

The Treaty of San Stefano

This was a treaty between [Russia](#) and the [Ottoman Empire](#) signed at [San Stefano](#), then a village west of [Constantinople](#), on 3 March 1878 by Count [Nicholas Pavlovich Ignatiev](#) and [Aleksandr Nelidov](#) on behalf of the Russian Empire and Foreign Minister [Saffet Pasha](#) and Ambassador to Germany [Sadullah Bey](#) on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. The treaty ended the [Russo-Turkish War, 1877–78](#). There were no Bulgarian representatives participating in the deliberations.

According to the official Russian position, by signing the treaty, Russia had never intended anything more than a temporary rough draft, so as to enable a final settlement with the other Great Powers.

The treaty provided for the creation of an autonomous [Principality of Bulgaria](#) following almost 500 years of Ottoman slavery. The day the treaty was signed, 3 March 1878, is celebrated as **Liberation Day in Bulgaria**.

However, the enlarged Bulgaria envisioned by the treaty alarmed neighboring states as well as France and Great Britain. As a result, it was never implemented, being superseded by the [Treaty of Berlin](#) following the [Congress](#) of the same name that took place three months later.^[6]

The treaty established the autonomous self-governing [Principality of Bulgaria](#), with a Christian government and the right to keep an army. Though still *de jure* tributary to Turkey, the Principality *de facto* functioned as an independent nation. Its territory included the plain between the [Danube](#) and the Balkan mountain range ([Stara Planina](#)), the region of [Sofia](#), [Piro](#)t and [Vranje](#) in the [Morava](#) valley, Northern [Thrace](#), parts of [Eastern Thrace](#) and nearly all of [Macedonia](#) (Article 6).

Bulgaria would thus have had direct access to the [Mediterranean](#). This carried the potential of [Russian](#) ships eventually using Bulgarian Mediterranean ports as naval bases - which the other Great Powers greatly disliked.

A prince elected by the people, approved by Turkey, and recognized by the [Great Powers](#) was to take the helm of the country (Article 7). A council of Bulgarian noblemen was to draft a constitution (also Article 7). (They produced the [Tarnovo Constitution](#).) Ottoman troops were to withdraw from Bulgaria, while Russian troops would remain for two more years (Article 8).

The Great Powers, especially British Prime Minister [Benjamin Disraeli](#), were unhappy with this extension of Russian power, and Serbia feared the establishment of [Greater Bulgaria](#) would harm its interests in former and remaining Ottoman territories. In the "Salisbury Circular" of 1 April 1878, the British Foreign Secretary, [Salisbury](#), made clear his and his government's objections to the Treaty of San Stefano and the favorable position in which it left Russia. These reasons prompted the Great Powers to obtain a revision of the treaty at the [Congress of Berlin](#), held again without Bulgarian representatives. The San Stefano treaty was substitute by the [Treaty of Berlin](#).

Historically, the failure of the San Stefano Peace Treaty led to a long and bloody struggle of the Bulgarian nation against new foreign domination, for freedom and unity.

Below is an excerpt from a 1995 Memorandum by the Macedonian Patriotic Organization, namely its three chapters in Toronto: "Pravda", "Luben Dimitrov" and "Victory". Entitled "Short History of the Macedonian Question", the document sheds light on the events of 1878 and the implications of the San Stefano Treaty.

Vassil Popvassilev