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THE INFLUENCE OF THE VERSAILLES TREATIES FROM 1919 IN THE BALKANS

Апстракт: *Трудот ги анализира резултатите од периодот на Првата светска војна. Очигледно е дека овие состојби влијаеле на промените на Југозападниот дел од Балканскиот Полуостров, воедно предизвикувајќи ги интересите на Турција, Италија, Грција и Бугарија. Како пример, со договорот од Севр беше очекувано дека Источна Тракија и регионот на Смирна би се инкорпорирале во територијалното проширување на Грција, на што остро се спротивстави револуцијата предводена од Кемал Ататурк. Тоа беа причините за почетокот на грчко-турската војна која што започна во март 1921 година. Што се однесува до Бугарија со Нејскиот договор Западна Тракија беше одвоена од неа и ѝ беше дадена на Грција. Единствената добивка за Бугарија, како поразена страна во војната, беше гарантираниот излез на Егејското Море. Самиот чин на потпишувањето на Париските мировни договори за Балканските прилики неспорно имаа две значења. Првото беше содржано во фактот дека со нив беше реализирана поделбата на Отоманските и на Австро-Унгарските поседи на Балканскиот Полуостров. Второто значење беше тоа што со Париските мировни договори се случи ревизија на Букурешкиот мировен договор од 1913 година и со тие одлуки со кои балканските држави се стекнаа со територијални добивки и со овие акти беа зацементирани на подолг временски период.*

Клучни зборови: *Прва светска војна, Балкански полуостров, Париските мировни договори 1919, Букурешкиот мировен договор 1913*

Introduction

Regarding the conditions on the Balkan Peninsula, in the period from 1912 to 1919 the entire Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian heritage on the Balkan was divided and regrouped among the Balkan countries. The results of the World War I led to certain changes in the South-Eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, thus directly trigger-

ing the interests of Turkey, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria. Before the beginning of the Balkan wars, the Ottoman Empire stretched out on 2.917.000 km², from which 167.000 km² were on the European continent. With the ending of the war these great territorial spaces disappeared along with the great Empire. With the Treaty of Sèvres it was anticipated that Eastern Thrace and the region of Smyrna will be merged into Greece, to which firmly opposed the revolution led by Kemal Ataturk. These were the reasons why the Greco-Turkish war started in March 1921.¹ With the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the results of this war were carried out, setting the borders of the new Turkish state. According to this Treaty, Turkey kept Odrin (Edirne) and Smyrna. Because since the time of the enactment of the Treaty of Sèvres, Turkey was confirmed to be in a non-payment condition, therefore, this country has been freed from paying off the military reparations, and the same decision was approved with the Treaty of Lausanne as well. With this, the once enormous Turkish territorial possession on the Balkan Peninsula now was limited only to the Odrin-Thrace region. Regarding Bulgaria, with the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, Western Thrace was separated from it and was given to Greece. The only gain for Bulgaria, as a defeated side in the war, was the insurance of the economic exit to the Aegean Sea. With the same treaty, was decided that Bulgaria will pay off military reparation in amount of 2 billion and 250 million gold francs, in a period of 38 years, with 5% interest. Besides that, Bulgaria was obliged within a certain time to give to Yugoslavia, Romania and Greece a certain amount of livestock and coal.² Greece, on the other side, did not receive the desired Constantinople and Asia Minor, but its territory was doubled in size in comparison with the time before the wars. In fact, with the annexation of 42.945 km², which were given to Greece with the Paris peace treaties and the Treaty of Lausanne, within the borders of the Greek state the national homogenization was broken, because now in its annexed territory were found ethnic groups from non-Greek origins.

The very act of signing of the Paris peace treaties for the Balkan conditions indisputably had two meanings. The first meaning was contained in the fact that with them was performed the division of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian properties on the Balkan Peninsula. The second meaning was consisted in the fact that with the Paris peace treaties, among the other decisions, a revision was made to the Treaty of Bucharest from 1913, and with these decisions the territorial gains of the Balkan countries were cemented for an extended time, which among the other things, was also done on the account of the creation of the Macedonian country.

¹ Билјана Поповска, Иванка Додовска, „Париската мировна конференција од 1919 година и турското национално движење“, *Macedonian Political Science Forum e-Proceeding of papers*, Year II, Number 4, March (2015), 26 – 39.

² Георги П. Генов, *Една тџжна десетгодишнина. Нџойскитџ миренџ договорџ* (Софија: 1929), 10.

1. The special minority treaties

Under the name, “special minority treaties” signed during the peace conference in Paris, starting from 1919 and on, are known the following: the Treaty of Saint-Germain from 10th of September 1919 and the Treaty of Sèvres from 10th of August 1920. These treaties along with the Treaty of Trianon and the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, and later also the Treaty of Lausanne from 1923, belong to the so-called system of Versailles peace treaties which were signed after the ending of the World War I. From the aspect of the protection of minorities, with them were arranged the questions for protection of the national, religious and linguistic minorities in the countries which signed these treaties.

1.1. The Treaty of Sèvres, 10th of August 1920

The Treaty of Sèvres, also known as the Thrace peace treaty from 10th of August 1920, was signed between the principal allied powers and the associated powers of the one part, and Greece on the other side. As it is known, this treaty was not ratified by Turkey, which led to the outbreak of the Greco-Turkish war.

With this treaty, Greece gained a great territorial expansion on the Balkan on the account of Bulgaria, and on the Aegean Sea and Asia Minor on the account of Turkey.³ The Treaty of Sèvres was in favor of Great Britain as well, because it reinforced its position in the Eastern Mediterranean, and at the same time, it gained a mandate administration over Palestine and Mesopotamia, as well as some other strategic gains of enormous significance to the Near East.

In Article 14 of the Treaty of Sèvres was regulated the protection of the Muslims, and it was decided that: *Greece agrees to take all the necessary measures regarding the Muslims in order to enable the issues of the family law and of the personal status to be regulated in accordance to the Muslim customs.*⁴ In the same treaty, Greece agreed with the demands of the minorities for a proportional participation in the election system, especially in the part of the new territories which were annexed by the end of August 1914 (Article 7).

In its essence, this treaty was very one-sided and it did not express the will of the minorities which fell within the borders of the Greek country. On its side, Greece with the treaty made an attempt to avoid the obligation to formally agree to respect the rights of the minorities on its territory.

With the Treaty of Sèvres, France and Great Britain have given up from their special right to supervise and control the protection of the minorities in Greece and

³ Leften Stavrijanos, *Balkan posle 1453. Godine* (Beograd: Equilibrium 2005), 553.

⁴ Momir Stojkovič, *Balkanski ugovorni odnosi 1876–1996*, II tom (Beograd: 1998), 108–119.

on the Ionian Islands.⁵ This Treaty, after the end of the Greco-Turkish war in 1922, as we stated above, was revised with the Treaty of Lausanne, 1923.

1.2. The Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine from 27th of November 1919

The Treaty of Neuilly has manifested as an official truce between the principal allied powers and the allied powers, and the Bulgarian Empire. With it were projected the territorial concessions of Bulgaria in favor of Greece. Namely, it was regarding the Western Thrace, a region inhabited with Greek population, mixed Slavic population, as well as with Turkish population. This way, the strategic interest of the powers of the Entente was consisted in the preventing Bulgaria to exit on the Dardanelles. For Bulgaria, this meant closing of the exit to the Aegean Sea, which was a huge economic barrier. Besides the Western Thrace, Bulgaria with this Treaty was sanctioned also in the regions of South Dobruja, the western provinces and in the Strumica region, territories which it felt to be an integral part of its geographical wholeness. Aside from the territorial sanctions for Bulgaria according to this Treaty were projected other sanctions as well. They were referring to the limitation of its army to 20.000 people, repeal of the general military mobilization, and in a timeframe of 37 years, Bulgaria was obliged to pay off a military reparations in amount of 2.250.000.000 gold francs, with a yearly interest of 5%.

The obligations to the minorities were regulated in the section IV from Article 49 to Article 57 from the Peace Treaty. With these regulations, Bulgaria was obliged not to obstruct the citizens' rights regarding the right of choice to receive the Bulgarian citizenship. The key point regarding the minorities in this Treaty was the acceptance by Bulgaria of all the decisions which the allied and associated powers suggested regarding the reciprocal exchange of population between Bulgaria and the other Balkan countries.

Therefore, the Article 56 of the general Peace Treaty between the Entente and Bulgaria became the foundation upon which was legalized, and at the same time was implemented, the Convention for voluntary exchange of population between Greece and Bulgaria, which the two countries signed on 27th of November 1919, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, i.e. the same day when the general Peace treaty was signed with Bulgaria.⁶

With the Neuilly Peace Treaty was guaranteed to the minorities the right of equality and lawfulness, regardless of gender, language, race and religion. In the corpus

⁵ „Great Britain and France took these obligations with the treaties from London from 1863 and 1864, as well as with the London protocol from 1830.“ – Владимир Ортаковски, *Меѓународната положба на малцинствата* (Скопје: Мисла 1996), 122.

⁶ „On 24th of October 1919, Bulgaria sent a diplomatic note to the Peace Conference, in which expressed its readiness to accept the provisions which had arranged the rights of the minorities on its state territory.“ - Илија, Пржић, *Заштита мањина* (Београд: 1933), 106.

of these rights was included the free use of the native language in the education, trade, press, and generally in all the spheres of life. However, if we evaluate the conditions in reality, it is very obvious that with the prescribed peace clauses the “principle” of voluntarism was nothing more than phrase behind which was created the scenario for the forceful expulsion of the unwanted ethnic elements from the Greek state territory.

That way, the main task of the entire Greek state apparatus was aimed towards the extinction and “cleaning” of the conquered and annexed territory regarding the non-Greek ethnic minorities. Thusly Greece, as a subject in the international relations, created a foundation to build upon its own arguments of the ownership, and at the same time of the legitimacy of the new state’s territory acquired with the new territorial layout after the war. On this way, the process of the completion of the state territory has been breached with the declared principles of self-determination of the peoples, and practiced the rule of the principle of force over the principle of law.

1.2.1. The Convention for voluntary exchange of population between Greece and Bulgaria from 27th of November 1919

The Convention for voluntary exchange of population between the Kingdom of Greece and the Bulgarian Empire was signed at the same time with the Neuilly Peace Treaty between principle allied and associated powers and Bulgaria, on 27th of November 1919, in Neuilly-sur-Seine. With it was set the voluntary emigration of the ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups in Greece and Bulgaria, without these minorities being named in the document.

The Committee for new states during the process of observation of the Treaty for reciprocal emigration sent an invitation to the government of the Kingdom of SCS to participate in the same Treaty.⁷ However, with the letter of the president of the Serbian Delegation Nikola Pasic from 8th of November 1919, the delegation of SCS rejected its participation in this act. Therefore, the Committee, presiding with the 59th session on 13th of November 1919, brought a decision not to insist any further.⁸

The Convention for exchange of population entered into force on 9th of August 1920. The exchange of population with this act was turned into a forceful eviction which encompassed Thrace as well, to which was not referring at the beginning. This Convention has covered the heavy demographic picture, especially in the part which

⁷ (p.n.) The Kingdom of Greece offered the plan for exchange of population also to the Kingdom of SCS because it wanted to be rid of the entire Slavic population as much as it is possible; however, SCS declined this proposition.

⁸ Христо, Полјански–Андонов, *Велика Британија и македонското прашање на Париската мировна конференција во 1919 година* (Скопје: Архив на Македонија, 1973), 47.

was annexed by Greece. In fact, on the account of the Convention, throughout the entire period between the two world wars, the Kingdom of Greece performed pressure for eviction of the Macedonians from the Aegean part.⁹

From the aspect of its structure, the Convention was constructed by 16 Articles and in it were contained the directions for the method of conduction of the reciprocal exchange, as well as the conditions under which the exchange was to be executed.

Article 8 of the Convention for voluntary exchange of population between Greece and Bulgaria is of a particular importance for the focus of this paper. In this Article it was set that in a timeframe of three months a Mixed commission should be formed. A president of the Mixed commission was to be elected from these delegates. The task of the mixed commission as was to perform supervision of the paying off the real estate which belonged to the emigrants, and it had jurisdiction to perform revision of the same real estate as well. After the performing of the liquidity of these real estates, it was projected that the Government to the emigrants from where was performed the liquidation, under conditions set by the Commission, the value of these properties should be carried out before the Commission, which was obliged to refund it to their owners. The Commission therefore had a jurisdiction to give an advance to the emigrants according to the amount of the evaluated price of their entire real estates. "The Article 8 envisioned that in the timeframe of three months from the entrance into force of the Convention of the League of Nations will be formed a commission which will be assigned to control and facilitate the immigration and to liquidate the external possessions of the migrants. The Commission was obliged to set the method of the moving out of the estates. The Commission had a complete authority to adopt solutions by majority votes. With the Article 10 was planned that the mixed commission shall have the right even to establish the value of the estate after the hearing of the owners. The Government of the country, after the payment of the value, would become the owner of the estate."¹⁰

Because of the great waves of refugees from the period of the war even since the time of the Balkan wars, the Mixed commission was also authorized to pay off the properties to the refugees which emigrated during the wars into Bulgaria or into Greece, and at first were not covered by the focus of the Committee for new states and protection of minorities when was discussed the plan for reciprocal exchange of population in Paris. Because of that, the legal effect of this Convention had an economic use for the minority groups which were already outside of their native territory. Regarding this issues, the Mixed commission brought a decision to cover the peo-

⁹ *Историја на македонскиот народ*, том 4 (Скопје: ИНИ, 2000), 204.

¹⁰ Орде Ивановски, Зоран Тодоровски, *Македонското прашање во бугарскиот парламент, 1918 – 1941* (Скопје: ИНИ 2008), 74-75.

ple which emigrated in the previous 20 years and with that it greatly complicated its work, extending the benefices of the Convention also to the people which from a legal standpoint, were still citizens of the Ottoman Empire. However, the voluntary exchange of population designed with this Convention, did not fulfill the goal of its task. In fact, during the period until June 1923 only 197 families from the Kingdom of Greece voluntarily moved into the Bulgarian Empire. On the other side, around 166 families in the same period of time migrated from the Bulgarian Empire into the Kingdom of Greece. The Greek xenophobia, especially in Aegean Macedonia, which after the annexation by the Kingdom of Greece was renamed into the region of North Greece¹¹, forcefully conditioned in the following period of time the “voluntary” emigration of the Macedonians from their native land into the Bulgarian Empire.¹²

Compared to the Greek emigrants who unsatisfied by the new conditions, after the Acts for the agrarian reform have been adopted in Bulgaria in 1920/21, in major account moved into Greece, the Macedonians – especially those who lived near the border with the Kingdom of Greece, decided not to emigrate.

1.3. The Treaty of Lausanne, 30th of January 1923

During the period of 1914, around 265.000 inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire were banished from Turkey, and approximately 85.000 of them, for different reasons, were deported in the inner parts of Asia Minor. At the same time, approximately 115.000 Muslims (Turks, Macedonian-Muslims etc.) from the Balkan countries immigrated into Turkey. Therefore, in 1914 on the proposition of Turkey was signed between Greece and Turkey the first Treaty for voluntary exchange of populations on the Balkan.¹³

¹¹ “The region was divided on three general directions: one for the central part of Aegean Macedonia with its headquarters in Salonica and with the districts: Salonica, Halkidiki, Kukush, Voden and Ber; second for the eastern part of Aegean Macedonia with its center in Kavala, and in it entered: Serres, Drama and Kavala district; in the town of Kozani was found the third direction for the western part of Aegean Macedonia, with the districts: Kozani, Lerin and Kostur.” See more in: *Историја на Македонскиот народ*, том 4, 202.

¹² “In that sense, within the Bulgarian parliament occurred a harsh discussion among the members. The convention was evaluated as extremely negative and harmful for Bulgaria... As most responsible was held Alexander Stamboliski who signed the convention. The signing of the same was considered to be a great mistake of the Bulgarian foreign politics. With it to Greece was enabled the right of a violent eviction of “all the Bulgarians” who remained on the Greek territory, without the possibility to declare the right to live where they were born. This agreement excluded the right to return of the refugees from one or another reason... The Members of the parliament reacted to the unreal treatment in the convention which was supposed to be the obstacle for the signing of the same by the Bulgarian part, because the Greek government imposed another condition to Bulgaria for settlement of the expenses of the exiled “from their hearths”, which was unacceptable.” - Ивановски, Тодоровски, *Македонското прашање*, p. 7.

¹³ Stephen P., Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (NewYork: 1932), 20.

In fact, the reciprocal exchange referred to the Greek population from the city of Smyrna and its surrounding area, which was supposed to move out from there and immigrate to the Greek annexed region. The Muslim population from these areas was to be inhabited in the Villayet of Smyrna. After Greece signed the treaty, in its framework were placed also the regions of Epirus and Thessaly, and was formed a Commission with mixed members, led by a neutral arbiter. This Commission never functioned in the reality because very soon after its creation Turkey signed the alliance with the Central Powers. After the end of the World War I, on the Paris Peace Conference was signed the Treaty for protection of the minorities between Greece and Turkey on 19th of August 1920, in Sèvres. This document was never ratified by Turkey.

The result of the Greek-Turkish war was the revision of the Treaty of Sèvres with the Treaty from Lausanne in 1923. During the military activities the both warring parties performed massacres and destroyed the homes of the civilians in Asia Minor. From the reports of the British newspapers in 1920, in the place called Feival in the region Karamursel, South-Eastern from Izmir in Asia Minor, the Turks massacred 5,000 Christians. They equally massacred Greeks and Armenians, continuing in this manner their practice from 1915, i.e. the Armenian genocide.¹⁴ Also, enormous massacres over the Greeks in the region of Pontus were noticed, which are known as the Genocide of Pontus. At the beginning of 1922, approximately 10.000 Greeks were murdered by the forces of Ataturk. According to the reports for the war, the Turkish armies did not allow the humanitarian organizations to approach and to offer help to the Greek civilians, leaving them to die without any proper help.

Therefore, the great wave of Greek refugees which were forced to abandon their homes in Ionia, Pontus and Eastern Thrace during the period from 1914 to 1922, with the end of the Greco-Turkish war and with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, were not allowed to return to their homes. This practice exercised by Turkey was a classic example of ethnic cleaning in the region of the Aegean Sea and Western Anatolia of the Greek indigenous population. As a result to this with the Lausanne Treaty for mandatory exchange of population with Greece were forcefully deported approximately 1.5 million Greeks from Turkey, in exchange for half a million Turks and the remaining Muslim population from Greece.

The Conference in Lausanne started on 20th of November 1922 and ended on 24th of July 1923. According to the decisions in the Lausanne Treaty from 24th of July 1923, the entire Eastern Thrace along with the city of Odrin was returned to Turkey, along with the islands of Imbros and Tenedos at the Dardanelles. The rest of the islands in the Aegean Sea were given to Greece. Beside the general Peace Treaty, in Lausanne on 30th of January 1923 was also signed the Convention for mandatory ex-

¹⁴ Vahap Candan, *Velike sile i Armenski problem* (Ankara: 2007), 104-106.

change of population between Greece and Turkey. This endeavor in a great extent changed the ethnographic map on the Balkan.

With the Treaty of Lausanne was projected the mandatory exchange of population between Greece and Turkey, with an exception to the Greeks from Constantinople which were inhabited before 30th of October 1918 and the Muslims, inhabitants of Western Thrace, according to the Article 2 of the General Treaty. In addition to this, on the proposition of the Greek-Turkish mixed commission, the Council of the League of Nations asked for an advisory opinion from the Permanent Court of International Justice regarding the clarification of the term "inhabited" in the decisions of the Lausanne Peace Treaty and regarding to the conditions which the population of Constantinople is supposed to comply regarding the application of the decision for exchange of population.

The Convention for mandatory exchange of population between Turkey and Greece from Lausanne, in global terms, was structured by 19 articles. With it was arranged the date of the beginning of the mandatory exchange, i.e. was fixed for 1st of May 1923 as a beginning of the ethnic dislocation of the Greek and of the Turkish population from the both countries.

According to the provisions of the Convention for mandatory exchange of population, from the Aegean part of Macedonia were resettled approximately 350.000 Turks, from which around 40.000 were Macedonian-Muslims. From Greece, based on the same Convention, in Turkey emigrated around 390.000 Muslims, and it is evaluated that over 1.200.000 people from Greek and non-Greek origin from Turkey immigrated in Greece.¹⁵

The territorial changes which with the acts of signing of series of treaties and conventions were performed on the Balkan Peninsula are most graphically shown in the following table:

Country	Territory (km ²)		Population	
	1914	1923	1914	1923
Bulgaria	112.155	103.184	4.753.000	4.910.000
Greece	108.602	129.873	4.363.000	5.537.000
Romania	138.531	316.698	7.516.000	17.594.000
Turkey	5.050.305	766.877*	34.740.000	13.357.000
Yugoslavia	87.774	248.977	4.548.000	12.017.000

* Of the total area of after-war Turkey, only approximately 23.300 km² were in Europe, while the rest was in Asia Minor.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ladas, *The Exchange*, 162.

¹⁶ A. J. Lucacs, *The Great Powers & Eastern Europe* (New York: AmericanBookCo, 1953), 32-33.

Conclusion

After the four-year military showdown, the Great War officially ended in 1918. Nine weeks after the capitulation of Germany, the countries which won the war decided to meet in Paris where they planned to resolve the military questions and to decide about the future of the world.¹⁷ In this sense, the front row was taken by the influence of the USA, led by the American president Wilson, who was fully supported by Great Britain. Regarding the dimension of the forthcoming conference, it is certain that in every sense of the word, it surpassed the one of the Vienna Congress from 1815. Even more, in Versailles met the presidents of the governments and the ministers of external affairs of the winning countries and their allies with the ones from the defeated countries, unlike the time of the Concert of Europe, when in Vienna only the monarchs personally made all the decisions. In Versailles 1919, the American president Wilson and the Belgian king Albert were the exception.

Ever since the time of the Great War, the two warring parties were promising that on the future peace conference will be taken into consideration the principle of self-determination. In favor of this are witnessing the statements of the American president Woodrow Wilson, who during one of his first speeches categorically pointed out that: „every people has a right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live“.¹⁸ This can also be seen in the addressing of the president Wilson from 22nd of January 1917, when he spoke of the: “minimal rights which should be enjoyed by any nation that can not form its own country, or to merge towards one and only country consisted of its nationality”. In addition, besides the demand of Self-determination of the peoples along with the connected territorial adjustments, the American president Wilson, even before the official entering of the USA in the war, spoke about the protection of the minorities.

Mainly, in the Wilson's vision were contained all the states, regardless of the group in which they took part. However, it should be taken in consideration that Wilson, during the preparation of the Pact of the League of Nations, decisively held onto the principle of self-determination of the peoples, and the protection of the minorities considered as a corrective only in the cases where it was necessary to the minorities which were found outside their national borders. In favor to this speaks the addressing of the president Wilson before the American Congress during the exposition his addressing in 14 points, in which he composed the whole program of his policy

¹⁷ „The place of the Conference also had some significance. Geneva in neutral Switzerland had first been suggested, but President Wilson preferred Paris, where American forces were in plentiful supply. The choice of the French capital marked, almost symbolically, the center of gravity of the bloc of western liberal-democratic powers.“, David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon* (Penguin Books, 1966), 615.

¹⁸ The speech of president Wilson from 27th of May 1916. See more in: Георги П., Генов, *Правното положение на малцинствата* (София: Климентъ Охридски, 1929) 62.

and in which he paid attention only to the principle of self-determination of the peoples, without treating the problem of the protection of minorities in the process.

The main reason for the quake in the national principle of the Versailles system was contained in the differences which came out of the issues for the protection of minorities. The big countries did not intend to universalize the minority issues and therefore, declared themselves against the generalization of the regulation for the minorities. For these reasons, the president Wilson stepped back from this point as well, and in the first draft of the constitution of the League of Nations he wrote a special Article: "The League of Nations will ask from each new country as a condition for recognition of their independency or autonomy, to be obliged that they will give to all the races or national minorities, which remained under their jurisdiction, a complete security equal to the national majority."

The protection of the national minorities for the first time in an international sense was exposed on the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, but basically, the Pact of the League of Nations did not contain even one decision referring to the rights of the ethnic minorities. The Great Powers within the Pact did not include the clauses of the minorities because they considered that if it is not written on paper, they will not be obliged to respect them. According to that, the protection of the minorities with the Versailles system was not projected as one general rule in the international law, but only as a regional rule which was supposed to be exercised in the countries which with the international treaties or with the one-sided declarations were obliged to the minorities on their territories to enable legal protection and to secure certain rights. The establishing of the instruments for protection of minorities within the Versailles system was conditioned by the principle of nationality. This principle in 1919 was still not fully formed, mostly because of the results left behind the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian territorial heritage on the Balkan, and referring to the processes of final formation of the national countries. In fact, within the borders of the entire Europe could exist the same problem which we can recognize regarding to Poland, in reference to the Jewish question, etc.¹⁹

The international protection of the minorities was declaratively secured through the Committee for new state and protection of the minorities, which posed as an auxiliary organ of the General Council of the League of Nations. Still, the process for submitting petitions by the national minorities to this institution was very complicated because of the necessity that at least one of the permanent members of the Council supports the same. Therefore it was ensured that the right of jurisdiction of the Permanent Court of International Justice, in case of a dispute to be authorized institution which will resolve these issues. This way, with the failure to legitimize the

¹⁹ Војо Кушевски, *Македонското прашање во Друштвото на народите* (Скопје: Менора 2001), 44.

system of protection of minorities, the League of Nations got the function of a collective organ for surveillance and conduction of the minority decisions contained in the peace treaties signed with the defeated countries.²⁰

With this, nothing was ever done from the aspect of a real protection of the minorities by the countries which were not ethnically homogenous. For those reasons, the League of Nations did not reach its goal in protection of the minority rights and in the securing of the implementation of the international treaties which obliged the signing countries to respect the national minority groups. The mechanisms of the League of Nations were not enough, were not effective and allowed the performance of the ethnic segregation, without giving any instrumental ban to its process.

As it can be concluded from the above, in the period of the Versailles order and in the historical cycles which followed, with the signing of series of treaties were executed large demographic-ethnic changes on the Balkan, with which the picture changed on the level of the entire Peninsula. This contributed for the ethnic cleaning to continue on a legal background, thusly damaging the natural balance of relations which existed during the XIX century. In fact, based on the Convention for mandatory exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece from 10th of August 1923 and with the Convention for voluntary exchange of population between Greece and Bulgaria from 27th of November 1919, most of all, was made an enormous injustice to the indigenous people which lived in that region. They were left without the opportunity to decide autonomously for their own future. Because of that, the aggressive nationalism of the three Balkan countries, under the protection of the principle of “self-determination of the nations” and generally with the support of the Great powers, created the tragedy of the huge refugee masses which were forced to leave their primordial hearths forever, without any possible alternative to ever go back.

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²⁰ De. P. Azcarte, *League of nations and national minorities* (Washington: 1945), 20 – 27.

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