefer incorporation with a great Slav State to any other modification of their existing status. Pan-Slavism, however, never made much progress south of the Balkans, and the influence of the Pan-Slav agitation has declined in a very marked way since the emancipation of Bulgaria from Turkish rule.

What the Bulgarians most desire at heart is to preserve their independence, and to be governed by their own people, according to their own ideas, customs, and sentiments. Education and material progress may possibly enlarge their aspirations, but for the present an autonomous peasant community, comprising the whole Bulgar-speaking race within its bounds, forms the ideal of the Bulgarian people. It is because this ideal is consistent with the maintenance of Turkey in Europe, and inconsistent with the establishment of Russia upon the Bosphorus, that the settled policy of the Bulgarian Government is to uphold the *status quo* in Eastern Europe. It is for this reason that the policy of the Government, though modified by hereditary dislike of Islam, commends itself on the whole to popular opinion in the Principality.

I do not believe, therefore, that an attempt to effect the general emancipation of the Rayah races under Turkish rule would meet with any enthusiastic support in Bulgaria, except under one particular contingency to which I shall refer presently. A crusade, for instance, for the emancipation of Armenia from Turkish rule would not in any case be actively encouraged by the Bulgarians; and if this crusade was conducted—as in all likelihood it would be—under the lead, and in the interest of Russia, it would probably be confronted by the active opposition of Bulgaria. For the time being Russia constitutes the chief danger of Bulgaria; and the Bulgarians, to speak the plain truth, care much more about the preservation of their own independence than they do about the immediate emancipation of their co-religionists under the rule of the Crescent, so long as these co-religionists are not men of their own race. It may be said that this is not a very magnanimous or elevated policy. My answer would be that I am discussing, not what the policy of Bulgaria ought to be upon abstract principles, but what it is as a matter of fact. I may add further, that no other policy could reasonably be expected from her. A community of small landed proprietors is the last one in the world in which altruistic sentiments are ever likely to obtain a footing. The French proverb that the shirt is nearer

than the coat expresses tersely the view taken by a peasant community in all public as well as private affairs. In the present instance the shirt is independence; the coat is the substitution, elsewhere than in Bulgaria itself, of the rule of the Cross for that of the Crescent.

Source:

From: Edward Dicey, *The Peasant State, An Account of Bulgaria in 1894*, (London: John Murray, 1894), pp. 143-151, reprinted in Alfred J. Bannan and Achilles Edelenyi, eds., *Documentary History of Eastern Europe*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), pp. 223-226.

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