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“Thousands of lives and millions of rubles!” The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 reflected in Czech periodicals

Abstract: The years 1876–1878 were a time when the nationalist movement of the southern Slavic nations in the Balkans was culminating, especially among the Bulgarians, who, under the influence of the anti-Turkish rebellion in Herzegovina in 1875, accelerated preparations for similarly organized rebel activities. These events showed the Bulgarian issue being not an internal affair of the Ottoman Empire but rather as being integral to the Great Eastern Crisis, related to differing opinions of European powers, especially Great Britain and Russia, which was also followed closely by the Czech periodical press (e.g., *Národní listy*, *Světozor*, *Čech*, etc.). This study examines the primary spectrum of attitudes taken on these questions of international politics by Czech journalists, especially those working for *Národní listy*, the leading Czech periodical of that era, who during this era of culminating Czech emancipation, were finally coming of age in the sense of an independent profession. The focus will not be on the ideological parameters of the Russo-Turkish War but rather on the perception of the military conflict and its reflections in a geographically relatively remote environment, which continues to be relevant even now.

Initial assumptions

The war in Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022 is, without doubt, the most significant turning point in relations between the European East and the West since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In connection with news of events at the front lines, which fill the front pages of both electronic and printed media every day, formulations that had disappeared with the end of the Cold War are entering the consciousness of (central) Europeans. Hence, the image of war has returned not only in the sense of an actual armed conflict that can elicit an unforeseeable or unexpected sequence of further destructive events but also as an image of a general threat penetrating general social discourse.

The fighting in Ukraine has returned to the broader use of a terminological apparatus, eliciting multiple questions about its urgency. One is how a similar threat was perceived in the past, mainly when war occurs in a relatively distant or remote part of Europe, subject to various negative stereotypes and imagological notions.¹ One can also wonder whether the essence of this psychological tension changed over time. Various parallels may also be drawn from how information from the location of wartime events is transmitted, shared, and interpreted in specific conditions of the day, including forms of propaganda.² With the awareness of certain analogies in the implied anatomy of a “distant war,” the following text focuses on the image of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, which brought significant political changes, especially in southeastern Europe. With the participation of Czarist Russia, Bulgaria was restored after five hundred years of Ottoman rule, which is why it may be helpful, in particular, to consider how the Czech public came to know about the conflict in the Balkans, how it perceived it, and what opinions on current events were accepted by society as a whole. The focus of the study is, therefore, not an analysis of the war as such but rather an effort to identify the streams of information that represented it from a geographically distant location in a Central European cultural context, specifically in the Czech lands.

1 In the context of artificial notions by the Western world about the Balkans cf. Todorova, M., *Imagining the Balkans*, New York 1997; Jezernik, B., *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers*, London 2004. It is possible to think in a similar sense about stereotypes linked to Ukraine and post-Soviet territory in general.

2 In a theoretical context, these are forms of war journalism, the beginnings of which are connected with the Napoleonic wars or even more often with the Crimean War of 1853–1856, when correspondents were first present at the location of the given event. Cf. Williams, K., *A new history of war reporting*, London 2020.

The Bulgarian question through Czech eyes

At the end of the 1870s, Bulgaria and the Czech lands were in a typologically different position following the different essence and dynamics of the nationalist movements in both countries. While the Bulgarians got their state in the first half of 1878, the Czech nation remained part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The year 1878 is seen as the apex of Bulgarian national revival and the final interval of cultural and political emancipation, even though at the level of the institutions that are necessary for every fully-formed national society, the young state found itself in many ways at the beginning of its formative journey.³ In the Czech context, in a purely formal approach to cultural history periodification, one can already speak of the final phases of a national revival during the revolutionary year of 1848, when a program of all-round cultivation of the Czech language formulated in previous phases of the national movement achieved its set goals and when it was already possible to consider more precise contours of Czech literary and book culture, and last but not least, also of the visible foundations of Czech academic life.⁴

Although after 1878, the Bulgarian nation developed in the context of renewed statehood, the spectrum of genres and themes in Bulgarian culture was still in the process of creation in an institutional sense during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, with significant international help.⁵ The comparable European quality of Czech science and culture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, its renown within the broader context of Austro-Hungary, and last but not least also, the emphasis of the day on Slavic cooperation represented the initial impulses for so-called “civilizational help” with which Czech teachers, scientists, artists, and engineers participated from the beginning of the 1890s in the building of the renewed Bulgarian state.⁶ Their presence in practically all areas of social, cultural, and, to

3 Regarding questions of problematic tone of climactic phases of the canonically understood Bulgarian national revival, cf. for example the proceedings Мишкова, Д. [ed.], *Балканският XIX век. Други прочити*, София 2006.

4 Cf. Kučera, M., *Kultura v českých dějinách 19. století: ke zrodu, genezi a smyslu avantgard*, Prague 2011.

5 Cf. in this sense papers devoted not only to Czech cultural assistance to renewed Bulgaria, but also efforts for a retrospectively understood comparison of results of relevant conclusions of the Czech and Bulgarian national movement (or revival) – Гладкова, Г., Ликоманова, И., *Языковая ситуация: истоки и перспективы: (болгарско-чешские параллели)*, Prague 2002; Gladkova, H., „Jazykovú program a typologie národného hnutí u Slovanů,“ *Slavia* 2003, pp. 169–184; Борисов, Б., *Българският и чешкият книжовен език през възраждането: особености на кодификацията*, София 2012.

6 For the last time cf.: *Българските чехи = Bulharští Češi = The Bulgarian Czechs*, София 2020; Jakoubek, M., Penčev, V., *Češi a Slováci v Bulharsku: příspěvky ke studiu české, slovenské a československé krajanské přítomnosti v bulharských zemích*, Brno 2022.

a significant extent, economic life confirmed the more profound interest of the Czech public in the Slavic Balkans in the past, which did not merely involve mutual contact between Czech and Bulgarian national revivalists. With interest, the Czech public followed the rebel movement in Bulgarian lands, which had been undergoing radicalization since the mid-1870s. Many personalities of Czech culture of the day followed not only the April 1876 uprising with admiration and enthusiasm but also soon the subsequent Russo-Turkish War, at the conclusion of which, on 3 March 1878, based on the preliminary version of the Treaty of San Stefano, an independent Bulgarian state was formed.⁷ The space given to these events and related topics in the Czech periodical press confirms that Czechs were not indifferent to the Bulgarian question and the entire Eastern crisis.

Among the requirements of the Czech nationalist movement was the need for systematic cultivation of domestic journalism not only in the sense of the periodicals themselves, if possible longer-term existence, but also in the sense of an effort to create a broad spectrum of journalistic forms and formations, held a specific position. In this context, we also cannot ignore the gradually developing status of the journalist as a member of a separate profession, which came into its own only during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸

Národní listy in the context of Czech journalism

The impetus for the ongoing evolution of journalist culture was the restoration of a constitutional regime under which periodicals of various types and profiles could be created, including dailies, weeklies, or illustrated magazines.⁹ *Národní listy* occupies a unique position in the overall spectrum of the Czech periodical press. Thanks to its lengthy existence (it was published from 1861 to 1941),

7 The April Uprising had been under preparation since the start of 1876, broke out in earnest on 20 April (Old Style), but during the course of May was defeated and drowned in blood. However, its conclusions played a role in showing the Bulgarian question as an integral theme of the Great Eastern Crisis, on which the European powers took different stances, especially Great Britain and Russia. At the same time, the powers realized that this was an event that could threaten peace in southeastern Europe. The unwillingness of Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II to accept the proposals of the Constantinople Conference and grant Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bulgarian lands autonomy resulted in the Russo-Turkish War. These events were naturally subject to multiple interpretations contingent on the times. In the last two decades one can mention, for example Димитров, Б., *Руско-турската война 1877–1878: хроника*, София 2002; Скрицкий, Н., *Балканский гамбит: неизвестная война 1877–1878 гг.*, Москва 2006; Косев, К., Дойнов, С., *От Шутка и Плевен до Сан Стефано и Берлин*, София 2018, etc.

8 Cf. for example Bednařík, P., Jiráček, J., Köpplová, B., *Dějiny českých médií: od počátku do současnosti*, Prague 2011, p. 20–21.

9 Hoch, K., „Dějiny novinářství od r. 1860 do doby současné,“ [in:] *Československá vlastivěda*, Vol. VII – Písemnictví, Prague 1933, p. 437n.

this daily paper could influence, comment on, and co-create the political and socio-cultural development of late national revivalist society. Thus, *Národní listy* excelled in their integrative role, with which the editorial staff succeeded in taking positions on the day's topics. The unique position of this daily is also confirmed by the demands placed on the craftsmanship and linguistic quality of published texts, thanks to which the paper became a valid symbol of Czech literary culture. Through its opinions, it represented new tendencies in Czech politics, as it primarily sympathized with Young Czech circles, to which many journalists also belonged, and simultaneously offered comprehensive consideration of the problems of Czech society.¹⁰ It can be said that, concerning the context of the times, it tried to promote a position of “Slavic politics,” to which its natural interest is related to themes related to the Slavic Balkans.

Národní listy was created in 1860 as the principal herald of the interests of the Czech nation, and through the personal efforts of the first editorial staff led by Dr. Julius Grégr, its first issue was published on 1 January 1861. It was conceived as the leading publication for Czech politics of the second half of the nineteenth century and, from a general perspective, was a prominent milestone in the history of Czech journalism. It became a type of contemporary daily where many modern journalistic genres found a home.¹¹ *Národní listy* introduced some new journalistic sections to the Czech socio-cultural scene. It is necessary to see the causes of this daily's uncommon success, particularly in its founder's capabilities. Julius Grégr succeeded in concentrating the cream of the Czech intelligentsia of the day. Despite their initial individual differences

10 Fitting is the evaluation of this paper by J. Mark, who states that “[*Národní listy* were] the main magazine of Czech political life and simultaneously had great political influence on the creation of non-political culture in Czech society as well. Already during the first years of its existence, when it was sanctioned, banned, and its journalists tried in court as well as jailed, the foundations could be seen of a future political split into the conservative wing of Palacký and Rieger and free-thinking and radical elements represented by Karel Sladkovský and journalist Julius Grégr. Grégr personified the type of nineteenth-century politician who was aware of the importance of journalism. At *Národní listy* he brought on board [...] not only capable journalists, but also prominent writers. He soon became the owner of *Národní listy* and transformed it into a modern magazine spanning the entire horizon of public life and mirroring all that took place on it.” Marek, J., *Česká moderní kultura*, Prague 1998, p. 131.

11 The place of *Národní listy* in Czech society of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century was regularly evaluated by many overview papers about the history of journalism as well as stand-alone studies, and annual almanacs were also published, whose concept and thematic composition are a clear testament to the importance of this periodical. Cf. *Půl století „Národních listů“: 1860–1910: almanach*, Prague [1910–1911]; *Národní Listy: jubilejní sborník: 1861–1941*, Prague 1941; Beránková, M., *Přehled českého tisku v druhé polovině 19. století*, Prague 1970, p. 108–109; TÁŽ, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky. Díl I, Český periodický tisk do roku 1918*, Prague 1981, p. 140–164; Vošahlíková, P., “Vliv Národních listů na utváření českého veřejného mínění ve 2. polovině 19. století,” [in:] Řepa, M., Vošahlíková, P. [eds.], *Bratři Grégrové a česká společnost v druhé polovině 19. století*, Prague 1997, p. 39–48.

of opinion, these people were willing to work on creating the paper's unified cultural language. Grégr and his collective moved the horizons of Czech journalism from a factographic, genre-related, or purely journalistic perspective to a linguistic one. Over the years, the editorial staff of *Národní listy* thus featured an entire panoply of leading Czech intellectuals – among the most prominent are Vítězslav Hálek (1835–1874), the paper's first columnist, who was later replaced by Jan Neruda (1834–1891), poet, journalist, and all-around emblematic personality of Czech culture of the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹² These literary personalities were given columns in which they did not infrequently write about current Slavic issues, including Bulgaria. Especially Neruda had been writing about the Bulgarian question in *Národní listy* since the end of the 1860s and about the revolutionary movement related to it, which he saw with apparent emotional involvement and sympathy as a movement affecting all social strata of the Bulgarian nation.¹³ With increased attention, he also watched the culminating moments of the Bulgarian revolutionary events of 1876–1878. He saw their participation in the broader framework of the Russo-Turkish War as especially painful for the ordinary people. Nevertheless, he understood the military conflict as necessary and unavoidable, without which Bulgarian liberation could not be achieved.¹⁴ In this sense, the period around 3 March 1878, related to the signature of the Treaty of San Stefano, attracts the most significant attention.

Neruda worked at *Národní listy* for thirty years, familiarizing readers with topical issues from home and abroad. *Národní listy* featured more than 2200 of his columns, which soon began publishing in book compendiums. The thematically rich and varied articles of this nature were also inspired by the many trips Neruda undertook, including to the Balkan and the Orient.¹⁵ In the context of Neruda's contribution to the variety of genres featured by *Národní listy*

12 Cf. Tureček, D., *Fejeton Jana Nerudy*, Prague 2007.

13 Cf. Pfaff, I., „Jan Neruda a východní otázka v l. 1875–1879: příspěvek k jeho názorům v otázkách mezinárodní politiky,“ *Česká literatura* 1954, vol. 2, 2, p. 135–155; Budín, S., *Jan Neruda a jeho doba*, Prague 1960, p. 414–420.

14 Zdeněk Urban, a prominent member of the Czech Bulgarian studies scene, in his overview of Czech-Bulgarian relations in connectino with Neruda's interest in the Bulgarian question, names a total of nine feuilletons published during 1867–1878. At the beginning of the 1870s, Neruda could at least look at the Bulgarian riverbank while navigating the Danube, and comment on the impoverished condition of the local villages. A prominent topic of his feuilletons was the bloody suppression of the April Uprising in 1876, which was followed by the battles of the Russo-Turkish War. Urban, Z., *Z dějin česko-bulharských kulturních styků*, Prague 1957, p. 40–41.

15 Neruda's travelogues reflect an effort at systematic exploration and presentation of Slavic countries, which in the spirit of increasing national consciousness were spontaneously seen as geoculturally interesting and worthy of the attention of Czech literature. Cf. Neruda, J., *Obrazy z ciziny*, 3rd ed., Prague 1893; Kšicová, D., „Nerudova cesta na Blízký Východ (realita putování),“ *Bohemica litteraria* 2012, vol. 15, 1, p. 19–45.

and their linguistic sophistication, it is also necessary to mention Karel Tůma (1843–1917). At *Národní listy*, he was responsible for writing editorials in the fateful year of 1878, also devoted to the Bulgarian question and the culminating Russian-Turkish War. Tůma joined *Národní listy* in 1862 and worked there for around 55 years. During this time, he wrote some 6000 politically-oriented editorials.¹⁶ Another personality was Jakub Arbes (1840–1914), who, as a “responsible editor,” was prepared, if needed, to bear all risk of criminal prosecution, including imprisonment.¹⁷ Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884) contributed to the music reviews section of *Národní listy*, and of the number of leading personalities of Czech culture of the day who contributed to the paper’s quality, one who deserves mention is the otherwise little-known František Uman (1829–1864), who as a local reporter, along with many other writers and journalists, helped take *Národní listy* to the apex of contemporary Czech journalism.¹⁸

Národní listy and the Bulgarian question

Národní listy espoused the positions of the Young Czech Party, which primarily focused on solving the Czech question. Their goal was general autonomy and, concerning nationality, demanding absolute equality between Germans and Czechs; following the political stance of the Young Czechs, the paper dealt with political and cultural events in other Slavic countries.¹⁹ In connection with the liberation of Bulgaria, there is Neruda’s familiar report on the Tarnovo bells, which had been buried underground to protect them from the Turks, where they waited for liberation.²⁰

16 Beránková, M., *Přehled českého tisku*, p. 131.

17 Arbes held this position during the years 1868–1873, when he was constantly persecuted and finally also convicted of infractions against the Press Act to thirteen years’ imprisonment. After being released from prison he returned to work, but only as a mere journalist. Cf. Charypar, M., “Kauza Arbes. Cenzura jako zkušenost zodpovědného redaktora a jako téma spisovatele,” [in:] Wögerbauer, M., Piša, P., Šámal, P., Janáček, P. [et al.], *V obecném zájmu. Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře, 1749–2014*, Vol. I (1749–1938), Prague 2015, p. 563–578.

18 Beránková, M., *Přehled českého tisku*, p. 131–132.

19 In the mood given by the times, Cf. Páta, J., *Jan Neruda a slovanský svět: Jubilejní poznámky a doklady*, Prague 1934.

20 “When the Bulgarian Empire fell and the Bulgarian nation was subjugated by pagans [...], Bulgarians cut church ropes, took down sacred bells, and buried them deep under the surface of the blood-soaked earth. Four hundred years they laid there. Rumours of them passed from generation to generation, secret rumours, impenetrable, guarded by love most faithful. [...] And now came the liberator – suddenly the veil of secrecy was torn from the four-hundred-year-old rumour, the watching spirits stepped away from the treasure, trembling Bulgarian hands grasped the the holy bells, swung them to the cathedral’s crown – and for the first time, for the first time in four hundred years the Bulgarian bells sang once again, sang a hymn to the approaching saviour! How did the hearts of those bells feel when they rang for the first time? And how did Bulgarian hearts feel?” r. “V Praze, 21. července.” *Národní listy* 17, No 199, 22 July 1877, p. [1]. Attention is drawn to the same feuil-

As has already been noted, reports from the Russo-Turkish War occupied a significant portion of the front page and often the second page of individual issues. The advance of Russian troops was followed through “reporters” and their telegraphic messages, especially during tense moments of the war, such as the conquest for Veliko Tarnovo by the Russians in 1877 or individual phases of the fighting for the Šipka Pass. It is evident that the events of the Russo-Turkish War represented a turning point not only for Bulgaria itself but for the entire Balkan peninsula, and in the context of the still fresh memory of the Crimean War of 1853–1856, were watched with trepidation by all of Europe. For example, on 18 April 1877, several days before the start of the conflict, *Národní listy* published an article on the front page entitled “European War?”, with the fear of the scope of this clash being evident from the first few lines. “The fateful first shot has not yet sounded between Russian and Turkish vanguards, but Europe is already shivering in anticipation of events so great and serious that human imagination can scarcely grasp and encompass them.”²¹ The essay goes on to assess the attitudes of the European powers toward the impending war. It hints at possible alliances with Russia, declaring its role as a liberator with respect to the Balkan Slavs, which both England and other states rejected. In the context of key moments in European history, testifying, inter alia, to a crisis in the Ottoman Empire, the commentary admits the possibility of a more extensive impact, as it notes that “just like all that blood of the wretched people murdered in Bulgaria falls on England, so will all the blood and all the misery of the next European war fall on it. For only England fans its flames, only it can cause it. If England remains at home, if it does stand in Russia’s way, nary a hand shall be raised against it in all of the rest of Europe.”²² It supplements clearly expressed positions with a geopolitical view of individual powers. It does not rule out Russo-German agreements, points out the passivity of Austrian diplomacy, and, in the context of these constellations, also does not ignore the positions taken by France.

Národní listy belongs among relatively well-informed periodicals. Regardless of the disputes between the Young Czechs and the Old Czechs, it espoused Slavic enthusiasm, which affected the paper’s structure. It was published daily during the period under discussion and most often had four pages. The events of the Russo-Turkish War and Eastern questions were generally on the front page. It informed readers of the latest events with a several-day delay. Its sources of information indicated the structure of columns, which also dealt

leton on the occasion of the liberation of Veliko Tarnovo by Urban, Z., *Z dějin česko-bulharských kulturních styků*, p. 41.

21 “Válka evropská?” *Národní listy* 17, No 56, 18 April 1877, p. [1].

22 *Ibid*, p. [1].

with the Bulgarian question in the context of the Great Eastern Crisis. Current telegraphic reports were published first and could not be accompanied by relevant commentary. These were followed by reports from reporters, for whom a separate column entitled “War” was established in tense moments.²³ Then there was usually a feuilleton (but not in every issue), which reacted to the latest events in this area through the lens of various genres. It is clear that the long-term Eastern question was followed closely and often placed into broader geopolitical contexts in commentaries with interesting perspectives.

Hence, by March 2, *Národní listy* was already accenting the economic causes of the Russo-Turkish conflict. In connection with Midhat Effendi’s book mentioned above, the Turkish economic system is looked upon ironically and placed in the traditionally conceived light of absurdity and unique idiosyncrasy. The essay explicitly mentions the proverbial indebtedness of the Ottoman economy when it states that “the declared state budgets were always only deception and trickery.”²⁴ It is evident that, as interpreted by *Národní listy*, the basic ideas of Midhat’s book also captivated the Czech public.

It is certainly interesting how Bulgarians were viewed then, which was not obscured by late-period revivalist language, style, and an intensely emotional descriptive form of expression. The same article states that: “both travelers and Turkish officials themselves had always declared the Bulgarian population to be a hard-working, patient, and peaceful people. Suddenly, a blazing flame of rebellion leaped up among them. In 1859, the Constantinople government began moving Circassians to Bulgaria. Both Christians and Moslems viewed the new arrivals and neighbors with the greatest of fears because news of the terrible havoc caused by these wild people wherever they arrived had already spread from Asia Minor.”²⁵ The force of expression used to describe the events of the culminating war confirms persisting Romanticisms in the generally reinforced perception of the warring parties. A clear expression of this imagery and ethnocentric matrices could be formulations placing into opposition “peaceful peasants” and “animals in human form,” indicating on a general level the basic principles of this viewpoint.

In the aforementioned “War” section, *Národní listy* mentioned, with a somewhat courageous tone, possible developments on the battlefield. The comments in the section assume that though the approaching signature of a peace treaty will be the last day of the Russo-Turkish War, it will simultaneously be the

23 A section under this name was first published on 24 April 1877, when the Russo-Turkish War was formally declared. *Národní listy* thus reflected the start of an open conflict by changing the name of the news section, hitherto called “Z balkánského bojiště”. The formal conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War also resulted in another renaming of the relevant section as of 5 April 1878.

24 Ibid, p. [1].

25 Ibid, p. [1].

first day of the Russo-English War. In this context, the possible partial mobilization within the monarchy is noted, which was called for primarily by the Hungarians, who were worried about the proximity of Russian troops to the Transylvanian border. *Národní listy* adds: “If other important matters of this empire did not need to be taken into account, Lord knows we’d be all for a war between Hungary and Russia. At least Hungarian megalomania would have its proud peacock’s feathers plucked once and for all, and then the ugly peacock’s feet upon which Hungarian glory stands would be visible.”²⁶

The enthusiastically Slavic, if not Russophilic, mood in the offices of *Národní listy* is also evident in the news from subsequent days. On March 3, *Národní listy* naturally could not yet bring news of the signature of the Treaty of San Stefano, and so this news did not reach its readers until March 5. The front page bore an extended commentary describing the course of the peace negotiations and the signature of the treaty itself. Excitement over the “Russian victory” is omnipresent in the paper. *Národní listy* welcomed the peace treaty with the following words: “Peace with Turkey has thus been signed; after a half-millennium of slavery the Slavic population of the Balkan peninsula is liberated from the hand of the Moslem. Europe stands before a fait accompli of immense extent that shall not be subject to further change.”²⁷ The individual points of the peace treaty were not yet known on that day, but despite that, there was a general conviction regarding South Slavic liberation. The introductory commentary also ends with congratulations from the editorial staff in a similar spirit: “Russia’s resolve is sufficient reason to welcome with pleasure the just-signed Constantinople peace treaty and congratulate our Slavic brothers in the south for the completion of the great effort of their liberation and rebirth.”²⁸ At the same time, the traditional “War” section was renamed “Eastern Question” and remained so until May 1878.²⁹

The name change of a primarily key section thus represents a symbolic illustration of the contemporary context. A day later (6 March 1878), the new peace treaty was analyzed from the perspective of Austro-Hungarian politics. An article appeared on the front page entitled “Austria After Peace in the East.” Its very first sentence states that “from midnight, the Habsburg Empire faces an event that could have unfathomable consequences for its own future.”³⁰ These

26 Ibid, p. [1].

27 “Mír s Turky uzavřen,” *Národní listy* 18, No 58, 5 March 1878, p. [1].

28 Ibid, p. [1].

29 The introductory sentence of the renamed section states: “as of today we are changing the war section into a section entitled ‘Eastern questions’ as today afternoon official news reached Prague that peace between Russia and Turkey has been signed and sealed.” “Východní otázka,” *Národní listy*, 5 March 1878, No 58, p. [1].

30 “Východní otázka,” *Národní listy*, 6 March 1878, No 59, p. [1].

comments indicate that March of 1878 was fateful not only for Bulgaria and southeastern Europe but also for Austria itself. In general, it shall be evident that during the second half of March and practically all of April, the attention of *Národní listy* journalists and correspondents (“telegraphists”) was not focused so much on the Bulgarian problem itself as the threat of a new military conflict between England and Russia. The Bulgarian question thus became somewhat sidelined as a diplomatic problem whose successful resolution, even after the signature of the peace treaty, was left to the diplomatic capabilities of our “Russian brother.” Therefore, a commentary from 6 March 1878 contains an eloquent sentence stating that: “at Austria’s borders, nations are rising from the dead. They are rising and, under the auspices of their strongest brother, claiming their place and voice among the ranks of independent European nations. From the Adriatic Sea’s shores to the Black Sea’s shores, one cheer, one exultation of liberated life is resounding, and that life is Slavic. An independent stronger Serbia is extending its hand to an enlarged Montenegro, and beside the larger free Serbian nation, a significant, liberated Bulgaria is rising, a state well equal in its extent to the Hungarian kingdom.”³¹ Neither here is there doubt regarding the broader significance of symbolic comparisons. The journalists of the day also considered the possible impact on Austria-Hungary.

6 March 1878 did not bring anything new as regards the Bulgarian question itself. The new “Eastern Question” section featured a terse commentary, to a significant degree based on telegraph reports, which said that “[a]uthentic peace conditions are not known as of yet.”³² And regarding the hitherto unclear concept of the Bulgarian state, it said: “Aside from Black Sea harbors, Bulgaria shall also have a harbor in the Aegean Sea, Kavala. All Bulgarian fortresses, including the Danubian ones and Šumen and Varna, shall be closed, and no Turkish garrison shall remain in Bulgaria.”³³ In this issue of *Národní listy*, fears and accusations persist that the Western powers are preparing a scenario for another armed conflict. A mere several days after the signature of the key treaty, the Bulgarian problem truly does take a back seat, and its place is assumed by speculations about the outlook for a new war, about the ability of Austria to mobilize its troops, about the capabilities of the English Army, etc. In the “Foreign Political News” section, we can thus read the observation that “the peace treaty with Turkey may have been signed, but the situation remains almost unchanged. A change may be caused by the declaration of the treaty’s terms if they are published in their entirety. Only when these terms are general knowledge can there be justification for the optimistic stance that considers

31 Ibid, p. [1].

32 „Východní otázka,“ *Národní listy*, 6 March 1878, p. [1].

33 Ibid, p. [1].

the signature of a preliminary peace treaty to be the end of the Eastern Crisis. Until then, the signature of the Russo-Turkish peace treaty cannot be considered anything else but the end of the fourth act of the Eastern drama.”³⁴ Only a few days after the signature of the preliminary peace treaty, uncertainty of opinion appeared in connection with further developments in the Balkans, which was also evident in the comments of journalists with *Národní listy*. Above all, the essence of the terms of peace themselves was subject to various interpretations, indicating the possibility of reassessment of existing provisions. As later developments showed, these fears for the Bulgarian state that was in the process of being born were quite realistic and more than crucial.

With the uncertainty regarding the factual conclusions of peace negotiations, which is also a characteristic trait today, the fact was that almost a week after the treaty was signed, its terms and individual points were still secret, or more precisely, unpublished. *Národní listy* was thus forced to repeat the positions of the parties involved without knowing the actual contents of the facts being described. Only in the 7 March 1878 issue, in the “*Národní Listy Telegrams*” section, were some points of the recently signed peace treaty finally outlined. In a report taken from Constantinople, the London Telegraph correspondent described the terms of the San Stefano Treaty as follows: “The treaty signed under the name preliminary peace treaty contains 29 articles, with the main ones concerning Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. [...] Bulgaria’s borders include the entire eastern coast of the Drinopol Vilayet, also called the Čirman Vilayet, all the way to Varna, and from Pirot, which shall go to Bulgaria – they run north. [...] A military road shall be established across all of Bulgaria for purposes of postal and telegraph communications and troop transports. The Muslim population can return to Bulgaria. If within two years affairs are not settled, their wealth shall be given to funds for widows and orphans.”³⁵ The Telegraph reports also state an assumption based on which “fifty thousand Russians shall occupy Bulgaria for about two years, they will be supported at the country’s expense until national armed forces are established [...]”³⁶

The next day, 8 March 1878, the borders of the new Bulgaria were further clarified, and it was stated that the railway lines from Thessaloniki to Mitrovice and from Dedeagač to Drinopol shall remain in Turkish hands.³⁷ The Telegraph reports also noted that “the election of the Price of Bulgaria shall take place in Plovdiv or Tarnovo under the supervision of Russian negotiators.”³⁸ At this

34 „Politické zprávy zahraničné,“ *Národní listy*, 6 March 1878, No 59, p. 2.

35 „Telegramy Národních listů,“ *Národní listy*, 7 March 1878, No 60, p. [1].

36 Ibid, p. [1].

37 „Telegramy Národních listů,“ *Národní listy*, 8 March 1878, No 61, p. [1].

38 Ibid, p. [1].

time, the basic framework of the Bulgarian state had been published, but the situation could not be described as having settled down.

Since 6 March 1878, the efforts of Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Andrassy to convene a congress – most likely in Berlin – that would concern itself with especially Bulgarian problems had helped shape the evolution of the Bulgarian question. On 10 March 1878, a rather ironically tinged commentary was published in the “Eastern Question” section, in which these demands of the Austro-Hungarian political scene are explained as follows: “In various papers, peace treaties with varying content appear, to which, however, are nothing but a guessing game. The explicit warning of the official Russian paper that the terms of these, being passed off as authentic, should not be believed is not even necessary. Their simple comparison elicits laughter instead of belief.”³⁹

Národní listy and the Berlin Congress

However, smiles and ironic comments lasted until 13 June 1878, when a meeting of European powers was convened in Berlin, which entered history as the Berlin Congress. *Národní listy* described this commencement one day later as follows: “The eyes of all of Europe are turning to the meeting room, in which ministers and leaders of European states sat down to discuss Eastern questions, questions regarding what for many decades has rightly been called Europe’s powder keg.”⁴⁰ This report continues: “it is, of course, an unusual case in history that the winner must, under pressure by uninvolved third parties, compromise on terms he acquired at the price of hundreds of thousands of lives and millions of rubles; however, Russia would like to avoid war with England as well as war with Austria, and so is looking to ensure the essence of its achievements through appeasement.”⁴¹ At this moment, the Congress of Berlin was still looked upon from the perspective of traditional Slavophilia (Russophilia) with an emphasis on preserving peace. But as the congress progressed (June and July 1878), gradual bitterness set in on the pages of *Národní listy* as well. The events of the congress are well-known; hence, we shall merely mention some commentaries that assess its conclusions. *Národní listy* published the text of the Treaty of Berlin on 17 July 1878. However, a day earlier, the conclusion of the congress had already been commented on with undisguised shock and consternation. On the front page, an article entitled “After the Congress” states: “The diplomats toasted their work with excellent champagne and went their separate ways. But the world remained sober, terribly sober, and in mute amazement

39 „Východní otázka,” *Národní listy*, 10 March 1878, No 63, p. [1].

40 „Kongres,” *Národní listy*, 14 June 1878, No 145, p. [1].

41 Ibid, p. [1].

looks upon itself as if to ask: Have I improved? Is this supposed to be a solution to the Eastern questions? Is this supposed to be a work giving Europe the comfortable certainty of permanent peace?"⁴² Another article contains a not less sharp assessment: "So disfigured is the work of liberation, which began so happily, and which also came at the cost of the brave lives of Slavic fighters and was sealed with such great victories!"⁴³

The shadow of the Congress of Berlin was evident on the pages of *Národní listy* long after its conclusion. On 17 July 1878, a critical commentary was printed on the front page expressing its extreme disdain for the Berlin resolutions. The editorial staff and correspondents of *Národní listy* agreed on the temporary nature of this treaty. A commentary entitled "For How Long?" was printed, which begins: "Elsewhere we are printing the articles of the Treaty of Berlin in their entirety, which shall become notorious in the Slavic world for all time. They are not a guarantee of peace but a formula for commencing new necessary and fateful disputes and wars. There is nary an article that would not be a dragon's seed from which a new fight, a new struggle must sooner or later sprout."⁴⁴ At the same time, this article confirmed the anti-Hungarian mood, for the paper brought fresh news that the Hungarian minister Tisza had called the results of the Berlin negotiations "a great moral victory" and "the foundation of a healthier European situation."⁴⁵

Since mid-July 1878, when the results of the Treaty of Berlin were also gradually published in the Czech periodical press, expressions of increased Slavophilic feelings continued manifesting. Negotiations regarding the territorial expansion of Southern Slavic countries were commented on with indignation. For that day, the following had been published in connection with the Berlin conclusions: "In almost every article of the Treaty of Berlin, one can detect efforts by European diplomacy to undercut the roots of the Slavic trunk so that it cannot take sustenance for its growth, to grow stronger and mightier. [...] By tearing down fortresses, the new Bulgarian kingdom is stripped of the means of defending itself at its very inception."⁴⁶

At the same time, however, Russia was also subjected to a certain degree of cautious criticism. In this regard, the voice of *Národní listy* was no longer so naturally enthusiastic as when the preliminary peace treaty had been signed at the start of March 1878. Under the telling heading of "Let us Rise From Passivity," the Treaty of Berlin is analyzed. In connection with the unfavorable

42 „Po kongresu,” *Národní listy*, 16 July 1878, No 172, p. [1].

43 „Na jak dlouho?” *Národní listy*, 17 July 1878, No 173, p. [1].

44 Ibid, p. [1].

45 Ibid, p. [1].

46 Ibid, p. [1].

terms of new political borders, the following is said in this commentary regarding Russian policy: “That all this Russia allowed, could or had to allow: this is also the source of great humiliation, such a political defeat, that alas the entire Slavic world shall feel the consequences along with it.”⁴⁷ Above all, Russia is criticized for its troops stopping before the gates of Constantinople. In Slavophilic enthusiasm, insufficient energy is thus noted in general when *Národní listy* continues in an unusually expressive text: “And cannot this latest lack of success of the Slavic cause in the East also be chiefly attributed to this fateful defect in Slavic nature? Would a victorious Brit or German, taking into account Europe, stop his march before Constantinople? Or would another nation allow foreigners to score a line across its breast with an arbitrary decree and tell it: on this side, you shall breathe freely; on the other side, nothing? And lo: the Bulgarian nation bears injustice without objection, without protest, let alone rising like a wounded lion and engaging in high diplomacy: ‘I shall never willingly allow myself to be cast down under the rule of the crescent moon, I shall resist and defend myself against your inhuman provisions in the name of my human rights with all lives and possessions.’”⁴⁸ Even despite his somewhat critical voice, in the same breath, the author of this commentary expresses hope and faith in a new Russian campaign.

In conclusion

From a period perspective, however, the prominent pathos is understandable; as has already been indicated, the liberation movement of Balkan Slavs and achievement of virtually full statehood also garnered a response in the Czech lands, especially in circles that on the threshold of renewed ethnocentricity continued to sympathize with the ideas of Slav reciprocity or even Slavophilia. Inclination articulated in this manner then gained new contours only a few months later in connection with the events of the so-called Bosnian Crisis.

The wealth of citations we could use to give countless other examples confirms that in Bohemia, *Národní listy* belongs among significant proponents of Slavic mentality. The Romantic elements of Slavic reciprocity in this periodical were still evident long after the conclusion of the Treaty of Berlin, wherein *Národní listy* preserved in a certain sense the diction of revivalist journalism, which even at the end of the 1870s was still popular with its readers. In the context of a specific chain of events, it represented an uncritical image of Russia with not very prominent transformations. The effort to systematically provide information about the Bulgarian question and the Russo-Turkish War

47 Ibid, p. 1.

48 Ibid, p. 1.

simultaneously became a significant “case study” influencing contemporary public opinion and, in a general framework, de facto furthering the principles of professional journalism.

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