

Version 1.0 | Last updated 20 February 2017

Neuilly-sur-Seine, Treaty of

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The Treaty of Neuilly was signed on 27 November 1919 between Bulgaria and the Allied and Associated Powers in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. Its territorial clauses were considered by Bulgarian society to be a national catastrophe and the definitive failure of the Bulgarian political programme of national unification.

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Bulgaria's Defeat

After the Entente breakthrough at Dobro Pole, despite [Bulgaria's](#) partially successful defensive efforts on the [Macedonian Front](#), Bulgaria had to seek an armistice with the Entente to avoid occupation. This was signed on 29 September 1918 in Salonika. [Ferdinand I, Tsar of Bulgaria \(1861-1948\)](#) abdicated in favour of his eldest son [Boris III, Tsar of Bulgaria \(1894-1943\)](#). The old parties lost their popularity – a phenomenon familiar to and characteristic of many European countries involved in the First World War. The influence of radical and leftist political parties – socialists and communists – increased. The greatest popularity, however, was enjoyed by the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union, a consequence of the populism and anti-war activities of its leader [Aleksandŭr](#)

[Stamboliyski \(1879-1923\)](#), and of the contemporary structure of Bulgarian society, with a majority of the population living in rural areas and owning small or medium-sized farms.^[1]

The Bulgarian Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference

According to the words of one Bulgarian historian, the “foreign policy of Bulgaria on the eve of the Paris conference bore the marks of utter helplessness, indecision and short-sightedness.”^[2] All members of the Bulgarian delegation were known to be supporters of the Entente. The group was headed by the new Prime Minister Aleksandŭr Stamboliyski, who was to fulfil the politically unpopular role of signing the peace treaty. The Bulgarian delegates were refused access not only to the meetings during the [Paris Peace Conference](#), but also to the various participating committees that discussed the terms of the treaty. They had to use other channels to obtain information about the course of the conference and the conditions under which Bulgaria would have to sign the treaty.

Numerous declarations about the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of the Bulgarian population in the territories to be lost were sent to the Paris conference by many different Bulgarian civilian organizations – patriotic, revolutionary, regional, cultural, and scientific. Generally, they called for the implementation of the principle of self-determination outlined in President [Woodrow Wilson's \(1856-1924\) Fourteen Points](#).

Terms of the Treaty

It is notable that the text of the treaty was adapted from the treaty signed with [Germany](#). Therefore, many terms were actually unusable in the Bulgarian case. Generally, the structure of the peace agreement was similar to the treaties with other defeated countries. Under its terms, Thrace was awarded to [Greece](#). Consequently, Bulgaria lost its access to the Aegean Sea, gained in the First [Balkan War](#) in 1913. The newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes ([Kingdom of Yugoslavia](#) after 1929) expanded its eastern borders and gained Macedonian territory. Southern Dobruja was lost to [Romania](#).

Bulgaria had to pay 2.25 billion gold francs, and had to deliver its neighbours enormous benefits in kind, mostly cattle and coal. A reparations committee established its headquarters in Sofia to monitor the implementation of Bulgaria's financial and natural duties. What is more, the Bulgarian state was obligated to provide for the [occupying troops](#) stationed in its territory, in accordance with the Salonika armistice. In addition, Bulgaria had to reduce its army to 20,000, the gendarmerie to 10,000 and the border guard to 3,000. The regular conscript army had to be replaced with a paid professional army. The dismissal of a large number of officers led to many of them becoming increasingly involved in political life, flowing into revolutionary organizations or creating their own professional structures, which had great influence on Bulgarian political life. Other dismissed members of the military joined the French Foreign Legion or the colonial forces of [Great Britain](#).

The Bulgarian air force and warships were destroyed or handed over to the Entente; Bulgaria was denied the right to possess heavy [artillery](#). Moreover, an Entente military commission was instated in the country to oversee the disarmament of the Bulgarian army and to control the release of [prisoners](#) and the maintenance of Entente military cemeteries.

Political, Economic and Social Effects of the Treaty

The violation of the principle of self-determination, anchored in Wilson's Fourteen Points, was the essential *leitmotif* of Bulgarian [propaganda](#) against the territorial terms of the treaty. In the capital and in major cities, there were numerous immigrant communities from Macedonia, Dobruja and Thrace, whose cultural, social and political organizations influenced public life in the country. Many of the officers' corps, as well as cultural and scientific elites, belonged to these communities. The perceived harshness of the treaty – or the “dictate of Neuilly,” as it was popularly called – was the main reason for the radicalization of large parts of Bulgarian society. It was the sense of unjustified punishment, along with the economic crisis and Bolshevik propaganda that produced favourable conditions for left-wing, anarchist and anti-system organizations to strengthen their influence.

Even before the peace treaty was signed, a wave of nearly 250,000 [refugees](#) from Thrace, Macedonia, the Morava Valley and Dobruja headed for Bulgaria. After the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey (Treaty of Lausanne), the displacement continued, causing a large-scale humanitarian crisis in the country, as the Bulgarian state was already politically unstable and at its [economic limits](#). The displaced people suffered, along with the rest of the population, under prolonged shortages of basic foods, cholera and tuberculosis outbreaks, and an increase in child mortality.

Conclusion

The short-term impact of the treaty was the rise of sharply opposing political and ideological movements. In the next decade, Bulgaria would become the scene of violent clashes, bloody strife bordering on civil war, and social and political experiments – the last being the work of agrarians and communists in the government. In the long run, Bulgarian society developed a kind of complex of doom and martyrdom, manifesting in messianic [nationalism](#) or nihilism.

With the Treaty of Neuilly, as with the disastrous outcome of the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, Bulgaria fell once again far short of the territorial goals for which it had entered the war. Although Bulgaria's loss of 18,865 square kilometres was much less than the territorial losses of its wartime allies, this outcome created resentment and a nationalist backlash, leading Bulgaria to strengthen its bonds with Germany throughout the interwar period, as both countries sought ways to revise the terms of the Paris peace treaties.

Notes

1. † [Winkler, Heinrich August: The Age of Catastrophe. A History of the West 1914-1945, London 2015, p. 281.](#)
2. † [Khristov, Khristo: Bŭlgariya, Balkanite i mirŭt 1919 g. \[Bulgaria, the Balkans and the Peace of 1919\] Sofia 1984, p. 53. Further see \[Markov, Georgi: Bŭlgariya sled Solunskoto primirie i na Parizhkata konferentsiya za mir \\(1918-1919\\) \\[Bulgaria after the armistice of Salonika and at the Paris Peace Conference 1918-1919\\], in: \\[Markov, Georgi/Statelova, Elena/Nyagulov, Blagovest \\\(eds.\\\): Istoriya na Bŭlgariya, Vol. 9 Istoriya na Bŭlgariya 1918-1944 \\\[Bulgarian history 1918-1944\\\], Sofia 2012, pp. 131-157; \\\[Lyudmil Spasov: Bŭlgarskata diplomatsiya 1919-1944 \\\\[The Bulgarian Diplomacy 1919-1944\\\\], Sofia 2016.\\\]\\\(#\\\)\\]\\(#\\)\]\(#\)](#)

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Citation

[Minkov, Stefan Marinov: Neuilly-sur-Seine, Treaty of , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universitat Berlin, Berlin 2017-02-20. DOI: \[10.15463/ie1418.11055\]\(#\).](#)

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