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**BULGARIA'S TOBACCO INDUSTRY, LEGISLATION, AND POLITICS AFTER
THE WORLD WAR I**

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Abstract

Tobacco has been one of the most important production sectors in the economic life of Bulgarian lands and the Bulgarian state for centuries. A number of economic, legislative and political factors determine the historical development of tobacco production. After the restoration of the Bulgarian state in 1878, in just a few decades, the tobacco industry and the tobacco trade began to play a significant role in Bulgaria's economic, political and international life. The awareness of the significant role that tobacco production plays in the social and financial system of the country leads to the modern development of tobacco legislation in that time. The positive attitude of the state, the entrepreneurial spirit of private capital and the adequate changes in the legal framework enable the country to take advantage of the international changes in the historical period under discussion and to establish itself as one of the world leaders in the production and trade of Oriental tobacco.

Keywords

Tobacco – Tobacco legislation – Tobacco industry – Tobacco trade – Oriental tobacco

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Introduction

This paper aims at looking into Bulgaria's tobacco policy and evaluating its tobacco legislation as well as their correlation after the end of World War I. The legislation and the policy concerning the tobacco production are discussed on the basis of organization, production and commercial activities and their impact on the financial, social and political activities of the country. Historically as well as in modern times, tobacco production has always played an important role as one of the country's main industrial components. For many generations of Bulgarians, tobacco growing had been the only source of income. According to many historians, the tradition of tobacco growing in the Ottoman Empire dates back as far as to the end of the 16th century, and it is well kept alive in modern times.¹ There are differing opinions regarding the penetration of tobacco in the Ottoman Empire with part of the research linking it to the activities of English traders, while others have suggested that this happened through Italy. Mary Neuburger makes a comment on the disputes by considering the two main points in historiography.² In this long period of time, tobacco production had followed the complex and unsteady developing spiral of historical ups and downs on the Balkan Peninsula. Economic factors as well as political and international events intermingled steadily during that period and formed the pace of development, trends and social role of Bulgaria's tobacco production.

The tobacco industry in Bulgaria and the state-territorial changes in the Balkans in the period 1878-1919

Taking into consideration the above mentioned, the period from 1912 till 1919 and the years after World War I can be considered as a very important stage in the development of Bulgaria's tobacco industry – they mark a significant leap into the international world of tobacco.

Here are some statistics:

In the year 1912, the entire tobacco acreage totals 88 910 acres (8 891 hectares) with an estimated production of 5 812 tons of dry tobacco. In the following years, these numbers steadily increase, and in 1920 the acreage reaches 385 810 acres (38 581 hectares) and 29 302 tons of dry tobacco. In 1912, the tobacco export totals 1 623 tons, where in 1920 it totals 17 696 tons. In 1912 the share of tobacco exports comprises 0.99% of the country's exports, and it increases to 40.55% in 1920, which by far is not the highest peak – e. g. in 1918 the export share of tobacco products is 79.00%.³ In the course of this article, I will try to give answers to what were the reasons for this enormous increase in productivity and commerce with tobacco and tobacco products. Further, I will put emphasis on the changes caused by this economic boom and what role the state played on the international scene.

By the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire had already formed the main geographic regions suitable for the production of the so called "Oriental tobaccos". Two

¹ J. Greham, Smoking and "Early Modern" Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries), *The American Historical Review*, Vol: 11 num 5 (2006).

² M. Neuburger, *Balkan smoke, Tobacco and the making of modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University press, 2013).

³ K. Belchev, *Tyutyunat v Balgariya* (Sofiya: Yubileyno izdanie na „Marko Belchev i sinove“, 2006).

provinces - Macedonia and Thrace, were mainly populated by Bulgarians and were a substantial part of the ethnic and cultural presence of Bulgarians on the Balkans. Other important regions where mainly tobacco was grown were around the regions of Izmir and Samsun in Asia Minor. In fact, in the twentieth century, the individual tobacco regions of the Balkans and the Bulgarian territory finally established themselves as such.⁴ In the course of time, tobacco growing had become a main economic source of income because the population (Muslims and the other ethnic groups) developed specific skills for how to grow, produce and handle tobacco. This resulted in the forming of a specialized category of tobacco growers who passed down their knowledge and experience through the family, maintaining family business traditions, for there was an abundance of skilled manpower resources constantly engaged in producing more and more tobacco.

After the 1877-78 Russian-Turkish war, the main tobacco-producing regions are outside the borders of the newly-formed Principality of Bulgaria. Till the beginning of the 1912-1919 wars, the Ottoman Empire defends covetous and ruthless its European provinces – the battle for its heritage also aims at acquiring the economic importance of the tobacco-growing provinces. During this period, the efforts of the Bulgarian government aim to compensate the deficiency of tobacco-producing lands. The legislation tries to help the tobacco production in various ways, but their share in the Bulgarian economy remains very low.⁵

The changes on the political and geographic map on the Balkans and the new territorial gains after the wars of 1912-1919 shape a new Bulgarian economic paradigm. According to the clauses of the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), which puts an end to the Second Balkan war, Bulgaria loses South Dobrudja – a main grain-producing region, - simultaneously gaining the Pirin part of Macedonia and Western Thrace, where from an economic point of view tobacco growing and production are well-developed.⁶ Another consequence of the wars was that a substantial portion of refugees from Macedonia and Thrace were skilled tobacco growers. The refugees were diverted to and settled down in and around main Bulgarian towns – this new situation altered Bulgaria's social and economic characteristics.⁷ In this way, the Bulgarian government acquired new skilled tobacco growers and workers for the tobacco industry without spending large sums.

Ultimately in 1913, Bulgaria acquires new territories suitable for the growing of oriental tobaccos. Also, it has a large stock of skilled work force on hand, ready to start working in the tobacco industry. The next question I want to go into, is whether the country was well-established in terms of infrastructure, production facilities, legislation, etc. which on a whole scale would enable the development of a social base that could lead to a new, successful, and winning economic policy.

Development of tobacco legislation

Let's have a short look at the development of the tobacco legislation from 1878 till 1919. This approach will help us draw up logical conclusions. Initially, the Principality of

⁴ D-r K. Myuler, *Proizvodstvo, obrabotvane i targoviya s tyutyun v Evropeyska Turtsiya, a sega Nova Bulgariya* (Sofiya: Darzhavna pechatnitsa, 1916).

⁵ V. Kitanov, *Nachalo na politikata po tyutyuna v Balgarskoto knyazhestvo*. *Godishnik na universiteta „Prof. D-r Asen Zlatarov“*, Burgas, Vol: XLIII num 2 (2014): 30-34.

⁶ G. P. Genov, *Mezhdunarodni aktove i dokumenti, zasyagashti Bulgariya*. *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet, Filozofsko-istoricheski fakultet*, Vol: XXXIV num I Sofiya (1940): 401-417.

⁷ D. Baylov y M. Popov, *Tyutyun* (Sofiya: Zemizdat, 1952).

Bulgaria used the Ottoman judicial traditions as well Russian legal practices as a legal frame in the field of tobacco growing and production. In 1879, the *Interim rules about tobacco excise practices* and a bunch of requirements became effective.⁸ In the following years, they were to be modified and supplemented many times.⁹ The first *Tobacco Act* was adopted in 1890.¹⁰ The Tobacco Act was approved by Decree under number 207 / 15-th December 1890 and promulgated in the State Gazette. Until 1919 the Act was altered and supplemented more than 50 times, thus responding to and considering the real changes in the tobacco branch as well as defending the interests of the country.¹¹ The first amendments to the Tobacco Act were made at the end of 1891 and promulgated in the State Gazette in 1892.¹² In 1893 a Law was adopted and promulgated in 1894 to amend the tariffs of excise labels for tobacco and tobacco products manufactured in the Bulgarian Principality.¹³ An Act amending and supplementing the Tobacco Act and the Tariffs for labels for Tobacco Products Manufactured was promulgated in 1914.¹⁴ A new Tobacco Act was adopted in 1917, the text of which listed all the amendments made to the Tobacco Act from 1890 to 1917.¹⁵

Initially, these frequent changes were often the result of the country's fiscal needs, and so they did not express an intention to solve the problems on a sustainable basis. In the course of the following years and by gaining practical experience, the Bulgarian government started a lot of legal changes in order to help the tobacco industry not only in a financial way, but also to build up a strategic presence in the country's economy. We can assume that the country's legal agility and versatility had created adaptive stimuli for both, the tobacco producers and merchants, which in the years after World War I proved as very farsighted.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the Bulgarian state and economic elite paid great attention to the tobacco industry. An attempt was undertaken to create a state monopoly like in other West European countries.¹⁶ In another attempt to aggregate the tobacco production process, the *Kartel United Tobacco Works* was established.¹⁷ Even during the war years, the Bulgarian government initiated legislative actions, aimed at boosting the production activities in the new territories where tobacco growing was a very important source of income – e.g. in 1916 a new *Interim decree on the sales of tobacco, cigarette rolling papers, and matches in the occupied lands* and a *Decree on the tobacco growing, tobacco production, tobacco exports and sales in Bulgarian and the occupied lands* were adopted.¹⁸ Thus, after the end of World War I, the Bulgarian government

⁸ Vremenni naredbi po aktsiza na tyutyuna v Balgarskoto knyazhestvo, Sofiya. 1879.

⁹ Predlozhenie za nyakoi izmeneniya na Vremennite naredbi za aktsiza na tyutyuna, utvardeni s Visochayshiy ukaz ot 21.XII.1879 g. Godishen sbornik ot Zakoni na Balgarskoto knyazhestvo, prieti ot II Obiknoveno Narodno sabranie, (Sofiya: 1886): 211-212.

¹⁰ Zakon za tyutyuna (Sofiya: Darzhavna pechatnitsa, 1891).

¹¹ D. Baylov, Ocherk varhu zakonodatelstvoto po tyutyuna v Bulgariya, Tyutyunev pregled, Vol: V num 10 (1936): 259-271.

¹² Darzhaven vestnik, broj 30, Sofiya. 1892.

¹³ Darzhaven vestnik, broj 2, Sofiya. 1894.

¹⁴ Darzhaven vestnik, broj 161, Sofiya. 1914.

¹⁵ Zakon za tyutyuna (Sofiya: Darzhavna pechatnitsa, 1917).

¹⁶ Monopol ili Banderolna sistema na tyutyuna. Dokladi, cheteni v XXII-ta redovna sesiya na Sofiyskata targovsko-industrialna kamara, Sofiya. 1914.

¹⁷ D. Yadkov, Bulgartabak. Spomeni. (Sofiya: Izdatelstvo "Sibiya", 2003): 88-89.

¹⁸ Vremenna naredba za prodazhba na tyutyun, tsigareni knizhki i kibrit v okupiranite zemi, Sofiya. 1916.

established good traditions in the field of tobacco legislation. These undertakings demonstrated well-thought financial, political and strategic actions in a sector of high priority for the national economy.

A logic consequence were all changes regarding the tobacco legislation basis, which continued the well-established tradition of adequate economic and social decisions. From 1919 till 1924, more than 25 legislation initiatives in the field of tobacco growing were adopted, including the *Tobacco Act* and various decrees, regulations, and ordinances. The most important legislative act of this period was the Tobacco Act of 1923. It was voted on and adopted at the Third Regular Session of the 19th Ordinary National Assembly on 25th December 1922 and approved by Decree No. 1/03 January 1923, after which it was promulgated in the State Gazette on 25 January 1923.¹⁹ Before its promulgation, the Law came in the form of a draft of the Ministry of Finance.²⁰ Decree No 17 / 06 October 1922 approved the Tariff for the excise label, which covers the tobacco products in the Kingdom of Bulgaria and was promulgated in the State Gazette.²¹ By Decree No.24 / 21 December 1922, a Tariff for the maximum selling prices of tobacco products in the Kingdom of Bulgaria was adopted, which was promulgated in the State Gazette.²² It is also important to mention that changes in labour and cooperative legislation had a strong impact on tobacco growing. Social legislation decrees date back to 1903, and by 1919 legislation practices included restrictions on hiring women and children, establishing inspection bodies, demanding an unbroken 36-hours rest for workers, guaranteed medical care for enterprises with more than 10 workers, etc.²³ Right after World War I, an 8-hours working day was introduced, improvements in the *Act on Insurance against illness and labour incidents* were made, the *Act on labour and unemployment insurance* was adopted, etc.²⁴

The tobacco industry after the First World War

Some developments in the cooperative and trade union movements had a significant impact on tobacco legislation acts. E.g. - the first tobacco cooperative *Asenova Krepost* was established in 1919, and by 1925 the number of tobacco cooperatives totaled 41 enterprises with about 295 000 members.²⁵ Between 1919 and 1923, when the demand for Bulgarian tobacco reached its highest levels, the *Trade union of tobacco workers* was established, and the tobacco entrepreneurs established the *Union of tobacco exporters*.²⁶ As a whole, the legislative, social and syndical changes had a beneficial impact on the development of the tobacco industry as well as on all Bulgarians engaged herewith. Our conclusion would not be quite correct, if we do not mention the role of the political factors in this context. After World War I, the Agrarian party in Bulgaria took over and logically all agrarian problems, in particular the ones concerning tobacco growing, were solved in favour of the tobacco growers.²⁷

¹⁹ Darzhaven vestnik, broj 239, Sofiya. 1923.

²⁰ Zakon za tyutyuna, Proekt, Sofiya. 1922.

²¹ Darzhaven vestnik, broj 152, Sofiya. 1922.

²² Darzhaven vestnik, broj 216, Sofiya. 1922.

²³ Zh. Aseov, Tyutyunat v balgarskoto stopanstvo (Sofiya: Kooperativna pechatnitsa « Napred», 1933).

²⁴ K. Belchev, Tyutyunat v Balgariya (Sofiya: Yubileyno izdanie na Marko Belchev i sinove, 2006).

²⁵ A. Krastev, Tyutyuneva kooperatsiya Asenova krepost, Asenovgrad (Asenovgrad: 1994).

²⁶ K. Belchev, Tyutyunat v Balgariya...

²⁷ K. Belchev, Tyutyunat v Balgariya...

From their point of view, the tobacco industry and commerce, and respectively the political, economic and legislative measures taken by the Bulgarian government in the war years between 1912 and 1919, gave the opportunity to react adequate to the political changes on the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire had completely lost its European tobacco growing territories – they were divided between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.²⁸ As mentioned above, the clauses of the Treaty of Bucharest, some well-established tobacco producing centers as Gorna Djumaya, Nevrokop, Razlog, Sveti Vratch, Petritch, and Strumica were added to Bulgaria. Before the outbreak of World War I, huge quantities of tobacco products headed towards Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy and even to the USA. Germany's and Austria-Hungary's demands for tobacco products were covered mainly by imports from Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.²⁹ After the end of World War I, the tobacco growing and producing regions of Xanti, Gyumurdzhina and Strumica were taken away from Bulgaria. The Treaty of Noah of 27 July 1919 approved the borders between Bulgaria and Greece after the First World War.³⁰ Huge numbers of refugees, mainly well-skilled tobacco growing farmers, fled those regions and settled down in Bulgaria – a welcomed labour force.

In 1921-1922, the entire situation on the Balkans turned more beneficent for Bulgaria's tobacco industry. Turkey was at war with Greece, which had a negative impact on both economies, including the production and commerce of oriental tobacco.³¹ On the international markets, the demand for oriental tobacco was steadily increasing as smoking was becoming more and more popular and fashionable. It is a well-known fact that oriental tobacco made up a substantial portion of all cigarette brands, thus tobacco products from the Balkan were in high demand. At the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, Turkish and Greek merchants quoted large quantities of oriental tobaccos on the international stock markets. Bulgaria's presence on international trade level was rather modest. Tobacco exports went through Turkish middlemen or through well-established European and American companies such as *Commercial, Herzog, American Tobacco, R. J. Reynolds*, etc.³² The war between Turkey and Greece tore apart their trading operations, and various international tobacco companies opened their agencies in Bulgaria. At the same time, Bulgaria's production capacities, legislation, technological level and human potential took advantage of the situation – while both neighbor countries were at war, Bulgaria expanded its tobacco fields and the number of tobacco growers increased substantially. This said, Bulgarian tobacco merchants almost succeeded to monopolize the oriental tobacco market on international level. A lot of Bulgarian commercial enterprises and companies emerged on the international trading scene along with well-established international companies. The war between Turkey and Greece turned to be a win for Bulgaria and for its tobacco industry as a whole. The tobacco export figures rocketed in the sky, and the country's fiscal gains were very substantial.

Conclusions

Finally, I would like to end my article by sharing the conclusion of other colleagues that tobacco played a leading role in helping Bulgaria to overcome the post-war economic

²⁸ I. Pitekov, *Tyutyunevata istoriya na Balgariya 1909-2009* (Sofiya: 2010).

²⁹ I. Pitekov, *Tyutyunevata istoriya na Balgariya...*

³⁰ G. P. Genov, "Mezhdunarodni aktove i dokumenti, zasyagashti Balgariya. Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet", *Filosofsko-istoricheski fakultet*, Vol: XXXIV, num I (1940): 427-461.

³¹ A. Behar, *Tyutyunat v Balgariya*.(Sofiya: Pechatnitsa Yunion, 1927).

³² M. Neuburger, *Balkan smoke, Tobacco and the making of modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University press, 2013).

and financial crises and to stabilize its national currency. In historiography, researchers describe the period as the “Golden era” of Bulgarian tobacco industry – the incredible increase in tobacco production and the subsequent financial results in the years during and after the war built up a stable basis of economic development in the country.³³ Tobacco began to play a key role in the country's financial, commercial, and social systems. Due to the interaction of beneficial factors between Bulgaria's legislation and production capacities, a well-balanced social policy and advantageous constellation in international politics, Bulgaria became one of the main global factors in the production of and trade with oriental tobacco and tobacco products after World War I. This trend proved to be of very stable nature, as in the following years Bulgaria boosted to a 26%-share on the international oriental tobacco market.³⁴

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