
**THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE,
DIPLOMACY AND SOCIETY
NEW PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES
ON THE GREAT EASTERN CRISIS 1875-1878**

**RĂZBOAIELE DE INDEPENDENȚĂ,
DIPLOMAȚIE ȘI SOCIETATE
NOI PERSPECTIVE ȘI ABORDĂRI
PRIVIND MAREA CRIZĂ ORIENTALĂ 1875-1878**

INSTITUTUL PENTRU STUDII POLITICE
DE APĂRARE ȘI ISTORIE MILITARĂ

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NOTĂ ASUPRA EDIȚIEI

În perioada 9-10 mai 2022, s-a desfășurat conferința internațională cu tema: „Războaiele de independență, diplomație și societate. Noi perspective și abordări ale Problemei Orientale 1875-1878”. Activitatea a fost organizată de Ministerul Apărării Naționale prin Departamentul pentru politica de apărare, planificare și relații internaționale, sub coordonarea Institutului pentru studii politice de apărare și istorie militară (ISPAIM). Conferința a fost prilejuită de aniversarea a 145 de ani de la obținerea independenței de stat a României, eveniment care a marcat în mod definitiv evoluția istorică a statului român și, deopotrivă important, a deschis noi perspective în dinamica de putere regională.

Conferința și-a propus să ofere un cadru de dezbateri și dialog privind rolul și semnificația Războiului de Independență din 1877-1878, dar și a implicațiilor geopolitice ale Marii Crize Orientale din anii 1875-1878 asupra organizării spațiului de securitate Balcani–Marea Neagră. Chestiunea Orientală a constituit o amenințare constantă la adresa păcii și stabilității continentale începând din secolul al XVIII-lea până la începutul Primului Război Mondial. Dacă pentru marile puteri ale vremii, situația din Balcani a fost văzută mai degrabă ca o chestiune geopolitică ruso-otomană, pentru popoarele din regiune – bulgari, greci, sârbi, muntenegreni, români, chiar și otomani – a fost una de natură existențială.

Într-o perspectivă generală, Criza Orientală a integrat două dimensiuni geopolitice cu deosebire relevante: prima a avut în vedere soarta Imperiului Otoman și a rolului care urma să-i fie rezervat în ansamblul construcției de putere europeană; cea de-a doua dimensiune a vizat agenda regională a Rusiei, având ca ax central obținerea controlului asupra Strâmtorilor, extinderea influenței în Marea Neagră și asigurarea proiecției de putere în bazinul mediteraneean. Prezervarea Imperiului Otoman devenea, așadar, o piedică majoră în calea ambițiilor expansioniste ale Rusiei. Politica asertivă a Rusiei în Balcani, cu scopul slăbirii puterii otomane, s-a suprapus cu dorința tot mai puternică de independență a popoarelor aflate sub dominația otomană, ale căror aspirații naționale au început să zguduie stabilitatea statutului otoman la jumătatea secolului al XIX-lea.

Războiul ruso-turc declanșat în aprilie 1877 a fost punctul culminant al unor tensiuni care se acumulaseră deja pe parcursul ultimului secol. Refăcută după înfrângerea în Războiul Crimeei (1853-1856) și profitând de un context geopolitic favorabil, Rusia s-a simțit pregătită să reia ofensiva către Strâmtori, acțiune care a dus la o nouă înclăștare militară între cele două mari puteri rivale.

Pentru România, războiul ruso-turc a fost prilejul așteptat pentru a-și revendica dreptul la independență, un ideal care a motivat generația Revoluției de la 1848 și care a definit proiectul de țară al statului român începând cu a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Obținerea independenței a fost un efort conjugat al armatei, diplomației și societății în ansamblul său. Moțiunea prin care se lua act de „independența absolută a României”, votată de Adunarea Deputaților, întrunită în sesiune extraordinară la data de 9/21 mai 1877, a primit consacrarea oficială prin sancționarea acesteia de către domnitorul Carol I

o zi mai târziu, la 10/22 mai 1877. „Voim să fim independenți – afirma Mihail Kogălniceanu – pentru că voim să trăim viața noastră proprie, pentru că nu voim să mai pătimim pentru greșelile altora, pentru că voim ca la gurile Dunării de jos să fie un bulevard în contra rezelului.”

Declarația politică a fost urmată de angajarea în luptă a armatei, acțiune care a consacrat și actul de naștere a armatei române moderne. Armata română a mobilizat peste 125 000 de militari, din care efectivele armatei operative s-au ridicat la 66 000 de oameni. La trecerea Dunării, armata a participat cu peste 38 000 de militari grupați în 41 de batalioane, 32 de escadroane și 18 baterii de artilerie cu 108 tunuri și 7 000 de cai. Cifra pierderilor s-a ridicat la peste 4 000 de morți și dispăruți. Sacrificiile armatei române pe câmpurile de luptă de la Plevna, Grivița, Vidin sau Smârdan au legitimat aspirațiile de afirmare națională și au consfințit realizarea proiectului istoric al recunoașterii statului român ca actor suveran și independent, capabil să joace un rol de sine stătător pe scena de putere regională. Sunt cu deosebire relevante cuvintele domnitorului Carol care îi scria tatălui său: „Independența noastră ne-am câștigat-o cu sângele nostru și, prin urmare, nu o datorăm decât nouă înșine.”

La 145 de ani de la aceste evenimente, ne-am propus să readucem în atenția publicului un dosar istoric deopotrivă important și complex care a definit atât istoria noastră, cât și geografia regională în ansamblul său. Considerăm important să continuăm și să extindem dialogul și dezbaterile științifice ca parte a eforturilor de prezervare a memoriei colective, de înțelegere și cunoaștere corectă a trecutului, dar și din nevoia de a racorda mai strâns istoria militară românească la cercetarea internațională.

Conferința a fost structurată pe două paliere. Primul a inclus o dezbatere în format internațional privind semnificația și impactul Crizei Orientale, precum și rolul marilor actori implicați în evenimentele de acum aproape un secol și jumătate. Cel de-al doilea palier a inclus desfășurarea mesei rotunde dedicate discutării și analizării problematicii Războiului de Independență al României, semnificații și consecințe istorice, la care au participat istorici, specialiști și cercetători din România.

La manifestare au luat parte istorici și specialiști din Austria, Bulgaria, Germania, Italia, Marea Britanie, Republica Moldova, România, Turcia și Serbia. Pe parcursul primei zile a conferinței au fost prezentate 12 lucrări, la care s-au adăugat alte opt comunicări susținute în cadrul mesei rotunde.

În cadrul conferinței internaționale, participanții au abordat teme privind evoluțiile geopolitice de ansamblu ale crizei din 1875-1878 din perspectiva intereselor și pozițiilor marilor actori implicați în conflict sau cu interese în regiune. În acest sens, au fost discutate aspecte legate de modul în care Londra a încercat să gestioneze situația de criză din Balcani, fiind accentuată dificultatea Marii Britanii de a armoniza interesul imperiului cu presiunile și așteptările opiniei publice. De asemenea, au fost analizate interesele majore ale Vienei, axate cu deosebire pe menținerea integrității teritoriale, obiectiv confirmat și prin Tratatul de la Berlin care i-a permis, practic, imperiului să-și păstreze prestigiul și influența în regiune. O altă temă abordată a fost cea a viziunii cancelarului Otto von Bismarck în cadrul conferinței de la Berlin din 1878, unde a fost, cu deosebire, preocupat de menținerea balanței de putere în Europa, ceea ce însemna, implicit, limitarea influenței Rusiei în Balcani. Alte subiecte au vizat interesele atașărilor militari italieni pentru

regiunea Dobrogea după încheierea Crizei Orientale; evoluția organismului militar al Serbiei în perioada premergătoare intrării în război (1876) și dificultățile economice ale acestui stat, care au afectat capacitatea de modernizare și pregătire a armatei sale; organizarea și desfășurarea acțiunilor informativ-ale armatei ruse în Balcani în anii anteriori declanșării războiului ruso-turc, informații care confirmă faptul că Imperiul Rus s-a pregătit și a planificat din timp campania împotriva Imperiului Otoman; relațiile româno-ruse în anii 1877-1878; evoluția geopolitică în Balcani pe parcursul secolului al XIX-lea care ilustrează, în fapt, pierderea progresivă a influenței otomane în fața afirmării ambițiilor tot mai sporite ale Rusiei de a controla zona Balcani–Marea Neagră, pe fondul încercărilor Marii Britanii de a încetini acest proces; perspective istoriografice ale Războiului de Independență și modul în care acest subiect a fost folosit ca instrument politic de către regimul comunist.

Discuțiile și dezbaterile din cadrul mesei rotunde, care s-au desfășurat în ziua de 10 mai 2022, s-au axat pe discutarea problematicii Războiului de Independență al României. Scopul dezbaterilor a fost de a genera un dialog cât mai cuprinzător, care să permită identificarea de noi paradigme de analiză și direcții de cercetare privind evenimentele de la 1877-1878 prin valorificarea noilor tendințe/abordări istoriografice, dar și a bogatelor resurse documentare din țară și din străinătate. Independența a fost un proces complex, care a implicat atât jertfa a mii de soldați și sacrificiile lor pe câmpul de luptă, cât și inteligență politică și diplomatică într-un context de securitate deosebit de complicat, definit de interese geopolitice divergente, ambițiile agresive ale Rusiei și riscurile de instabilitate regională generate de slăbirea accentuată a Imperiului Otoman.

Participanții au pledat pentru necesitatea ca istoricii români să extindă cât mai mult aria de cercetare, volumele de documente publicate în statele implicate direct în Criza Orientală sau apărute în urma acesteia fiind o sursă cu deosebire importantă pentru înțelegerea evoluției României în plan militar și diplomatic în anii 1877-1978. De asemenea, a fost susținută nevoia de reconsiderare a documentelor cu caracter memorialistic, care pot oferi informații cu totul inedite privind modul în care militarii români au trăit experiența frontului în timpul războiului ruso-turc. A fost reiterată necesitatea aprofundării cercetării asupra problematicii securității în regiunea Balcani–Marea Neagră în a doua parte a secolului al XIX-lea. Înțelegerea corectă a evenimentelor de acum un secol și jumătate este cu deosebire importantă atât prin prisma menținerii unor focare de tensiune în regiune, dar și a necesității contracarării unor narațiuni istorice false, care se răspândesc în spațiul public, generând vulnerabilități societale și perspective distorsionate asupra istoriei naționale.

Volumul reunește cea mai mare parte a comunicărilor prezentate în cadrul conferinței. Acestea au fost reproduse în limba în care au fost susținute, fiind însoțite de rezumate în limba engleză. Lucrarea conține, de asemenea, și un set de fotografii cuprinzând imagini din timpul desfășurării evenimentului.

Au fost, de asemenea, incluse, cuvintele de deschidere ale ministrului apărării naționale de la acea dată, Vasile Dîncu, și ale secretarului de stat pentru politica de apărare, planificare și relații internaționale, Simona Cojocaru, care au deschis lucrările conferinței confirmând, și pe această cale, sprijinul și implicarea conducerii Ministerului Apărării Naționale în promovarea cercetării istorice și a acțiunilor menite să încurajeze prezervarea memoriei marilor fapte de arme ale înaintașilor.

Ca de obicei, adresăm mulțumirile noastre personalului Editurii Militare, redactorului-șef, domnul Marius Iorgulescu, pentru sprijinul acordat în publicarea acestei lucrări care, sperăm, va contribui la menținerea și extinderea dialogului științific care să permită o mai bună cunoaștere a istoriei militare românești, dar și la o integrare cât mai strânsă a acesteia în circuitul istoriografic internațional.

Dr. CARMEN-SORINA RÎJNOVEANU*

* Directorul Institutului pentru studii politice de apărare și istorie militară.

**OPENING REMARKS BY
THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE,
VASILE DÎNCU***

Madam Secretary of State,
Madam Director,
Mr. State Counsellor,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today at this event marking 145 years since the proclamation of Romania's state independence, in the wider context of the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878.

A landmark moment in our history, the achievement of independence represented the cornerstone of Romania's future fulfilment, a step of utmost importance in shaping the identity that would later contribute to its European course.

The accomplishment of this historical act was possible in a complex geopolitical context, dominated by the new security architecture in the Balkans and the Black Sea region, which took shape in the period 1875-1878 as a result of the accentuated weakening of the Ottoman Empire, as well as tsarist Russia's propensity for territorial expansion.

Although the project of independence involved a joint effort of the military, diplomacy and society as a whole, it must

* Minister of National Defence at the time of the conference.

be emphasized that it was achieved on the battlefield. The Romanian Army, engaged in the Russo-Ottoman war with over 125,000 soldiers, of whom the operational army was 66,000 men, paid a heavy tribute: over 4,000 dead and missing persons. The efforts of society as a whole and the sacrifices of the Romanian Army on the battlefields of Plevna, Vidin or Smârdan fully established the internationally recognized independence, following the Congress of Berlin of June-July 1878.

During the following decades, Romania's independence was consolidated through a sustained process of constitutional, legislative, institutional and economic modernization. In this process, the responsibility and commitment of political leaders towards European progress played an extremely important role. Moreover, obtaining state independence represented a preliminary phase of the 'Great Union' of 1918, since, without an independent Romania, 'Greater Romania' could not be created either.

Please allow me to evoke the personality of King Carol I, the leader of the Romanian army in the fight for independence. In a letter to his father, he stated: 'Our independence was won/earned with our blood, and therefore we owe it only to ourselves.' He was absolutely right! The achievement of Romania's independence was the result of the efforts and sacrifices of Romanian soldiers, but also of intense diplomatic activity. In a turbulent history, as the Romanian people have constantly had, courage, devotion, and love for the homeland allowed us to assert ourselves as a nation and a state, preparing us for the subsequent European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The blood spilled by our heroes, yesterday and today, compels us and makes us responsible to take up the task of defending our country, now even more so, when Europe is once

again threatened by the spectre of war. And the defence of the country is not an individual choice, but an obligation and a necessity for each of us! A nation that honours its past and the sacrifices of its ancestors is able to assume, with more courage, its historical mission, now as well as in the future.

I believe that it is particularly important to know and promote our history, to pay tribute to our heroes and to integrate Romanian historical research into the international scientific environment as much as possible. Scientific dialogue is particularly necessary not only to understand international perceptions and approaches, but also to bring new clarifications regarding a complex historical period that laid the foundations for the development and construction of modern Romania.

In the context of new security challenges that threaten world peace, our national values and objectives, which once animated the Romanian political class and which can still be found, in a new form, in the Euro-Atlantic values, remain a constant of the development and promotion of relations between our country and the states of the free and democratic world.

I congratulate all the institutions involved in organizing this conference for their efforts. I would like to thank you all once again for your involvement and support in the preparation of this event.

I wish you all the best of luck!

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE STATE
SECRETARY AND CHIEF OF THE
DEPARTMENT FOR DEFENCE POLICY,
PLANNING AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS, SIMONA COJOCARU**

Mr. Minister,
Mr. State Counsellor,
Esteemed guests from home and abroad,

Allow me to also express my satisfaction at being here with you today at this scientific event.

Why is it important to discuss what happened 145 years ago? Undoubtedly, the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878 marked a new stage in the geopolitical reorganization of the Balkans-Black Sea region and provided an opportunity for the peoples in the region to openly assert their national independence movements. As historians, you have a better grasp of the implications and consequences of this crisis and what it meant for each of the countries involved. And surely, you will discuss these aspects in detail over the course of these two days. What I would like to emphasize is that the topic of today's activity is also relevant to the times we live in. Once again, the Black Sea region finds itself at the centre of a major geopolitical confrontation. Back then, a century and a half ago, the stakes were the control of the straits and ensuring power projection in the Mediterranean. Today, the future of the liberal order, democracy, and the international order built over the past 30 years are at stake. And the Black Sea is once again a space of con-

frontation and military aggression. Undeniably, the times are different today, but, if we look at the action agendas of some actors, both past and present, we observe a consistency in geopolitical ambitions and aggressive behaviour on the international stage.

For Romania, the Great Eastern Crisis was the long-awaited opportunity to claim its right to independence, an ideal that motivated the generation of the 1848 revolution and defined the country's national project starting from the second half of the 19th century. Romania's independence is about the Romanian army, about the sacrifices and hardships endured by soldiers, about the political and diplomatic struggle to defend the country's territorial integrity from Russia's aggressiveness, about the efforts of an entire generation of political and diplomatic decision-makers to obtain the international recognition of Romania's independence and sovereignty.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 left deep marks in the collective consciousness of the peoples from the Balkans and Southeast Europe. For the Romanian army, participation in this war was the baptism of fire and the birth of the modern Romanian army. The Romanian army did not fight against or alongside anyone, but fought for its own independence. And these things need to be known and studied, your role as historians being crucial in the correct understanding of historical events and the accurate investigation of the past. For us, today, and for future generations.

Knowledge means power. The power to respond to false narratives, to combat aggressive discourse, to promote truth, to overcome tensions or prejudices of the past, and to build dialogue and cooperation. History should not be a source of con-

flict and war, but rather it should teach us why it is important to avoid returning to the logic of threats and military force.

Furthermore, it is important, especially in moments like the ones we are experiencing these days at our borders, to be able to ensure our security and defence. It is an important lesson that our predecessors from the war of independence have taught us through their courage, determination, and devotion to the country. For their sacrifices, we owe to them to honour their memory.

I am delighted to see the presence of distinguished historians and researchers from abroad, representing Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, and Turkey. These are states directly involved, either militarily or diplomatically, in the Great Eastern Crisis of a century and a half ago. Needless to say, my gratitude extends equally to the historians from Romania. We thank all of you for accepting our invitation. As I mentioned earlier, maintaining scientific dialogue is an essential component in the development and promotion of regional and international cooperation. That is one more reason to express my satisfaction with the initiative of the Ministry of National Defence in hosting this event.

In conclusion, I would like to personally thank everyone who has been involved and supported us in organizing this event. Of course, I would mention the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History, Director Carmen Rîjnoveanu, and my colleagues at the institute who have coordinated the preparations for the event.

My thanks also go to the National Archives of Romania, the Diplomatic Archives, the National Library of Romania –

Mr. Adrian Cioroianu is with us today, “King Ferdinand I” National Military Museum and the National Museum of History. And, very importantly, the Military Publishing House.

Thank you all, and I eagerly await the results and conclusions of the scientific discussions during these two days.

I wish you success and a pleasant stay in our country!

COMUNICĂRI

PAPERS

‘A peace, I hope, with honour’..

**GREAT POWER CRISIS MANAGEMENT
DURING THE NEAR EASTERN CRISIS
(1875-1880) BETWEEN STRATEGIC
INTERESTS, HUMANITARIAN AGENDAS
AND PUBLIC OPINIONS**

Holger Afflerbach*

Abstract

The following paper examines the “Great Near Eastern Crisis” of 1875-1878 as an example of how and why an internal complex situation can develop and spread culminating, despite many efforts to contain it, in a costly and bloody war. Within the overall conflict equation, a dangerous feature of the crisis was the role of public opinion and popular sentiment that was to become a key element in shaping the policies of the main great actors involved. The 1875-1878 crisis offers insights of how European Great Power politics and their crisis mechanisms functioned, how the interaction between the powers worked and also how internal politics and the currents of public opinions influenced the decision making of the governments.

Keywords: *Eastern Question, Public Opinion, Ottoman Empire, War, Balkans, Atrocities*

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The 'Oriental' or 'Near Eastern' Question in European politics

The so-called 'Eastern Question' was, according to Ottoman historian Benjamin Fortna, 'essentially the issue of what to do with the Ottoman Empire as it shrank',¹ and the issue indeed posed a serious threat to the peace of Europe from the 18th Century to the end of the First World War. For the German Foreign Office the so-called 'Oriental' Question was a 'Russian, Turkish' question,² which was misleading insofar as it implied that it was solely a Russian and Turkish problem. In reality, it was of fundamental importance for the European states system. If all the Great Powers were interested, some more than others, in the 'Eastern Question', it was for all regional powers and people in the Balkans – Greeks, Serbs, Romanians and Montenegrins, the Ottomans themselves and the various ethnicities of European Turkey – a truly existential problem.

The Near Eastern Question concerned the future of Ottoman rule in Europe – if indeed there was a future at all – and the various means of containing, freezing or eventually solving this problem. It had three aspects that were intrinsically interwoven:

1. The first was the internal situation in the Ottoman Empire with severe economic, financial, social, religious and ethnic tensions leading periodically to rebellions, to which the central government responded by compliance or massive repression.

¹ Benjamin Fortna: *The Reign of Abdülhamid II*, Resat Kasaba (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4, Cambridge 2008, p. 38-61, p. 44.

² See, for example: Acta betreffend die Verhandlungen über die Orientalische (Russische, Türkische) Frage nach dem Abschluss des Friedens vom 30. März 1856, in: PA/AA, Berlin.

2. The second concerned the politics of the Balkan states, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, Romania, which had irredentist ambitions and were waiting for opportunities to make gains at the expense of the Ottomans. Internal unrest and rebellions inside the Ottoman Empire, in some cases stirred up and assisted by these states, were for them an opportunity to intervene in pursuit of their own objectives.

3. This led to the third and probably decisive aspect: the interest of the European Great Powers in the future of the Ottoman Empire. This was, despite the seriousness of the other aspects, probably the crucial point until the early 20th century. The internal problems of the Ottoman Empire were extremely complex and admitted of no easy solution; and even with hindsight it is very difficult to see how they could have been contained, let alone resolved. The Turks were, however, until the 'Near Eastern Crisis' 1875-78 able and strong enough to handle internal rebellions and to crush them, albeit with great cruelty. They were also able to hold their own against the Balkan states. The latter needed the military help of Great Powers to have any chance of success against the Ottomans, the fate of Greece in the 1820s and of Serbia in 1876 being striking examples, of how the Balkan states were saved from the Ottomans' retaliation only by intervention of Great Powers. This Ottoman regional superiority was lost only after the turn of the century, as events during the First Balkan War in 1912 were to show. During the 19th century, however, the interference of the Great Powers was the decisive factor that made the 'Oriental' or 'Near Eastern question' one of life and death for the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans were aware of this and tried in the 19th century quite desperately to reform and modernize and to close the economic and financial performance gap be-

tween them and the European powers (Tanzimat period, 1839-1876).³

As far as the European Great Powers were concerned, the 19th century 'Eastern Question' was the problem of a 'power vacuum' in the Balkans resulting from the rapid decline of Turkey.⁴ Some years ago Bismarck's biographer Lothar Gall compiled a list of options of what the Great Powers thought might be done to solve the 'Eastern Question,' or at least to make it more manageable:

1. The first option was the most radical: to eliminate the Ottoman Empire and to replace it with a completely new political structure. The best example of this is Catherine the Great's plan of 1781 for a revived Greek Empire but the plan came to nothing owing to Great Power competition and rivalry.

2. The second option was to guarantee the status quo of the Ottoman Empire and to integrate it somehow into the European concert, as was attempted in 1815 and in the peace treaty of Paris of 1856 after the Crimean War which 'shielded the Ottoman Empire.'⁵

3. This could be combined with a further option, namely to help the Ottomans to stabilize the empire, and keep the problem on ice for as long as possible.

4. A fourth idea was to divide the Balkans into zones of influence between the competing Great Powers, notably Austria and Russia.

³ Resat Kasaba (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Vol. 4, Cambridge 2008, here: Carter Vaughn Findley: *The Tanzimat*, p. 11-37 ; Fortna, Abdulhamid II, p. 38-61; M. Hakan Yavuz: *The transformation of "Empire" through Wars and Reforms: Integration vs. Oppression*, in: Yavuz/Sluglett, *War and Diplomacy*, p. 17-55.

⁴ Lothar Gall: *Die europäischen Mächte und der Balkan im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 1979, Vol. 228,3, pp. 551-571, p. 556 f.

⁵ Barbara Jelavich: *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question 1870-1887*, Bloomington, London 1973, p. 22.

5. A fifth idea was simply to partition Ottoman Empire between the Great Powers in the manner of the three Polish partitions. This plan was frustrated by Great Power rivalries, but it often reappeared until the end of the First World War, and notably in the 1870s.⁶

6. A final option was to accept the principle of nationalities and self-determination, abandoning the idea of Great Power preponderance and leaving the Balkans to the Balkan peoples.⁷ This might appear fair and generous, but it had, from a Great Power perspective, a number of unappealing, and even dangerous, aspects. The Powers most directly concerned, Austria Hungary and Russia, were multinational Empires themselves and therefore enemies of ideas of self-determination. They insisted on the 'schöne Vorrecht des Stärkeren' ('the beautiful privilege of the stronger'.⁸) As for the Balkan states they were rivals and tended to disregard the claims of others to self-determination if their own territorial ambitions were at stake. There was also the danger of developing a sub-system of potentially uncontrollable small and middle-sized states in the Balkans that might escape from Great Power control – as was indeed to happen during the First Balkan War of 1912.

These were the options, some of which tended to overlap, that the Great Powers contemplated on various occasions from the late 18th to the early 20th century. The Great Near Eastern Crisis of 1875-78 demonstrated that all these options

⁶ Sneh Mahajan: *British Foreign Policy 1874-1914. The Role of India*, London, New York 2002, p. 40; Marta Petricioli: *L'Italia in Asia Minore. Equilibrio mediterraneo e ambizioni imperialiste alla vigilia della prima guerra mondiale*, Firenze 1987.

⁷ Gall, *Die europäischen Mächte*, p. 567-569.

⁸ Holger Afflerbach: *Der Dreibund. Europäische Grossmacht und Allianzpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Wien, Köln, Weimar 2002, p. 821.

were contemplated at some point by the European cabinets, with some politicians, confusingly enough, favouring different options at different times. Hence, the diplomatic moves of this very complex crisis can only be understood properly if it is analysed blow by blow.

Even so, the European Powers' view throughout the crisis must be contrasted with the Ottomans' understanding of events. The government in Constantinople saw the European Powers as predators out to gain advantages by exploiting Ottoman weakness. Writing from an Ottoman perspective, Barbara Jelavich made a list of five dangers the Empire was facing in the second half of the 19th Century:

1. The Empire 'had to defend itself against the Powers who wished to conquer and annex definitive parts of its lands.'

2. 'It had to guard against a power or a group of Powers exploiting the discontent of a subject people to gain control over Ottoman territory.'

3. 'It had to prevent other Powers, principally Great Britain and Russia, from actually controlling the government itself.'

4. 'The national movements, particularly those originating in the Balkan peninsula, but also those in the Asian and African territories, had to be either suppressed or appeased to prevent the empire from simply disintegrating into its national parts.'

5. There was also the danger 'of economic domination of the empire by outside interests.'⁹

Given the complexity of the problems, the contradictory interests and the underlying rivalry between the Great Powers, the 'Near Eastern Question' was considered on all sides to be a true Pandora's box that it would be best left un-

⁹ Jelavich, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 4 f.

opened. Even so the problem was plain for all to see and periodically it pressed for a solution, between the Crimean War 1853-56 and the Balkan Wars 1912-13, and notably during the 'Great Near Eastern Crisis' 1875-78. This latter crisis will be examined here as an example of how and why the 'Pandora's box' was opened.

The 'Great Near Eastern Crisis' – a model of escalation

The 'Great Near Eastern Crisis,' a series of interwoven problems, one leading to another and threatening an ever wider conflict, started in 1875 and ended in 1878, even if its immediate aftermath lasted until 1880.¹⁰ It culminated, despite many efforts to contain it, in a costly war.

1. It started as an uprising in the Ottoman Empire, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1875, caused not only by tensions between Christian subjects and Muslim overlords, but also by poor harvests and harsh taxation which was the consequence of a serious Ottoman debt crisis ending in a state default in 1875.¹¹

2. In 1876 the rebellion spread over to other parts of the Ottoman controlled Balkans, notably the territories inhabited by Bulgarians.

¹⁰ The volume Jost Dülffer/Martin Kröger/Rolf-Harald Wippich: *Vermiedene Kriege. Deeskalation von Konflikten der Großmächte zwischen Krimkrieg und Erstem Weltkrieg (1856-1914)* (Avoided Wars, 1856-1914), Munich 1997, has also a chapter on the Near Eastern Crisis: Russisches Taktieren und britische Politik der Stärke. Krisendiplomatie und der russisch-türkische Krieg 1877/78, p. 221-248. See also for an overview: Francis Roy Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European State Systems, 1814-1914*, Harlow 2005, pp. 197-211; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1915*, Oxford 1988, pp. 228-254; William Langer: *European Alliances and Alignments 1871-1890*, New York 1964, 59-170.

¹¹ Fortna, *Abdülhamid II*, p. 44.

3. The uprisings were violently suppressed by the Ottomans who were able to beat the insurgents, but were widely and severely criticised for their methods ('Bulgarian horrors'). By March 1876 about 156.000 refugees from the provinces had fled to the neighbouring territories of Serbia, Montenegro and Austria-Hungary.¹²

4. In the late spring of 1876 the crisis escalated further when Serbia and Montenegro declared war to the Ottomans.

5. Serbia's defeat on the battlefield despite massive assistance from Russian volunteers, compromised Russian prestige and made the intervention of the Tsarist Empire more likely.

6. In the first part of the crisis the Great Powers had tried to settle the problem by putting pressure on Turkey to implement reforms in the Balkans and by protecting the insurgents from Turkish retaliation. The negotiations between Turkey and the powers failed for a number of reasons, one being that the Ottomans considered the powers to be biased towards the insurgents. Another problem was the volatile internal situation in Turkey. Sultan Abdülaziz was deposed in 1876, his successor, Murad V, lasted only three months and was replaced by Abdülhamid II, while the Empire got a constitution. (Already the Empire had had to declare bankruptcy in 1875, upsetting its international debtors.) The wider international situation apart from the Near Eastern Question, especially the rivalry between Britain and the Three Emperors League, did not help either. The British government did not support a reform agenda which the Three Emperors' league tried to enforce on Turkey (Andrassy note) and whose acceptance might have prevented further escalation. Central to British politics was, in this case, a hostility towards the dominance of the German-Russian-Aus-

¹² Langer, *Alliances*, p. 81.

trian alliance;¹³ and knowing of this the Ottomans felt encouraged not to yield to the pressure.¹⁴

7. Finally Russia declared war in 1877 (the Ottomans called it the '93 (1293) war')¹⁵, followed by Romania which gained its full independence from the Porte.

8. The war ended with a Russian victory against the Ottomans who were forced to sign the preliminary peace treaty of San Stefano. It was a victory for the Russians, but contradicted a number of previous Russian agreements with other powers, like Austria and Great Britain, who saw in it a clear breach of promises, and indeed, talked of going to war. At this, the Russian government backed down and agreed to a revision of the treaty at the Congress of Berlin in June 1878.

To call these events a 'crisis' is something of an understatement. They resulted, after all in a bloody war, that cost the lives of more than 200,000 soldiers and that might have escalated further. If other Great Powers such as Great Britain or Austria-Hungary had intervened to stop the Russians, the crisis would have widened into something resembling the Crimean War or perhaps even a continent-wide conflagration.

True, the crisis and its climax, the war, were the result of a mixture of uncontrollable local events, complex diplomatic interactions, mistrust and competition between the European governments and the uncertainties of war. The European governments were reacting to events in an ad hoc manner rather than pursuing carefully premeditated plans. Yet even so, a dangerous feature of the crisis was the role of public opinion and popular sentiment. Indeed, they influenced the policies of two

¹³ Taylor, *Struggle*, p. 237.

¹⁴ Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 38.

¹⁵ Fortna, *op.cit.*

of the three Great Powers most deeply involved, Great Britain and Russia, to such a degree that they could be described as key elements in the crisis.

Russia and the Near Eastern Crisis

To start with Russia: There were groups of activists, such as the 'Moscow Slavic Benevolent Society' founded in 1858, and journalists like Katkov or Aksakov, who always regarded Russia as the leading Slav power who ought to work to free the Balkan Slavs from Ottoman rule.¹⁶ Other high ranking individuals, such as Count Ignatyev, ambassador in Constantinople, or the Tsar's brother, Grand Duke Michael, cherished nationalist and panslavist ideas.¹⁷ When Balkan events led Belgrade to declare war on the Ottomans, Russian pan-Slavs sent 4.000 Russian volunteers to help Serbia.¹⁸ The Russian general Mikhail Chernyaev, the 'hero of Tashkent', commanded the Serbian army, Russian committees collected money for Serbia and there is no doubt that a significant portion of Russian public opinion felt deeply engaged in the struggle of Christian orthodox Slavic brothers against brutal Ottoman repression. The more aggressive ones even dreamed of a Russian-controlled state in the Southern Balkans.¹⁹ A number of notables testified to this feeling of solidarity: Tchaikovsky composed the 'Marche Slave' to help a pro-Slavic charity,²⁰ while Katkov re-

¹⁶ Barbara Jelavich: *St. Petersburg and Moscow. Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1814-1974*, Bloomington, London 1974, p.174 f.

¹⁷ *Idem*, p. 176.

¹⁸ Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

²⁰ Adrian Ruprecht: *The Great Eastern Crisis (1875-1878) as a global humanitarian moment*, in: *Journal of Global History* (2021), 16:2, p. 159-184, p. 170.

fused to print the last chapter of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* because Tolstoy had criticised Russians volunteering for Serbia,²¹ and the Tsar's own son and heir, later Alexander III, was – unlike his cautious and hesitant father – bellicose and strongly influenced by pan Slavic ideas.²² Russian volunteers, especially officers, flooded into Serbia and their number exceeded that of the entire Serbian officer corps (while there were only two battalions of Russian privates.) The Serbian Foreign minister, Jovan Ristic, argued that the Russian volunteers were simply prolonging the war, and that if Russia wanted to help Serbia, it should itself declare war on Turkey.²³ While Russian officers and intellectuals demanded action and war, the Russian government, especially Tsar Alexander II, and his Foreign Minister Alexander Gorchakov, still sought to avoid war, as was indeed widely known abroad.²⁴ Research on the topic, for example by Dietrich Geyer, shows that the Russian government was all too aware of its own weakness.²⁵ Remembering the Crimean disaster, they wanted to avoid a conflict and to focus on internal reforms. As Jomini, Gorchakov's assistant, wrote in 1876: 'What is now necessary is the development of [Russia's] ... internal life, her productive resources, her prosperity, her culture, her commerce, her industry – all things which require peace. Her foreign policy should thus be purely preventative

²¹ Ruprecht, *Great Eastern Crisis*, p. 170.

²² V.A. Astonkov: *Crown Prince Aleksandr Aleksandrovich during the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878*, in: *Russian Studies in History*, 57:3-4, 220-244.

²³ Seton-Watson, *Disraeli*, p. 95.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

²⁵ Dietrich Geyer: *Russian Imperialism. The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy 1860-1914*, Leamington Spa, Hamburg, New York, 1987, p. 64-85.

and defensive.²⁶ The finance minister, von Reutern, too, protested against waging war while the army was in the middle of a major reorganisation and its leadership felt ill prepared for action.²⁷ Even so, events were pushing reluctant Russian government towards intervention.

An important reason were tedious and fruitless negotiations between the Great Powers and the Ottomans in Constantinople. The Turks replaced the Sultan and rejected the Powers' recommendation for reforms, complaining that they favoured the insurgents and the defeated Serbs; British diplomacy stiffened the Turkish resolve to withstand the pressure.²⁸

This pushed the Russian government forward who saw an opportunity – or a convenient pretext – to act in the name of Europe. As the Tsar wrote to his uncle, Wilhelm I, he was acting on behalf of humanity: 'Puisque l'Europe ne veut pas accomplir ce qu'elle reconnaît juste, humain et nécessaire, je suis décidé à le faire seul.'²⁹

This was more than mere opportunism: the public mood demanding intervention was probably the decisive factor. As Russian volunteers were engaged in Serbia and its defeat compromised Russia,³⁰ the Russian government slithered reluctantly into the war with the Ottomans. Russian military preparations started on 1 November 1876 with a partial mobilization of the army.³¹ The Tsar continued to claim the moral high ground in his declaration of war: 'All of our loyal citizens are

²⁶ Barbara Jelavich: *St. Petersburg and Moscow. Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1814-1974*, Bloomington, London 1974, p. 173.

²⁷ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

²⁹ Dülffer, Kröger, Wippich, *Vermiedene Kriege*, p. 229.

³⁰ Bridge, *Great Powers*, p. 202 f.

³¹ Dülffer, Kröger, Wippich, *op.cit.*

aware of the empathy with which we have always treated the fate of the oppressed Christian population of Turkey. Today the entire Russian nation expresses its readiness to relieve the plight of Christians in the Balkan Peninsula.³²

One key argument to explain Russia's action was 'social imperialism'; a weak government acting because it did not dare to defy public pressure. The war started slowly and the Russian army, not initially superior to its opponents, needed until December 1877 to conquer the Balkan fortress of Plevna. In the end, however, the Tsarist Army reached the outskirts of Constantinople and the Turks signed an armistice. Russian losses had been very significant, however, with 120.000 soldiers dead, which does much to explain the massive public discontent over the eventual results of the Congress of Berlin.³³

Britain and the 'Near Eastern Crisis'

A comparable and yet very different mechanism was at work in Britain. The public was appalled to hear in late spring 1876 reports of brutal Ottoman repression of the Balkan uprisings, such as those published in the *London Daily News* on 23 June. They described the transgressions of Turkish irregular units (bashi-bazouks) in Bulgaria and reported of thousands of homicides and babies 'spitted on bayonets'.³⁴ The reports of atrocities committed in Batak were especially sensational; Turkish irregulars had suppressed local rebellions with uncontrolled violence, ending with the raping, beheading, paling,

³² *The Liberation of Bulgaria and the role of media – History and religion*, <https://bnr.bg/en/post/100664617/the-liberation-of-bulgaria-and-the-role-of-media>.

³³ Yavuz, *Transformation*, p. 26.

³⁴ Ruprecht, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

roasting and burning of villagers.³⁵ Traditionally, Britain favoured and helped the Ottomans as a gatekeeper of the Straits against Russia, but these positive affiliations had already been damaged by Turkey's defaulting on its debts to Western and also British investors.³⁶

The immediate consequence was massive public outrage and a debate in Parliament on 26 June 1876 with the government promising to investigate the events. Only a few tried to defend the Turkish actions. Admiral Slade, a former British naval advisor to the Turks, wrote in *The Times* on 22 August 1876 that the Porte 'had neither the leisure nor the means to be scrupulous in its choice of agents' and that the prompt stamping out of the rising had averted 'a war of races, intensified by religious rancour.'³⁷ The general reaction of the British public was very different, condemning the atrocities sharply and criticising the British government for being at least indirectly involved in the atrocities by holding to its traditional alliance with Turkey. This was now put in question. In a public letter on 4th of August, 1876, Lord Russell demanded that Britain should use the fleet to insist on an 'instant termination to the atrocities.' Should this not work, he suggested a fundamental change in British Near Eastern Policy: 'Ultimately, if we cannot keep the Turks from being barbarous and cruel, we might ally ourselves with Russia and concert means to accomplish our objects.'³⁸

The debate was given a further and mighty impetus when William Gladstone, then in opposition, wrote in a few days

³⁵ James J. Reid: *Batak 1876: A massacre and its significance*, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* (2000), 2(3), p. 375-409.

³⁶ Langer, *Alliances*, p.

³⁷ Seton-Watson, *Disraeli*, p 71.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

the pamphlet ‘The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East’ and published it on 6 September 1876.³⁹ He strongly condemned the Turkish repression of Balkan uprisings and questioned whether it was morally acceptable for Britain to remain allied to a power that massacred its Christian subjects, and demanded an end to the Ottoman administration of the territories in question. 200.000 copies of the pamphlet were sold in a month.⁴⁰ Disraeli’s government however saw in Gladstone’s views a populist and dangerous threat to British strategic interests, and the prime minister, the real target of Gladstone’s crusade, caused an uproar when he dismissed the information about Balkan massacres as ‘coffeehouse babble’. Gladstone’s pamphlet was for him ‘vindictive and ill-written ... of all the Bulgarian horrors perhaps the greatest.’⁴¹ Disraeli was above all concerned to preserve the alliance with the Ottomans for strategic reasons, to keep the Russians out of the Mediterranean.⁴² For him the Mediterranean was ‘one of the great highways of our Indian Empire’ that ‘should be free and secure.’ He was even inclined, against the more cautious ministers of his own government, to go to war against Russia, if necessary.⁴³

³⁹ L 94. William Ewart Gladstone: *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (J. Murray, 1876) <https://archive.org/details/bulgarianhorror-01gladgoog>; Cameron Whitehead: *Reading behind the Lines: Marginalia, W.E. Gladstone and the International History of the Bulgarian Horrors*, in: *The International History Review*, Vol. 37:4, p. 864-886.

⁴⁰ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

⁴¹ Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone: A Biography*. New York 2002, pp. 399 ff.

⁴² Richard T. Shannon: *Gladstone and British Balkan Policy*, in: Ralph Melville/Hans Jürgen Schröder (eds.): *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878. Die Politik der Grossmächte und die Probleme der Modernisierung in Südosteuropa in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1982, p. 163-178, p. 175.

⁴³ Good summary: Richard Millman: *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878*, Oxford 1979, p. 452-461. Bendor Grosvenor: *Britain’s most*

However, the line eventually adopted by Disraeli, Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, and his successor Lord Salisbury was complex and contradictory and not free of dramatic turns.⁴⁴ For while Disraeli, primarily interested in strategy and British prestige, was ready to go to war if necessary, Derby's priority was to preserve peace.

As regards the question of whether the reports of the massacres were exaggerated or biased, opinions were and remain divided.⁴⁵ A key role was played by the reports of the American war correspondent MacGahan who wrote for the *Daily News*, and the American diplomat Eugene Schuyler who investigated the massacres. He estimated that at least 15,000 persons were killed,⁴⁶ whereas British diplomats in the region normally downplayed the issue and favoured the Turks.⁴⁷ While reports of the massacres were biased and massively filtered by the views of European and American observers, there was still ample evidence that the Turks had used brutal violence to suppress the rebellion. An estimate of 23 June 1876, compiled by a British Vice-Consul, spoke of similar numbers

isolationist foreign Secretary: The Fifteenth Earl and the Eastern Crisis, in: Geoffrey Hicks (ed.): *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820-1920*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2001, p. 129-169.

⁴⁴ Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, p. 452-461.

⁴⁵ A conference which was scheduled to be held in Batak on 18 May 2007, organized by Ulf Brunnbauer and Martine Baleva ('Feindbild Islam – Geschichte und Gegenwart antiislamischer Stereotype in Bulgarien am Beispiel des Mythos vom Massaker in Batak') ('The Image of the Islamic Enemy – the Past and Present of Anti-Islamic stereotypes in Bulgaria as exemplified by the Myth of the Batak Massacre') had to be cancelled because of massive protests of Bulgarian historians.

⁴⁶ Januarius Aloysius MacGahan: *The Turkish Atrocities In Bulgaria, Letters of the Special Commissioner of the "Daily News"* J.A. MacGahan, Esq., with an Introduction & Mr. Schuyler's Preliminary Report, London 1876.

⁴⁷ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 58-61.

to Schuyler's: 'some 12,000 innocent men, women and children have been massacred, hundreds of young women carried off and dishonoured and some 60 villages more or less completely burnt, and the country ... plundered.'⁴⁸ Other observers felt that many crimes were not even reported. A British officer who accompanied the Ottoman army in its campaign of 1877 reported that numerous massacres had occurred, especially in the Tunja valley: 'The enormity of the crimes committed in this and other districts made it difficult to credit them. But the proofs were undeniable; and I believe, so far from the reports being generally exaggerated, that a large proportion of them have never been brought to light at all.'⁴⁹ In short, the reports of atrocities, even if they were one-sided, were mainly correct.

It is interesting to see how the mechanism of mobilizing humanitarian protests worked in Great Britain. Gladstone was a sworn and life-long campaigner against repression and violence; already decades previously he had fought against the situation in prisons in the Kingdom of Naples. Now, in the case of the 'Bulgarian atrocities', he was still driven by a strong humanitarian agenda. Even so, a careful analysis of Gladstone's reading shows that he was far from well informed on events on the Balkans.⁵⁰ A key issue – maybe, the key issue – was that he was a devout Christian, as were most of the protesters in Great Britain.⁵¹ Solidarity of Christians with Christian victims of Ottoman repression in the Balkans seemed to be the fundamental reason why the protest assumed such proportions that

⁴⁸ Philipp Dupuis, Vice-Consul at Philippopolis, 23.6.1876, quoted by Seton-Watson, *Disraeli*, p. 65.

⁴⁹ Reid, *Batak 1876*, p. 392.

⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Reading beside the lines*, passim, esp. p. 882 f.

⁵¹ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 83-87, on the reaction of the churches in Britain.

Disraeli and the government, already subject to severe criticism for their allegedly callous attitude towards the 'horrors', felt that they could do nothing to oppose the general mood, at least for the moment: 'When the country goes mad ..., explanation is hopeless, for a time.'⁵²

Gladstone's brochure is, to modern eyes, not so much a human rights programme in a modern sense, as a diatribe against the Turks⁵³ with a strong sense of civilizational and racial superiority and racist undertones.⁵⁴ His agenda and demands were unclear and led to misunderstandings.⁵⁵ The mobilisation of public opinion in Britain was based on Christian solidarity and sympathy for the victims of atrocities as 'imagined communities' of fellows in suffering.⁵⁶ By contrast, while violence in the Balkans had not spared Muslims, reports of cruelties committed by Christians against Muslims had been given much less attention.⁵⁷ Bulgarian insurgents had 'cut down helpless and unarmed Turks in the most ruthless fashion.'⁵⁸ Indeed, in other parts of the British Empire, this factor of religious compassion produced very different results. Reports of Christian violence against Muslims in the Balkans aroused widespread sympathy in the Muslim world including British India, where the Muslims solidarized entirely with their fellow Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. In August 1876, Indian newspapers announced that Russia "«had created a rebellion in the northern

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁵³ See also Ruprecht, *Great Eastern Crisis*, p. 168.

⁵⁴ Whitehead, *op.cit.*, p. 881, 882.

⁵⁵ Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983.

⁵⁷ Fortna, *Abdülhamid II*, p. 45.

⁵⁸ Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

provinces of European Turkey» and was threatening not just to invade the Ottoman Empire, but to «destroy Islam».⁵⁹ A year later an Indian newspaper commented that the ‘cruelties of the Bashi Bazouks fall into insignificance compared with the cruelties of the Cossacks.’⁶⁰ Money was collected for Muslim victims of Christian violence. The contributions raised in England for Christian victims were only slightly larger (250.000 £) than the collection for Muslim victims in much less wealthier India (227.509 £).⁶¹

Although demonstrations of Muslim solidarity in British India had no perceptible impact on European politics during the crisis, it was important inside the Ottoman Empire. Large numbers of volunteers ‘flocked to Constantinople to join the army’⁶² and the Ottoman army, far from being the ‘sick man’, was able to defeat the Serbs.

The conflicting views of Gladstone and Disraeli had far-reaching and contradictory consequences for international politics during the crisis. The prime minister’s anti-Russian attitude and the pro-Turkish stance of British diplomacy encouraged the Ottomans to reject compromises, trusting in English assistance,⁶³ while Gladstone and the protesters gave the Russians the feeling that Britain might stay neutral and encouraged them to risk a war with Turkey without having to fear immediate British intervention.⁶⁴ Together, both factors perhaps made the outbreak of the war between Russia and the Ottomans more likely. On the other hand, Disraeli’s very firm

⁵⁹ Ruprecht, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

⁶¹ Ruprecht, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

⁶² Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁶³ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

⁶⁴ Whitehead, *op.cit.*, p. 880, esp. p. 883; Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

anti-Russian attitude perhaps brought St. Petersburg to agree to revise the peace treaty of San Stefano.

Disraeli had lamented at the height of the atrocities debate in September 1876 that British public opinion was being roused by talk of injustice, and that some unscrupulous demagogues – i.e. Gladstone – were exploiting these sentiments for their ‘sinister ends’. He nevertheless insisted on standing up for ‘the permanent interests of the country’ and the ‘maintenance of peace’; for him it was imperative to stick with Britain’s strategy of protecting its interests in the Mediterranean, as abandoning them would provoke dangers ‘worse than any of the Bulgarian atrocities.’⁶⁵

Even so, the campaign against the Bulgarian horrors had significant effects on British politics. It convinced the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby, ‘that continued support of Turkey was unwise and immoral’, ‘ultimately allowing the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8 and hastening the collapse of Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkan Peninsula.’⁶⁶ Britain was “neutralized by the surge of popular opinion against the «terrible Turk»”.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Benjamin Disraeli’s line prevailed as the agitation against the horrors lost traction and the resolutions put by Gladstone to the House of Commons were rejected.⁶⁸ One reason may be that nearly two years had passed between the debate on the atrocities and the Congress of Berlin; even more, that Russia’s military successes against Turkey had changed the public mood in Britain entirely. Now Gladstone even needed police protection against the ‘patriotic

⁶⁵ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

⁶⁶ Whitehead, *op.cit.*, p. 883.

⁶⁷ Fortna, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ Whitehead, *op.cit.*, p. 880-1.

mob.⁶⁹ Disraeli was able to steer his course, albeit with running a significant risk of a war with Russia.⁷⁰ At the end, however, Derby's successor, Lord Salisbury, 'could not stomach ... an alliance with, or a war for, Ottoman rule over European Christians.'⁷¹ He refused to render active assistance to the Ottomans, except when it was bound by rigid conditions, and 'was open and honest in his distaste for the Turks.'⁷² Therefore, Salisbury's attitude symbolises a compromise between Disraeli's pursuit of British strategic interests and Gladstone's humanitarian agenda.

In sum, therefore, in the Russian case, it appears that ambition and power, but more importantly a feeling of solidarity based on cultural and especially religious affinities were the main motives for starting the war. A group of influential social activists forced a reluctant government into far reaching actions. In the British case, feelings of solidarity, this time based on religion, were equally important, with the activists demanding a fundamental turn in British foreign politics and the abandonment of the traditional role of protector of Turkey. In the event, a compromise was reached: assistance for the Ottomans was limited, but the government line prevailed to stop the Russians from gaining too much power in South-Eastern Europe.

The other Great Powers during the Near Eastern Crisis

The attitudes and objectives of the third Great Power with direct interests in the region, the Habsburg Monarchy, in the 'Great Near Eastern Crisis' were, as always in the Austro-Hun-

⁶⁹ Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 43.

⁷⁰ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 570.

⁷¹ Millman, *Britain*, p. 456 f.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 458.

garian case, complex and contradictory. The Viennese government was torn between imperialism, the desire to acquire Balkan territories for strategic and dynastic reasons, and the thought that a feeble Ottoman Empire was probably the most comfortable Balkan neighbour possible, at any rate preferable to irredentist Balkan states or a peninsula under Russian-Orthodox control. The foreign minister, Julius Count Andrassy, was pro-Turkish, anti-Russian and anti-Slav,⁷³ and during the 1870s torn between wanting to preserve Ottoman rule in the Balkans, even to assist the Turks; to give Bosnia to Serbia, and the desire to make gains for Austria-Hungary.⁷⁴ Whereas the Emperor and the military were clear in their desire to acquire Bosnia for strategic reasons,⁷⁵ the Austrian liberals did not want to incur the huge expense of occupying and administering formerly Turkish provinces.⁷⁶ The government was also against an independent Bosnian state, fearing perpetual strife between religiously and socially completely diverse populations on their southern border. They agreed that 'Bosnia had to be Turkish or Austrian; a third possibility simply does not exist.'⁷⁷ In the end, Andrassy concluded during the Near Eastern Crisis a number of agreements with Russia, such as the Reichstadt and Budapest Conventions, in an attempt to regulate the division of potential Balkan gains between both powers. As

⁷³ Bridge, *Great Powers*, p. 199; Taylor, *Struggle*, p. 231.

⁷⁴ Haselsteiner: *Zur Haltung der Donaumonarchie in der orientalischen Frage*, in: Melville/Schröder, *Der Berliner Kongress*, p. 227-243, p. 231 f., 237.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

⁷⁶ Lothar Höbelt: *The Bosnian Crisis Revisited: Why did Austrian Liberals oppose Andrassy?*, in: Lothar Höbelt/Thomas G. Otte (eds.): *A Living Anachronism? European Diplomacy and the Habsburg Monarchy*, Wien 2010, p. 177-198.

⁷⁷ Bridge, *op.cit.*, p. 200.

Andrassy had all the time to bear in mind also the attitudes of other powers, notably Great Britain and Germany, he was for good reasons hesitant to take the initiative, so much so that it started to look as if he was awaiting for a formal Turkish or international invitation to take over the provinces. Bismarck made a crude joke: 'I have heard of people refusing to eat their pigeon unless it was shot and roasted for them, but I have never heard of anyone refusing to eat it unless his jaws were forced open and it was pushed down his throat.'⁷⁸ In the end, Austria-Hungary acted and occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the Austro-Hungarian case, too, public opinion played an important role; the 'Bulgarian horrors' made it impossible for the Turkophiles to push for intervention in favour of Turkey, even if there were some pro-Turkish demonstrations. The ruling class was divided, but the Emperor and the military, driven by imperialist designs, were able to push through their agenda, which benefitted anyway from the overall course of the crisis.

As for Germany, Bismarck's attitude is common knowledge. Initially Bismarck seemed almost pleased about developments; 'at last something is happening and we do not stand at the centre.'⁷⁹ The 'war-in-sight' crisis of 1875 had been a setback for Bismarck, and he was relieved that he and Germany were no longer the focus of European attention. As for his famous remark that the entire Eastern question was not worth the 'bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier', this did not mean that he thought that the Balkan and the Ottoman Empire

⁷⁸ Sean McMeekin: *Benevolent Contempt. Bismarck's Ottoman Policy*, in: M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett (ed.): *War and Diplomacy. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the treaty of Berlin*, Salt Lake City 2011, p. 79-97, p. 84 f.; Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

⁷⁹ Andreas Hillgruber: *Südosteuropa in Bismarcks Aussenpolitik*, in: Melville/Schröder, *Der Berliner Kongress, 179-188*, p. 182.

were worthless,⁸⁰ but they were for him completely subordinate to the need to preserve peace between the Great Powers. 'Our main interest', he declared, 'is not to implement this or that reform in the Turkish Empire, but the way it influences the position of the friendly powers towards us and each other. The question as to whether we come to an agreement on the Oriental mayhem with England, still more with Austria, and most of all with Russia, is for the future of Germany indefinitely more important than Turkey's treatment of its subjects and its relations with the European powers.'⁸¹ His priorities were clear, probably the clearest of all those governments involved. He considered a war between the Great powers as a calamity, and the worst calamity a war between his allies, the Austrians and Russians, forcing Germany to choose between them.⁸² His policy was not driven by humanitarian considerations, except the avoidance of a great war. To prevent that from happening, he tried from the beginning to appease the rivalling powers by offering compensations, which had to be provided by the Ottomans – Britain should take Egypt, Austria Bosnia and Hercegovina, Russia Southern Bessarabia.⁸³ Later he suggested that

⁸⁰ Sean McMeekin: *op.cit.*, in: Yavuz/Sluglett, *op.cit.*, p. 79-97.

⁸¹ McMeekin, *Benevolent Contempt*, p. 82 ("...unser Hauptinteresse nicht in dieser oder jener Gestaltung der Verhältnisse des türkischen Reichs liegt, sondern in der Stellung, in welche die uns befreundeten Mächte zu uns und untereinander gebracht werden. Die Frage, ob wir uns über die orientalischen Wirren mit England, mehr noch mit Österreich, am meisten aber mit Russland in die dauernde Verstimmung gerathen, ist für Deutschlands Zukunft unendlich viel wichtiger, als alle Verhältnisse der Türkei zu ihren Untherthanen und zu den europäischen Mächten." Christoph Nonn, *Bismarck*, p. 295).

⁸² McMeekin, *Benevolent Contempt*, p. 82.

⁸³ Hillgruber, *Südosteuropa in Bismarcks Aussenpolitik*, p. 182 f; Taylor, *Struggle*, p. 235; Richard Millman: *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878*, Oxford 1979, p. 306.

Tunisia should go to France while Derby and Bismarck offered Albania to Italy.⁸⁴

Bismarck had clear objectives, but still he was criticised by some historians, like for example Medlicott. He claims that Bismarck was unstable and temperamentally unsuited to be 'the honest broker' between the powers. Consumed by his chronic distrust and suspicion he committed mistakes, the greatest one being that in the end he lost patience with Russia and concluded an alliance with Austria which did not allow him later to balance the Austrians and Russians as he had previously done.⁸⁵

The role of France had been given much less attention than that of other powers. The French government was generally conciliatory and well-meaning, sceptical about Russian policy in the Near Eastern crisis and worried that the conflict might escalate.⁸⁶ At the same time, reports of the horrors, and the Ottoman financial default influenced also French investors who held 40% of Turkish bonds (British investors 30%).⁸⁷ Generally, the French tried to stay neutral and to mediate, agreeing to the various reform proposals brought forward by Russia, Austria and Germany. Their caution was also attributable to the international situation; the two Powers which France needed for its security against Germany, Britain and Russia, were antagonistic. Last but not least, the French agreed that the peace conference should take place in Berlin, and acknowledged therefore the European power shift from Paris, the place of the peace

⁸⁴ T. Palamenghi-Crispi (ed.): *Die Memoiren Francesco Crispis*, Berlin 1912, p. 32, 72.

⁸⁵ W. Medlicott: *The Congress of Berlin and after*, London 1963, p. 365-403.

⁸⁶ Dülffer, *Vermiedene Kriege*, p. 229.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 228.

negotiations after the Crimean War.⁸⁸ Originally the French disliked the policy of compensations – the spoils of war for Russia, the Austrian gains in Bosnia, and the handing over of Cyprus to Britain, as an Ottoman remuneration for London's help during the crisis.⁸⁹ When France was invited by Bismarck and others to take Tunisia, they responded positively in 1881. This move was going to alienate the Italians and prepare a major shift in European politics with Italy seeking Austrian and German assistance which led to the conclusion of the Triple Alliance in 1882.⁹⁰

Italy, represented in Berlin by its foreign minister Count Corti, was oscillating between neutrality, a cautious policy of 'clean hands'⁹¹ and 'amici con tutti' and the beliefs of the 'sinistra' in the ideas of Mazzini and Garibaldi and the principle of self-determination for the Balkan people. True, some politicians had wanted to get a compensation from Austria for its Balkan gains, and Count Corti was afterwards criticised for his policy of 'empty hands'. But the attempt of Francesco Crispi, the president of the Parliament, to enlist Bismarck in a grand design at Austria's expense, came to nothing.⁹²

Conclusion: 'A peace I hope with honour'

When Disraeli returned from the Congress of Berlin in summer 1878, he declared to the crowd in front of Downing Street 10: 'Lord Salisbury and I have brought you back peace—

⁸⁸ Immanuel Geiss: *Der Berliner Kongress – eine historische Retrospektive*, in: Melville/Schröder, *Der Berliner Kongress*, p. 31-49, p. 48 f.

⁸⁹ Mahajan, *op.cit.*, p. 47; Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 152, 159.

⁹⁰ Afflerbach, *Dreibund*.

⁹¹ Langer, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

⁹² T. Palamenghi-Crispi (ed.): *Die Memoiren Francesco Crispi*, Berlin 1912, p. 33 f.

but a peace I hope with honour.⁹³ It was not a perfect settlement, but it was a peace which was going to last longer than the second time a British Prime Minister used a similar phrase of ‘peace for our time’.

The Great Near Eastern Crisis 1875-78 offers insights of how European Great Power politics and their crisis mechanisms functioned, how the interaction between the powers worked and also how internal politics and the currents of public opinions influenced the decision making of the governments.

1. In many cases, government policies were essentially reactive. As Gorchakov observed: ‘There are two ways of dealing with the Eastern Question. First, a complete reconstruction or second, a mere replastering which would keep matters together for another term of years. No one could possibly wish for a complete settlement – everyone must wish to put it off as long as possible.’⁹⁴ The crisis did not start because one of the European governments pushed forward aggressively. They were all aware of the dangers and complexities of the Eastern question and were often simply reacting, either to events created by others in the Balkans, or to pressure coming from their own internal politics.

2. It is important to highlight the attempt by all governments to control political dynamics. There was a strong and practically universal desire to prevent the crisis from escalating into a Great Power conflict. Bismarck favoured a situation where the other Great Powers were bound by rivalry at the periphery to be unable to unite against Germany; but he did not

⁹³ Stanley Weintraub: *Disraeli: A Biography*, Boston 1993, p. 597.

⁹⁴ A.J.P. Taylor: *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, Oxford 1971, p. 228 f.

want these rivalries to escalate into a major war, especially one which would oblige Germany to choose between Austria and Russia. Indeed, Bismarck's attitude was more the rule than the exception; the Austrians wanted to avoid a conflict with Russia; the Russian government wanted to avoid a war altogether, and at least a war with other great powers such as Austria or Great Britain. Nor did the government in London wish to intervene, even if Disraeli, perhaps the most willing of all those concerned to risk escalating the crisis, used very bellicose language against Russia.

3. Interaction between the Great Powers influenced the outcome of the crisis, but the start of their involvement was the result of internal pressures. Currents of public opinion, more precisely, ideas, ideals, and especially feelings of solidarity based on religious beliefs were a key element to set things in motion. Indeed, religion played a very important role in mobilizing public opinion. For contemporaries religion was, as a thoughtful article by Ruprecht argues, more than 'having a specific personal faith'. 'They saw themselves as part of an organic, trans-temporal entity, a sort of religious civilization... Religion became an important and heavily contested badge of identity.'⁹⁵ 'Humanitarian narratives were at their most effective when the victims were portrayed as being embedded in exactly the sort of nexus of social relations as those of their readers and auditors.'⁹⁶ Categories of religion, nation, and a sense of belonging to a specific affective community played a role in creating a framework for foreign policy.⁹⁷ This means:

⁹⁵ Ruprecht, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 165.

⁹⁷ Ebd.

The 'Christian powers' acted the way they did because an influential part of their 'political classes' demanded it.⁹⁸

4. At the same time, events demonstrated the political dominance of Europe as the very strong pro-Ottoman movement in British India remained without visible consequences for British policy during the crisis.

5. The solidarity with the victims created strong conflicts between traditional 'strategic' interests and a humanitarian agenda, especially in the Russian and British cases. Contemporaries noted the conflict between British 'interests' and 'civilization and humanity'.⁹⁹ This conflict had significant impact on international politics, but proved to be fluid and unstable. In later stages of the crisis open jingoistic movements were very important, in Russia as well as in Britain.

6. Last but not least: European concert diplomacy worked only in conjunction with previous or simultaneous agreements between the powers directly involved and the peace was in fact preserved by a very complex multiplicity of such agreements – an argument that could only be touched on here, and must remain the prerogative and legitimation of diplomatic history old style.

7. Great Power diplomacy during the crisis showed a mix between compromises and deterrence, and maybe they got it right this time, in a way described by Churchill in 1938: 'I have always held the view that the maintenance of peace depends upon the accumulation of deterrents against the aggressor, coupled with a sincere effort to redress grievances.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 128

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 566.

¹⁰⁰ HANSARD 1803–2005 →1930s →1938 →October 1938 →5 October 1938 →Commons Sitting. Policy of His Majesty's Government. HC Deb 05 October 1938 vol. 339 cc362; Seton-Watson, Disraeli, p. 490.

8. There was a general desire to uphold the balance of power: if a Great Power seemed about to make gains, the others tried to stop it, or made an effort to get a compensation. The Near Eastern Crisis shows therefore some mechanisms of European politics which operated also on other occasions, the danger being less original initiatives of the powers but reactions to events in terms of a balance of power mentality which led to escalation and open and aggressive imperialism. Compensations were a very prominent feature of resolving such crises, and on the occasion of the Great Eastern Crisis, the bill was passed on by the Powers to the Ottomans.

THE “EASTERN CRISIS” AND THE HABSBURG MONARCHY 1866/1875-1878

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of the Habsburg monarchy in the dynamics of the Eastern Crisis and its effects on the international political system.

Keywords: *Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, Danubian Principalities, Chancellor Friedrich Ferdinand Graf von Beust, League of the Three Emperors*

Preliminary note

The so-called “Eastern Crisis” of 1875-1878/79 and its effect on the subsequent development of the Habsburg monarchy has been the subject of controversial discussion, both by contemporaries and retrospectively, especially with regard to the further crises, *caesuras* and turning points in Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) foreign policy¹. Undoubtedly, after a

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¹ Allgemein zur österreichischen Außenpolitik: Francis Roy Bridge: *From Sadowa to Sarajewo. The foreign policy of Austria-Hungary 1666–1914*, London 1972; Barbara Jelavich: *The Habsburg Empire in European affairs 1814–1918*, Chicago 1969; Theodor von Sossnosky: *Die Balkanpolitik Österreich-Ungarns seit 1866*, Stuttgart 1913/14; Enno E. Kraehe: *Foreign*

phase of continuous territorial losses and constant weakening of foreign policy, Austria had succeeded in presenting itself (again) as equal to the other European great powers in the context of the Congress of Berlin of 1878; it had also achieved territorial acquisitions through the conceded occupation of the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, Vienna's expansion in the Balkans, even at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, whose continued existence and integrity was to be (and indeed should have been) of great importance to Austria-Hungary, can also be seen as one of the triggering factors for the further crises of 1885/1886, 1897, 1908/1909, 1912/1913 and, of course, 1914, which were related to the increasing decay of the European system of pentarchy.

It became evident that the strength of the Habsburg monarchy, which had been acquired after the end of the French Wars as a decisive part of the victorious alliance in Europe, was in fact an illusion. It had been achieved through diplomatic skill and by cleverly exploiting potential common interests or rivalries with and to other great powers, especially Great Britain and Russia². It was well known in Vienna that the actual resources of the empire would barely be sufficient to create the material basis for an independent policy of interests, and this required the strong diplomatic involvement of other great powers and the search for alliances. The basis was to be established in each case by cleverly weighing and balancing mutual interests.

policy and the Nationality Problem in the Habsburg Monarchy 1800-1867. In: *Austrian History Yearbook* 3/3, o.O. 1967.

² Francis Roy Bridge: *Österreich (-Ungarn) unter den Großmächten*. In: Adam Wandruszka, Peter Urbanitsch: *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918. Band VI: Die Habsburgermonarchie im System der internationalen Beziehungen* (2 Bde.), Wien 1989, hier: Band VI/1 S. 196-373, S. 197.

In the years after 1815, the monarchy faced three problem areas, some of which threatened its existence: first, in the Austrian (Upper) Italian territories in connection with Italian unification efforts, second, within the German Confederation with its opposition to Prussia, and finally in the “Eastern question” in the Russo-Turkish conflict. While the wars of 1859 and 1866 had already rendered Austria’s importance in Italy more insignificant due to its territorial losses, and Prussia’s victories of 1866 and 1870/71 clarified the “German question,” Austria’s position in Southeast Europe remained a perennial issue for its own foreign policy until 1918. However, this did not rule out different approaches, changes of perspectives, or even clear breaches in their actual implementation. The anachronism of the multinational Ottoman Empire (which was probably also inherent in the Austro-Hungarian system), especially regarding the idea of the nation-state that was increasingly gaining ground in Southeast Europe, was also recognised in Vienna, as being the associated internal and external weakness of the empire (“the sick man on the Bosphorus”), and with it its predictable collapse. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire was thought to be an optimal as well as predictable and harmless neighbouring state. But it was precisely this weakness that also created potential dangers: nationalist and separatist currents in the Balkans could too easily spread to Austria (-Hungary) and, given Russia’s role as a possible protective power for the “endangered” Slavic Christian peoples, corresponding actions could be triggered. The creation of possible small Russian satellite states and interactions with the Danube monarchy were thus a possible solution. Due to Austria’s economic, financial and military weakness, as mentioned above, its own interests could not be implemented or enforced by political pressure or military force. Diplomatic manoeuvring between the Western

powers, Russia and the Ottoman Empire became a characteristic of Austrian policy, which was judged by the other powers as inconsistent or unreliable.

The national uprisings against the Ottoman Empire in Greece and the Danubian Principalities between 1821 and 1829 showed that this form of foreign policy could prove disparaging. The propagated but inconsistent neutrality policy with its strong affinity toward the Ottoman Empire was criticised by the other great powers because of its unpopularity and ended in a political fiasco; in the ensuing Russo-Ottoman War of 1828/29, Austria's position vis-à-vis the other great powers was already so isolated that the provisions of the Peace of Adrianople and its Russian territorial extensions could only be noted³. The same was true of the Crimean War, which broke out in 1853: Austria's "armed" neutrality was met with strong disapproval by the Western powers and the Ottoman Empire; Russia was enraged, and ultimately Austria also ruined its own state finances (1854) through an arbitrary military intervention in the Danube principalities⁴. Thus, the war of 1866 against Italy and Prussia certainly represented a decisive climax. The military, economic and financial collapse was followed by several reform projects, of which the introduction of universal conscription, the negotiation of the Compromise with Hungary and the turn to a liberal economic policy could certainly set positive accents for the future. Trade agreements with the other great powers and within the German Confederation not only improved the monarchy's economic base but also made it

³ Bertram Buchmann, Claudia Reichl-Ham: *Habsburger und Osmanen. Eine bilaterale Geschichte*. Schriften des Heeresgeschichtlichen Museums Band 29, Wien 2021, S. 426 – 433.

⁴ Ebd. S. 463.

seem possible to end its foreign policy isolation⁵. These hopes, however, did not come true; merely the threat of collapse had been averted. Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916) and the foreign minister and Reich Chancellor Friedrich Ferdinand Graf von Beust (1809-1886) simply lacked the political and military means for independent foreign policy initiatives.

Therefore, in the war of 1870/71, it was impossible to influence events through an active policy, for example as retaliation for losing the war against Prussia and Italy in 1866. Under these circumstances, only France remained as a potential ally among the great powers anyway, whereby Napoleon III's (1808-1873) "adventures", such as the attempted annexation of Luxembourg, and the consequently fierce reaction of the other great powers would have weakened Austria. On the other hand, France strongly sympathised with the Christian peoples (and their national aspirations) in the Balkans during these years, which in turn would have presupposed from the outset the need for closer relations with St. Petersburg and an end to the "preservative" policy also pursued by von Beust with regard to the Ottoman Empire; a dilemma in every respect. The consequence was again a policy of manoeuvring, now less in terms of a strictly neutral position than that of a middle way. And in this context, (minor) successes could have certainly been achieved. During the uprising on the island of Crete in 1866, Serbia and Romania also asked the great powers to free them from the last remnants of their Ottoman "yoke". Again, there was the threat of a Russian advance in the Balkans, but

⁵ Vgl. dazu etwa: Herbert Matis, Dieter Stiefel: Protektionismus und „free trade imperialism“ – der englisch-österreichische Handelsvertrag von 1865. In: Paul W. Roth (Hg.): Beiträge zur Handels- und Verkehrsgeschichte. Festschrift für Othmar Pickl, Graz 1978, S. 157-173.

the actual situation of the Christians within the Ottoman Empire had to be considered as well. In bilateral negotiations, von Beust was able to extract quite acceptable concessions from the Ottoman Empire on this issue, ultimately even achieving autonomy for Crete and having this confirmed by the other great powers at an international conference in London.

However, the defeat of France in the war of 1870-71 deprived this success of his “middle way” policy of its foundations. France was no longer a potential partner in foreign policy matters, and the founding of the German Empire had finally settled the “German question”. The latter in particular, although Emperor Franz Joseph I had still not overcome Prussia’s “betrayal” in the war against the Danube Monarchy (1866), now seemed to offer (new) opportunities to end Austria-Hungary’s isolation⁶. This “reorganisation” of foreign policy perspectives had been initiated under von Beust, but then developed in a new direction under the new foreign minister (from November 1871) Gyula Count Andrassy of Csíkszentkirály and Krasznahorka (1823-1890).

Austria-Hungary’s “Eastern” Policy 1871-1878

As described above, the “Eastern Question” had developed in Austro-Hungarian foreign policy mainly as a side effect of the attempt to prevent possible Russian expansion in the Balkans and had more or less failed, partly because of the difficulties of finding support for it among other great powers. The change of strategy initiated under von Beust, but ultimately implemented by Andrassy, resulted from a rapprochement with the German Reich that now seemed possible. Nevertheless, Andrassy’s first advances towards Berlin to steer the

⁶ Francis Roy Bridge, S. 244-245.

“Eastern Question” and Austria’s conservative perspective on it in an anti-Russian direction failed.

Berlin was not interested in jeopardising its good relations with Russia in favour of rather vague Austro-Hungarian interests in the Balkans. The same applied to Great Britain, which decided to maintain its more or less isolationist course. This was to change fundamentally with the Three Emperors’ Meeting in Berlin in September 1872. Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881) and his foreign minister Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov (1798-1883) convincingly conveyed to Andrásy that they thought more conservatively on the Eastern question than had been assumed, but above all that a common or coordinated Balkan policy was certainly within the realm of possibility. Russia’s cooling relations with republican France and tensions with Great Britain over the demarcation of mutual spheres of influence in Asia played an important role in this⁷. Only a few months later (June 6, 1873), a convention of the same name was concluded in Vienna’s Schönbrunn Palace, which in its basic conception served to “secure, and if necessary enforce, the maintenance of European peace against all upheavals, from whatever quarter they may come”⁸. At its core, however, it also contained strong military elements and thus came very close to an actual Russian-Austrian-Hungarian cooperation. Even though the German Empire joined the agreement in October 1873, thereby transforming it into an “Alliance of the Three Emperors”, the individual interests of the contracting parties remained essential despite the special emphasis on the peace-

⁷ Christoph Baumer: *History of Central Asia. The Age of Decline and Revival*. 4. Band, London 2018, S. 141.

⁸ Bernhard Schwertfeger (Hg.): *Die große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914. Die Bismarck-Epoche. Kommentar I*, Berlin 1923, S. 216.

keeping intentions of the agreement. In addition to the Eastern question, which was a priority for Russia and Austria-Hungary, there was also a considerable distrust of the possible ambitions of the still young German Empire. On the other hand, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) had few other options to prevent German isolation in Europe. However, the isolation of France achieved in this way was to prove decisive, a core area of Bismarck's alliance policy, which was already emerging, with all its "temptations" and contradictions⁹. Andrassy now had the opportunity to implement his trade interests in the Balkans, which were in the midst of an economic crisis. The Ottoman Empire was irritated, especially since it was obstructing the regulation work on the Danube – the most important transport and trade route with the "Orient" – which was crucial for Austria-Hungary. It remains unclear whether the activities of the government in Constantinople in return, through the promotion of railway projects in Macedonia, which primarily accommodated British and French trade interests, can be seen as an attempt at political or diplomatic emancipation vis-à-vis Russia and Austria-Hungary and an increase in the value of a neutral status on the Bosphorus. However, the effects in Vienna were noticeable. The unconditional support of the Ottoman Empire began to soften, especially since the Christian elements particularly in the Balkans were gaining more and more influence and, in continuation of the Treaty of Paris (1856), expected foreign intervention to help achieve their state sovereignty¹⁰. What had changed, however, in contrast to von Beust's policy, was Vienna's underlying

⁹ Volker Ullrich: *Die nervöse Großmacht. Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871–1918*. Frankfurt am Main 1999, S. 77.

¹⁰ Francis Roy Bridge, S. 249.

motivation for this more pragmatic approach, since the focus was now less on warding off Russian expansionist intentions in the Balkans than on safeguarding its own trade interests in an already emerging economic competitive environment in Southeast Europe.

Interestingly, Romania played a kind of pioneering role for Vienna. In the years from 1874 to 1876, the Austrian state railways built a railway line from Budapest to Bucharest, and in 1875, a trade treaty was concluded. At the same time, foreign policy relations had cooled after 1867 due to the Austro-Hungarian Compromise and the resulting incorporation of Transylvania into the Hungarian half of the empire¹¹, which began to normalise and ultimately improve considerably after the conclusion of the “Alliance of the Three Emperors” in 1873, but also due to simple commercial interests on both sides. Andrásy’s efforts to intensify trade fell on fertile ground, especially among Romanian landowners who hoped to gain access to the large Austro-Hungarian market. Although Prince Carol I’s (1839-1914) efforts to use these economic interests and the associated rapprochement with Austria-Hungary to support a Romanian declaration of independence from the still formally existing sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire were not supported by either Andrásy or the other great powers, the rapprochement with Vienna, which was quite controversial in domestic politics, was maintained, and the trade treaty was signed¹². Andrásy’s ambivalence became apparent: on the

¹¹ Keith Hitchins: *The Rumanians of Transylvania and the Ausgleich 1865-1869*. In: Anton Vantuch, Ludovit Holotik (Hg.): *Der österreichisch-ungarische Ausgleich 1867*, Bratislava 1971, S. 860-896.

¹² Uta Bindreiter: *Die diplomatischen und wirtschaftlichen Beziehungen zwischen Österreich-Ungarn und Rumänien 1875-1888*. Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Neuere Geschichte Österreichs Band 63, Wien 1976, S. 100.

one hand, not to endanger the stability of the Ottoman Empire and, on the other, to pursue his own economic interests. Furthermore, a domestic political aspect of Andrassy's "Hungary" could not be dismissed, namely to promote a possible counterbalance to the Slavic Balkan peoples with a pro-Austrian oriented Romania.

How fragile and inconsistent this foreign policy perspective of Vienna with regard to Southeast Europe actually was, however, became clear in the context of the uprising of the Christian population of Bosnia, Herzegovina and parts of Bulgaria against Ottoman rule in 1875. In addition to the continuing fear of possible destabilising consequences for other Christian Balkan peoples and for the Ottoman Empire as a whole, Vienna's concrete imperial territorial interests in the *vilayet* (province) of Bosnia (and in Herzegovina) now became prominent for the first time. This was connected with the problematic border demarcation in the southernmost part of the monarchy, the district of Cattaro and the so-called Krivošije. There was no territorial connection to the latter; the only connection was by sea. Already during the fight against a local revolt in 1869, considerable logistical problems had arisen in bringing the necessary troops and their required supplies to the area of the revolt. Therefore, there was indeed a very concrete "need" for the creation of a direct land connection, but at the same time Dalmatia was to be provided with a hinterland in order to secure it strategically and also to create an additional economic basis. The fact that even Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916), otherwise extremely conservative with regard to territorial changes in Europe, speculated about a land seizure in order to annex a region that was already in a state of religious protectorate for the Christian strata of the population

was probably also due to his personal aspiration to appear in historiography as the “Augustus” of the empire¹³.

For Andrásy, on the other hand, both the idea of a possible annexation and that of an emerging independent new (revolutionary) state on the southern border were unacceptable. And when Russia also proposed to promote the emergence of a whole group of sovereign Balkan states through joint military intervention, Andrásy even threatened to jeopardise the League of the Three Emperors in a meeting with Bismarck and Gorchakov in May 1876¹⁴. In the end, Andrásy prevailed, and his tactic of sitting out the crisis seemed successful for the time being, when in May 1876 radical Islamic students rioted and eventually overthrew Sultan Abdülaziz (1830-1876). His successor was also deposed after only a few weeks. Serbia and Montenegro considered the turmoil on the throne of Constantinople an appropriate moment to declare war on the Ottoman Empire. Austria-Hungary could not ignore these events, but was more than limited in its latitude for action when reports of massacres by Ottoman troops in Bulgaria were published. Bismarck was only interested in cooperation within the Alliance of the Three Emperors, which led Vienna and Saint Petersburg to an agreement, the Reichstadt Convention, as early as July 1876. It stipulated that the province of Bosnia (and possibly also Herzegovina and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar) fall to Austria-Hungary and Bessarabia to Russia in the event of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Christian Balkan states would only experience territorial expansions to the extent that they did not change the balance of power. But contrary to ex-

¹³ Buchmann, Reichl-Ham, S. 471.

¹⁴ Tofik Islamov: *The Balkan Policy in the 1870s. War and Society in East Central Europe* 17, New York 1985, S. 31-41.

pectations, there was no collapse: rather, the Ottoman army was largely victorious and thus strengthened the self-confidence of the (new) ruling Sultan Abdülhamid II (1842-1918) to such an extent that it was possible to take a more energetic stance at an ambassadorial conference convened for December 1876 in Constantinople. The period until then was used to draft a constitution in no time at all, which, in addition to federal elements, provided for the constitution and also for the legal equality of Christians and Jews vis-à-vis Muslims. However, the indivisible unity of the empire remained decisive¹⁵.

Even if Andrassy was fundamentally in favour of this approach – the equality of the Christians within a stable and sovereign Ottoman Empire was in line with his basic ideas – the resistance of the Balkan principalities striving for sovereignty and thus also Russia's possible intervention could not be ignored. For a potential military intervention, however, Saint Petersburg sought unconditional agreement with Vienna, which finally led to the signing of the Budapest Convention of January 1877 (with a supplementary provision of March 1877). In principle, the stipulations of Reichstadt were confirmed but supplemented by the fact that Russia would not create a large Slavic state in the Balkans and that Austria-Hungary would oppose possible British aspirations to expand the conflict into a European war similar to that of Crimea¹⁶. After Bismarck's fundamental interest in a unification of Austria-Hungary and Russia was thus also met, the League of the Three Emperors had once again given a strong sign of strength. Russia finally declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 24, 1877, Ro-

¹⁵ Buchmann, Reichl-Ham, S. 474.

¹⁶ Eduard von Wertheimer: Graf Julius Andrassy, sein Leben und seine Zeit, 3 Bde., Stuttgart 1910-1913, Bd.3, S. 17.

mania on May 9, 1877 declared its (unilateral) independence and thus a state of war, and Bulgarian volunteers supported the Russian advance. Fighting on many fronts, the Ottoman Empire was unable to successfully maintain military resistance. Ultimately, the British threat not to allow the Russians to conquer the Dardanelles and Constantinople prevented the Russian advancement, which finally came to a halt at San Stefano. On January 19, 1878, an armistice (Edirne) was declared. Russia now tried to quickly secure its military successes diplomatically in a peace treaty by concluding the Peace of San Stefano in March 1878, which, however, was not recognised by the European powers.

Despite considerable warnings and protests, the peace agreement included the autonomy of Bosnia and the creation of a Greater Bulgarian state, a clear breach of the Budapest Convention. However, an open, militarily secured demarche to Saint Petersburg was not possible due to the weakness of Austria-Hungary¹⁷. From today's perspective, Andrassy's plan to evaluate or revise San Stefano within the framework of an international conference cannot yet be seen as a new change of trend in Austro-Hungarian foreign policy. In Vienna, however, they insisted on the provisions of Reichstadt and Budapest, which Russia had unilaterally broken, and believed that skilful diplomatic negotiation would even accommodate Saint Petersburg's ideas. The congress finally took place in Berlin in June/July 1878, with Bismarck, who had little interest in Balkan issues, presenting himself as an "honest broker"¹⁸. Before

¹⁷ Edmund Glaise von Horstenau: Franz Josephs Weggefährte. Das Leben des Generalstabschefs Grafen Beck, Zürich 1930, S. 201.

¹⁸ Rede des Fürsten Bismarck über die orientalische Frage. In: Hottinger's Volksblatt über Bismarcks Rede vom 19. Februar 1878.

the actual negotiations in Berlin, however, there were already secret preliminary meetings between Great Britain on the one side and Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire on the other. The most important issues were the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar by Austria-Hungary, a “redimensioning” of Bulgaria, the occupation of Cyprus by Great Britain, and the takeover of Tunisia by France¹⁹.

Even if Gorchakov believed that he would be able to change the concessions already promised by Russia at the congress, it must nevertheless be noted that precisely for this negotiation strategy and also for possible revisions, Russia had already diplomatically isolated itself too much vis-à-vis Vienna and Berlin. For the weakest great power – Austria-Hungary – and Andrassy, the Berlin Congress turned out to be quite successful, especially since, with the unexpected support of Great Britain, all the desired goals could be achieved. Even the attitude of the young Balkan states towards Vienna, with whose formal self-determination (Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro) he now agreed, along with territorial extensions, seemed to improve. This created the basis for increased economic and political influence during the 1880s – but at the expense of relations with the Ottoman Empire. The latter rejected the occupation of the two provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and ultimately also supported the later guerrilla activity against the invading imperial and royal troops. Contrary to Andrassy’s initial ideas, Russia failed to gain the agreement of the other great powers for its positions at the Berlin Congress and, out of deep disap-

¹⁹ Theodor Schieder: *Europa im Zeitalter der Nationalstaaten und europäische Weltpolitik bis zum I. Weltkrieg (1870–1918)*. In: ders. (Hrsg.): *Handbuch der europäischen Geschichte*. Stuttgart 1968, S. 65.

pointment at the lack of support from the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, invalidated the Agreement of the Three Emperors, only to rejoin the League of the Three Emperors three years later, in 1881. The final break with Vienna would come during the Bulgarian crisis of 1885/1886.

In Vienna, the possible annexation of the two provinces was not only met with domestic political approval. On the one hand, the invasion of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was intended as a mere formality, did not go according to the plan and even threatened to become a fiasco for a short time (also for Austro-Hungarian finances). On the other hand, the question of an immediate annexation or mere occupation remained undecided, especially with respect to the possible administration of these territories (and the costs involved). Ultimately, it was these domestic political consequences that led to Andrassy's resignation in 1879. Before that, however, he had succeeded in realising his original dream of entering into a defensive alliance with the German Empire against Russia ("Dual Alliance"), which was to remain the core of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy until the dissolution of the Danube Monarchy²⁰.

²⁰ Francis Roy Bridge, S. 257 f.

THE QUESTION OF DOBRUJA IN ITALIAN MILITARY REPORTS*

Emanuele Di Muro**

Abstract

Following the process of national unification, the interest of the Italian military authorities towards the Balkan area became more and more accentuated, in line with the growing need to secure the state's borders. This article aims to analyse the Italian military interest in Dobruja, especially through the perspective of topographical studies regarding this region. At the same time, an important component of the analysis deals with the representation of this province in the Italian military reports, in which one can find, beyond aspects of military interest, valuable elements regarding the ethnic and religious component of the population, as well as the administrative-territorial structure of Dobruja.

Keywords: *Italian General Staff Corps, Dobruja, topographical records, Colonel Celestino Rossi, Captain Francesco Tanfani*

General information on topographical correspondence of the Italian General Staff Corps

The so-called Eastern Question interested both Italian soldiers and diplomats in their desire to identify national interests

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and direct foreign policy. The achievement of Italian unity oriented the new state towards a more active Balkan policy, being closely linked to the possibility of the Austro-Hungarian Empire ceding territories. This approach aimed to complete the process of national unification that began in 1848 and which manifested itself through the participation of the Piedmontese in the Crimean War (1855-1856).

The military operations of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 were presented to the Italian public by Lieutenant Colonel Angelo Ravenni¹ in his volume entitled *Russo-Turkish War (1877-78)*². Published in 1929 and included in the "Great Wars" series, Ravenni's work was part of a historiographical tradition that aimed to present and summarize political-diplomatic problems from a technical-military point of view, thus trying to understand the complex Balkan events that constituted the background of the greatest continental crisis that ultimately triggered the First World War. While the military press sought, on the one hand, to provide a geopolitical framework for political decision-makers, from a military point of view it was necessary to know the territories that were of strategic interest for the defence of the state and for the country's foreign policy.

The study and interest of the Italian military authorities in the Balkans and border areas became necessary from the first moments after national unification; these studies were part of the national border defence policy based mainly on the search for defensive lines that could exploit the salient features of the terrain. Indeed, the General Staff Corps, which was responsi-

¹ Heavy field artillery officer, born on June 19, 1889, was the author of numerous historical-military studies.

² A. RAVENNI, *La guerra Russo-Turca (1877-78)*, Roma, Edizioni Tiber, 1929.

ble for drawing up operational plans, concentrated on carrying out topographical and relief studies that were made available to the Permanent Commission and the General Staff Committee. These studies were carried out by the officers of the General Staff following long and detailed reconnaissance of the border territories, which sometimes could even cross the [national, n.r.] border³. The Italian General Staff had borrowed from the Piedmontese military traditions all the experience of the military revolution applied to cartography and the study of the terrain. In addition, the development of military cartography in the modern era was driven by the Habsburg Empire which, for strategic defence reasons, had to move troops from the centre to the outer borders to deal with various threats. A similarly advanced military cartography was employed in Napoleon Bonaparte's France. In 1688, *Depôt Général de la Guerre* was created in France. This was an archive and a place of study for the geographical officers tasked with surveying the territories where a military campaign would have been possible. The activity of the geographers was not limited to the simple mapping and study of the territory, but also to the gathering of information that these officers found as field agents, effectively contributing to the creation of useful databases for the so-called basic *intelligence*. The studies of geographers took into account, in addition to the territory, the anthropological, social and economic aspects. Often sent undercover, these officers drew up, at the end of the surveys, long reports complementary to the cartography⁴.

³ F. CAPPELLANO, *Piani di guerra dello Stato Maggiore Italiano contro l'Austria-Ungheria (1861-1915)*, Valdagno (VI), Gino Rosato Editore, pp. 29-38.

⁴ Cfr. E. DI MURO, *La valle del Po attraverso l'arma del genio nei primi anni dell'età napoleonica*, Streetlib, 2020, pp. 11-19.

Similarly to the two great continental powers, the Kingdom of Sardinia also set up an office within the Army General Staff Corps which was in charge of topographical work.

Since the middle of the 19th century, sensitivity to topographical works has increased. This operational need was the main reason why the Corps Commander, General Enrico Morozzo, decreed that the Corps Central Office be split into two special offices.

For this reason, the first important provision, dated July 16, 1853, was the “General Orders relating to the service of the body”. In this document, operational functions were differentiated between technical drawing (geodetic and topographic) and military analysis.

This provision was supplemented in 1856 by the “Instruction regarding the Military Office of the Royal General Staff Corps and on the organization of the Archive itself”, through which the Historical Archive was also established⁵.

The main activities of the General Staff Corps were the collection and ordering of topographical surveys and statistical data on resources that could be used in case of war, through explorations along the borders aimed at verifying the lines of defence and the coherence of the Army. Knowledge of the terrain was vital at the time of general mobilization which the Corps had to schedule so that it would be ready when the War Ministry deemed it necessary. The study of the territory was accompanied by a historical analysis of the war events concerning the area in question.

The General Staff Corps had at its disposal the means of disseminating research activities among the Army personnel,

⁵ Archive of the Historical Office of the General Staff of the Army (Archivio Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito), henceforth AUSSME, fund L3, b. 301.

such as reports, publications and conferences, reconnaissance reports. Military reconnaissance was fundamental, being carried out especially for those areas that did not have geodetic and topographical works. The organization of reconnaissance missions usually took place in the summer and focused on the military aspects of the terrain. These trips were made along a little-known border area, along fortified lines, in a potential theatre of operations, but also on battlefields (that's why observers were sent to the battlefield after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78); all with the aim of gathering information and reporting it on topographical sketches, useful for planning any operations. For the preservation of these studies, the Military Office of the General Staff Corps had an archive where all documentary and cartographic material was kept for operational purposes.

The defence of the country and the observation of nearby theatres of war were the main objectives of the Military Office which kept in order all the papers and studies of interest⁶. Cataloguing through an internal register was organized into "tactical regions" for domestic territories, and into "theatres of war" for foreign states, in order to always have at hand the necessary information relating to a specific area.

The strategic-operational aspect of these functions of the General Staff Corps had been emphasized after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy due to the need to create a territorial defence plan that would include all the territories of the peninsula. Among the priorities was the territorial reorgani-

⁶ For a review of the documentation relating to the Balkan peninsula see A. BIAGINI, *I documenti dell'archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito per la storia dell'Europa centro-orientale e danubiano-balcanica*, in *Bollettino dell'Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico*, Luglio/dicembre 2001, Anno I - n° 2, pp. 7-18.

zation and the standardization of the maps and measurement units of the territories. For this reason, the Royal Decree of January 23, 1862 was issued, appointing a permanent commission for the defence of the territory in order to develop the "General Plan for the Defence of the State"⁷.

Later, to demonstrate the state's interest in geographical studies and cartographic products, organizational measures were taken to adapt the General Staff Corps to operational needs, for which new organic provisions were issued between 1867 and 1882. Among the most significant was the establishment in 1872 of the Military Topographic Institute, renamed in 1882 the Military Geographical Institute.

The study of the territories by the General Staff Corps was not limited to cartography, but led to a rich production of memoirs and monographs that accompanied the cartographic works. For the purpose of military operations, it was necessary to analyse the territories in relation to the anthropic and infrastructural aspects in order to devise a plan of defence or attack as complete as possible.

Most of these works are preserved in the Historical Archive of the General Staff of the Army, thus being able to reconstruct the events that played an indispensable role in the operational plan. Over the years, these operational contributions have had various relocations and transfers, but above all various reorganization interventions. To make these studies usable, the topographical records have been reordered into categories of topographical, technical, and historical studies.

⁷ Cfr. M. MAZZETTI, *I piani di guerra contro l'Austria dal 1866 alla Prima Guerra Mondiale*, in *L'Esercito Italiano dall'unità alla Grande Guerra, (1861-1918)*, Roma, Stato maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio storico, 1980, pp. 161-177.

At the end of the 19th century, the cataloguing presented four categories of studies: historical-military, topographical-military, technical-military and topographical-technical. The practical purpose of these studies was identified in the way the reports or manuals were prepared. Since they were to be used in operations, they had to be practical and intuitive. The scheme used provided for a general introduction of the analysed area, a description of the mountain ranges, valleys and watercourses and then ended with a statistical overview of the territory⁸.

This introduction gives us some reasons why the war and the events of 1877-78 were important to Italian military institutions.

Military reports on the Dobruja region for the General Staff Corps

Although Italy did not employ ground units or observers during the conflict, it was invited to the Congress of Berlin as a power foreign to the conflict and guarantor of a stable and lasting peace on the European continent, along with Germany and France⁹. Although these were the premises of the European powers, the three states had very specific diplomatic frictions and objectives. The main objective pursued by Italian diplomats at the conference was to gain territory in the event that the Habsburg Monarchy took control of Herzegovina. However, in the opinion of Bismarck and the Austrian diplomats, Italy should have sought new territories in Africa and not in Trentino Alto Adige. The purpose of this German policy was

⁸ AUSSME, A.G. PETACCIA, *Inventario del Fondo d'Archivio "Studi Topografici"*, G-26, pp. 4-18.

⁹ A. BIAGINI, *Momenti di storia balcanica op. cit.*, p. 49.

to fuel the conflict between Italy and France in North Africa (e.g. the Tunisian issue) and to tie Italy to Germany.

From a purely military point of view, Italy had not sent observers on the ground, but limited itself to receiving information from military attachés¹⁰. The information on the operations was obtained following reconnaissance, on the Danube theatre of the conflict, by two officers of the General Staff Corps: Colonel Celestino Rossi and Captain Francesco Tanfani.

In November 1878, the two officers were put in contact with the Italian ambassador in Constantinople to organize technical reconnaissance. At the end of the field surveys and reconnaissance, carried out between 1879 and 1880, the two officers, on the basis of the observations that emerged and the data collected, drew up a report concerning the Danube theatre, the Asian theatre, the defence of Odessa, secondary theatres in Europe, grouping them by chapters. The title of the work, collected at the Historical Office of the Army General Staff¹¹ and divided into chapters, was "Mission Report on the Theatre of War of 1877-78". We will analyse below the chapter 21, dedicated to Dobruja.

The interest of the Italian military command in the area was evident as early as October 1878, when Mr. Bertolani sent a brief report on the region. Bertolani was an Italian member of the Frontier Commission that Romania had sent to the new territory. Navy captain and former Turkish telegraph inspector, he sent a first report describing the new territory.

It should be emphasized that this activity was important from an *intelligence* perspective, and today those reports can be used for a historiographical approach aimed at new research

¹⁰ *Infra*, E. TIRONE, *L'attività degli addetti militari italiani durante la guerra russo-turca*.

¹¹ AUSSME, L3, bb. 74, 189, 190, 202, 203.

perspectives, such as for example studies related to human and territorial geography.

The Italian military correspondence regarding the conflict of 1877-1878 can thus be divided into two types, which are not mutually exclusive and do not constitute separate sectors: the first, of a technical nature¹², is intended to provide useful elements for the planning of the General Staff Corps; the other is related to Italian diplomatic activity and the Boundary Delimitation Commission¹³, resulting from the Congress of Berlin.

Therefore, the fundamental elements of the reports regarding the Commission for the borders between Romania and Bulgaria, following the acquisition of Dobruja, will be outlined below.

The main report was written by Colonel Celestino Rossi, who was in Romania during Romania's takeover of Dobruja. The colonel thought that his activity would be appreciated in Italy¹⁴.

The first summary report of the Dobruja area had been drawn up between October 4 and 16, 1878. The objective was to have a clear picture of the geography and population according to the criteria mentioned above.

¹² *Ibidem*, fasc. 6, "Rapporto di Missione sul Teatro della Guerra del 1877-78. Capitolo 21°: Cenni sulla Dobrodcha. Con 2 Allegati. Allegato A: Rapporto sulla Dobrodcha del Signor Cav. Bertolani; Allegato B: Carta rumena della Dobrodcha".

¹³ Of particular interest is the summary of Lieutenant Colonel Alessandro Baldassarre Orero preserved in AUSSME, G-33, b.9 fasc. 88, *Notes of a journey to the Balkan Peninsula* by the International Commission for the delimitation of the Bulgarian Frontier. First part (September 13-December 17, 1878). Report by Lieutenant Colonel Orero of the General Staff. This report, drawn up in 1880, as we learn from the text, was accepted by the Archive of the General Staff on October 26, 1880 among the Topographic Studies.

¹⁴ AUSSME, L3, b. 74, fasc. 6.

Bertolani reported that Dobruja, with the exception of Medgidia, where the air was very bad because of the marshes, was a generally healthy region. The climate of the region was dry with a significant temperature difference: in summer between 15°–27° degrees and in winter between 4 and –17 degrees. The sanjak of Dobruja was divided into six districts (Tulcea, Babadag, Hirşova, Măcin, Constanța, Sulina. There were also 3 cantons: Mahmudia, Isaccea and Chilia). The report on the state of health of the population is also interesting in this report. During 1877 the situation was good, but in the winter of 1878 there was an epidemic of smallpox and whooping cough. The only area where the fever was endemic was that of Medgidia because of the smoke produced by the stagnant waters.

The main crops were wheat, barley, rye, millet, rape, flax, potatoes and tobacco. The technique used for cultivation was old-fashioned, but it could be updated with more common European technology. Part of the coasts of Dobruja were not favourable for human settlements because the land was sandy and with many lakes. Only the Mangalia area was suitable for agricultural activities. The Italian observer reported that there were no industries in Dobruja, but some for wool and sugar beet would have been useful. The land was also considered to be rich in natural resources such as coal and metals.

An important economic activity was fishing in lakes and rivers instead of the sea. The Turks had settled this activity by selling the right to exploit the fishing industry for 500,000 local currency.

The population of Dobruja consisted of Russians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Tatars, Turks, Germans and other minorities. It was reported that the Ta-

tar and Turkish populations were increasing due to immigration. Statistics showed that the non-Muslim population was approximately 116,203, while the Muslim population reached 103,328.

This brief report¹⁵ had been attached to the larger one, compiled in 1879 for the General Staff Corps.

According to the Italian Colonel Celestino Rossi, the Romanian military commission had been welcomed and helped by the Russian authorities. The mission took place in October 1878 and lasted approximately 18 days. This commission was to discuss the border issues between Romania and Bulgaria. The map used for the demarcations showed three possible border lines. While the common opinion was that the border line was A, the Romanian military authorities demonstrated that the solution was not fair, as it lacked important key points on the ground to set up an effective border defence. Defence capacity would have been enhanced if the border included the Kuzgun region. That is why the Romanian commission expressed its preference for the second line as the border between the two states.

According to the Italian report, the Romanian government wanted to annex the bay of Silistra and Balchik, north of Varna. This bay could have provided adequate protection for ships, but it could also have become a challenge to Odessa and Varna as a commercial hub. The acquisition of Dobruja gave Romania access to the sea, and this was seen by the Italian colonel Rossi as a new opportunity. The new Black Sea territory, however, had only one port: Constanța, while the ancient Roman port of Mangalia was not in a condition to be used for commercial purposes, becoming a beach. The main port was Constanta,

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, Allegato A.

but the commission declared its intention to build a new one near the Golovița Lake, by expanding the existing canals.

Such reasons would have been taken into account only if the commission had chosen the third demarcation line drawn on the map.

Romania had deployed a division (about 10,000 men) to occupy the new territory. The commission suggested where to set up the main bases of the engaged corps: cavalry and artillery units were deployed between Medgidia and Babadag. In addition, the establishment of a garrison in Tulcea and Constanța had been suggested. This military operation had to be managed quickly to appease Romanian public opinion on the Bessarabian issue. On the other hand, Russia had to guarantee a line of communication for its troops, which is why it had taken that territory from Romania.

After this geopolitical opinion, the report moved on to describe the geographical elements. The physical description of the region highlighted the key military points. Dobruja was bordered by the Danube and Silistra. In his report, Colonel Rossi had divided the territory, from a military point of view, into two zones, identified by the line Cernavodă–Medgidia–Constanța. The northern part of that line was a slightly elevated area characterized by swampy areas, ponds and lakes.

The southern portion was characterized by an undulating plateau, bordered by high banks, both on the sea shore and on the Danube¹⁶.

This region was inhabited by Russians, Germans, Romanians, Turks, Bulgarians, Greeks, Jews and Tatars. As anticipated earlier, the population of the region was around 200,000.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, “Rapporto di Missione sul Teatro della Guerra del 1877-78. Capitolo 21°: Cenni sulla Dobrodcha, parte III.

In total, there were 3,267 Russian families, 5,542 Romanian, 4741 Bulgarian, 544 Greek, 111 Armenian, 496 German, 151 Tatar, 222 Jewish and 740 other nationalities. The report did not include Muslim families. This population was distributed throughout the region – the most important cities of the region were the ones that named the districts – as follows:

Tulcea District: non-Muslims 23,814, Muslims 1,288; Babadag district: non-Muslims 38,924, Muslims 14,268; Hîrșova district was inhabited by a majority Muslim population of 24,939 people, 7,458 inhabitants being non-Muslims. In Măcin district the population was almost equal: 14,659 non-Muslims and 129,256 Muslims. Constanța District had a significant Muslim population, 21,466 and 1,451 non-Muslims. In Sulina district, 8,640 were non-Muslims and 102 Muslims. The three cantons, Mahmudia, Isaccea and Chilia had a majority non-Muslim population (5,238; 8,476; 3,232). As mentioned in the Bertolani report, the population of the region was 219,531 people.

Regarding the population's reaction to the new structure of the region, Colonel Rossi expressed himself as follows¹⁷: "All this population, the majority of which is Romanian, does not show any opposition to the current order of things, and only the Bulgarians, who are also a considerable number, can create difficulties for the new government. The Turkish and Russian Circassians, who infested the districts to the great detriment of other populations, were expelled."

Colonel Rossi's report also examined the infrastructure in the region. There was only one main road, which was the one from Isaccea to Babadag. Other roads were not in good condition due to swampy terrain. There was a railway that connected the port of Constanța with Medgidia. There had been a tele-

¹⁷ *Ivi*, paragrafi 5 e 6.

graph line since the Ottoman rule, but it was mainly developed on the right side of the Danube and on the Black Sea coast, while during the war a new line had been built by the Russians on the main road from Isaccea to Babadag.

From these observations of the territory, the Italian officer considered the region to be fertile, but in poor condition because the withdrawal of the Turks had not been followed by any improvement and economic conditions had not developed. In this regard, Colonel Rossi testified: "Before the last war, it can be said that all the land of Dobruja was cultivated with various products such as cereals, flax, rapeseed, potatoes and tobacco. If agriculture was more intelligently practiced, and [the people, n.r.] had the courage to drain the swamps and do other large-scale works, that land might bring in considerable capital and the health of the population would be greatly improved. What is somewhat lacking in Dobruja, especially in the upper parts, is drinking water. It was necessary to build wells, as they are often found in the region, but they are so deep that to extract the water it is necessary to resort to devices set in motion by horses. Industries have not developed at all, but, according to Mr. Bertolani, the country has the necessary elements to activate them with good results. The main port on the Black Sea is that of Constanța, but the Romanian Military Commission would have signalled to the government the possibility of creating another port under much more advantageous conditions in Golovița Lake, work that would not require too much expense, as it would be enough to conveniently expand the exit (Portița) of this lake, through which only fishing boats can pass at present."

Colonel Rossi's report ended with a wish for the new territory¹⁸: "All considered in Rumania, after having acquired a

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, paragrafo 8.

more exact knowledge of the conditions of the new province, the discontent, which the exchange of Bessarabia for Dobruja had aroused, gradually diminished and it is now believed that, if currently the recent acquisition may not compensate for the loss of Bessarabia, it will nonetheless be able in the not so distant future to contribute considerably to the prosperity of the country. May 1879.”

The military reports on the Dobruja region for the delimitation of the borders with Bulgaria

The reports prepared by Colonel Baldassare Orero¹⁹ had a different tone, as the task entrusted to the officer of the General Staff had different objectives and was part of the Italian diplomatic activities within the European Commission for the delimitation of borders.

Colonel Orero’s reports had a limited temporal development, closely related to the Commission’s activity, the first from September 13 to 17, 1878, the second from March to May 1879²⁰. In the introduction of the report, Colonel Orero addressed the diplomatic reasons and causes which led the European powers to adopt the measures which the commission was preparing to verify.

Moreover, “Among these requirements, which the congress thought it fulfilled, is the one imposed by Britain and Austria to remove from the Bulgarian principality, as it had been created by the Treaty of San Stefano, the territory located south of Balkans. Part of this territory returned under the direct rule of the sultan, the rest constituting a semi-independ-

¹⁹ Orero’s accounts were later published in B.A. ORERO, *Note di viaggio nella penisola dei Balcani*, Novara/Lenta, 1881. This work was included among the Italian geographical publications.

²⁰ AUSSME, G-33, b.9 fasc. 88.

ent province called Eastern Rumelia. Britain's goal, supported by Austria-Hungary, was to offer Turkey, lacking the Danube border, a good defensive border along the Balkans. Russia, exhausted by the war and consequently unable to undertake a new struggle at the time, bowed eventually in front of the demands of the British cabinet, supported by the Austro-Hungarian plenipotentiaries and sanctioned by Europe. With supreme skill, she then showed herself compliant, but thought at the same time to neutralize in substance what seemed to yield in form. The very nature of the new frontier, obviously little known to the plenipotentiaries gathered in Berlin, matched Russia's views."²¹

In the preamble to the report, as can be understood, Orero revealed the differences between Russia and Britain, accentuated during the work of the commission. To these were added the delays of the Turkish delegation. The instructions of the foreign ministry, to which Orero had been in August 1878²², were to maintain a faithful, fair and loyal application of the Berlin agreements: "(...) impartial attitude and inspired by the desire to succeed in a just composition of the divergent interests that would have arisen. Colleagues in Germany and France will probably be animated by similar feelings and in such a way as to facilitate the friendly work of the Italian Commissioner."²³

The importance of delimiting the Romanian-Bulgarian border immediately emerged from the preliminary meetings.

²¹ *Ibidem*, "Note di un viaggio nella penisola dei Balcani" operato dalla Commissione internazionale per la delimitazione della frontiera della Bulgaria. Parte Prima (13 settembre-17 dicembre 1878), pp. 2-3.

²² A. BIAGINI, *Momenti di storia balcanica...*, p. 47.

²³ AUSSME, G-33, b.9 fasc. 88, "Note di un viaggio nella penisola dei Balcani" operato dalla Commissione internazionale per la delimitazione della frontiera della Bulgaria. Parte Prima (13 settembre-17 dicembre 1878), p. 23.

According to articles II and XLVI of the Berlin Treaty, it was necessary to fix the borders of the new principality of Bulgaria: to the north with Romania, to the west with Serbia, to the south with Turkey and Eastern Rumelia; therefore, a special commission was needed for this purpose. The first segment to be resolved, even for climatic reasons, was the demarcation of the Romanian-Bulgarian border. The commission met in Silistra on November 2, the place being already set in Berlin. This matter brought with it the dissatisfaction of the Romanians for the exchange with Bessarabia. Moreover, regarding this aspect, Orero testified as follows: "Some of the speeches exchanged with Colonel Bogolyubov²⁴ by me and other colleagues of mine predicted that there would be a very pronounced disagreement in the choice of the point on the right bank of the Danube, from which to fix the border that attributes to Romania that part of territory (Dobruja), granted in exchange for all of Bessarabia. This disagreement became evident on the first day when the commission met in Silistra in an official session."²⁵

The description of the situation was explained by Orero, who indicated how the decision taken at the Congress of Berlin stipulated that the Danube Delta, together with part of the territory to the south, be separated from Bulgaria and assigned to Romania as compensation for Bessarabia. According to the Italian officer, the territory granted to Romania was larger in size and population than the one it was deprived of and offered a useful outlet to the Black Sea. However, Romania proved to be against this exchange.

²⁴ Russian army officer.

²⁵ AUSSME, G-33, b.9 fasc. 88, "Note di un viaggio nella penisola dei Balcani" operato dalla Commissione internazionale per la delimitazione della frontiera della Bulgaria. Parte Prima (13 settembre-17 dicembre 1878), p. 34.

“And meanwhile, it was omitted that the Treaty of Paris would have imposed on it a neutral attitude in the fight between Russia and Turkey. Among other things, [Romania, n.r.] also used this treaty to obtain support from Europe against Russia. Apart from the violation of the treaty of 1856 which Romania could not invoke either reasonably or in good faith, two considerations militated in its favour. The first was that Russia had guaranteed its territory; the second was that with the exchange between Bessarabia and Dobruja, the principality was deprived of a province inhabited by a majority Romanian population, receiving instead one in which the Romanian population was represented in smaller proportions. At this point, it should be noted the share of the Romanian population in Dobruja – approximately 30,000 inhabitants out of 106,000 – compared to that of Bessarabia – 30,000 out of 50,000.

In any case, if for these two considerations and mainly for the second, Romania did not think it worthy to accept a fact based on the relinquishment of one of its provinces, there was no middle way. He had to make it a national question, and, regardless of the probability of victory, set out to uphold his rights by arms. Who knows that by acting in this way complications may arise to his advantage. What did the Bucharest government do instead? It considered a war against Russia foolish, and confined itself to filling Europe with its complaints and protests, finally taking the position of accepting what it considered to be a trade-off, trying to gain as much as he could in return.”²⁶

The border line of Dobruja identified in the preliminaries at Santo Stefano was not well defined, and this also led to problems during the work in Berlin, as the transfer of this region

²⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 36-37.

was to diminish Bulgaria's expansion. The question, however, was not addressed by Britain and Austria, already satisfied with the advantages obtained as a result of the works in Berlin: "When the issue of this border came up at the congress, an approximate line between Rasova and Mangalia was taken as a basis for discussion. France and Italy then proposed to include Silistra in the territory that was to be assigned to Romania. This proposal would probably have been accepted if it had had the support of the other powers. But England and Austria, who dominated the discussions at that congress, were too satisfied with the successes obtained in their own interests not to be conciliatory with Russia in a matter which did not concern them."²⁷

However, the activity of the Russian representative, together with the other members of the commission from November 1878, tried to find a solution on the starting points. They wanted to stay as close as possible to the decisions of the congress, resorting to the resolutions of protocols 10 and 15 of the treaty. This led the commission members to accept that the only starting point of the measurements was the one identified in Silistra. Thus, on November 4, the commission boarded a Romanian boat for a reconnaissance action on the Danube. But the commission's decision changed the attitude of the Russian delegate, who from that moment displayed a behaviour of protest and spite. The representative of Romania did not fail to mention how the territorial change imposed by Russia and supported by the other powers could harm Romania. During the sessions in Istanbul, the points for the surveys to be carried out in Dobruja and delimiting the rest of the border to the Black Sea were determined. Indeed, on this occasion "the

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

question was debated whether the expression used in the treaty of *fixing* the border line in places should be understood as the task of the European commission to draw this line on the ground with fixed terms placed at a certain distance between them. However, the majority understood and the entire commission accepted the interpretation of the word *fix* in the sense of giving an exact and indisputable description of the border, using only signals or terms in those points where such a description, related to topographical accidents, could be insufficient to avoid any doubt or objection. Since the Austrian map, which was the best document available, did not present the necessary guarantees of accuracy and was, on the other hand, on a scale too small, it was decided that the description should be accompanied by a topographical map 1:30000 (this scale is 10 times higher than the Austrian one) made by the commission itself during its march along the border”²⁸.

The choice of this approach was dictated by practical and political issues. In fact, point by point regulations would have required years of work, which could have been affected by their non-ratification by governments. On November 7, 1878, the commission had established the point of departure, so that the action could continue towards the Black Sea. The route and the border line, identified in the Silistra-Mangalia line, had to continue independently of any military considerations.

Orero’s description of Dobruja does not differ much from Rossi’s and Bertolani’s analyses. “Dobruja is far from a flat country and cannot even be called a swamp. Yes, it is poor, because it is not cultivated, but the fertility of its soil cannot be doubted. Suggestive in this sense are the remains of ancient and magnificent forests, which at other times must have

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

covered most of its surface, the beautiful vegetation that can be admired in many natural pastures and in those rare places where the hand of man has tried to cultivate the land. An intense plateau, intersected in all directions by gullies and small valleys, this is how Dobruja presents itself as a whole. Along the Danube, the three Bulgarian, Romanian and Turkish elements are almost equally represented. When the three are in the same village, as in Silistra, each has its own neighbourhood and remains a stranger to the others, but until now they have lived in harmony.”²⁹

In this phase of the report, the officer described the habits, customs and way of life of the populations encountered, as well as the condition of the villages which were seen as different from the European urban way of life. Orero’s description addressed the difficulties of the commission from a practical point of view, which resulted in the isolation of the Russian delegate. However, regarding the relations between the members of the commission, Colonel Orero recounted: “I could not say in good conscience that a little hostile feeling towards Russia did not creep through the majority of the commission and, consequently, I could not say that in the delimitation of the new Romanian-Bulgarian border the interests of Bulgaria, of which Colonel Bugolyubov is a warm supporter, were treated in the same way as Romania’s interests were treated; but what I can firmly affirm is that the sympathies of the majority did not affect the impartiality of the commission, to the point of granting Romania clear advantage, which the plenipotentiaries of the congress intended to grant them. The commission gave clear evidence of its impartiality, rejecting not only the proposal from the representatives of Romania to assign the

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.

city of Silistra to Romania, which was contrary to the spirit and letter of the treaty, but also rejecting various other border corrections, which it could accept, remaining within the limits imposed by the treaty.”³⁰

The relationship between the members of the commission was described in the report. For Orero, the existing differences of opinion never altered the feeling of “military camaraderie”, but under that camaraderie it was not difficult to see other differences between members as follows: “(...) with the same complacency with which the two Russian and English colonels exchanged today laughing courtesies and witticisms, tomorrow they would find themselves at the head of their own regiment, one against the other. It was not impossible to understand that the German uniform reminded the French commissioner of bad memories... The group of the commission that lived together as in a war camp was the group represented by the Anglo-French-Italian canteen... In that so-called camp of the Crimean allies, fires were lit in the evening, and the bivouac of the allies was often the meeting of the whole commission.”³¹

From these assumptions of impartiality, the commission proceeded promptly, advancing about ten kilometres of the frontier a day, aided also by the clemency of the season.

Of interest in Colonel Orero’s report is the relationship with the populations encountered during his mission, as well as a brief mention of the Romanian military organization.

The commission completed the surveys in twelve days, thus reaching the town of Mangalia, completing its assigned task before the arrival of winter. Thus the commission was

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 56-57.

dissolved, and a meeting was established in Constantinople within eight days. Compared to the rest of the commission that went to Varna, Orero travelled to Bucharest via Constanța. After a short digression on the historical aspects related to the Black Sea port, he mentioned in his report some observations about Russian-Romanian relations: "The arrival of the Prince, postponed from one day to the next, because of the difficulties which the Petersburg cabinet put in the way of the prompt occupation of Dobruja, was the subject of my and Colonel Scherff's discussions with the various known Romanian officers that evening, being an argument for the usual complaints concerning Russia's aggression against its ally since 1877.

Independent of the misunderstandings created by Russia's ungenerous conduct towards Romania, another cause made the mutual aversion between the Russian and Romanian armies more and more sensitive. The considerable role played by the Romanian army in the final victory damaged the self-esteem of the Russian officers; and therefore they availed themselves of the discontent and protests of their ally at the retrocession of Bessarabia, as a plausible pretext for freeing themselves from the weight of gratitude, and manifesting the wounded feeling of haughtiness. Through Romania passed the supply lines of the Russian army corps that were still in Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia. As a result, there were many Russian officers and soldiers who could be seen on the streets of Brăila and Bucharest, their encounters with Romanian officers and soldiers being thus frequent.

Well, I never saw an exchange of greetings, I never saw two individuals from the two armies sitting at the same table or walking together. Two enemies who, due to the vicissitudes

of war, had found themselves prisoners in each other's house, therefore could not have behaved differently."³²

The first part of the activity of Colonel Orero's commission ended in Bucharest. In the Romanian capital, he first visited Baron Fava, consul general and diplomatic agent in Romania, then requested an audience with Prince Charles. The figure of the prince struck Orero, which highlighted the anthropological contrast between the German sovereign and the Romanian people. However, he received praise for his work within the commission, in favour of Romania's rights.

On November 26, 1878, the commission resumed its meetings in Constantinople. It was hoped that the Petersburg cabinet would eventually instruct its commissioner not to persist in opposition alone against all his other colleagues or, at the very least, to order him not to push matters so far as to refuse his signature until the final act. But it was not like that. Colonel Bugolyubov not only showed himself steadfast in his protest, but, throwing aside the appearances which he had hitherto maintained, attacked the commission in such violent terms as to test the composure of his colleagues. Colonel Home³³, the English commissioner, though indisposed, always wanted to attend those turbulent meetings...

"Colonel Bugolyubov's behavior on that occasion was also a cause of great displeasure to the good and good Colonel Scherff... The Berlin cabinet was in a difficult and delicate situation compared to the Petersburg cabinet. Basically he did not mind that his commissioner supported, in agreement with the Austrian and English delegate, the interests of Romania

³² *Ibidem*, p. 70.

³³ Certainly ill, in the continuation of the report, Orero related the circumstances of his death after his return from Constantinople.

in opposition to those defended by Russia, but he would have liked it to be passed, without damaging certain considerations imposed by the relations existing between the two emperors. Now, things had reached such a point that it was no longer possible for the German delegate to emerge from it with honour, without offending the Petersburg cabinet and without harming those considerations which the German emperor wanted at all costs to be kept intact. The result of this was a peremptory order sent from Berlin to Colonel Scherff to insert into the protocol a declaration which he with manifest signs of reluctance submitted in writing to the commission, this declaration read: 'I have signed the diplomatic document in accordance with my instructions to adhere to the decisions taken by majority vote without thereby intending to take part in the question raised by the Russian delegate.'

The conduct of Colonel Bugolyubov on that occasion was also a cause of great displeasure to the brave and good Colonel Scherff... The Cabinet at Berlin was in a difficult and delicate situation compared with the Cabinet at Petersburg. In practice, he did not mind that his commissioner supported, in common agreement with the Austrian and English delegates, Romania's interests in opposition to those defended by Russia, but he would have liked it to be passed, without harming certain considerations imposed by the existing relations between the two emperors. The situation had now reached such a point that it was no longer possible for the German delegate to get out of it honourably, without offending the cabinet at Petersburg, and without prejudicing those considerations which the German emperor desired at all costs to preserve intact. The result was a peremptory order sent from Berlin to Colonel Scherff to enter into the protocol a statement which he, with evident signs of

reluctance, submitted in writing to the commission, this statement reading: 'I have signed the diplomatic act in accordance with the instructions to adhere to the decisions taken by majority vote, without thereby intending to take part in the question raised by the Russian delegate.'³⁴

On December 17, 1878, the diplomatic act was signed, but without the signature of the Russian commissioner. The act provided for the border line between Silistra and Mangalia. During the entire phase of the works, the object of discord was always whether or not to include Silistra in Romanian territory, a dispute concluded only in 1880.³⁵ In fact, from a military point of view, owning that area and its fortifications would have guaranteed control of the lines of communication in Dobruja.

³⁴ AUSSME, G-33, b.9 fasc. 88, "Note di un viaggio nella penisola dei Balcani" operato dalla Commissione internazionale per la delimitazione della frontiera della Bulgaria. Parte Prima (13 settembre-17 dicembre 1878), p. 78.

³⁵ A. BIAGINI, *Momenti di storia balcanica...*, pp. 65-67.

“WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF POSSIBILITY: OTTO VON BISMARCK AND THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN OF 1878

Heiner Bröckermann*

Abstract

While possessing an unquestionable political and diplomatic talent, Otto von Bismarck's legacy is certainly not without flaws. And one cannot discuss his legacy without taking into account the Congress of Berlin of 1878. Deemed as an "honest broker", Bismarck sought to and eventually succeeded in limiting Russian influence in the Balkans or the formation of a Greater Bulgaria, in contrast to the Treaty of San Stefano, something that was perceived by the Russians as an unwarranted betrayal – or, as Alexander Gorchakov described it in his memorandum to the Tsar, as the "blackest page" of his career.

Keywords: *Otto von Bismarck, Congress of Berlin, Russia, Ottoman Empire, The Eastern Question, Treaty of San Stefano, Alexander Gorchakov*

The Congress of Berlin of 1878 was the last major purely European peace congress. Seven European powers, including Britain, Russia, France, Austria-Hungary and Italy as well as the Ottoman Empire and Germany, came to an agreement against the backdrop of the complicated Eastern question.

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Contemporaries and some historians retrospectively praised the leadership of Otto von Bismarck at the Congress. As an “honest broker” without own interests, he demonstrated authority, expertise, impartiality and, above all, patience. Some of the topics at the Congress are of permanent relevance: from the slow disappearance of an empire and the actions of great powers, to the states of the Balkans, the recognition of national movements and strategic questions concerning the Black and the Mediterranean Seas. Even though not every participant was satisfied with the results, the long period of peace supported the solution achieved under Bismarck’s leadership. The actual task had seemed impossible beforehand; it meant to prevent a war and to find a way to contribute to the solution of the Eastern question. And there were also important individual interests behind the scenes, such as Britain’s strategic objective of keeping Russia away from both the Mediterranean Sea and India. After two world wars, the fact that after 1878 until the Balkan wars there were 30 years of peace was retrospectively regarded as great diplomatic success. As the German historian Imanuel Geiss pointed out, the Congress was therefore a “first-rate pivotal point in the modern history of Europe” and “the historically indispensable link between the Congress of Vienna of 1814/15 and the Paris Peace Conference of 1919”. Although the contents of the Congress of Berlin were diverse, compared to the previously mentioned congresses, they were regionally limited, and the great powers hardly concerned themselves with their core territories.¹

¹ *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Ausstellung des Geheimen Staatsarchivs Preußischer Kulturbesitz zur 100. Wiederkehr der Eröffnung des Berliner Kongresses am 13. Juni 1978.* Edited by Friedrich Benninghoven et al., Berlin 1978, 7; *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien.* Edited by Imanuel Geiss, Boppard am Rhein 1978 (Schriften des Bundesarchivs, 27), 151.

Nevertheless, it was also mentioned that in retrospect the 1878 Treaty of Berlin was an imperfect solution. Bismarck had deceived himself about the outcome when he emphasised in his final address to the Congress: “The plenipotentiaries are entitled to the feeling of having returned to Europe and secured within the realm of possibility the blessing of peace that had been so seriously threatened.”

On the other hand, after his death and before World War I, Bismarck became the object of a nationalist myth, which was not so much in line with his achievements but rather intended as criticism of the ruling Emperor Wilhelm II. The instrumentalisation of Bismarck has long impeded a historisation of his person in all its facets. It was only in recent decades that endeavours were made to study Bismarck as a historical figure with a view to his time. But at no time it was denied that he had the “ability for complex strategic thought” as historian and former German Minister of Defence Gerhard Stoltenberg put it.²

The “sick man on the Bosphorus”, the Ottoman Empire, who had been kept alive with great effort, was to become Germany’s partner in World War I. And it seems almost as if the Congress of Berlin of 1878 had brought the Eastern question to Bismarck’s attention. And that despite his famous quote of December 1876 that it was not “worth the healthy bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier”³

² See Ulrich Lappenküper, ‘Bismarck heute. Zum 150. Jahrestag der Reichsgründung’. In: *Die politische Meinung*, 65. Jg./Nr. 565, November/Dezember 2020, 105-111, here 106 f.

³ At the 24th session of 5 December 1876. In: *Reichskanzler Fürst Bismarck 1873-1877*. Edited by Philipp Stein, Leipzig 1877 (*Fürst Bismarcks Reden*, 6), 223-243, here 237.

The Eastern question

The question of what would happen with the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774 continued to be a matter of concern for international politics for more than a hundred years. In aggravation to the decline of this Islamic Empire, young European national movements came into conflict with the imperial aspirations of great powers, above all Austria-Hungary and Russia but also Britain. For a long time, the Kingdom of Prussia, which had become part of the German Empire, and the Empire of Russia had basically been Eastern European monarchies with windows towards the West. Since the Napoleonic Wars at the latest, these two states have been allies with interconnected dynasties. Having no other interests during the period of the Holy Alliance, Prussia had accepted the Russian leadership in the Eastern question. The Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 was achieved through the mediation of Prussia, which had dispatched Lieutenant General Karl von Müffling, and prevented Britain's intervention. In the Crimean War, Prussia remained neutral and thus probably prevented a more active role of Austria in the conflict. In 1863, Prussia and its Prime Minister Bismarck had approved the suppression of the Polish uprising.⁴

For Bismarck, the Eastern question was a political constant he needed to consider in his foreign policy. The Holy Alliance of Eastern European conservative monarchies had long-lasting effects. Since 1873, the German Empire had been allied with Russia and Austria-Hungary but it did not yet have direct in-

⁴ *Ursachen und Folgen des Berliner Kongresses von 1878 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Balkankriege*. WD 1 145/05. Edited by Wissenschaftlicher Dienst des deutschen Bundestages. Fachbereich XI. Geschichte, Zeitgeschichte und Politik, Berlin 2015, 5-6; *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien*. *op.cit.*, XII-XVI.

terests in the Balkans. Gradually it became apparent, however, that in order to maintain a balance of power in Europe, which was advantageous to Germany in the future, Russian influence in the Balkans needed to be contained. During the Balkan crisis, Russia had discussed possible courses of action against the Ottoman Empire primarily with Austria-Hungary, Germany and Britain through diplomatic channels and tried to placate. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had even presented to Russia the prospect of neutrality of the German Empire in the event of possible war against Turkey. If action would be taken against Turkey alone, some weakening of Russia might have been well be in the German interest. Bismarck had not only given Russia quasi free rein in the run-up to the Russo-Turkish war, initially he also had not been in favour of a conference of the great powers before the war and immediately after peace. Austria-Hungary had also indicated neutrality in a secret agreement with Russia, the Budapest Convention of January 1877. In exchange, Vienna desired territorial expansion in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the future. As a result, Russia would have been allowed to annex Bessarabia. The emergence of a new dominant major state of Russian grace in the Balkans was to be prevented, however.⁵

Bismarck as an “honest broker”

Bismarck went down in the history of the Congress of Berlin as “honest broker”.⁶ However, in the run-up to the

⁵ *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien. op.cit.*, XIV-XV; Imanuel Geiss, *Der lange Weg in die Katastrophe. Die Vorgeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges 1815-1914*, Munich, Zurich 1990; 150-156; Winfried Baumgart, *Europäisches Konzert und nationale Bewegung. Internationale Beziehungen 1830-1878*, Paderborn et al. 1999 (*Handbuch der Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen*, 6), 416-418 and 422-428.

⁶ So also Bismarck in his address to the Reichstag on 19 February 1878. He compares his possible role with that of “an honest broker who really

Congress, Bismarck had held quite different views. From a distance, Germany was, at the very least, interested in peace in the Balkans. Neither Russia nor Austria-Hungary were to emerge from the crisis crucially weakened in order to maintain the status quo in the middle of Europe for Germany. In this respect, even the German-British relations since 1875 are to be understood as basis of a European Balkan policy intended to preserve peace and the balance of powers. Only the British Prime Minister Disraeli was not of a mind to settle the conflict himself as quickly as Bismarck would have liked. According to this way of thinking, a result in favour of a European status quo was already a very good result for Bismarck if it was not to the disadvantage of Germany. Bismarck considered the Ottoman Empire a useless "source of irritation" in the discussions of the great powers. It was not intended to quasi renegotiate the Turkish defeat against Russia. Bismarck was unable to prevent the Turks from participating, however, he later made it known to the delegation from Constantinople that the Congress of Berlin had not convened for Turkey. Also, in their own country the delegation was isolated and powerless: for instance, they had not even been informed about the agreement between Britain and Turkey on Cyprus in exchange for the English protection of Asia Minor.⁷

Strictly speaking, 1878 was not a good year for the German leadership. Domestically, Bismarck was challenged by the Social Democrats as well as by Catholicism. He suffered

wants to make the business happen"; 6th session of 19 February 1878. In: *1878-1880 Sozialistengesetz und Wirtschaftsreform*. Edited by Philipp Stein, Leipzig 1877 (*Fürst Bismarcks Reden*, 7), 10-34, here 21.

⁷ Friedrich Scherer, *Adler und Halbmond. Bismarck und der Orient 1878-1890*, Paderborn et al. 2001 (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung. Wissenschaftliche Reihe, 2), 46-48.

with his whole being. The Chancellor of the German Empire Bismarck had left the capital of Berlin as early as on 16 April 1877, and during the subsequent ten months he only returned unfrequently. He suffered from overweight, asthma, rheumatism, neuralgia, shingles and insomnia. For health reasons, he worked from his country estate in Varzin, Pomerania or from health cures in Bad Gastein and Bad Kissingen. The latter place became known by his *Kissingen Dictation* where he described the principles of his foreign policy in view of the permanent crisis of the Eastern question: "If I were able to work, I could complete the picture and go into greater detail about my ideas: not about acquiring some country but of an overall political situation in which all powers except France require us; and are deterred from coalitions against us by their relations to each other as far as possible."⁸

The German Emperor was worse off than Bismarck. On 2 June 1878, Wilhelm I was attacked with a shotgun. It would take him until 5 December 1878 to return to Berlin, recovered from his serious injuries.

Preparations for the Congress of Berlin

The Congress of Berlin of 1878 as the last European peace congress was also compared with the Congress of Vienna of 1815. The differences, however, are great. The Congress of Vienna lasted longer, and the negotiations settled a multitude of technicalities. The Congress of Berlin lasted much shorter, and the work was much more specialized. This may have been modern or probably pragmatic. Bismarck insisted on a

⁸ "Kissinger Diktat" Bismarcks vom 15.6.1877. In: *Otto von Bismarck, Gesammelte Werke*. Edited by Michael Epkenhans and Erik Lommatzsch, Paderborn et al. 2008 (Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe, III. 3), 153.

short congress; because of his health, as he liked to emphasise. While the general tenor became clear very early, individual questions were referred to commissions and special arrangements became the responsibility of those who were allegedly directly affected.

The result of the Crimean War had to be considered as well. According to the principles of international law, the signatories of the Treaty of Paris of 1856 (with France, Britain and the Ottoman Empire on the one side and Russia on the other) should all have been included in bringing about a peace treaty like that of San Stefano. Russia was aware of this diplomatic and political mistake. But it did not do enough to correct this mistake either in advance nor later. As a result, the Peace Treaty of San Stefano could become a cause of war for Britain and Austria-Hungary, especially the creation of Great Bulgaria as a quasi-Russian outpost in the Balkans with access to the Aegean Sea. Moreover, it seemed to be only a pre-stage to further expansion toward the Western Balkan countries of the Ottoman Empire, which had been cut off from the heartland in the process.⁹

The organizational background is sometimes described as a German-Austrian game with the Russian Chancellor Gorchakov. Count Andr assy had proposed a conference in Berlin or Vienna. Bismarck supported Vienna as a conference venue, but Russia rejected Vienna and insisted on chairing the conference. Gorchakov is said to have said: "I cannot meet St Peter in heaven without having presided over at least one congress in Europe". Bismarck would have liked to have Gorchakov preside over the congress for a few days at least. The 81-year-old Russian was, after all, the oldest representative of the great powers and had been in office since 1856. However, it was clear

⁹ *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien. op.cit., XVI.*

early on that Britain would not support this. Gorchakov also proposed Dresden or Baden-Baden as a conference venues. It was said, however, that Bismarck would have had someone else act in his place there. Since it was important to Russia that all leading ministers and, above all, Bismarck were present at the conference, the presidency was quickly dispensed with, and they worked towards Berlin as venue for the conference and Bismarck as president of this Congress of Berlin.¹⁰

Many topics and results of the Congress seemed to have already been determined. This had advantages and disadvantages. From the perspective of the future Treaty of Berlin, the Treaty of San Stefano was also referred to as “preliminary peace”. The treaty granted Serbia, Montenegro and Romania independence from the Ottoman Empire. The states on Russia’s side were to be increased in size as a reward. Bosnia and Herzegovina were to become autonomous.¹¹ In May 1878, the situation in the Balkans was already the subject of talks between the German Empire, Austria-Hungary and Russia in Berlin. And on 30 May 1878, Britain and Russia even entered into a secret agreement. Even before the Congress of Berlin, it became obvious that the Peace Treaty of San Stefano would be revised to the disadvantage of Russia. Bulgaria was to lose 50 percent of its size as laid down in the Treaty of San Stefano. Britain was to be able to annex the strategically important Mediterranean island of Cyprus. And Russia was at least allowed to occupy Bessarabia. Shortly afterwards on 6 June

¹⁰ Horst Günter Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorchakov (1798-1883). Kanzler des russischen Reiches unter Zar Alexander II.*, Paderborn 2020, 986.

¹¹ Aydin Babuna, ‘The Berlin Treaty, Bosnian Muslims and Nationalism’. In: *War and Diplomacy. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*. Edited by M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett, Salt Lake City 2011, 198-225, here with emphasis on the Muslim population 198-199.

1878, Britain and Austria-Hungary negotiated the new borders of the territory of Bulgaria. Two days earlier, on 4 June 1878, Britain had already signed a secret treaty with the Ottoman Empire. In the process, Britain promised to support the Ottoman Empire at the Congress of Berlin and guaranteed the existence of Asia Minor, Syria and Mesopotamia. Britain, on the other hand, was to be allowed to occupy Cyprus if Russia annexed Batum at the Black Sea.¹²

Russia was finished militarily and already braced itself for a diplomatic defeat at the Congress. This was also the tenor of Russian consultations held in St. Petersburg on 8 and 9 June 1878. They consoled themselves at least ideally with the “considerable advantage for the Christian peoples of the Orient”. The Russian Minister of War Dmitri A. Milyutin had already explained in advance his perspective to Count Pyotr Shuvalov: “We are unable to continue fighting. We are unable for both financial and military reasons. You have taken on a patriotic task. Defend us now as well as possible. Insist on the points which you think you can insist on and best yield in everything to prevent the Congress from failing.” This was in accord with Gorchakov’s statements: “I wish peace, and I know only one person who wishes it even more urgently than I do, and that is the Minister of War.”¹³

One week before the start of the Congress of Berlin, it became apparent, at least for Britain, that it could become a success. Russia must have travelled to the defeat in Berlin with open eyes. And the representatives of the Ottoman Empire had, after all, lost the war, and after the so-called “Bulgarian

¹² *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien. op.cit., S. XVI-XVII.*

¹³ Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorchakov, op.cit., 987-989.*

horrors”; they had very bad international press. They did probably not arrive with great expectations. Bismarck, the “honest broker”, did not yet have great expectations, and had rather cautiously pointed out to his son Herbert that it was “altogether more important that we appeared to endeavour to secure peace than to actually maintain it.”¹⁴

Organisation and course of the conference

The letter of invitation to the conference highlighted the revision of the Peace Treaty of San Stefano as content of the negotiations. From the very beginning, Bismarck did not want the negotiations to get out of hand. He did not want it to be a congress of princes, but rather have the character of tight working meetings of the statesmen. Therefore, no other states were to be admitted as participants. And if such was inevitable, as in the case of Romania, Greece and Persia, then at least only short presentations were to be allowed and no joint consultations with third countries.¹⁵

From 13 June to 13 July 1878, the Congress of Berlin chaired by Otto von Bismarck took place at the Palace of the Imperial Chancellery (Reichskanzlerpalais) on Wilhelmstrasse. 20 plenipotentiaries and about 60 other persons came to the Congress. They lived in the buildings of the embassies or in hotels such as the “Kaiserhof” and the “Royal”.¹⁶ The conference lan-

¹⁴ Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorcakov, op.cit.*, 989.

¹⁵ Walther Hubatsch, ‘Der Berliner Kongress vom 13. Juni bis 13. Juli 1878’. In: *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Ausstellung des Geheimen Staatsarchivs Preußischer Kulturbesitz zur 100. Wiederkehr der Eröffnung des Berliner Kongresses am 13. Juni 1978*. Edited by Friedrich Benninghoven et al., Berlin 1978, 10-15, here 14-15.

¹⁶ ‘Der Kongress in Berlin’. In: *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Ausstellung. op.cit.*, 52; Imanuel Geiss, ‘Der Berliner Kongress. Eine historische Retros-

guage was French, but Disraeli did not speak French well and sometimes spoke English, which had never happened before at international conferences. Bismarck constantly changed between three languages. In addition to the European great powers of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary, the Congress was attended by Italy as the new sixth power and by the Ottoman Empire. At the Congress, the principle of unanimity was applied to all substantial decisions. There was a hard-working congress secretariat and an elaborate catering service, which was very important for Bismarck. The congress consultations and decisions were carefully recorded. During the four weeks of the Congress of Berlin, there were 20 plenary sessions that lasted about two to three hours each and always took place in the afternoon. There were a total of 20 plenipotentiaries, including three delegates from the major powers and two from Italy. The representatives of the Balkan countries and of Persia were consulted on certain topics. However, they had no general right to be heard and did not have the right to vote. As formally not yet sovereign states, the Balkan states did not yet have international legal capacity. Bismarck's negative attitude and downright bad behaviour toward the delegates of the Ottoman Empire did not comply with diplomatic conventions. However, nobody supported the Turks, and therefore Bismarck did not need to expend much effort on the vote. Bismarck anyway prepared the findings of the Congress himself and relied on approval through inertia or on minor changes in the plenary. In addition, he deliberately kept the pace and

pektive'. In: *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878. Die Politik der Großmächte und die Probleme der Modernisierung in Südosteuropa in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Edited by Ralph Melville and Hans-Jürgen Schröder, Wiesbaden 1982, 31-49, here 49.

the number of the various consultations high. This exhausted the participants and allowed little time for undesired consultations in other constellations. However, if Bismarck was unable to find solutions in the plenary, he visited the delegations individually. During such a difficult consultation with the Turks, he even appeared in uniform with a helmet, which made quite an impression. Bismarck brushed off small protests about the high workload with the remark that work had never killed anyone.¹⁷

Britain and Russia represented the two antagonists of the Congress. But many issues had already been basically clarified in advance. The Congress of Berlin apparently created a new alliance and political friendship: “Dizzy” and “Bizzy”, these were the names the British press sometimes used for the power duet of Benjamin Disraeli and Otto von Bismarck. Both were pragmatists of politics, and in their countries, they were challenged by liberal humanists. Behind this, however, was Bismarck’s bias for British positions on the Eastern question. Even though this was at the expense of the Agreement of the Three Emperors of 1873. The foreign policy of the German Empire had moved into gear, and the British Empire was a fixture of power.¹⁸

The Bulgarian question was regarded as difficult and was thus the subject at the beginning of the conference. The Bulgarians were represented by Russia and had not even come to the Congress. The “Great Bulgaria” created by Russia could not endure. The smaller autonomous principality of Bulgaria and the self-administered Turkish province of Eastern Rumelia

¹⁷ *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien. op.cit.*, XVII-XXI and XXIII.

¹⁸ Lothar Gall, *Bismarck. Der weiße Revolutionär*, Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Vienna 1980, 522-525.

were established. Furthermore, it was ensured that none of these new territories was to have a land connection to the Aegean Sea. Behind the scenes, there was a fierce dispute between Gorchakov and Shuvalov, since Gorchakov wanted to escape responsibility towards the Tsar for the poor results with pretended sickness and weakness. Gorchakov, therefore, did not attend the 4th, 5th and 6th sessions of the Congress and had Shuvalov deal with the negotiations that were unfavourable for Russia, yet inevitable. In other questions, however, Gorchakov overestimated his opportunities to influence, which became clear to the Tsar even from afar. However, the Tsar also saw that at the Congress Bismarck did not act in the way that would have been expected in the spirit of the Agreement of the Three Emperors and of the Russian policy toward German unity. The occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary and the question of the Sanjak of Novi Pazar were quickly resolved thanks to the secret preliminary negotiations. In relation to this, the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro was no longer a particular point of contention. With the exception of the difficult questions, Bismarck dealt with the individual topics in the order in which they appeared in the Peace Treaty of San Stefano. However, the nations concerned, such as the Romanians, had no idea what decisions the major powers had already made in the run-up to the conference. The Romanian Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister, for example, had different assessments of the future of Bessarabia, and both had correct basic assumptions for their respective positions.¹⁹

¹⁹ Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorchakov, op.cit.*, 991-997; *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien. op.cit.*, XXI-XXII and XXIV; Barbara Jelavich, 'Romania at the Congress of Berlin. Problems of Peace-

Therefore, they entered into diplomatic battles that had already been lost. This was at times unrewarding. On 26 June 1878, the Romanian plenipotentiaries, Prime Minister Ion Constantin Brătianu and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihail Kogălniceanu, submitted a memorandum of the Prince of Romania. The two politicians had been invited to give a presentation to the participants at the meeting on 1 July 1878. However, they were not allowed to attend the subsequent consultation. Memorandum submitted to the Congress by Romania summarized Romania's requests in five points:

“1) no part of the current territory will be separated from Romania; 2) Romanian territory will not be subject to any right to march through for Russian armies; 3) Romania will regain possession of the islands and Danube estuaries, including Snake Island, in consideration of hundred-year-old claims; 4) Romania will receive compensation in relation to the fielded military power in the form that will be deemed to be the least expensive; 5) Romania's independence will definitely be recognized and its territory neutralized.” Finally, the future role of Romania was emphasized: “In view of its geographical position, its cause is that of calm and peace in the Orient.” Anything else would not have been an option given the situation at that time since young Romania did not have a powerful ally or a strong army. In this respect, the Treaty itself provided a certain preservation of the status quo during the initial stage. Article 43 of the Treaty of Berlin of 13 July 1878 was to be the reward for all efforts and suffering, that is the independence

making.’ In: *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878. Die Politik der Großmächte und die Probleme der Modernisierung in Südosteuropa in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Edited by Ralph Melville and Hans-Jürgen Schröder, Wiesbaden 1982 (*Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz*. Abteilung Universalgeschichte, Beiheft 7), 189-204, here 198.

of Romania. However, as a result Bessarabia with its Romanian majority was also lost, and the new territories with a Muslim-Turkish-Tartar majority in Dobruja seemed to be only an unequal substitute at that time. In consequence of the Treaty of Berlin, the subsequent decade saw a large exodus from both areas.²⁰

On 16 July 1878, Prussian Crown Princess Victoria wrote in a letter to her mother, the English Queen, with some compassion: "The Romanians left Berlin deeply upset and depressed. But I don't see how more could have been achieved for them after they had put their fate in the hands of Russia."²¹

The question of Asia Minor developed into a final dispute. Originally, everything had been settled between Britain and Russia in advance. However, in the middle of the conference, the British-Russian Convention and thus concessions to Russia, such as the possession of Batum, appeared in the English press. For a time, there was even a discussion of continuing the war. At the request of Shuvalov, Bismarck spoke with Disraeli and convinced him to relent with a compromise. He referred to the Russian-British arrangements that had been made in advance, and which Bismarck regarded as a package deal together with Germany's original willingness to hold the Congress. After all, with his approval of the compromise for a free port, Gorchakov finally got his important appearance at the end of the Congress.²²

²⁰ Jelavich, *Romania at the Congress of Berlin*, *op.cit.*, 200-203; Justin McCarthy, 'Ignoring the People. The Effects of the Congress of Berlin.' In: *War and Diplomacy. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*. Edited by M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett, Salt Lake City 2011, 429-448, here 434-435.

²¹ *Briefe der Kaiserin Friedrich*. Edited by von Frederick Ponsonby, Berlin 1929, 197.

²² Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorchakov*, *op.cit.*, 997-1001.

A lasting testimony of the Congress is the large painting that hangs in the *Rote Rathaus* (townhall) of Berlin today. Since Bismarck refused the reception planned by the city of Berlin, the city council used the funds earmarked for it to commission a painting of the Congress by the famous history painter Anton von Werner. In the last weeks of the Congress, Werner prepared portrait studies and decided to capture the conclusion of the Congress on canvas. This may have had political consequences. In view of the meagre results of the Congress, the handshake of Bismarck and Russian ambassador Count Shuvalov was later regarded in Russia as an inappropriate gesture, if not as a betrayal. However, it was certainly in keeping with Bismarck's support of Shuvalov in order to make him look good as a possible successor to Gorchakov. However, anyone who was identified with the Congress of Berlin had a hard time in Russia later on.²³ Gorchakov later wrote in his memoirs with regard to his memorandum to the Tsar and the conclusion therein: "The Treaty of Berlin is the blackest page in my career." The Tsar is said to have commented on the margin: "And in mine, too."²⁴

In the months after the conference, there are only few references in the files of the German Foreign Office. The major work was completed. Subsequently, discussions dealt with the "Rumelian border regulation commission" or "territorial regulations" in connection with Greece. After all, the Ottoman Empire had to implement the decisions of the conference, and the Congress powers had to control the implementation. This was now also the interest of the German Empire as the host of the Congress of Berlin. Furthermore, even France was supported by Berlin in individual issues since dealing with the Balkans

²³ Anton von Werner, *Erlebnisse und Eindrücke 1870-1890*, Berlin 1913, 223-236.

²⁴ Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorchakov, op.cit.*, 1006.

distracted them from Germany. Bismarck had, of course, realised that Russia regarded itself as the “great loser” of the Congress and still hoped for support from Germany. For Bismarck, the old Prussian role of the “spectator” was the solution for the transition. For example, the German ambassador to Constantinople, Paul von Hatzfeld, was instructed by the Foreign Office to stay out of British-Russian diplomatic disputes at the Bosphorus and to no longer act as a “mediator a tout prix”. Here, the “honest broker” Bismarck became the “invisible partner of the Treaty of Berlin”. Although Bismarck did not tolerate any objection to Russia in his ranks, this restraint in disputes to the disadvantage of Russia was a German “anti-Russian policy”, which eventually forced Russia to side with Germany for lack of options. In November 1878, Bismarck stated that the “oriental ulcer” was to be kept open in order to secure German peace in the centre of Europe. Such a German-Russian partnership had an unpleasant overtone, and this was not lost on Russia either.²⁵

In St. Petersburg, they felt that Bismarck and the Germans had deceived them. In Russia and among the politically thinking people, the government of the Tsar himself was to blame for the political loss of the results of the Treaty of San Stefano. The Russian Minister of War Milyutin committed his realis-

²⁵ Letter by Herbert von Bismarck to Bülow. PA AA, R 13033. Schreiben. Ausfertigung. Praes.: 30.10.1878. In: *Otto von Bismarck, Gesammelte Werke. Schriften 1877-1878*. Edited by Michael Epkenhans and Erik Lommatzsch, Paderborn et al. 2008 (*Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe*, III. 3), S. 578; Bülow to Kronprinz Friedrich Wilhelm. PA AA, R 13033. Immediatschreiben. Ausfertigung. 10.11.1878. In: *op.cit.*, S. 592; Bülow to Hatzfeld (Konstantinopel). PA AA, R 12968. Erlass Nr. 432. Reinschrift. 12.11.1878. In: *op.cit.*, S. 596; On this volume. In: *op.cit.*, XIX; Friedrich Scherer, *Adler und Halbmond. Bismarck und der Orient 1878-1890*, Paderborn u.a. 2001 (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung. Wissenschaftliche Reihe, 2), 56-58.

tic assessment of the situation to his diary: "Public opinion in Russia is extremely hostile to the government, in particular in Moscow. The Treaty of Berlin causes discontent almost everywhere. Disappointment can be considered as the reason for this. They had expected something colossal. When the idealistic dreams did not materialize, when the harsh reality manifested itself, everyone raged against our diplomacy and the entire government."²⁶

And eventually peace

The Treaty of Berlin of 1878 was a compromise on the interests of the major European powers. The outcome of the Congress of Berlin of 1878 was based on an agreement of a new system of six powers after a series of various European wars between 1853 and 1878. In the end, this proved the functioning of a diplomatic principle that had existed in Europe since the Thirty Years' War. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire was regarded as a problem to be dealt with in Europe, Asia and Africa, which should be approached step by step. The results of the Treaty of Berlin showed how comprehensive the regulations for the entire Balkans were. They included the division and reduction of the territory of (Great) Bulgaria and the further existence of Macedonia within the Ottoman Empire, including a connection to Albania. The occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by a foreign power such as Austria-Hungary was in contrast to the independence of Serbia, Romania and Montenegro. Free navigation on the Danube ensured the economic and political influence of Austria-Hungary and supported the development of the new Balkan states. For the first time since 1829, the Ottoman Empire had to abandon territories in the

²⁶ Quoted in Linke, *Fürst Aleksandr M. Gorcakov, op.cit.*, 1007-1008.

Balkans, and in addition lost 4.5 million Christian inhabitants. The reduction of future Russian influence, which was primarily due to efforts by Britain, was reflected in territorial gains of Greece as well as of the Ottoman Empire and Persia in Central Asia, and in the free harbour of Batum, which was not realized in the end, after all. The continued existence of the Ottoman Empire for so long may also have been due to the fact that the cession of territory resulted in the Eastern question increasingly becoming a separate “Balkan question” and that Turkey, by quasi moving eastward, no longer stood between the major powers.²⁷

The Congress of Berlin did not prevent all conflicts, but at least it prevented a great war of the European powers and a Russo-British war that had been imminent at that time. And Russia, which had already been deprived of its power in Paris in 1856, was once again consigned to her place on the edge of Europe for the long term. In the light of the mounting crisis of 1877 and 1878, the great powers also developed a “European awareness” that seemed to seize even Bismarck, whose primary concern had been a rapprochement between Russia and Austria-Hungary. In the end, however, as early as in 1879, the Dual Alliance between the German Empire and Austria-Hungary showed that Bismarck felt compelled to take a stand on foreign policy and to commit himself to it. Other European powers were to follow. From Bismarck’s point of view, any rapprochement between Austria-Hungary and Britain was problematic since this could force Russia to side with France. Of

²⁷ *Der Berliner Kongress 1878. Protokolle und Materialien. op.cit.*, XX-IV-XXVII; Friedrich Scherer, *Adler und Halbmond. Bismarck und der Orient 1878-1890*, Paderborn et al. 2001 (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung. Wissenschaftliche Reihe, 2), 52.

course, at the time Bismarck had by no means reached the end of the art of his diplomacy.²⁸

The Russian war had jeopardized the balance of power in Europe. The Congress was an intermediate step toward a final solution, whatever it might be. Crises regarding the Eastern question in the Balkans remained. The Ottoman Empire survived as a political power in the Balkans for another three decades until the First Balkan War of 1912 also in view of the results of the Congress of Berlin.

The auspicious course of the Congress of Berlin also had domestic consequences for the peacemaker Bismarck. The Congress took place during the election campaign for the Reichstag, and the supporters of Bismarck were able to achieve a good election result. Russia, however, resented Bismarck for many things and felt as the loser of the Congress of Berlin. In France and Britain, on the other hand, Bismarck and thus the German Empire had gained a certain reputation and predictability, as had not been the case since the foundation of the Reich in 1871.²⁹

Otto von Bismarck was a giant in Prussian-German politics of the 19th century. He was a political and diplomatic talent, but unfortunately not a democrat. There is always a certain admiration for Bismarck in Germany, but on the whole the public memory of Bismarck is not unprejudiced. He does not seem to have left the Germans a legacy for democracy. And yet, the Congress of Berlin had been a starting point for solving difficult issues. In the end, Bismarck recognized that “an independent and interest-based but nevertheless responsible and balancing, and therefore predictable, policy was the connecting element between the European states and their states-

²⁸ Andreas Hillgruber, *Bismarcks Außenpolitik*, Freiburg 1972, 153.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 152-153.

men.”³⁰ Regardless, many Germans have learned from him something of and about politics and diplomacy. And people like to quote him still. The secret of his political genius is often explained with the following quote by him: “It is impossible to create something new, we can only wait until we hear the footsteps of God in history and then leap forward and try to catch on to His coat-tails – that’s all.”³¹

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³⁰ Dominik Haffer, *Europa in den Augen Bismarcks. Bismarcks Vorstellungen von der Politik der europäischen Mächte und vom europäischen Staatensystem*, Paderborn et al. 2010 (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung. Wissenschaftliche Reihe, 16), 625.

³¹ Quoted in Arnold Oskar Meyer, *Bismarcks Glaube. Nach neuen Quellen aus dem Familienarchiv*. 2nd edition, Munich 1933, 7.

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SERBIAN ARMY DURING THE SERBIAN – OTTOMAN WARS (1876–1878)

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Abstract

The paper deals with the activities of Serbian Army during the Serbian-Ottoman wars of 1876-1878. As the main reason behind its bad performance, the author stressed lack of qualified officers and low fighting capacity of the Serbian National Militia. Due to its poor results on the battlefield, the Serbian Army gained the reputation of a low-value armed force. As a consequence, the awareness of the need for military reforms grew. During the next 30 years, mainly following the German organizational pattern, the Serbs managed to create an army which was prized as a first class fighting power during the Balkan wars and WWI.

Keywords: *Serbian-Ottoman War, Balkans, National Militia, Serbian Army, Military Reform*

During the period before the Serbian-Ottoman wars of 1876-1878, Serbian tributary principality had a small standing army and large scale militia at its disposal. From 1860 to 1874, the Standing Army with the strength of 123 officers and 4,918 soldiers consisted of one Infantry regiment comprising 4

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battalions, one cavalry squadron divided into two troops, one artillery battalion of 3 batteries and one pioneers company. Serbia also managed to settle some professional institutions such as Artillery school for basic education of officers of all branches, Military hospital, Arsenal in Kragujevac for artillery pieces production and reparation of military armament and equipment and small gunpowder workshop in Stragari near Kragujevac. Army Ministry was established in 1862, and the army organization was further improved by the introduction of military discipline law two years later.¹

During the entire period from the official introduction of Serbian Standing Army in 1830s up to 1870s, the quality of the Serbian officers' corps was relatively low. Most of the Serbian officers were those promoted from the ranks of common soldiers without passing any serious examination regarding professional military skills. There were also former Austrian officers, mostly Serbs by origin, who decided to continue their military carrier in Serbia. For most of them, the main reason for changing the citizenship and army of service was not the patriotic one. Some of them were dismissed from the Austrian army because of bad behaviour (mostly alcoholism and embezzlement). There were also those belonging to Pan-Slavic circles or active participants in the Polish rebellions, mostly Croats, Czechs, Slovaks and Poles, who felt that Serbia could offer them ways of social promotion or of promoting their national ideas.² Some of them, such as František Zach, who was the founder of Serbian Artillery School, brought an important contribution to the development of Serbian military

¹ Славица Ратковић – Костић, *Европеизација српске војске 1878 – 1903* (Београд: Војноисторијски институт, 2007), 22–30.

² Радосав Марковић, *Војска и наоружање Србије кнеза Милоша* (Београд: Научно дело, 1957), 126–129.

organization.³ First Serbian military educated officers came from Russia. Mainly, in the period from 1833 to 1836, Prince Miloš Obrenović sent a group of 30 men to acquire military education in Bessarabia.⁴ Next generation was developed during the period from 1850 to 1876, when about 10 classes of 156 cadets graduated from the Serbian Artillery School.⁵ After graduation, a third of them were further educated and trained abroad.⁶ Most of them were sent to Prussia at War Academy or United Artillery and Engineering School in Berlin, following by those sent at the Technical Academies and Cavalry Schools in Austria and Russia.⁷ Thanks to the knowledge they brought from abroad, in 1871 some further improvements were made. For example, officer examinations for promotion to the ranks of Second Lieutenant, Captain and Major were introduced for the first time.⁸ Especially valued from that period was Lt. Colonel Kosta Protić, who became Minister of the Army in 1873. Graduating the first class of the Serbian Artillery School in 1855, followed by the United Artillery and Engineering School in Berlin, Protić was the first Serbian officer with full military

³ About František Zach's biography see more: Милић Милићевић, Љубодраг Поповић, *Генерали војске Кнежевине и Краљевине Србије* (Београд: Војноиздавачки завод, 2003), 98–102.

⁴ Радосав Марковић, *Војска и наоружање Србије кнеза Милоша ...*, 276–280.

⁵ *Споменица седамдесетпетогодишњице Војне академије* (Београд: Штампарска радионица Министарства Војске и Морнарице, 1925), 269–274.

⁶ Далибор Денда, *Шлем и шајкача: војни фактор и југословенско – немачки односи (1918–1941)* (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2019), 52.

⁷ Слободан Ђукић, “Школовање српских официра у Аустро-Угарској и Немачкој у XIX и првој половини XX века”, *Војноисторијски гласник*, 1 (2014), 88–91.

⁸ Далибор Денда, *Шлем и шајкача: војни фактор и југословенско – немачки односи (1918 – 1941)*, 154.

education in this position.⁹ He immediately improved the system of military training and education and expanded the formation of the Standing Army into a single main command (Division), consisting of Artillery and Infantry brigade commands and Engineers and Cavalry regiments commands. Artillery brigade consisted of 3 regiments with 4 batteries each, Infantry brigade of two regiments with two battalions each, Engineers regiment command of one pioneer and one pontoon battalion, and Cavalry regiment command from two squadrons. The number of officer's posts within the Standing Army also rose to 317, including 5 Colonels, 12 Lt. Colonels and 20 Majors.¹⁰ Only a few months before the start of hostilities, in February 1876, a decree on the formation of Main General staff was passed. Unfortunately it was not operational until the outbreak of the conflict.¹¹

At that time, Serbia's main fighting force was the large-scale National Militia. The role of the Standing Army was long considered only to be used as an institution for providing instructors for Militia. The Militia system was introduced by Prince Mihailo Obrenović in the period 1861-1864. The militia was divided into two classes. The first one was to be used as a spearhead, ready for action at any moment, and the second one as a reserve. It was to comprise 17 regiments with 62 infantry battalions, 26 cavalry squadrons, 17 pioneer troops and 6 batteries. The plan was to have 50.000 men enlisted within

⁹ About Kosta Protić's biography see more: Милић Милићевић, Љубодраг Поповић, *Генерали војске Кнежевине и Краљевине Србије*, 192–196.

¹⁰ Далибор Денда, *Сербская армия 1804–1918* (Москва: Институт славяноведения РАН, Санкт Петербург: Нестор – история, 2021), 51–53.

¹¹ Слободан Ђукић, "Оснивање и рад Главног генералштаба српске војске 1876–1912", *Војно дело*, 2 (2015), 329–330.

the first class of militia and some 40.000 men within its second class. Commanders up to the battalion level were to be appointed from the respectable representatives of municipalities who had to accomplish adequate military training courses. Military training was scheduled to take place on Sundays and holidays at platoon and company level, and regimental manoeuvres once a year in the fall, lasting 15 days. Retired soldiers of the standing army were to act as instructors.

All this looked good on paper, but the implementation of these ideas brought a lot of problems. The local commanders were usually poorly trained and preferred to picnic, drink bear, and eat pork, then engage in military exercises with their countrymen.¹² This type of military service was very popular in Serbian society at the time. According to the ideas of those times, with the implementation of the Militia system followed by conscription, Serbia could obtain a large-scale army for a small amount of money. There were only a small number of foreign-educated officers who advocated for a more modern recruiting system similar to that in Germany. Some of them, such as Captain Sava Grujić, were even dismissed from the Army because of this kind of views. Although, from a military point of view, Serbia was considered the strongest Balkan tributary state due to its Militia, most of foreign military observers had no doubts about its value. For example, when one of the Turkish generals of Serbian origin, Omer Pasha Latas observed the manoeuvres of Serbian militia troops in the vicinity of Belgrade, he commented that after the first clash with the enemy, they would all run away.¹³ The action of the Serbian

¹² Живота Ђорђевић, *Српска народна војска 1861 – 1864* (Београд: Народна књига, 1984), 134–141.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 160.

militia during the Serbian-Ottoman wars of 1876–1878 came to confirm the validity of Omer Pasha Latas's opinions.

The semi-independent Serbian principalities of Serbia and Montenegro began preparing for war after the Serb revolt that broke out in Herzegovina in 1875 against Ottoman rule and soon spread to other regions of the Vilayet of Bosnia. This was followed by the Spring Uprising of 1876 in Bulgaria. Although the Ottoman Empire quickly suppressed the revolt in Bulgaria, the fighting in Herzegovina and Bosnia continued to drag on. Serbia declared war on Ottoman Empire on 30 June 1876. Immediately before the start of operations, the Serbian War Council adopted the view supported by Major Sava Grujić regarding the war plan that was based on the strategic principle that the defeat of the main opposing forces ensures successful achievement of the war goals. Shortly before war was declared, the Standing Army was disbanded. Each of its 16 companies went into one of the Militia battalions. The Serbian principality managed to mobilize approximately 123.000 enlisted men in 176 battalions, 18 cavalry squadrons, 42 artillery batteries equipped with 206 guns, followed by 18 pioneer and 6 medical companies.¹⁴

When the war of 1876 started, Serbia had only 317 officers, out of which only 37 were senior officers. Most of the officers were promoted from the ranks and were characterized by the lack of any serious military education. Reserve officers were mostly peasants who had attended only short officer courses.¹⁵ Even before the outbreak of war, the Serbian army

¹⁴ Славица Ратковић – Костић, *Европеизација српске војске 1878–1903*, 32.

¹⁵ Dalibor Denda, „A Professional army as a Successful Factor of war – Case Study: Serbia, 1876 – 1918”, in: *Why do Nations participate in War and why not?* ed. by Jordan Baev (Sofia: G.S. Rakovsky Defense and Staff Collage, 2013), 16.

was reinforced with a huge number of volunteers from various countries, including Russians, Bulgarians, Italian followers of Giuseppe Garibaldi, Prussian officers, but also English, French, Greeks, Belgians, Norwegians, Romanians, Albanians and Poles. The largest detachments were those of Serbs from Austria and Turkey, Russians and Bulgarians.

Russian contingent headed by General Mikhail Chernyaev consisted of about 2.700 volunteers, of which 718 were officers.¹⁶ This significantly helped in balancing the shortage of officers in the army. In the first phase of the war, Chernyaev was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian army, and the number of Russian officers was more than twice that of the Serbian one.¹⁷

Serbs formed four corps. Morava corps, under the command of General Chernyaev, with a strength of 50,000 men, was concentrated nearby Aleksinac and Deligrad. Ibar corps, under the command of General Zach, with 24,000 men on the Javor Mountain; Eastern corps, under Colonel Milojko Lešjanin, with a strength of 25,000 men, near the Eastern border (Negotin, Zaječar and Knjaževac) and Western corps, under the command of Colonel Ranko Alimpić, near the Western boarder on the Drina river (Lešnica and Kušići). The general reserve made of 18,000 men was to be assembled in the north from Morava corps, near Jagodina, Paraćin and Ćuprija. The main Ottoman army was based in Sofia under the command of War Minister Abdul Kerim Pasha with 50,000 men plus some 20,000 irregulars (*bashi-bazouk*) and Circassians. By the end of June, a strong division of Ahmed Eyüb Pasha's Danube

¹⁶ Petar Tomac, *Ratovi i armije XIX veka* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1968), 605–606

¹⁷ Чедомир Попов, “Први српско-турски рат 1876”, *Историја српског народа*, V-1 (Београд: Српска књижевна задруга, 1994), 383–389.

Corps was deployed to positions near Niš, Bela Palanka and Pirot. At Vidin and Nikopol, Osman Pasha and Fazil Pasha had 23,000 men. To the west, in Bosnia, there were small garrisons at Bijeljina and Zvornik, with a strength of more than 12,000, mostly Egyptians. There was also a garrison at Sandžak of Novi Pazar commanded by Mehmed Ali Pasha, with 8,000 men.¹⁸

The initial Serbian military plan was to attack the main Ottoman forces concentrated in the vicinity of Niš, with the main forces under the command of General Chernyaev. Other corps were to launch simultaneous attacks as a diversionary tactic. When Serbian offensive began, General Milojko Lešjanin was defeated in the north-east, in attempt to seize the town of Kula. He also failed to hold the Ottoman advance over the Timok River. Although he retreated to the fortress at Zaječar, the Ottoman army captured the town on 7 August 1876. Shortly after, the Serbian troops were forced to evacuate the town of Knjaževac, which was immediately set on fire by the Turks.

The main advance of the Serbian army in the south initially appeared to be successful when it moved quickly down into the Nišava Valley. They were forced to withdraw, however, when the Ottomans responded by sending the whole East Army grouped in two columns near Brestovačka and Soko Banja to flank the Serbian position. On the western front, General Ranko Alimpić crossed the Drina in July 1876, but failed to capture Bijeljina.

As one can conclude, even at the beginning of the offensive, the Serbian forces were pushed back on all front lines. The real disaster was just about to happen. Soon after, the Ottoman commander Abdul Kerim Pasha concentrated 40,000 troops at

¹⁸ Petar Tomac, *Ratovi i armije XIX veka*, 606.

Niš and advanced through the Morava Valley towards Aleksinac. Chernyaev had fewer than 30,000 men and, unlike the Ottoman commander, he spread them thin on both sides of the Morava River and in the mountains. Although the Serbs fought with bravery in defending Šumatovac's positions, the Serbian troops were overwhelmed by massive Ottoman firepower and bayonet attacks. A new Serbian defensive line was created at Djunis. At the Serbian request, the Great Powers intervened and agreed on a ten-day ceasefire (September 3-13, 1876). Soon after, General Mikhail Chernyaev, who opposed peace with the Ottomans, provoked the so-called Deligrad event. On 4 September, he declared the proclamation of a kingdom to the Serbian Army. Prince Milan, pressured by the Great Powers, stated that he would not accept the proclamation. On 16 September, a new Serbian offensive began, but it soon failed. Until the end of October, Turks managed to break through and occupy Aleksinac and Deligrad. The road to Belgrade was open. On 31 October 1876, with the situation becoming dire and Serbian forces about to collapse, Russia mobilized its army and threatened to declare war on the Ottoman Empire unless it signed a truce with Serbia and renewed the peace negotiations within forty-eight hours. Soon after, an armistice was concluded. General Chernyaev resigned his command at the beginning of November. The negotiations lasted until 28 February 1877 and effectively ended the fighting between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire under the conditions of *status quo ante bellum*.¹⁹

The performance of Serbian troops during the war justified all of Major Sava Grujić's criticism of the National Militia. Im-

¹⁹ Чедомир Попов, "Први српско-турски рат 1876", *Историја српског народа*, V-1, 383–389.

mediately, on the Armistice Day, Grujić was promoted to the rank of Colonel and took over the position of Minister of War, which he would hold until early October 1878. As Minister of War, Grujić immediately increased the number of Infantry battalions of the standing army from four to eight. Its 32 companies reinforced the Militia as was the case during the First Serbian-Ottoman war. He also implemented a new war formation of active troops, organizing them into five instead of four corps. The Second Serbian-Ottoman war took place between 13 December 1877 and 5 February 1878. This time Serbia mobilized about 82,000 men enlisted within 124 battalions and 24 squadrons supported with 232 guns.²⁰ Due to the circumstances in which the main Ottoman forces were engaged in fighting against Russian and Romanian forces, Serbian army fought mainly against Ottoman irregulars, mostly Albanian and Serbian Muslims. The value of these troops was largely similar to that of their Serbian counterparts. By early 1878, the Serbian Army had captured most of the South Morava basin, including the cities of Niš, Kula, Ak Plalanka, Prokuplje, Leskovac and Vranje. It also reached Vitina and Gračanica in Kosovo, stopping near Priština.²¹ The war ended with Serbian victory. According to official sources, Serbia suffered 3,876 men fallen on the battlefield or missing. Another 1,534 enlisted men died of wounds and illnesses in the Serbian military hospitals.²²

As a consequence of the poor performance during the First Serbian-Ottoman war, for a long time the Serbian army would be seen by the European public as a low value armed force. However, the Serbian-Ottoman wars were a turning

²⁰ Далибор Денда, *Сербская армия 1804 – 1918*, 60–62.

²¹ Petar Томас, *Ratovi i armije XIX veka*, 629–631.

²² Далибор Денда, *Сербская армия 1804–1918*, 65.

point leading to the acceleration of military reforms in Serbia, which began soon after, under the patronage of King Milan and Alexander Obrenović. The results of those reforms will be proven during the Balkan wars and First World War, when the Serbian army was appreciated, especially by the enemies, as a first-class fighting force.

RUSSIA PREPARES FOR WAR – THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE PERSPECTIVE

Mihail Simov*

Abstract

This paper is focused on analysing the development and the evolution of the Eastern Question showing that, in fact, Russia started the strategic preparation for a war with the Ottoman Empire well before the Eastern crisis broke out. The research of peacetime military intelligence sources from the years between the Crimean War and the beginning of the Eastern crisis, which remains a relatively less studied aspect of Russia's military activity in this period, provides significant evidence as to better understand the strategic thinking of some high-ranking officers in St. Petersburg, to trace out the shaping of the Russian strategic plan for this conflict and also to see the different layer in Russia's policy towards the strategically important region. The intention is to outline the way to Russian-Ottoman conflict as a whole process of strategic planning and preparing for a hypothetical war against the Ottoman Empire. In that light, the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 stand out not only as a conflict in which Russia was pushed by the circumstances, but as a sought-after opportunity to achieve the its strategic aims in the region.

Keywords: *Military Intelligence, Russia, Ottoman Empire, War, Balkans, Eastern Question*

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The Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878 ended the series of bilateral conflicts between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, re-shaped the political map of Southeastern Europe and marked the beginning of a new stage in the history of the Eastern question.

Despite all the weaknesses in the army's command, tactics, coordination between different type of troops, armament, etc. within less than a year after the declaration of war, Russia's troops were on a direct striking distance from the Ottoman capital – unprecedented success in the history of the Russo-Ottoman conflicts. Nevertheless, reading the diplomatic documents from the pre-war months leaves us with the firm (and actually well-founded) impression that St. Petersburg was drawn into this war after doing everything possible to avoid it.

Here we will not question the obvious hesitant reaction of the Russian government to the events in the initial stage of the Eastern crisis, Minister Gorchakov's attempts to find solution of the Balkan crisis within the League of the three emperors or the overall desire of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to avoid another costly military gamble on the Balkans. Our intention instead is to trace the way to this conflict as a whole process of strategic planning and preparing for a hypothetical war against the Ottoman Empire, a process that took place for at least a decade before the Eastern crisis broke out. The subject is viewed through the prism of peacetime military intelligence in the years between the Crimean war and the beginning of the Eastern crisis which remains relatively less studied aspect of Russia's military activity in this period and which can help us to better understand the strategic thinking of some high-ranking officers in St. Petersburg, to trace out the shaping of the Russian strategic plan for this

conflict and also to see the different layer in Russia's policy towards the strategically important region.

Despite the fact that after 1856 a new war with the Ottoman Empire was not among St. Petersburg's immediate plans, the perspective for such conflict became quite clear as soon as the guns of Crimean war felt silent. Although with moderate general terms the Treaty of Paris (1856) deprived St. Petersburg of its dominant positions on the Balkans and the Black Sea region and struck a heavy blow on the prestige of Romanov dynasty and on Russia as a Great power. Nevertheless, after 1856 Russia's Eastern policy seen no major change in its basic concepts. Given the circumstances and the newly adopted policy of avoiding foreign complications and focusing on domestic renewal, the Tsarist government had to restrain itself from active interventions in the East, but Southeastern Europe remained firmly in the sphere of its political interest and the region continued to be seen as inextricably bound up with Russia by the ties of Orthodoxy and Slav descent. Restoration of influence and prestige on the Balkans and solving the Eastern question in Russia's favor remained one of the principal long term goals of Tsarist government. And the means to achieve that went not much further than a new war in the East against the old enemy – Ottoman Empire. Moreover, due to the nature of Eastern question, major implications could force Russia to intervene at any moment in near future even against its will. As General Nikolay Obruchev wrote in 1864, "The Eastern question is now quieted down but not solved. Who can vouch that our generation won't have to face it again in a far greater scale than in the previous war?"¹ All this meant that

¹ Oleg Airapetov. *Zabytaja karera Russkogo Moltke Nikolai Nikolaevich Obruchev.* (St. Petersburg: Aleteyya 1998), 116.

the period of domestic renewal will also have to serve as time to prepare for a future campaign with a great political stake – the solution of the Eastern Question.

Achieving this political goal was to be significantly more challenging than before due to the strategic situation unfavorable for St. Petersburg and the changed balance of powers in the Near East and Europe as a whole. The Treaty of Paris deprived Russia of its Black Sea fleet, constraining it to rely solely on a land campaign, unlike all the previous wars with the Ottoman Empire when naval power played considerable part in Russia's strategy. On top of that, the offensive had to be quick and effective enough to prevent a foreign intervention and possible repetition of the Crimean scenario. Other key factor, other than time, was geography, this time Russian troops will have to operate in largely unknown territories inland the Balkan Peninsula crossing the Balkan mountain range in its most difficult to pass central part. Given all the political importance of the hypothetical future conflict, the strategic and operational challenges Russia needed to prepare in advance for the moment when it will have once again to go to war in the East.

Meanwhile, the era of Milyutin's reforms shaped the structure of the military intelligence apparatus and, given the above mentioned circumstances, Ottoman Empire and the Near East naturally turned into one of its primal fields of action. What it comes to residence network in the Ottoman lands, its fundamental component after 1856 was the military agent in Constantinople. The post was occupied consecutively by Staff-Captain Viktor Antonovich Frankini and Colonel Alexander Semenovitch Zelëni². Until the outbreak of war in 1877, this

² Mihail Alekseev. *Voennaya razvedka v Rossiyskoy Imperii – ot Alexandra I do Alexandra II* (Moscow: Veche 2010), 443; 462.; *Spisok Generalam po Starshinstvu* (St. Petersburg: Vornnaya Tipografiya 1903), 173.

remained the only permanent resident of Russia's military intelligence in the whole region whose reports played important role in evaluating enemy's abilities, understanding the local context, and preparing Russia's decisive actions in the region. Military agents were responsible not only for collecting data about Ottoman armed forces and their current condition, in their reports we can find wide-scale analysis, concerning the overall strategic situation and Russia's further steps towards overcoming the unfavorable conditions set by the Treaty of Paris. Besides that, during the period of question a number of Russian officers visited for intelligence gathering the territories that soon will become the main theatre of war.

Even though concrete war planning and preparation for a hypothetical war against the Ottoman Empire started in the second half of the 1860s, in parallel with the end of another stage of military reforms, documental record of Russia's intelligence activity from the years immediately after the Crimean war makes it evident that the new Russian strategy against the old enemy already began to emerge in the early 1860s. In November 1860, most probably following a direct instruction, the military agent in Constantinople, Viktor Frankini, presented to the authorities in St. Petersburg a detailed strategic analysis of a future war in the East. Taking into account all the unfavorable conditions, both in regional and international aspect, Frankini pointed the need of a land-based campaign with the main forces deployed inland in the Balkans due to the Ottoman domination in the Black Sea from where they should march rapidly towards the Ottoman capital and achieve decisive victory within one offensive campaign. The political goal of this war according to the military agent could be only one – the final solution of the Eastern Question. Frankini also stressed on

the need of meticulous planning and securing an alliance with the other great power with most direct interests on the Balkans – Austria³. Frankini's views on a possible future conflict are matching in their key points with the general strategic plan of Russia from the eve of 1877-1878 war and come to show that strategic preparation for a war with the Ottoman Empire began long before the Eastern crisis broke out.

In another report from 1867, Colonel Frankini indicated that, in the current situation with the escalating anti-Ottoman movement on the Balkans and tension between Serbia and the Sublime Porte, threatening to grow up into a full-scale war, the sudden death of the “sick man” is possible more than ever as Western Powers at the same time are not ready to go to war for saving his life. This, according to Frankini, presented the most favorable so far conditions for Russian intervention and fundamental shift in the *status quo* in the East. Important is to mention Emperor's handwritten note on the side of the document that states “*His view is perfectly accurate*”⁴.

These more notable examples let us confirm the logical assumption that planning a future war in the East became, if not primal task, at least an object of thought among military man in St. Petersburg almost as soon as the peace had settled. Consequently, work concentrated on collecting intelligence information, observing and analyzing the situation was done almost invariably in relation with the possibility for a new war, seen as an inevitable conflict that once and for all will have to solve the Eastern Question and restore Russia's influence and prestige in the region.

³ RGVIA (Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyy Voenno-Istoricheskiy Arkhiv/Russian State Archive of Military History), f. 450, op1, d, 61, 46-64.

⁴ RGVIA, f. 450, op. 1, d. 81, 38.

Reports of the military agent were not just piled up in the chancellery of the Ministry of War but were regarded as an important information source, many of them ended up on the desks of the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Emperor himself to give deep insight into the kaleidoscope of factors that define the current situation and draw St. Petersburg's necessary moves to the east. From Frankini's reports we can also get some idea about the difference in views of some military circles and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The military agent's sometimes undisguised incentives for more active intervention in the Near Eastern affairs had to be met with moderation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gorchakov.

After 1862, Minister of War Milyutin undertook a series of major reorganizations of the central military apparatus which resulted in 1865 in the foundation of the Main Staff (rus. Glavnyi Shtab) – the supreme institution of military-strategic management responsible among all for the systematic collection of information useful in relation with possible armed conflicts, preparation for such conflicts and developing war plans. After several experimental reforms in 1867, the Military Scientific Committee (rus. Voenno-uchenyiy komitet) was founded within the structure of the Main Staff and, until the outbreak of the war in 1877, it remained the agency responsible for gathering, analysis and accumulation of military intelligence information⁵. These developments marked the beginning of a more purposeful preparation for a war with the Ottoman Empire.

General Nikolay Obruchev, the chief strategic mind behind the war of 1877-1878 and after 1867 head of the Military-Scientific Committee, was among the high ranked officers seeing the Eastern Question as subject of primal importance

⁵ Mihail Alekseev. Voennaya razvedka v Rossiyskoy Imperii..., 206.

for Russia and consequently something that Tsarist army one day will have to march. The southern vector in Russia's foreign policy and military strategy had to be dominant from his perspective as meanwhile the political situation in the traditionally unstable region meant that willing or not Russia is destined to shed blood for its strategic interests there⁶.

In 1866, Obruchev presented, in a memorandum to the Emperor Alexander II, some general considerations for a future war against Ottoman Turkey. The basic principles presented there will eventually lay into the base of the strategic plan for the war of 1877-1878. New challenges in the East conditioned by the Treaty of Paris shaped the strategy of a blitz land campaign main theater of which will have to be the Balkan Peninsula and more specifically Bulgarian lands. This meant break up with traditions of the previous Russo-Turkish wars and adopting a different strategy. That demanded careful preparation and the main concern, according to Obruchev, had to be the profound exploration of the future war theatre and its topographical features. "If the Prussian campaign (Austro-Prussian war of 1866 – author's note) was successful, it was because of the preliminary preparation... Roads and fortifications were surveyed and units were provided with accurate and detailed maps", added the General⁷. This way, a decade before the actual mobilization in 1876, Russian staff had the basic concept of its strategy clarified, main challenges were outlined which combined with the developments in the military intelligence apparatus set the ground for more purposeful intelligence preparation for a hypothetical war with the Ottomans.

In accordance with his strategic views and also with the minister Milyutin's concept, topography and military statistics

⁶ Oleg Airapetov. Zabyitaja kar'era Russkogo Mol'tke..., 115-117.

⁷ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 7622, 64.

became main emphasis of the intelligence work in general and in preparing for a war with the Ottoman Empire specifically. Concrete intelligence preparation for a possible war started in the late 1860s as accumulating sufficient topographical knowledge for the interior of the Sultan's European domains and compiling of a new topographic map of European Turkey became primal task of the newly found Military-Scientific Committee and the Military Topographers Corps.

Military agent's reports from the late 60s continued to be related with the possible complications on the Balkans which in turn could draw Russia into a war but were much more focused on military statistics and issues of topographic exploration of the future war theatre than on general political analysis, which was exactly what the Ministry of War wanted. Colonel Zelëni, who succeeded Capt. Frankini in 1870, managed to provide valuable materials for the completion of the new general topographic map of European Turkey but detailed topographic survey of the Balkans and especially the Bulgarian lands was not possible to be done only with the powers of the military agent which made necessary sending officers to conduct needed field work. The series of missions of Russian officers in European Turkey from the late 1860s and early 1870s could not be examined as anything else but preparation for a hypothetical and very plausible war with the Ottoman Empire.

In 1867, Russia began to conduct a detailed military-topographic exploration of the Ottoman Empire's European lands with a large-scale military-scientific expedition. Despite the previous wars with the Ottoman Empire, in 1860s Russian army staff had insufficient knowledge of the Balkans (or at least of their interior) as a war theatre as well as few and inaccurate maps – far too inadequate for the planned campaign. Actually,

Tsarist army have penetrated deep into the Balkans only in 1829 and then the offensive developed mainly in the eastern parts near the Black Sea coast so the territories to the west remained largely unknown. So, in 1867, under the pretext of conducting primary surveys for the measuring of the meridian from the town of Ismail to the isle of Candia, a group of Russian officers, geodesists, topographers and astronomers arrived in Ottoman Empire⁸. Beyond any doubt, the real motive behind the whole undertaking was to explore the land south of Danube as a possible war theatre and to conduct topographical surveys for subsequent mapping of the territory. Conditions were: Russia will pay all the expanses, results of the research will be presented to the Porte and Ottoman officers will also be included in the expedition.

Attention of the Russian officers was focused on exactly those lands that will become main battlefield a decade later and especially on Balkan mountain range – one of the most serious geographical obstacles on the way to Constantinople. Divided into two groups, Russian officers spent two months traveling over the Central North Bulgaria, Central Balkan Mountains, and the sub-Balkan region⁹. The “Military-Statistics collection”, published in St. Petersburg a year later, contained detailed description of the mountain passes and routes with the overall conclusion that the impassability of the mountain is more fiction than geographic reality¹⁰. Data collected during this mission laid also in the basis of the 10-verst topographic map of European Turkey completed in 1876.

⁸ RGVIA, f. 404, op. 2, d. 6, 65;

⁹ Zapiski voenno-topograficheskogo otdela Glavnogo Shtaba. (Saint Petersburg: Voennaja tipografija 1971, Vol. 32), 6-7.

¹⁰ Voенно-statisticheskij sbornik na 1868 god. (Saint Petersburg: Voennaja tipografija 1868), 292.

Formally a member of the already examined expedition but in fact on a separate intelligence mission was sent lieutenant Skalon, previously attached to the diplomatic mission in Constantinople as an aide-de-camp of General Ignatiev. He was sent for a first time in Ottoman Empire two years earlier by command of the Minister of War to collect topographic and statistical information of European Turkey. His work as an intelligence agent probably proved to be useful because of which he was left under the disposition of General Ignatiev. Narrative "Route from the borders of Bosnia and Serbia to the town of Burgas on the Black Sea coast" compiled by him gives us an idea of his travels on the Balkans prior the 1867 expedition¹¹.

In 1867, Skalon followed different route from the rest of the expedition and traveled over the territories of nowadays Western Bulgaria and Eastern Serbia and also part of Vardar Macedonia. Directions given by the command clearly demanded collecting statistical data. His "Data of the statistics of European Turkey" contains detailed description of the visited provinces, ethnic and confessional composition of the population, economy, trade, agriculture, etc. Separate chapter is devoted to the route network in nowadays Western Bulgaria where Skalon describes roads, their passability in different seasons, possibility for transporting heavy loads, etc.¹² In the end of 1867, Skalon was joined in the town of Vidin by the Serbian officer and intelligence agent Bogolyub Katalinich and they continued together their travel along the border of the Serbian Principality through old Serbia and to the border of Greece¹³.

¹¹ RGVIA, f. 450, op. 1, d. 79, 56-60.

¹² *Ibidem*, 1-27.

¹³ Mihail Nigalatiy. *Perspectivy serbsko-ruskogo voennogo sotrudnichestva v 60-e – nach. 70-h godov XIX v.* Dissertation for PhD in History. (Moscow: Moscow State University 2009), 116.

In 1869, one of the expedition members and editor-in-chief of the map of European Turkey, Nikolai Artamonov, arrived again in Constantinople. His official task was to present to the Porte the calculations made by the Russian astronomers and topographers and to verify the geographical position of some settlements on the Balkans. This time, Artamonov spent nearly 8 months on the Balkans and during that time made topographic surveys along the route Constantinople–Edirne–Philippolis–Sofia–Svishtov¹⁴. Unlike 1867, this time territories in nowadays Western Bulgaria were explored, which clearly characterizes Artamonov's mission as a continuation of the 1867 expedition to the west. The Russian officer managed to calculate the geographical position of 37 settlements and made detailed route descriptions and also collected data for the making of a map of Constantinople and its vicinity in 1:21 000 scale¹⁵.

As we can see, the other main accent of the Russian intelligence missions carried out on the Balkans in late 1860s and early 1870s, along the topography, is military statistics. Here we have to note that the term “military statistics” defines not simply data presented in a form of numbers but a political science dealing with collection and analysis of information about states and societies. Founder of military statistics as a branch of science in Russia is namely Dmitriy Milyutin, head of the Ministry of War and architect of all the military reforms carried out in 1860s and 70s¹⁶. Thus is not surprising that during the period in question officers were sent on the Balkans for

¹⁴ Zapiski voenno-topograficheskogo otdela..., 89-135.

¹⁵ Valerij Glishkov. Stanovlenie i razvitie voennoy kartografii v Rossii (XVIII – nachalo XX veka). Dissertation for the degree of doctor of geography (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences 2003), 28.

¹⁶ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. “Milyutin I voennaya razvedka Rossii.” Petr Andreevich Zayonchkovskiy. Sbornik statey i vospominaniya k stoletiyu istorika. (Moscow: ROSSPEN 2008), 696-697.

collecting information needed for updating the military statistics database as this was also always done in relation with the needs of the strategic planning of a possible war.

One of these officers was General Staff Colonel Georgii Bobrikov specialized in studding the Balkan region. In 1873, the Military Scientific committee asked for royal approval for Bobrikov's sending in Ottoman territory for "... filling some blank spots in the description of the country and routes"¹⁷. Approval was given and Bobrikov left for Ottoman Empire on a formally private trip as an officer on leave. He was entrusted to compile military-statistical description of Bulgaria and also detailed descriptions of all the main communication routes of that country. In August and September 1873 he managed to travel over territories south of Danube around Vidin, Ruse, Silistra and south to Veliko Tarnovo and to collect enough data for his work.

Nikolay Obruchev himself visited Ottoman Empire on an official trip in 1873 with one of the tasks unambiguously formulated as: "to travel over the most-important area of the Balkan-Danube theatre"¹⁸. In his report to minister Milyutin, Obruchev once again emphasized on the importance of topographic exploration of the future war theatre as otherwise the general picture of it will remain inaccurate. "Roads, fortifications, population. All these change here very quickly" wrote Russian general adding that many villages and towns are still missing from the topographic maps and the knowledge about the condition of main roads is often out of date¹⁹. What it comes to his assessment of the qualities of the Ottoman troops it didn't differ much from the opinion of the military agents.

¹⁷ RGVIA, f. 401, op. 2/926, d. 48 (1873 r.), 14.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, op. 1/926, d. 49 (1873 r.), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 15.

Noting the good armament and the high personal qualities of the Ottoman soldier, Obruchev characterizes the army as poorly trained and organized, borrowing from Europe regulations but remaining foreign to their meaning. "The Turkish army resembles more a well-trained militia than standing European army. Soldiers are good and well equipped but Turkey still can't create an army from this material due to the absence of systematic training."²⁰ His overall assessment is that the Ottoman armed forces are unprepared for a wide-scale offensive action and are destined to a defeat in a future war.

Far beyond the purposes of a simple scientific expedition went also the travel in European Turkey of Nikolay Venukov, famous ethnographer, geographer, explorer of the Far East and also general staff officer. In 1874, he arrived on the Balkans for a second time with the task to "collect data about objects interesting in military and political respect". For his travel by steamer on the Danube he later recollected: "From Bazias to Ruse, I spent all my time on the deck with a map in hand trying to get better acquainted with the countryside along Danube. To this day, I well remember many details of the Danube plain topography." Once arrived in the Danube town of Ruse, he traveled by train to Varna and then by sea to Constantinople. During his trip on the recently build railway he managed to observe a number of inaccuracies in Russian topographic maps. After his return in St. Petersburg, he published comprehensive account of his trip in "Military Collection" magazine with description of the Ruse-Varna railway and the territories along it and also a description of the Bosphorus strait with map drawn by him²¹.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 17.

²¹ Mihail Venyukov. S dorogi po Turtsii – Voennyj Sbornik, Nr. 8, 1874, 364-392.

The cited examples show up the dominant focus on topography and map-making in the process of preparation for a future war with the Sublime Porte which continued through the initial stages of the Eastern crisis. The fact that Nikolay Artamonov (specialist namely in military topography) was appointed by the Commander-in-Chief as a head of the intelligence section in the staff of the Danube army is a clear confirmation of that fact. Artamonov's lectures read to officers of the St. Petersburg military region in the autumn of 1876 once again put the accent on the importance of profound topographic exploration of the future war theatre as a precondition for the desired blitz campaign. Under the direction of Artamonov, in 1876 also was completed the 10-verst (1:420 000) topographical map of European Turkey which, although far from perfect, was the most accurate for that time topographic depiction of many previously unexplored Ottoman territories.

All these facts lead to the conclusion that the Russian officers regarded as main challenge for their army on the Balkans the natural obstacles not the enemy forces, generally seen as poorly trained and organized and unfit for effective offensive action. All this of course raises the important question about the intelligence assessment of the enemy before the war.

Underestimation of the Ottoman army is often pointed as one of the main reasons for the failure of the Russian plan to achieve victory within one offensive campaign. Looking at this subject through the prism of military intelligence gives us reason to propose a little different view to this problem. Even though the Ottoman army was seen generally as poorly trained and missing vital components for effective actions on a modern battlefield, reading of the military agent's reports doesn't leave much impression of severe underestimation of Ottoman

military power. Both military agents, Frankini and Zelëni, constantly informed about the enormous rearmament efforts of the Ottoman government, pointed out the modern weaponry, the well equipped with modern guns and trained personnel artillery and also emphasized on the high individual qualities of the Ottoman soldier. Colonel Zelëni also informed about the substantial fortification work done on the Ottoman border lands both in Europe and especially in Asia. His overall conclusion in the eve of the war was that the Ottoman army has no capabilities for wide-scale offensive actions but is well prepared for effective defense. Actually this assessment was not far from reality and the ottoman defensive strategy initially facilitated the Russian quick advance.

On the other side, Russia's efforts on topographic exploration of the Balkan war theatre, although not without omissions, didn't went in vain and largely facilitated General Gurko's offensive and the crossing of Balkan Mountains in the initial stage of the war. After all, the war of 1877-1878, no matter the setbacks, remains in history as the shortest of all the Russo-Turkish conflicts and the one in which Russian army achieved a most decisive victory. Without a doubt, preparation efforts that took more than a decade played important role for that. Russia managed to anticipate Ottoman tactics and to achieve major strategic success with the crossing of Danube but division of opinion among the command, hesitance and carefulness more than intelligence blunder prevented the development of the success and led to failure of the initial plan. The end goal to put Ottoman Empire on its knees while preventing international intervention was nevertheless achieved.

At the same time, the intelligence preparation for this war suffered from one major drawback. Being concentrated on top-

ographical exploration and legal means of intelligence gathering, the Military-Scientific Committee largely missed the vital element – the undercover espionage. Until the outbreak of the war, current information about Ottoman military preparations and the disposition and movement of enemy forces was provided by the functioning consular network. But after the break-up of diplomatic relations and the unplanned prolongation of the war, the staff of the Danube army started to experience shortage of information helping to anticipate enemy's next moves. This made necessary urgent spy recruitment including infiltration of a spy in Constantinople which to provide information from the center of the Ottoman Empire. Part of the reason for this situation, along with the minister Milyutin's concept of the importance of military statistics and General Obruchev's focus on topography, was some rivalry between the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the examined period, the later was trying to keep the whole residential network under its control and wasn't willing to leave much freedom of action abroad to the Ministry of War. The 1877-1878 war revealed namely the insufficient undercover work in peace time as the most serious fault in the system of intelligence gathering, as a result new revised instructions for the military agents were adopted soon after the war and the agent's network of the military intelligence was significantly widened.

Examining the activity of Russia's military intelligence on Ottoman Empire after the Crimean war makes evident the fact that during the period in which diplomats were trying to keep the fragile balance of peace on the Balkans and to postpone the solution of the Eastern Question, army's staff was carrying out a systematic preparation for a possible and highly plausible war. From this perspective, we can see more clearly the differ-

ent layers of Russia's policy towards the Balkan region in the period and especially the existence of a strong "party of war" preparing and pushing the political leadership towards more decisive actions in the Near East. In that light, the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 stand out not only as a conflict in which Russia was pushed by the circumstances, but as a sought-after opportunity to achieve its strategic aims in the region.

MEDIUM-TERM GEOPOLITICS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: 1829, 1878, 1913*

Alexandru Mamina-Rudei**

Abstract

In the Southeast Europe, the waning influence of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for an increased Russian presence, something that France and Britain wanted to prevent. The first significant transfer of hegemony was marked by the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, when the Ottoman Empire lost Serbia and the southern half of Greece and was forced to abandon the fortified towns of Wallachia: Turnu, Giurgiu, Brăila. Until the Crimean War, Russia aimed at weakening the Ottoman Porte and placing it under Russian tutelage as much as possible. After the Crimean War, Russia encouraged the national emancipation movements of the Balkan states, hoping in this way they would come under its political and military influence. In the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War, the Congress of Berlin established a certain balance of forces in Southeast Europe, both between the great powers and among the states in the region. In practice, the Congress of Berlin inaugurated an unusual situation, namely that there was no longer a hegemonic state, i.e. a state to control exclusively the region. The great powers no longer interfered in a direct way, but they did it only through the smaller states, such as Bulgaria and Serbia, trying to attract them to their sphere of influence.

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Keywords: *Hegemonic Competition, Great Powers, Balance of Forces, Geopolitics, Ottoman Empire, Balkan Peninsula*

A geopolitical approach to international developments has at its core the power relationships among states, defining themselves on three levels: armed forces, natural resources and free access to the main trade routes. In all these aspects, power implies a space where it is able to exercise itself. Therefore it is ultimately understood as a control over territory. From this perspective, the idea of power corresponds to that of hegemony. According to Carl Schmitt's terminology, a hegemonic state is the one which extends its military protection, in fact its control, over other states or regions. Military capacity prevails therefore over economic capacity. This is why, in the Euro-Atlantic area, it is not Germany that holds the hegemonic position, but the United States of America, although the former has a higher competitive economy than the latter.

In order to ensure their security and possibly increase their control, the hegemonic states showed an imperial tendency. It does not necessarily mean the territorial expansion Friedrich Ratzel was talking about, but the expansion of their sphere of influence. And they used various methods. Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany resorted to conquests and set up protectorates. The United States acted through some "friendly governments" and by funding political and military groups favourable to them.

As far as southeast Europe is concerned, the Congress of Berlin of 1878 marked a turning point in the dynamics of the power relationships. To be more specific, the imperial logic that had previously ruled them was replaced by the rationality of national states.

Until the Congress of Berlin, the geopolitical dynamics in Southeast Europe consisted in the progressive loss of control by the Ottoman Empire, which was inversely proportional to the increase in influence of the European powers, especially that of Russia. In fact, the most qualified states to take over the hegemony exercised until then by the Ottoman Porte were two: Russia and Austria (later Austro-Hungary), which were able to deploy ground troops in the region. At the beginning, the influence of Britain and France was exercised through intermediaries – Greece in the first case, Egypt in the second – and was conditioned by the existence of an international consensus, as it had been the case with the Crimean War. However, despite the fact that Austria was already present in the Balkans, Russia was favoured by three factors. First of all, by its military force: the Russian army was larger and more efficient than the Austrian one as it was demonstrated, for example, in 1849, when the involvement of Russia was needed to put the Hungarian revolution down. Territory was the second factor: while a massive Austrian military deployment was hampered by the mountainous relief of the Balkan Peninsula, the low plateau of Moldavia and the Wallachian plain offered the Russian troops a wider manoeuvre space and communication lines easier to maintain. Thus, in 1806, 1828, 1853 and 1877, the Romanian principalities, later Romania, became the basis for the operations of the Russian army south of the Danube. The third factor was related to religion, as long as most of the inhabitants in Southeast Europe were Orthodox Christians. Ever since the treaty concluded in Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, Russia legitimized its intervention in the region as a protector of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Another source of its legitimacy was pan-Slavism, which asserted the liberating

role of the Russian people in the context of the Eastern Question¹. Although it could resonate favourably in the case of the Bulgarians, Serbs and Montenegrins, pan-Slavism risked to estrange the Greeks, Albanians and Romanians².

Russia's strategic objective was considered to have been the occupation of the Straits area, in order to exclusively dominate the Black Sea and have free access to eastern Mediterranean from where it could have threatened the British interests, especially the route to India. In fact, Russia was not a real naval force able to engage itself in an expansion at sea. Regulation of the Straits regime, domination of the Black Sea, free access to the Aegean Sea through Bulgaria were only tactical means, the strategic objective having been to control the Balkans on land³. To this end, Russia acted in two ways. Until the Crimean War, it aimed at weakening the Ottoman Porte and placing it under Russian tutelage as much as possible. After the Crimean War, Russia encouraged the national emancipation movements of the Balkan states, hoping in this way they would come under its political and military influence.

On the other hand, Austria had a limited expansion potential in the region. The occupation of some poor and backward territories inhabited by the Slavs would have resulted in an increase of its internal problems⁴. That is why, until 1877-1878,

¹ N. J. Danilewsky, *To pan-Slavic doctrines. La Russie et l'Europe* (resumé par J. J. Skupiewski), Bucarest, Bureaux de la «Liberté Roumaine», 1890, pp. 72-73.

² Barbara Jelavich, *A Whatntury of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814-1914*, Philadelphia and New York, J.B. Lippincott Company, (1964), p. 60.

³ Pierre Renouvin, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales*, Paris, Armand Colin Bookstore, 1966, p. 17.

⁴ Barbara Jelavich, *The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs, 1814-1918*, Chicago, Rand Mc.Nally & Company, (1969), p. 41.

Austria (later Austro-Hungary), favoured the preservation of the Ottoman Empire's integrity as a way to stem the rise of Russian influence in Southeast Europe. In particular, it sought to maintain the Sanjak of Novi Pazar in order to prevent Serbia and Montenegro from having a common border and prevent Montenegro from getting a sea port at the Adriatic.

The first significant transfer of hegemony was the consequence of the Adrianople Peace Treaty of 1829. On that occasion, the Ottoman Empire lost Serbia and the southern half of Greece and was forced to abandon the fortified towns of Wallachia: Turnu, Giurgiu, Brăila. In exchange, Russia imposed its protectorate on the Romanian principalities and was awarded the Danube Delta, which meant it was given exclusive rights to control the mouths of the river. Four years later, with the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, Russia practically became the guarantor of military security of the Ottoman Empire, incapable of resisting alone the confrontation with the Egypt of Mehmed Ali.

After its defeat in the Crimean War and the Treaty of Paris of 1856, Russia's advance on Southeast Europe experienced a setback when it was forced to return southern Bessarabia to Moldavia and accept the setting up of the European Commission of the Danube, losing thus the exclusive control of the mouths of the Danube River. Yet, in agreement with France, it would come back quite soon, more precisely in 1858, when Russia supported the anti-Ottoman uprising of Montenegro and its territorial expansion to the detriment of the Ottoman Porte.

The moment of utmost importance for the Russian influence in the region was reached with the conclusion of the Peace Treaty of San Stefano, in 1878, because the formation of the Bulgarian state with free access to the Aegean Sea and

the presence of its troops in the region for two years placed Russia in a dominant position, extending it from the mouths of the Danube River to the Balkan Peninsula. The Russian hegemony, though, was short-lived, until the Congress of Berlin in the same year, convened mainly at the insistence of Great Britain which felt that its strategic interests in eastern Mediterranean were threatened. Although in Berlin it was decided that Russia should receive southern Bessarabia from Romania, its access to the Aegean Sea through Bulgaria was blocked by creating the province of Rumelia which had a Christian governor appointed by the Sultan, while Austro-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, strengthening thus its position in the western Balkans. When Romania joined the Triple Alliance in 1883, the access road that the Russian army had used to cross south of the Danube was closed.

The Congress of Berlin, therefore, established a certain balance of forces in Southeast Europe, both between the great powers and among the states in the region. Strictly speaking, the Congress of Berlin inaugurated an unusual situation, namely that there was no longer a hegemonic state, i.e. a state to control exclusively the region. The great powers no longer interfered in a direct way, but they did it only through the smaller states, especially Bulgaria and Serbia, trying to attract them to their sphere of influence. Thus, Bulgaria began by drawing near Russia, only to join Austro-Hungary later. Beginning with the 1880s until the First World War, Serbia evolved in the opposite direction. The same thing happened to Romania as well.

Under the new circumstances, the fundamental problem in Southeast Europe was no longer to transfer the hegemony from one empire to another, but to finish the process of becoming of national states, whose territorial stake was the divi-

sion of Macedonia, still under the rule of the Ottoman Porte. Paradoxically, it was precisely the balance of forces among these states that generated political and military conflicts, as each of them in turn tried to prevail over the others, but without having the capacity to succeed in a decisive way.

Geopolitical change was reflected in diplomatic relations. The Congress of Berlin was the last occasion when the great powers acted in an imperial manner by making decisions for the small states without taking into account their will. Not even Romania was accepted at negotiations even though it had fought on the Russian side in the war of 1877-1878. Moreover, it was forced to concede southern Bessarabia to Russia in exchange for Dobruja. Later, however, the small states were able to reject some regulations of the great powers which affected their sovereignty, as Romania did in 1883, when it refused to accept several articles of the Treaty of London concerning navigation on the Danube. Moreover, after the wars among themselves, the small states in the region began to make peace without the involvement of the great powers. It happened in 1885, following the war between Serbia and Bulgaria. It happened especially in 1913 in Bucharest, following the Second Balkan War, when the president of the Peace Conference was the Prime Minister of Romania, Titu Maiorescu. Austro-Hungary's intention for a European conference to be convened in order to ratify the Treaty of Bucharest denoted precisely the frustration of a great power that had been left outside the rules.

Geopolitics is about position, resources, control. The policy of a national state refers to its will for collective action and to its organization. Their common element is the territory. In Southeast Europe, the formation of national states involved a change in the imperial *statu quo*. Only that the national bound-

aries of the states had never been homogeneous. In addition, some geographical conditions continued to fuel political disputes. We mention here the continental isolation of Serbia, which wanted to have free access to the Adriatic Sea at the expense of Albania or the lack of a marked border between Romania and Bulgaria in Dobruja, which left room for disagreements over the political border until the Second World War. These are aspects of the so-called constants of history. They do not determine the events in an absolute manner, but give them a certain orientation and coherence concerning the exegesis.

THE ACTIVITY OF ITALIAN MILITARY ATTACHÉS DURING THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR*

Emilio Tirone**

Abstract

The process of national unification of Italy required a reassessment of its position, role and interests in the sphere of international relations. In this context, connecting to the dynamics of the international scene was one of the priorities of Italian foreign policy in the second part of the 19th century. This article aims to analyse how the Italian decision-makers acted in order to be as well informed as possible regarding the international political environment and its actors, the central element of interest being Romania's involvement in the Russo-Turkish war.

Keywords: *Russo-Turkish War, military attachés, Lieutenant General Giuseppe Francesco Ricci, Major Luigi Mainoni, Plevna*

The activity of the Italian military attachés during the Russo-Turkish War finds a rich and interesting testimony in the documents of the Historical Archive of the General Staff of the Italian Army¹. With the defeat at Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman

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¹ The documentation used for this paper is based on the sources present in the Archive of the Historical Office of the General Staff of the Italian Army (AUSSME). The Historical Archive is an important reality, both as a cultural institution and as guardian of the Italian national memory. The cur-

Empire exhausted its old expansionist drive in Europe, entering a period of slow but progressive decline. In successive stages, the Turks were actually expelled from the European continent. This crisis opened up a series of complex political and international relations issues known as the "Oriental Question", fuelled primarily by the conflicting ambitions of the Habsburg and Russian Empires towards the Balkans and the Mediterranean. In an attempt to limit this new expansion, Britain and France acted to slow or at least control the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Among the stages of this complicated succession of relations and events, the period 1875-1878 was of particular importance. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878² put an end to the domination of the *Sublime Porte*³ in the Balkans. Starting

rent Historical Office descends from the Military Office of the Royal Corps of the General Staff of the Kingdom of Sardinia, established in 1853. From its origins until today, it has fulfilled a double function: that of preserving military documentation, mainly technical-operational, and the historical-scientific one, as a driving force for military history studies. In fact, the Historical Office has constantly promoted research, study and editorial activities, not only with the aim of preserving the spiritual heritage and transmitting the traditions of the Italian army, but also to draw useful lessons for military purposes. This initial approach, of conservation of documentation for historical purposes and, at the same time, of support to the activities of the General Staff, has remained unchanged over time. Thus it was possible to preserve an enormous mass of documents relating to the entire history of the Italian Army, of great historical and archival value, which remained in uninterrupted custody at the same institution, the Armed Forces. This documentary heritage is estimated at approximately eight million documents, divided into ever-expanding funds. The Archive is now fully included in the national archival organization and consequently is open to public debate.

² Cfr. A. Ravenni, *La guerra russo-turca (1877-78)*, edizioni Tiber, Roma 1929.

³ The Sublime Porte (Arabic-Persian linguistic compound *bāb-i'ālī*, literally the High Porte) term used in European chancelleries to designate the Government of the Ottoman Empire.

from the uprisings of 1875-1876 in Herzegovina and Bosnia and the Serbian-Turkish Wars of 1876-1877, this conflict sanctioned the final failure of the results of the Congress of Paris of 1856. In the aftermath of the Crimean War, these provisions were to guarantee the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the neutrality of the Black Sea. A path fuelled by the resurgence of Russian expansionism, stemming, above all, from the change in the European balance of power following the French defeat in the war against Prussia in 1870-1871⁴.

Compared to this crisis, the recent conquest of national independence placed Italy in a particular position on the international scene. In fact, the victory of the Italian national aspirations, despite the consolidated balance between Powers, was an example for the European peoples who aspired to acquire independence. At the same time, Italian public opinion looked with sympathy at all the national independence movements⁵ which, in a certain way, followed their own experience. On the other hand, in Italy, the contrast between Austria-Hungary and Russia was seen favourably for the Balkans, since it was thought that the pressure towards the East would have somehow favoured the attempts to take over at least one part of the Italian territories still under Habsburg control, even if in reality the political world has shown itself to be very cautious. In fact, aspirations to obtain territorial concessions from the Habsburg Empire in return for political support were completely illusory and unjustified.

For the Italian military leaders, the Balkan Question, and in particular the 1877-1878 war was considered an interesting

⁴ With the Treaty of London of March 13, 1871, Russia succeeded in obtaining the abrogation of the articles of the Congress of Paris relating to the neutralization of the Black Sea and the demilitarization of its coasts.

⁵ Cfr. A. Biagini, *Momenti di storia balcanica (1878-1914). Aspetti militari*, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Roma 1981, p. 20-21.

opportunity, not only for the possible geostrategic implications but also for educational purposes. The conflict, in fact, constituted an excellent observation stage, because it was conducted, from a territorial point of view, in an extensive and difficult theatre, of which almost nothing was known. The consequent considerations would have been invaluable for the military technical-doctrinal update and growth. Right from the start, the developments of the military aspects of the question were mainly followed by military attachés, starting above all with those present in Vienna and Berlin⁶. The growth of interest in the so-called Eastern Question led the Army General Staff to question whether to employ specific observers in that area, in order to verify whether national interests were involved. In fact, in 1867, in a confidential report to the Ministry of War⁷, General Ricci⁸ highlighted the opportunity, on the occasion of the emergence of a crisis in Europe, to follow the example of the other foreign Powers to detach “intelligent” officers abroad for the necessary time. Those would have the mission of collecting exact and detailed information that would be useful in the event of direct involvement in the international crisis, “when there is no more time or means to obtain it” (the information, *editor’s note*)⁹. General Ricci pointed out this need precisely for the contemporary case of the so-called “Eastern

⁶ *Idem*, *La questione d’Oriente del 1875-’78 nei documenti dell’Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore Esercito*, in *Memorie Storiche militari 1978*, Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito, Roma 1978, p. 353-386.

⁷ Relazione Riservata 571 del 19 marzo 1867 in Archivio Ufficio Storico dello SME, L3 - *Studi particolari Ufficio Storico*, b. 295 fasc. 1.

⁸ Lieutenant General Giuseppe Francesco Ricci (1811-1881), Marquis, Head of the Superior Office of the General Staff. He was president of the committee of the General Staff and then a member of the Permanent Commission for the Defense of the State.

⁹ *Ivi*.

Question". The countries involved as protagonists in the Eastern Question were for Italy, for geographical reasons and political circumstances, those which unfortunately presented the greatest information gaps. Emphasizing in particular the scarcity of information relating to the Russian army, the general expressed the opportunity for the Italian legation in Petersburg to transmit news relating to the recruitment system, duration of service and all other information necessary to understand the military structure. However, the legation did not have personnel familiar with military matters, so it was necessary to send a military attaché to Petersburg. In addition, the general saw fit to send officers to the European provinces of Turkey and Greece with the task of studying local resources, main communications, the organization of existing military forces and their development. In addition, they had the additional task of procuring topographic maps of the places, these being difficult to find on the market. The report therefore summarized its object in "the advisability of having 'military attaché' to all the main foreign legations, particularly with regard to disputes in the East".

By the Royal Decree of November 29, 1870¹⁰, it was established that "when the utility of the public service is deemed useful", to send to the Legations, within the limits of the amounts allocated in the budget, general or superior officers of the Army or Navy as military attachés. The destinations of the attachés were coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the Ministries of War and Navy. These officers, appointed by ministerial letter, but excluded from the diplomatic career, although they depended on the Chief of Lega-

¹⁰ Royal Decree no. 6090 of November 29, 1870, regarding the legations abroad and the personnel assigned to them (G.U. (abbreviation for *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, n.r.) no. 349 of December 20, 1870).

tion as regards relations with foreign authorities, maintained a close relationship with their ministries for technical matters of military art¹¹. Honorary attachés could also be appointed, in a number not exceeding half of the regular ones¹². With this organizational structure, the General Staff Corps of the Italian Army managed to obtain the necessary information about the conduct of the various phases of the war, even if it did not have, unlike other European armies, observation officers stationed at the various armies directly involved in the field of action. Thus, it was prepared, when asked, to provide officers in the delegation for the settlement of the borders at the end of the conflict, as established at the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

Among the most active officers was Major Luigi Mainoni, who, as an employee at the embassy in Vienna¹³, followed the pre-conflict phases of the crisis in Herzegovina and Bosnia, providing information on the mobilization of Austria-Hungary. Also of notable interest was his report, dated December 1876, entitled "Calculation of the Land Military Forces which Turkey could Oppose Russia in a Future War". The document was based on the observations of the mission for the demarcation of the armistice line between Serbia and Turkey. According to the military attaché in Vienna, the Ottoman army was poorly prepared and not up to a possible European war. Although the qualities of the Turkish soldier were recognized, the unpreparedness of the officers and the serious organizational, administrative and logistical deficiencies of the army

¹¹ *Ivi*, art. 67.

¹² *Ibidem*, art. 68.

¹³ Luigi Mainoni d'Intignano, officer of the General Staff, attached to the Royal Italian Embassy in Vienna from October 1874 to October 1877. Cfr. Archivio Ufficio Storico dello SME, L3, *Studi particolari Ufficio Storico*, b. 295 fasc. 2.

were highlighted. For the Italian officer, any Russian operation would have been carried out simultaneously in Asia and Europe. This was inferred based on ongoing agreements between the Romanian government and Russia. The indications of an attack were deduced from the mobilization of the Wallachian army and from the gathering of materials for the construction of a bridge on the two banks of the Danube.

From Berlin, the military attaché, Major Luchino del Mayno¹⁴, followed the mobilization of the Russian army and subsequently the Russian-Turkish operations since 1876, collecting and transmitting the assessments from Prussian sources. From the information gathered in Berlin, also from Russian officers, del Mayno claimed that the tsar's army would not have encountered difficulties in crossing the Danube from an operational point of view, but there would certainly have been logistical difficulties in ensuring the sustenance of the numerous troops in Bulgaria. These difficulties were amplified by Russian reluctance to ask for Romanian help. The intelligence revealed how, in the first months, the war operations were characterized by a lack of initiative on the Turkish side and disorganization on the Russian side. The attaché reported to the Italian General Staff that the first battle of Plevna had ended negatively for the Russians, mainly due to the underestimation of the enemy's military capabilities. This failure led to a sudden change in the attitude of the Russians, who insistently requested help from the Romanian forces, until then avoided. After a period of stagnation, the Russian-Romanian joint forces succeeded in breaking the Turkish resistance at Plevna. For the Italian mili-

¹⁴ Luchino del Mayno (1838-1911), count, officer of the General Staff, attached to the Royal Italian Embassy in Berlin from March 1875 to March 1879. *Cfr. Ivi.*

tary attaché, who corresponded directly to the commander of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Ettore Bertolè Viale¹⁵, this event and the important Romanian contribution opened the way to the final victory. At the end of December 1877, del Mayno reported on the situation on the Danube after the long siege of Plevna. In fact, the latest news from that theatre of operations was learned in German circles at the General Staff: “The fall of Plevna is here considered to be a product of the prudent and sagacious influence of General Tottleben. Now that Osman Pasha no longer dreams of returning to the adventurous strategy of before and the tendency to create various armies to give independent commands to accommodate men, Gurko, Skobelev, [...]; it is likely that the Romanians will act against Viddin; Reinforced Gurko will march on Sofia¹⁶”.

In this context of reorganization of the Russian troops and its allies, the Ottoman army was still effective and was preparing for the defensive at Razgrat, trying to build a second Plevna, as this fortress was in an excellent position. However, the Italian attaché reported that General Tottleben was no longer a senior adviser to Grand Duke Nicholas, who “did not want him as Chief of Staff”¹⁷, and had been demoted to the position of director of engineering operations at the fortifications. In Berlin they did not believe the news that 40,000 unharmed men and 20,000 sick and wounded had been captured at Plevna. Equally problematic was the news of Russian casualties, for it was believed that in the siege more than 50,000 men were killed, that is, a number greater than that of the defenders. Technical ob-

¹⁵ Ettore Bertolè Viale (1829-1892). In 1874, promoted to lieutenant general, he was Chief of Staff. From 1867 to 1869 and from 1887 to 1891 he was Minister of War.

¹⁶ Fondo G-29 *Addetti militari*, b. 48 (ex b. *Germania 3*) fasc. 4.

¹⁷ *Ivi*.

servations were not lacking: the use of the *Berdan* rifle by the Russians was lower than that of the *Martini* used by the Turks. However, some Russian units used the *Krnka* rifle, which, tested in the presence of the Emperor Alexander, turned out to be absolutely the worst, both in terms of range and penetration force: “solid targets were pierced by the Martini, while the Krnka’s projectiles only left light footprints. Russian artillery performed poorly”¹⁸ and to remedy this deficiency, 1,000 fire guns were ordered from the Krupp Company. The German judgment of the Russians reported by the military attaché was clear: “the Russians are being laughed at a bit here because before the war they boasted of excellent field artillery”¹⁹.

Continuing to follow the war, on March 17, 1878, the military attaché in Berlin sent a summary report to the General Staff of the Army in Rome in which he reported on “[...] the provisions taken by the Russians to prevent the Turkish warships from circulating freely on the Danube”. The main action taken to prevent Turkish ships from entering the great river of Eastern Europe was the establishment of fixed torpedo barages, placed at key points along its course. To this end: The Russian Ministry of War ordered the construction of 2,300 stationary torpedoes in Berlin: each containing 32 kilograms of guncotton (nitrocellulose, *n.r.*) at a price of 5 marks per kilogram. Those torpedoes which the Russian Navy had already prepared and which were the smallest model were handed over to the Ministry of War and were also used on the Danube²⁰. As soon as the political horizon began to darken again and England let it be understood that she wished to interfere actively in the Eastern Question, the Russian Ministry of the

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ Fondo G-29 *Addetti militari*, b. 48 (ex b. *Germania* 3) fasc. 6.

Navy ordered the construction of 100 torpedo boats intended to serve in the Black Sea, along with the ones he already owned [...]. By these means they believe they can prevent the English fleet from passing the Dardanelles. The precautionary measures taken by the Russian army already indicate two barrier points, south and north of Constantinople²¹.

As previously mentioned, lacking observers on the ground to directly follow the ongoing phases of the war, Italy made use of officials and attachés of legations or embassies, and later officers sent to the areas of operations to conduct surveys for the military study of the conflict just ended. At the end of the assessments, studies were conducted using the collected documentation. Of particular relevance were the data relating to the defence of Constantinople, the straits under Turkish control and the Gallipoli peninsula. No less important was the note regarding Dobrogea²².

Among the various and historically interesting mission reports carried out by Italian officers on the war theatre of 1877-78, we note the one relating to the defence of Odessa and Nikolayev. The report was aimed at highlighting the military elements useful to the Italian General Staff in anticipation of future crises. Moreover, in preparing for the war, Russia had to think about the defence of its territory, in the event of the entry into the war of other states that could have threatened the provinces adjacent to the theatre of war and bordering the Black Sea.

As expected, at the end of the war, Italy was invited to the Berlin Congress to delimit the borders of the newly independent territories. As a member of the military commission that

²¹ *Ivi*.

²² *Infra*, E. Di Muro, *La questione della Dobrugia nelle relazioni militari italiane*.

was to deal with the mapping necessary for the negotiations, Lieutenant Colonel Luchino del Mayno had already highlighted and predicted how the lack of adequate equipment and time constraints would cause further disagreements, which would have negatively impacted negotiations to demarcate the borders of the countries concerned (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Rumelia).

As mentioned, even if Italy had no direct observers during the war operations, it was still possible to study, shortly after their conclusion, directly on the battlefields. In November 1878, a series of reconnaissance missions led by Colonel Celestino Rossi²³ and Captain Tanfani were made possible thanks to the Italian ambassador in Constantinople. At the end of them, the two Italian officers drew up a report, supported by a rich documentation collected on the spot. This report particularly illustrated the defence of Constantinople and the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles and Gallipoli²⁴. There was no lack of interesting observations about the possible fate of Dobrogea, disputed between Romania and Bulgaria.

Starting from November 1879, an international commission dealt with the important delimitation of the Turkish-Montenegrin border, based on the discussions at the Berlin Congress. The character of this area of primary interest to Italy is testified by the fact that the correspondence was produced by the "Operations Department" of the Colonial Office of the General Staff. In this circumstance, Lieutenant-Colonel Giuseppe Ottolenghi²⁵, who would later have a brilliant ca-

²³ Francesco Celestino Rossi (1832-1888), promoted to lieutenant general in 1887. He was military attaché in Paris.

²⁴ Cfr. A. Biagini, *Momenti di storia balcanica...*, *op.cit.*, p. 29-30.

²⁵ Giuseppe Ottolenghi, (1838-1904). Promoted to lieutenant general in 1905. Senator of the Kingdom of Italy in 1902, he was Minister of War in 1902-1903.

reer, also becoming Minister of War, reported the difficulties regarding the delimitation of the borders of the small Balkan state, emphasizing from the beginning of his report the critical nature of adopting decisions by majority and not unanimously, as proposed by the Russian delegate. Ottolenghi reported in detail the problems that arose between the Turkish and Russian delegates, which led the former to abandon the commission. The works were resumed shortly thanks to the action of the Italian delegation which proposed drawing temporary border lines. The work was not completed due to the impossibility of accessing all the places of interest, such as the border area with Albania (a problem that would be solved only a few years later). Lieutenant-Colonel Ottolenghi's testimonies on the different attitudes assumed by the members of the Commission are also interesting. In his opinion, like Italy, France also maintained a substantially impartial position. Unlike Russia, which tried to favour Montenegro in all respects, the Ottoman Empire, protected by England, also obtained the support, although not constantly, of Austria and Germany. This situation ensured for Turkey the majority in the Commission.

Also interesting is the report on the situation in Serbia by Colonel Velini²⁶, who in 1879 was a member of the International Commission for the settlement of the Turkish-Greek dispute. Beyond the border situation, this report clearly indicated the political, institutional and, of course, military situation.

In all the reports drawn up by the Italian military observers, two pertinent considerations emerge: that the territorial division was carried out too roughly, due to conflicting inter-

²⁶ Attilio Velini (1839-1906) was promoted to lieutenant general in 1903.

ests, and that it did not fully take into account the principle of nationality of the peoples concerned, a problem that had to definitely characterize future international relations. In view of the predicted complete collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the recommendation, following the Risorgimento spirit of Italian public opinion, was to support and facilitate national choices over assimilationist ones exercised by the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Later history will demonstrate how these tensions will form the basis of larger conflicts.

SERBIA IN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1876-1878. THE STATE, POLITICAL SYSTEM AND SOCIETY

Miljan Milkić*

Abstract

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, Serbia was still an economically underdeveloped agricultural country, lacking modern industry. After the adoption of the Constitution of 1869, the Principality of Serbia was partially freed from Ottoman control, being granted the right to free internal administration. Yet, neither Serbia nor Romania had the right to conclude international agreements, to have their own diplomatic missions and to wage war. During the decade before the beginning of the Great Eastern Crisis, political freedoms developed in Serbia and many political issues began to be discussed in public. Political journalism began to be very lively and opposition magazines began to be published. From 1867, when Ottoman fortified cities were handed over to Serbia, until the War of Independence, the Turkish administration had no military forces or any political competencies on the territory of Serbia.

Keywords: *Serbia, Ottoman Empire, Great Eastern Crisis, Prince Mihailo Obrenović III, Prince Milan I, Treaty of Paris of 1856*

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Until 1878, the Principality of Serbia covered a small area of only 38,000 square kilometres. The population was constantly growing: about 1,200,000 in 1866, 1,350,000 in 1874 and 1,390,000 in 1878. The urban population increased faster than the rural population, so that its number increased from about 116,000 in 1866 to about 139,000 in 1874 and 177,600 in 1878. Thanks to this fact, the number of cities increased from about 10% in 1866 up to 13% in 1878. The largest city was Belgrade with 27,605 inhabitants in 1874, while others were much smaller: Šabac had 8,208 inhabitants, Požarevac 7,829, Kragujevac 6,663, Smederevo 5,107.¹ About 99% of the populations was Serb, and there were several thousand Muslims, Croats and other Catholics, as well as Jews. Administratively, Serbia was divided into 17 districts. At the end of the 1860s and during the 1870s, Serbia was still an economically underdeveloped agricultural country, with incompletely built commodity-money relations, insufficiently productive agriculture, and underdeveloped crafts and without modern industry and traffic. However, it was at that time that new impetus was given to the development of the capitalist economy and society, whose major effects appeared after the liberation wars from 1876 to 1878. At that time, over 90% of the population of Serbia was engaged in agriculture and made a living from it. The fact that the course of property stratification was slowed down by a smart legal measure at the beginning of the 1870s also contributed to this development. Namely, in 1873, the "Law on People's Welfare" was passed, which prescribed that a farmer could not sell his land due to the accumulation of debts. Thus,

¹ Vladimir Stojančević, Jovan Milićević, Čedomir Popov, Radoman Jovanović, Milorad Ekmečić, *Istorija srpskog naroda, Od prvog ustanka do Berlinskog kongresa 1804-1878*, knjiga V-1, Beograd, 1994, p. 305.

this law protected small rural property and prevented more massive and faster material decline of small rural landowners. In terms of economic importance, the craft was in second place, right behind agriculture. The craft was legally regulated in 1847. During the 1860s and 1870s, the craft gradually entered a period of stagnation and crisis due to industrial goods imported into Serbia.

The fastest growing industries were domestic and foreign trade. In the first half of the 1870s, the total value of foreign trade increased from 58.5 to 66 million dinars.² Serbia's economic relations with the outside world took place in unfavourable conditions, which were a consequence of its international legal position. About 80% of foreign trade was with the neighbouring Austria-Hungary. The biggest problem in the Serbian economy was industry. The only real and large factory was the State Bureau in the city of Kragujevac, which, in addition to weapons, also produced various metal objects. This factory employed about 600 workers in 1870, and its production grew steadily over the next decade. In addition to the industry in Serbia, the beginnings of modern mining can be found in the 1860s. The Serbian financial market was undeveloped; in fact, it first appeared in an organized form in the 1860s and 1870s, primarily thanks to the progress of trade. The state played an important role in initiating the first organized forms of credit policy and creating the first financial institutions in Serbia. In the period during the 1870s, Serbia had a centralized state administration, there were no democratic forms of political life, and the system of legislative power and parliamentary institutions were underdeveloped. All this was a consequence of the delay in the development of capitalism in Serbia. It was

² *Ibidem*, p. 305-309.

in these years that Serbia went through a period of gradual political transformation in the direction of building a modern parliamentary system, constitutionality and the gaining of political and civil freedom one by one. One of the characteristics of Prince Mihailo's rule during the period from 1860 to 1868 is his intention to free Serbia from Ottoman rule.³ Prince Mihailo appointed Ilija Garašanin (1861-1867) as Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Together with him, Prince Mihailo was supposed to initiate important movements in the context of improving the legal position of Serbia.

During the period of interest, there were two events that set the chronological boundaries of Serbia's domestic and foreign policy. The first event is the assassination of the Serbian prince Mihailo Obrenović in May 1868, while the second event is the beginning of the uprising against the Ottoman government in Herzegovina and the outbreak of the Great Eastern Crisis in July 1875.

After the death of Prince Mihailo, a "Temporary Vice-royalty of Princely Dignity" was established in Belgrade, consisting of the President of the State Council Jovan Marinović, the Minister of Justice Rajko Lešjanin and the President of the Court of Cassation Djordje Petrović.⁴ Elected prince was Milan Obrenović, who was 14 at the time and was studying in Paris. Very soon, in 1869, a new Constitution was adopted.⁵ The National Assembly shared legislative power with the prince. The Council had lost the right to have legislative power. The assembly consisted of deputies who were elected, as well

³ Radoš Ljušić, *Istorija srpske državnosti. Srbija i Crna Gora*, knjiga II, Novi Sad, 2001, p. 133.

⁴ Vladimir Stojančević, Jovan Milićević, Čedomir Popov, Radoman Jovanović, Milorad Ekmečić, *op.cit.*, p. 322-335.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 335-338.

as deputies appointed by the prince.⁶ It worked in the way that for every three elected deputies, the prince had the right to appoint one of his deputies. In terms of legislation, the prince was a more powerful factor than the Assembly. The Assembly did not have the right of legislative initiative, but could only declare its wishes. The legislative procedure was in the hands of the government, which together with the prince had the right to adopt laws. These “decree laws” were valid until the first meeting of the Assembly. The Parliament could not reject the government’s budget proposal in its entirety, nor could it condition its approval on the previous fall of the government, because the budget could be carried over to the next year. The Constitution did not introduce a parliamentary regime, because the ministers were not people’s deputies and were not politically responsible to the Assembly but to the prince, and their only responsibility was to uphold the law. After the adoption of the Constitution of 1869, the Principality of Serbia was finally freed from Ottoman control, in the sense of acquiring free internal administration.⁷

At the end of the 1860s, the state budget was very small and was primarily intended to support the Army and State administration.⁸ Until the beginning of the Great Eastern Crisis and the wars against the Ottoman Empire, state revenues in Serbia often exceeded expenditures. That is why Serbia took loans abroad. During the period from 1868 to 1875, Serbia repaid only one loan of 200,000 imperial ducats. This loan was secretly concluded by Prince Mihailo in 1867 with the Russian government, and the loan was intended for military needs. The

⁶ Radoš Ljušić, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

⁸ Vladimir Stojančević, Jovan Milićević, Čedomir Popov, Radoman Jovanović, Milorad Ekmečić, *op.cit.*, p. 335-338.

loan was repaid with 6 percent interest. Such loans were possible because Serbia at that time did not engage in major economic endeavours (for example, the construction of railways), and did not have major expenditures for education, culture and other social activities. Insufficient funds were allocated even for military needs. During the decade before the beginning of the Great Eastern Crisis, political freedoms developed in Serbia and many political issues began to be discussed in public. Political journalism began to be very lively, and in addition to government newspapers, opposition magazines began to be published.

Prince Milan formally assumed the princely throne in August 1872 after reaching the age of eighteen. Prince Milan was bothered by constitutional restrictions and thought that the people had been given too many rights and freedoms, so he started a debate on changing the 1869 Constitution. In March 1875, Prince Milan dissolved the Assembly and set up a bureaucratic government with which Serbia entered a state of internal political turmoil. So, in the moments when the whole Balkans were in trouble, in the moments when the great popular uprising began in Herzegovina at the beginning of July 1875, and when the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878 erupted, Serbia was caught in a real political crisis, which was marked by even one minor peasant uprising in the north-eastern part of Serbia (Negotin region).

After the great uprising of the Serbian people in Herzegovina began in the summer of 1875, the insurgent and warrior spirit grew in public opinion in the Principality of Serbia.⁹ Ser-

⁹ Vladimir Stojančević, *Srpski narod u Staroj Srbiji u Velikoj istočnoj krizi 1876-1878*, Beograd, 1998, p. 72. Viliam Dž. Stilman, *Hercegovački ustanak i crnogorsko-turski rat 1876-1878*, Beograd, 1997.

bian Foreign Minister Jovan Ristić believed that Serbia should enter the war, but only after receiving Russia's consent for a war with the Ottoman Empire. At the time when the uprising in Herzegovina began, which soon spread to Bosnia as well, thus prompting the Great Eastern Crisis (1875), the situation in Serbia was unstable. The state was threatened by anarchy from within, while war was a major threat in terms of foreign policy.¹⁰

During the summer of 1875, committees were formed in Serbia to collect aid for the Herzegovinian rebels, volunteers came and soldiers gathered to support the rebel areas. Refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina played a major role in these activities. The "Main Committee for Aiding the Uprising" was formed. The head of this committee was Serbian Metropolitan Mihailo. The Serbian government was under pressure from public opinion and could not quell the belligerent mood, but helped them. The government gave money and weapons to the volunteers, and tried to send them to the border as soon as possible in order to remove them from Belgrade. The Serbian government did not pay any attention to the belligerent writing of the press. The question is what happened to the Serbian prince Milan in those days. He was in Vienna, trying to find a suitable bride. In addition, the Serbian prince developed an important diplomatic activity. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Count Andrassy, assured the Serbian prince that nothing serious was happening in Herzegovina. Russian Ambassador Novikov explained to the Serbian prince that Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary were firmly determined to maintain peace in the East and that the uprising in Herzegovina would finish soon. Prince Milan returned to Belgrade in mid-August,

¹⁰ Radoš Ljušić, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

full of confidence that there would be no storm in the Balkans, that Serbia would remain calm and peaceful and that he would soon be able to marry Natalia Keshko, a Moldavian-Russian noblewoman. The crisis of the Serbian government was caused by the request of the Prince Milan to stop sending volunteers to Herzegovina. The government resigned and new elections were prepared for August 1875.

The help that Russia provided to Serbia during the War from 1876 to 1878 was significant. A Slovenian charitable society was formed in Moscow. They collected financial aid, formed medical teams, which then went to Serbia and Montenegro. General Chernyaev left for Serbia with several hundred volunteers. He was appointed commander of the Serbian army. Money collected from the Slovenian committees arrived from various parts of Russia.¹¹ During the Serbian-Turkish wars in 1876, he was the commander of the Serbian Timok-Moravian Army and led battles near Serbian cities, Mramor, Izvor, Abrovac, Djunis, Knjaževac, Aleksinac, and in the battle near Šumatovac. During the Russian-Turkish war, from 1877 to 1878, he was in the Russian Danube and Caucasus armies.¹² At the end of July 1877, the Russian Emperor Alexander II granted Russian officers permission to go to Serbia.¹³

Until 1878, the international legal position of Serbia was determined by Articles 28 and 29 of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856.¹⁴ According to that agreement, Serbia was a state in

¹¹ Nada Tomović, "Ruski dobrovoljci na Balkanu 1876-1878", *Matica crnogorska*, proljeće 2012, p. 368.

¹² Military Archive Belgrade, Army of Kingdom of Yugoslavia, box 91, p. 27.

¹³ Nada Tomović, *op.cit.*, p. 368.

¹⁴ Vladimir Stojančević, Jovan Milićević, Čedomir Popov, Radoman Jovanović, Milorad Ekmečić, *op.cit.*, p. 342-346.

a vassal relationship with the Ottoman Empire. Serbia was granted self-governing privileges: independent internal administration, freedom of religion, legislation, trade and navigation. All these privileges were under the joint guarantees of six great powers: Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy and Prussia (and later Germany, since 1871). Since 1867, when Ottoman fortified cities were handed over to Serbia, the Turkish administration had no military forces or any political competencies on the territory of Serbia. The symbol of Serbian vassalship towards the Ottoman Empire was the annual tribute of 2,300,000 groschen and the Ottoman flag on the ramparts of the Belgrade Fortress. The real international legal feature of the dependence of the Serbian state was the same as in the case of Romania, and consisted in the fact that these two states did not have three attributes of sovereignty. Therefore, neither Serbia nor Romania 1) had the right to conclude international agreements; 2) had the right to have their own diplomatic missions; and 3) had the right to wage war.

In the first half of 1876, the Serbian government examined the condition of the Serbian army. The results showed that Serbia has a standing army of about 4,000 soldiers and 36 cannons, then two classes of the People's Army with nearly 160,000 soldiers and 126 cannons.¹⁵ This Serbian army was significantly smaller in number than the Turkish army. In addition, research has shown that the Serbian army was poorly equipped, insufficiently trained and almost completely unprepared for attack.

We can see the way in which Serbian diplomacy functioned during the Great Eastern Crisis on the example of Ser-

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 347-351.

bian territorial demands. Although the Serbian government did not have well-defined goals before the war, it did formulate them at the end of the war. At the session held on 15 January 1878, the Serbian government decided to ask Turkey to recognize Serbian independence and annex the territory of Kosovo and the city of Vidin when concluding the preliminary peace treaty. At this session, the Serbian government also discussed the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the coming period caused a conflict between the Serbian government and the Austro-Hungarian government, which was determined to use all "necessary means" if Serbia tries to gain Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nicola Lazzaro, an Italian journalist with rich experience as a war correspondent, one of the many European reporters who followed war events from the front or behind it, wrote about the Balkan countries that began to draw new political borders.¹⁶ These borders were not only political and military, but also cultural and religious. In its final territorial claims, Serbia left out Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the order of the Prince of Milan, the borders of the requested territories were drawn on the military map, so it was delivered to the Russian consul in Belgrade together with the explanation. Such a sweeping program of territorial expansion of Serbia immediately met with resistance from two sides: from the Turks, where it was expected, and from Russia, where it was not expected. The Armistice Treaty, concluded in Adrianople (Edirne) on 31 January 1878, stated that Romania and Serbia would gain

¹⁶ Vesna Matović, "Types of Identity and the Image of the Other in Literature (War Prose on Serbian-Turkish Wars 1876-1878)", 235-247. U: *Slika drugog u balkanskim i srednjoevropskim književnostima*, urednik Midrag Matički, Beograd, Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2006, p. 237.

their independence. Also, “sufficient territorial compensation” will be provided for Serbia, while Romania will be allowed to correct its borders. At the beginning of February 1878, the Serbian prince Milan and the Serbian government continued the diplomatic fight for the recognition of the rights to the conquered territories. At that moment, there were suspicions that Russia was planning the territorial expansion of Bulgaria, against the Serbian interests. These suspicions proved to be justified when the Treaty of San Stefano was concluded on 3 March 1878.

The movements of the Balkan nations in the Great Eastern Crisis began in 1875 as an Agricultural Revolution of the unliberated nations, but with a distinct national basis. Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians, Romanians and other Balkan peoples, in the context of unfavourable geopolitical conditions in the Balkans and in complex international circumstances, were faced with a difficult task at the time. Serbia was small, weak and underdeveloped, and did not have enough material or political forces to successfully conclude its national and social revolution. In what Serbia was concerned, this unlucky domestic political and international position was not crucial to its importance in the Balkans. Serbia’s geopolitical position, the fact that it was liberated through its own struggle, as well as the strong moral and political influence it had on Serbs living in the Balkans, meant that Serbia, together with other Balkan nations, was one of the most important factors in the 19th century in the development of international relations in Europe during the resolution of the Great Eastern Crisis. Serbia, like other Balkan states, sought the help of the great powers that intervened in the difficult Balkan drama, and they managed to resolve it in the end.

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RĂZBOIUL RUSO-ROMÂNNO-TURC DIN ANII 1877-1878: ASPECTE ISTORIOGRAFICE

Valentin Burlacu*

Abstract

Romania's War of Independence has been thoroughly pored over, this topic being the basis of a rich historiography, which spares us from the customary inventory of events. Nevertheless, there are some aspects that deserve further scrutiny. Given that, throughout history, the Balkan space was the object of a fierce dispute between the great neighbouring empires, resulting in numerous armed confrontations, the writings about its history (with a rather small number of exceptions) often bore the stamp of political divides, the historical reality being thus distorted. As a consequence, we will try to outline some general aspects regarding the manner in which the political factors and historiography in communist Romania presented the role of Tsarist Russia in Romania's struggle for independence, respectively the perception of the Soviet officials on the same topic.

Keywords: *Romania, Moldova, Soviet Union, Russo-Turkish War*

Obținerea independenței de stat a României în anul 1877, în rând cu alte evenimente din epoca modernă, precum Uni-

* Conf. univ. dr., șeful Secției istorie și artă militară din cadrul Agenției pentru Știință și Memorie Militară din Chișinău, Republica Moldova.

rea Principatelor de la 1859 și integrarea celor trei provincii românești înstrăinate la patria-mamă în anul 1918 (sau Marea Unire), reprezintă jaloane de cotitură în istoria multiseculară a poporului român. Aceste evenimente au fost determinate atât de factori interni, cât și de factori externi. Astfel, confruntările armate ruso-turce, începute în anul 1877, au oferit României șansa de a se elibera definitiv de sub suzeranitatea Porții.

Războiul ruso-turc din anii 1877/78, în cadrul căruia România, prin jertfa de sânge adusă pe altarul biruinței, și-a obținut independența, a fost ultima confruntare armată dintre cele două imperii din lunga epopee care a marcat, la ultima sută de metri, maratonul țărilor ruși pentru mult râvnitul trofeu – orașul Constantinopol și pentru Strâmători. Obiectivele țariste erau mascate sub paravanul misiunii mesianice de eliberare a popoarelor balcanice de sub jugul otoman prin intermediul panslavismului și panortodoxiei.

În ansamblu, Războiul de Independență al României s-a bucurat de o generoasă atenție, subiectul în sine formând substanța unei bogate istoriografii, care ne dispensează de obișnuita tratare a evenimentelor. Totuși, sunt câteva aspecte care merită o privire suplimentară.

În condițiile în care spațiul balcanic a constituit de-a lungul istoriei obiectul unei dispute acerbe între marile imperii vecine, soldate cu numeroase confruntări armate, scrierile despre istoria lui (cu un număr nu prea mare de excepții) au purtat adesea pecetea confruntărilor politice, care distorsionau realitatea istorică.

În sensul prezentului demers, ne vom strădui să schițăm câteva aspecte generale care privesc maniera în care factorii politici și istoriografia din România comunistă s-au raportat și au apreciat rolul Rusiei țariste în obținerea independenței

statului român, respectiv care a fost reacția oficialităților sovietice.

După cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial, în condițiile când România ocupată și încorporată în blocul sovietic, timp de aproape două decenii a fost imposibilă aducerea în discuție a acestui subiect, altfel decât o impunea „prietenia cu marele popor sovietic”, evident incompatibilă cu realitatea istorică. La baza re/scrierii „noii” istorii a românilor a stat pseudo-tratatul de istorie a României, sub redacția politrucului Mihail Roller, apărut în mai multe ediții¹, și care aborda cele mai importante evenimente din istoria țării în spiritul directivelor impuse de noile raporturi sovieto-române.

Din această perspectivă, obținerea independenței de stat a României era apreciată exclusiv ca o consecință a victoriei Rusiei în Războiul din 1877/78, prin prisma rolului ei de eliberator al popoarelor balcanice de sub jugul turcesc.

Acest mod de tratare a fost în vigoare, în linii generale, până la apariția unor divergențe majore între Moscova și București, în 1964, an care a reprezentat un moment de cotitură în relațiile sovieto-române, când conducerea României a optat pentru un curs deosebit și autonom în politica ei internă și externă și pentru o tot mai redusă dependență de Uniunea Sovietică.

„Lovitura” în plan istoriografic a fost dată de publicarea în acel an a lucrării *Note asupra românilor. Manuscrise inedite* aparținând lui K. Marx. Apărută la scurt timp după *Declarația de independență* a PMR din aprilie, sub redacția Academiei Române, volumul, conținând notele de lectură ale lui Marx cu privire la istoria Valahiei și Moldovei, trebuia să-i atribuie nou-lui demers istoriografic argumente incontestabile.

¹ M. Roller, *Studii și note științifice privind istoria României*, București, 1956.

Editorii volumului nu fac comentarii, dar îl lasă pe Marx, cunoscut pentru antirusismul lui, să prezinte întreaga problematică a relațiilor româno-ruse în modul cel mai defavorabil cu putință marelui frate eliberator. În notele sale, Marx își exprima simpatia pentru ideea națională a românilor, aprecia Rusia ca o putere imperialistă și reacționară, denunța exploatarea Principatelor Dunărene, menționa diversele planuri de anexare totală sau parțială a acestora, specifica nedreptățile și actul ilegal al anexării Basarabiei. Fondatorul teoriei comuniste apăra activitățile antiruse ale României în secolul al XIX-lea și drepturile ei de suveranitate, în mod repetat încălcate de Rusia, arăta despre reprimarea revoluției pașoptiste de către ruși și despre antirusismul generației care luptase pentru crearea statului național român modern².

În aceste condiții, noua configurație politică a relațiilor sovieto-române își făcea loc, din ce în ce mai mult, în producția istorică din România, ca parte a escaladării conflictului cu Uniunea Sovietică, și a oglindit tendința generală naționalistă în scrierea istoriei poporului român. Controversa sovieto-română în probleme de ordin istoriografic, care s-a declanșat în ultimii ani ai guvernării Dej și s-a aprofundat în „epoca Ceaușescu”, s-a menținut în relațiile bilaterale până la căderea comunismului în România. Abordarea tot mai tranșantă de către partea română a „problemelor sensibile” legate de relațiile ruso/sovieto-române sunt calificate de sovietici drept „pretenții teritoriale”.

Pentru a contracara așa-zisele „diversiuni” românești, CC al PCUS a organizat o adevărată cruciadă politico-propagandistică, adoptând pe parcursul perioadei o serie întreagă de

² V. Georgescu, *Politică și istorie. Cazul comuniștilor români. 1944-1977*, Ediția a II-a, București, Editura Humanitas, 2008, p. 52.

hotărâri speciale, precum „Cu privire la cercetarea și folosirea în cadrul activității ideologice a trecutului istoric al poporului moldovenesc, raporturile sale seculare cu marele popor rus, legăturile politice cu popoarele din Balcani”³, „Despre studierea și interpretarea pe viitor a problemelor referitoare la istoria relațiilor româno-sovietice”⁴, „Cu privire la măsurile suplimentare în domeniul muncii ideologice în legătură cu intensificarea propagandei naționaliste române care lezează interesele URSS”⁵ ș.a., dublate de hotărâri similare ale CC al PCM.

Timp de peste două decenii, campaniile propagandistice și ideologice antiromânești, inspirate și dirijate de Moscova, au avut drept vârf de lance la Chișinău CC al PCM în frunte cu prim-secretarul Ivan Ivanovici Bodiul, un românofob înverterat.

Astfel, din 1965 până la sfârșitul anilor '80, CC al PCM a urmărit, pas cu pas, evoluția presei, literaturii politice și istorice din România, atitudinea conducerii de la București față de aceste probleme, raportând superiorilor de la Kremlin orice abatere a istoricilor și politicienilor din țara vecină de la schemele prestabilite anterior.

Cu scopul de a contabiliza pretinsele devieri comise, la Chișinău, în cadrul CC al Academiei de Științe și Institutului de Istorie, a fost creată o structură ierarhizată de organe (secții, sectoare) specializate în cercetări social-politice și în informație. Una dintre preocupările de bază ale acestora a devenit culegerea și sistematizarea informațiilor despre modul în

³ E. Negru, Gh. Negru, „*Cursul deosebit*” al României și supărarea Moscovei. *Disputa sovieto-română și campaniile propagandistice antiromânești din RSSM (1965-1989), Studiu și documente, vol. 1 (1965-1975)*, Chișinău, CEP USM, 2013. doc. 26, p. 151.

⁴ *Ibidem*, doc. 29, p. 162.

⁵ AOSPM, F. 51, inv. 39, d. 16, f. 2.

care decurgea rescrierea istoriei în România în spiritul noilor abordări istoriografice. Sintezele erau puse la dispoziția organelor de directivă.

Pe măsura apariției noilor publicații cu caracter istoriografic în România, aceste informații, actualizate, sub formă de rapoarte sau note secrete, semnate de prim-secretarul de partid de la Chișinău, erau expediate cu regularitate CC al PCUS.

Astfel, în una din primele note, datată 1 iulie 1966, se sublinia că „pe parcursul ultimului secol, toate guvernele României, indiferent de orientarea lor politică, recunoșteau misiunea eliberatoare a Rusiei în Balcani, rolul său decisiv în eliberarea de sub jugul turcesc a Principatelor Dunărene și unirea lor în statul român unitar”. În același timp, se atenționa „contrar faptelor istorice și tradițiilor formate, în materialele publicate în ultimul timp, mai ales cu ocazia celor 107 de ani de la formarea statului român, se tratează într-o manieră nouă acest eveniment, fapt ce vine în contradicție cu realitatea istorică general recunoscută. Este evident ignorată misiunea eliberatoare a Rusiei”⁶.

Cu referință la conținutul articolului din ziarul „Scântea” din 24 ianuarie 1966, dedicat aniversării Unirii Principatelor Române, precum și la conținutul altor publicații în care se fac aluzii la politica expansionistă a Rusiei și la amestecul ei în treburile interne ale Principatelor Dunărene, se evidențiază: „O atare reflectare, nu se limitează doar la trecerea sub tăcere a rolului istoric al Rusiei în destinele popoarelor balcanice, ci se face direct în scopul de a discredita gloria Rusiei în rândurile popoarelor din această regiune și a demonstra că ea, ca și alte monarhii, urmărea același scop de ocupare a unor teritorii străine și aservirea altor popoare. S-a conturat tendința

⁶ E. Negru, Gh. Negru, *op.cit.*, doc. 21, p. 138.

evidentă de a demonstra că în 1812 Rusia a anexat o parte a teritoriului statului român unitar.”⁷

Într-un alt raport secret se informa că, în ultimul timp, se desfășoară „reeditarea manualelor, literaturii istorice și altor lucrări, din care se omit tot ce este pozitiv, ceea ce era mai înainte recunoscut drept contribuție a Rusiei în destinele popoarelor balcanice: [...] se exagerează agresivitatea țarismului rus, acest lucru fiind prezentat ca barieră principală în calea unirii principatelor dunărene într-un stat român unitar [...], se editează lucrările social-democraților de dreapta și naționaliștilor burghezi înflăcărați, în care este exprimată ura înverșunată față de Rusia”.

O adevărată „bombă” pentru oficialii de la Chișinău a constituit-o editarea în 1971, la Editura Albatros din București, a volumului monumental *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până în prezent*, al istoricilor C. C. Giurescu (tatăl) și D. C. Giurescu (fiul). Autorilor li se reproșa că nu amintesc numele „marilor comandanți de oști ruși Rumeanțev, Suvorov și Kutuzov”, că „rolul decisiv” al armatei rusești în obținerea independenței României și, în ansamblu, problemele fundamentale ale istoriei României, inclusiv războiul ruso-turc din anii 1877/78, sunt tratate tendențios, de pe pozițiile naționalismului, antislavismului, antirusismului și antisovietismului⁸.

Într-un „Memoriu” ordinar din 27 iunie 1975, cu privire la faptele de falsificare în continuare a relațiilor ruso-române și sovieto-române în publicațiile din Republica Socialistă România, se constata generalizarea în istoriografia românească a acestor aprecieri: „Revizuirea pozițiilor s-a remarcat inițial în

⁷ *Ibidem*, doc. 21, p. 139.

⁸ A se vedea AOSPM, F. 51, inv. 42, d. 127, f. 28-67.

lucrările unor autori, în special istorici, care își exprimau propriile puncte de vedere. Mai târziu, aceste tendințe au început a-și găsi tot mai clar exprimarea în ediții științifico-publicistice (monografii, atlase istorice, manuale etc.), în opere artistice, presa periodică, emisiuni tv și radio, în propaganda verbală. În ultimul timp (1970-1974), în lucrările editate în RSR – *Istoria României, Istoria poporului român, Atlas istoric, Scurt dicționar enciclopedic, Formarea națiunii române și a statului unitar*, precum și în multe altele – se reflectă fără echivoc concepțiile istoricilor din România burghezo-moșierească.⁹

Astfel, se constata că în lucrările respective, cu referință la capitolele „războaiele ruso-turce”, se evidențiau doar scopurile subiective meschine ale țarismului de a cotropi teritoriile pe contul „provinciilor românești”, se ignora rolul obiectiv-progresist al Rusiei în perioada formării statului român, nu era reflectat, în măsură deplină, rolul armatei rusești în războiul ruso-turc din 1877-78, se selectau tendențios citatele din operele clasice ale marxism-leninismului cu caracter antirus și antițarist¹⁰.

Concomitent, în notele și rapoartele prezentate, o interpretare sofisticată ține de caracterul și rolul războaielor purtate de Rusia țaristă împotriva Porții Otomane, în care își găsește dezvoltare concepția „arhi-ideologizată” a „rolului eliberator” al Rusiei în raport cu popoarele balcanice și în special cu poporul român.

În acest context, se afirmă în mod elogios: „În veacul al XVIII-lea, Rusia a purtat multe războaie împotriva Turciei și, cu prețul unor jertfe uriașe, a zdrobit dominația Imperiului Otoman, ceea ce a dat posibilitatea noroadelor Moldovei și altor țări din Peninsula Balcanică să se elibereze din robia

⁹ E. Negru, Gh. Negru, *op. cit.*, doc. 142, p. 593.

¹⁰ AOSPM, F. 51, inv. 42, d. 127, f. 82-83.

turcească multiseclară. S-au realizat năzuințele de veacuri ale acestor popoare, care nutreau nădejdea că «izbăvirea veni-va de la Răsărit».¹¹

Or, este arhicunoscut că războaiele ruso-turce, desfășurate în mare parte pe teritoriul Principatelor Române în contextul „problemei orientale”, au avut un impact deosebit de grav pentru destinul istoric al poporului român, în special asupra integrității teritoriale, situației economice și demografice.

Totuși, ținând cont de faptul că începuse editarea operelor complete ale lui K. Marx și F. Engels în care, în mod explicit, era condamnată politica externă expansionistă a Rusiei țariste, este lansat un nou concept-mit al „caracterului obiectiv progresist” al războaielor purtate împotriva Imperiului Otoman și al formulei „răului mai mic”.

Astfel, cu ocazia aniversării a 90 de ani de la începutul războiului ruso-turc, într-o notă se constata: „Această dată este hotarul cel mai important în istoria multiseclară a relațiilor de prietenie dintre popoarele Rusiei și Peninsulei Balcanice, este începutul etapei finale a luptei lor de eliberare națională. Războiul ruso-turc a reprezentat un moment de cotitură în destinele lor. [...] De bună seamă, guvernul țarist urmărea în acest război scopuri de acaparare. El tindea să dea o lovitură Imperiului Otoman și să-și întărească influența în Balcani. Însă politica Rusiei în această regiune a lumii a avut urmări obiectiv progresiste pentru eliberarea popoarelor balcanice, dezvoltarea mișcării de eliberare națională a poporului român, care și-a căpătat independența la 9 mai 1877.”¹²

Într-o altă formulă se evidențiază: „Obiectiv caracterul progresist al războaielor ruso-turce nu se schimbă din moti-

¹¹ „Comunistul Moldovei”, 1965, nr. 11, p. 8; „Moldova Socialistă”, 23, 24 noiembrie 1965, 5 ianuarie 1966; „Cultura”, 8 ianuarie 1966.

¹² E. Negru, Gh. Negru, *op.cit.*, p. 170-171.

vul că atât guvernul țarist, cât și guvernul otoman în aceste războaie urmăreau scopuri expansioniste (de acaparare). Contrar voinței cercurilor conducătoare, biruințele reputate de oștirile rusești zdruncinau pilonii Imperiului Otoman, slăbeau și subminau dominația lui în Balcani. Acestea, la rândul lor, favorizau lupta de emancipare a popoarelor. Iată de ce ele își legau speranța de Rusia, în care vedeau în mod cert unica salvatoare de sub jugul turcesc insuportabil.¹³

Directivile organelor de partid cu privire la aprecierea politico-propagandistică a evenimentelor legate de Războiul ruso-turc din 1877/78, oglindirea rolului și însemnătatea războaielor ruso-turce în eliberarea popoarelor balcanice, relațiile ruso/sovieto-române sunt impuse istoricilor din RSSM drept principii metodologice pentru combaterea scrierilor istoricilor români, deveniți inamici ideologici.

În acest context, ținem să accentuăm: obiectivele, lista temelor de cercetare și termenul de executare a lucrărilor erau stabilite de la Moscova. Mai mult, materialele dactilografiate ale acestor lucrări, în limba rusă, erau prezentate pentru a fi recenzate și aprobate spre editare unei comisii speciale din cadrul CC al PCUS.¹⁴

În spiritul deciziilor adoptate de organele de partid, frontului istoric din republică îi revenea sarcina să organizeze „conferințe și sesiuni consacrate istoriei relațiilor ruso-române și sovieto-române”¹⁵, „să elaboreze și să publice monografiile, culegeri de articole și documente privind chestiunile legate de istoria Moldovei și a României, de relațiile ruso-române, so-

¹³ I. Bodiul, *Prisoiedinenie Bessarabii k Rossii i istoriceskie sudibi moldavskogo naroda*. „Voprosi istorii”, 1972, nr. 8, p. 4.

¹⁴ E. Negru, Gh. Negru, *op.cit.*, doc. 29, p. 162.

¹⁵ AOSP a RM, F. 51, inv. 34, d. 230, f. 420.

vieto-române și moldo-române”¹⁶. Printre conceptele istoriografiei românești, care trebuiau combătute în mod special, se înscriu: exagerarea rolului armatei române în Războiul ruso-turc din 1877-1878 și subestimarea rolului Rusiei în eliberarea popoarelor balcanice de sub jugul turcesc.

Un argument concludent al ingerinței politicului în scrierea istoriei, al „replicii” istoriografiei sovietice moldovenești la rescrierea istoriei naționale în România, este abordarea tot mai tranșantă a tematicii legate de rolul „progresist”, la început al Rusiei țariste, iar mai apoi al Uniunii Sovietice, în destinul istoric al popoarelor din sud-estul Europei și, în primul rând, al poporului român. După 1965, această tematică se impune tot mai insistent în istoriografia sovietică moldovenească.

În acest context, se organizează sistematic la Chișinău sesiuni, conferințe, simpozioane, sunt publicate culegeri de articole și monografii¹⁷.

În anii 1966-1985, conform estimărilor noastre, au fost editate peste 30 de lucrări ale istoricilor moldoveni, care tratau, dintr-o perspectivă favorabilă Moscovei, problemele fundamentale ale istoriei poporului român.

Diverse aspecte ale istoriei României, precum relațiile ruso-române și sovieto-române în epoca modernă și contemporană, teme reconsiderate de istoriografia românească după 1965, sunt tratate, în contrast chiar cu aprecierile fondatorilor teoriei comuniste despre politica externă expansionistă a

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, inv. 39, d. 16, f. 2.

¹⁷ *Iubilei drujbî. K 90-letiu osvobojdenia Bolgarii ot osmanscogo iga*. Kișinev, 1969; *Balkanski istoriceskii sbornik. Vîpusk I*. Kișinev, 1968; *Vîpusk. II*. Kișinev, 1970; *Vîpusk. III*. Kișinev, 1973; *Vîpusc. IV*. Kișinev, 1974; *Balkanskie stranî v novoie i noveșee vremea*. Kișinev, 1976; *Issledovania po istorii stran Iugo-Vostocinoi Evropî v novoie i noveșee vremea*. Kișinev, 1983; ș.a.

tarismului, prin prisma elogierii și exagerării rolului progresist al Rusiei în Unirea Principatelor, formarea statului român modern¹⁸ și emanciparea României de sub jugul otoman¹⁹. Evoluția vieții politice interne a României este un alt obiect de studiu. Eforturile sunt canalizate în direcția denigrării regimului politic din „România burghezo-moșierească”²⁰, care, în realitate, era incomparabil cu cel al Rusiei autocrate, în componența căreia se afla atunci Basarabia.

Într-o altă categorie de lucrări, sunt studiate și evidențiate aspectele „benefice” ale influenței procesului revoluționar din Rusia asupra mișcării muncitorești și socialiste din România²¹. De pe poziții similare, este descris rolul Uniunii Sovietice în istoria postbelică a României socialiste²². De asemenea, istoricii din RSSM au „contribuit” la elaborarea tratatelor de istorie a

¹⁸ *Rusko-rumînskie i sovetko-rumînskie otnošenja*. Kișinev, 1969; V. Ia. Grosul, *Reformî v Dunaiskih kniajestvah i Rossia (20-30-e gg. XIX v.)*. Moscva, 1966; E. E. Certan, *Rusko-rumînskie otnošenja v 1859-1963 godah*. Kișinev, 1968; V. Ia. Grosul, E. E. Certan, *Rossia i formirovanie Rumînskogo nezavisimogo gosudarstva*. Moscva, 1969.

¹⁹ E. E. Certan, *Velikie derjavî i formirovanie Rumânskogo nezavisimogo gosudarstva*. Kișinev, 1980.

²⁰ S.A. Madievchii, *Politiceskaia sistema Rumîinii. Posledneaia treti XIX-nacialo XX v. (Monarhia, parlament, pravitelstvo)*, Moskva, 1980.

²¹ A. Novac, *Pervaia russkaia burjuazno-demokrateskaia revoliuția i revoliuționnoe dvijenie v Rumîinii (1905-1907 gg.)*, Kișinev, 1966; V. P. Storojuc, *Rabocee dvijenie v Rumîinii i rumîno-russkie revoliuționnie sviazi (1893-1907)*, Kișinev, 1977; A. C. Moșanu, *Rabocee i soțialisticeskoie dvijenie v Rumîinii (1907-1914 gg.)*, Kișinev, 1974; Idem, *Soțialisticeskoie dvijenie v Rumîinii (seredina 70-h-nacialo 90-h gg. XIX v.)*, Kișinev, 1977.

²² M. A. Muntean, *Ocerk vneșnei politiki Rumînscoi Narodnoi Respubliki. 1948-1955 gg.*, Kișinev, 1971; Idem, *Boriba Sovetskogo Soiza za priem v OON Bolgarii, Vengrii i Rumîinii*, Kișinev, 1972; Idem, *Dunaiskaia problema v mejdunarodnih otnošeniah (1945-1948)*, Kișinev, 1977; K. L. Jignea, *Podgotovka i zakliucenie mirnih dogovorov s Bolgariiei, Vengriiei i Rumîniei posle vtoroi mirovoi voini (diplomateskaia istoria)*, Kișinev, 1981 ș.a.

României, realizate în spiritul postulatelor oficiale, sub egida Institutului de slavistică și balcanistică al Academiei de Științe a Uniunii Sovietice²³.

În ultimele lucrări de până la 1989, deși tematica și orientarea rămân, în fond, aceleași, se diversifică, totuși, aspectele, se impun noi accente în corespundere cu obiectivele trasate, se caută „noi” argumente speculative prin lărgirea bazei documentare și selectarea faptelor convenabile. Un exemplu concludent în acest sens o reprezintă lucrarea de sinteză a istoriei politice a României în anii 1859-1944, editată la Chișinău în 1985.²⁴

Ca urmare a reparației pe agenda relațiilor bilaterale a „problemei basarabene”, se intensifică activitatea politico-ideologică în RSS Moldovenească. Aceasta este susținută intens prin abordarea istoriografică dintr-o perspectivă nouă a procesului de rescriere și falsificare a întregii istorii a „poporului moldovenesc”. Majoritatea lucrărilor istoricilor moldoveni, apărute odată cu declanșarea așa-zisului „război istoriografic” dintre cele două țări, au fost o replică la acțiunile politice ale conducerii PCR și publicațiile istorice „revizioniste” care apăreau în România.

²³ *Istoria Rumîniei. 1848-1917*, Moskva, 1971; *Istoria Rumîniei. 1918-1970*, Moskva, 1971. (cu participarea istoricilor A. I. Babii, Ia. M. Kopanskii, E. D. Levit; I. Ă. Levit, A. C. Moșanu, C. F. Popovici, E. E. Certan, Ia. S. Grosul și P. V. Sovietov).

²⁴ *Ocerki politicescoi istorii Rumîniei (1859-1944)*, AN MSSR, Kișinev, 1985.

ASALTUL REDUTEI GRIVIȚA LA 30 AUGUST/11 SEPTEMBRIE 1877 ÎN CÂTEVA DIN RELATĂRILE PARTICIPANȚILOR

Sorin Cristescu*

Abstract

The siege of Grivitsa of August 30 / September 11, 1877, was marred by several strategic and tactical errors that cost the lives of hundreds of Romanian soldiers. While the accounts of those who participated in the battle confirm this, an official investigation was never launched.

Keywords: *Grivitsa Redoubt, siege, 2nd Chasseurs Battalion*

Bătălia din 30 august / 11 septembrie 1877, când trupele române și ruse au cucerit reduta Grivița 1, au capturat un drapel și cinci tunuri (dintre care două au revenit rușilor), este una dintre zilele de glorie ale armatei române când s-a arătat lumii întregi eroismul soldaților români și despre care s-a scris foarte mult.

În toți anii domniei principelui, ulterior regelui Carol I, ziua de 30 august a fost aniversată an de an ca sărbătoare a armatei române. Despre modul în care a fost prima oară serbată această zi, la 30 august 1878, aflăm din *Memoriile regelui Carol I. De un*

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martor ocular. Cu o zi înainte, principele a trimis o telegramă de felicitare țarului Alexandru al II-lea: „Această zi va rămâne veșnic gravată în inimile noastre...”¹ Principele Carol I a trimis și ministrului de război, generalul Al. Cernat², cel care comandase atunci armata română de operațiuni, o telegramă de felicitare: Azi se împlinește un an de când armata noastră prin curajul și prin disprețul ei de viață a acoperit de glorie steagurile române și a pus temelia măririi Patriei...”

În ziua de 30 august 1878, la ora 9, s-a slujit în biserica mânăstirii Sinaia o slujbă religioasă și un parastas pentru cei căzuți la datorie, „la care Principele asistă cu întreaga sa Casă. După acesta urmează defilarea companiei din primul batalion de vânători³, care face serviciul de gardă de când Principele se află la Sinaia”. Apoi a venit telegrama de răspuns a țarului Rusiei: „Da, această zi de griji mari a anului trecut a fost încoronată de un strălucit succes, pentru care trebuie să mulțumim lui Dumnezeu, în amintirea epocii glorioase când vitezele noastre armate și-au vărsat sângele pentru aceeași cauză sfântă. Vă trimit vouă personal și tuturor bravilor care au fost în fața Plevnei medalia noastră pentru războiul terminat acum.”

La ora 5.30, principele s-a dus în cazarma companiei de vânători și a servit masa în mijlocul soldaților săi, prilej cu care a rostit un toast: „Ridic acest pahar în onoarea armatei care

¹ *Memoriile regelui Carol I. De un martor ocular*, ediție Stelian Neagoe, Editura Machiavelli, București, 1994, vol. III, p. 155 (ediția originală în limba germană a apărut la Stuttgart în 1897). În continuare se va cita *Memoriile...*

² Alexandru Cernat (1834–1893), general român, ministru de război în guvernul condus de Ion C. Brătianu (2 aprilie–19 august 1877 și 19 martie–24 noiembrie 1878) comandantul armatei române de operații care a luptat la Plevna între 19 august 1877–19 martie 1878. Ulterior, a fost șef al Statului Major General (1881–1882).

³ Denumire dată unităților formate din soldați de elită, termenul de „vânător” poate fi echivalent cu cel de „țintaș”.

prin luptele sale pe câmpiile din Bulgaria și-a făcut un renume. Bătălia de la Grivița deschide șirul acestor frumoase date care vor rămânea neșterse în istoria noastră. – Mare, frumoasă, dureroasă, a fost această zi. Niciodată nu voi uita momentul când am venit pe câmpul de luptă și întâlnind vânătorii, frații voștri, ei îmi spuneau: *Niciunul de-ai noștri nu a mai rămas. – Cum se poate, răspunsei; sunteți 3, 4, 5 și acolo vin alții: adunați-vă, scăpați onoarea acestei zile, mergeți înainte cu vitejie și veți fi victorioși!* – Seara, bravii vânători au luat în reduta de la Grivița steagul turcesc, aruncându-l la picioarele mele ca semn de biruință. – Eu le spusei: *Sunteți voinici; vă mulțumesc din inimă; de azi înainte este o onoare a fi vânător. Și vouă, copii, vă zic: Faceți să fie și în viitor, întotdeauna o onoare a fi vânător și luați ca exemplu Vânătorii de la Grivița. Să trăiască Armata!*⁴

„Serbarea acestei zile e foarte frumoasă și se transformă într-o adevărată serbare populară”, avea să scrie principele. „C. A. Rosetti⁵ telegrafiază principelui că în toată țara ziua aceasta a fost serbată cu mare entuziasm. În București a ținut el însuși trupelor, în locul ministrului de război care este bolnav, un discurs cald, pe care l-a consacrat, în numele Principelui, celor morți la Grivița.”⁶

Aceste evenimente, amplu comentate de presa vremii – toastul principelui a fost publicat în „Monitorul Oficial” – l-au determinat pe unul din eroii acelei zile de tragic eroism, lo-

⁴ Reprodus după Al. Candiano-Popescu, *O pagină din istoria războiului Românilor din 1877 (de un martor ocular)*, Tipographia Frați Benvenisti, Craiova, 1878, p. 31-32, care redă textul original.

⁵ C. A. Rosetti (1816–1885), personalitate de prim rang a istoriei moderne românești, revoluționar la 1848, părinte al jurnalismului politic românesc, lider al mișcării unioniste, lider și fondator al Partidului Național Liberal alături de Ion C. Brătianu (aprilie 1875). La vremea respectivă, era ministru de interne (26 martie–17 noiembrie 1878).

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 155-156.

cotenent-colonelul Alexandru Candiano-Popescu⁷, pe atunci maior, să scrie o broșură, publicată la finele anului 1878, în care arăta că nu are „pretențiunea de a voi să învățăm ceva pe cei prezenți sau viitori, ci este pentru noi o datorie de conștiință pe care o împlinim. Voim să lămurim oarecari situații și oarecari fapte. Voim ca martur ocular ce am fost în această lungă și sângeroasă dramă să spunem impresiile și cugetările noastre, căci e bine ca fiecare să pue partea sa de muncă, dacă se poate la clădirea imposantului edificiu al adevărului istoric.”⁸ Motivul pentru care Candiano a scris acea broșură era acela de a răspunde ziarelor conservatoare, care în iunie 1878 contestau dreptul său la avansarea la gradul de locotenent-colonel la 15 octombrie 1877⁹ și trecerea în cadrele active ale armatei. Tot în broșura sa, Candiano-Popescu aduce o serie de acuzații dure la adresa generalului Al. Cernat, pe care îl învinuiește de toate neajunsurile campaniei și printre altele că „se încearcă să reinvie blestematul spectru ce divisase odinioară România în munteni și moldoveni”¹⁰.

⁷ Alexandru Candiano-Popescu (1841–1901), general și om politic român, a participat la detronarea principelui Alexandru Ioan Cuza, iar în anul 1870, fiind deputat în parlament, a încercat să determine răsturnarea principelui Carol I, luând în stăpânire prefectura din Ploiești la 7/19 august. A fost achitat de tribunalul cu Jurați din Târgoviște la 17/29 octombrie același an. A participat la constituirea Partidului Național Liberal la 15 aprilie 1875. S-a distins în Războiul de Independență la cucerirea redutei Grivița. A fost prefect al poliției capitalei în 1879, iar ulterior, la cererea lui Ion C. Brătianu, a fost adjutant al regelui Carol I între anii 1880 și 1892. Avansat general de brigadă în 1894. Operă memorialistică postumă: *Războiul Neatârănării. Istorie critică. Asaltul și luarea redutei Grivița*, București, 1913, și *Amintiri din viața-mi*, ediție îngrijită de Constantin Corbu, Editura Eminescu, București, 1998-1999, două volume.

⁸ Al. Candiano-Popescu, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 9

Primul lucru pe care îl subliniază Candiano-Popescu este faptul că, în condițiile înfrângerilor suferite de ruși la 8/20 și 18/30 iulie 1877 la Plevna, trecerea armatei române peste Dunăre nu era acceptată de nimeni în afară de premierul și ministrul de război Ion C. Brătianu, cel care „a avut această încredere și această rezoluțiune” pentru realizarea operațiunii care în fond le-a permis rușilor să continue războiul: „Da, Corpurile legiuitoare nu voiau să treacă Dunărea; țara nu voia să treacă Dunărea; Domnitorul nu voia să treacă Dunărea¹¹; Miniștrii asemenea. Ion Brătianu era însă singur contra acestei opinii generale, și în satul Șimnicul¹², lângă Craiova, depuse demisia sa în mâna Capului țării, stăruind în ideea ca Dunărea să fie trecută de armata noastră. Criză ministerială fuse timp de zece ore. Dar Măria Sa Carol I, inspirat de binele patriei, adoptă în fine părerea cutezătorului Președinte al Consiliului și lumea

¹¹ Afirmatie pe care o întâlnim și în memoriile unor liberali de frunte precum Iancu Bălăceanu și I. G. Duca. Temerile domnitorului și ale premierului erau legate de dorința lor de a se asigura individualitatea armatei române față de cea rusă. Consulul austro-ungar Zwiedinek a scris la 27 iulie 1877: „Principele Carol și dl Brătianu țin la fel de mult ca și înainte ca armata română să treacă Dunărea ca o entitate de sine stătătoare și, dacă acest lucru nu s-a realizat până acum, motivul principal rezidă în faptul că lipsesc mijloacele pentru a obține așa ceva.” *Documente privind Istoria Românilor*, Colecția E. Hurmuzaki, editori Flavius Solomon, Philipp H. Blasen, Sorin Cristescu, Andrei Cușco, Seria a 3-a, vol. VII, p. 191.

¹² Sunt două localități la nord de Craiova: Șimnicu de Sus și Șimnicu de Jos, aceasta din urmă fiind astăzi localitate componentă a municipiului Craiova. Aceasta este localitatea menționată în *Memoriile regelui Carol I de un martor ocular*, vol. III, p. 192, însemnare din 28 iunie/10 iulie 1877: „Principele și Principesa după o primire strălucită la gară (în Craiova) merg cu trăsura la Șimnic, depărtare 6 km de Craiova, își iau cartier în plăcuta casa de țară a d-lui Hagiadi. Satul are o poziție frumoasă, pe un deal între vii...” Acolo a fost primită telegrama marelui duce Nicolae din 18/30 iulie. Șederea principelui s-a încheiat la 13/25 august 1877: „Principele Carol părăsește Șimnicul pentru a trece Dunărea și a lua comanda supremă a armatei sale.”

știe astăzi cum acest ilustru soldat execută în Bulgaria colosală gândirea a Primului său Ministru. Faptul petrecut în satul Șimnicul afirmăm că este exactitatea exactităților.”¹³

De menționat că însuși tatăl principelui Carol I îi scrisese fiului său la 16 mai 1877: „Nu pot ascunde că mie această cooperare, subordonând și intercalând armata română în armata rusă, mi se pare o adevărată sinucidere politică”¹⁴

Următorul aspect important în relatarea lui Candiano este partea referitoare la contribuția sa personală la cucerirea redutei Grivița. Autorul citează *in extenso* raportul colonelului A. Anghelescu din 2 septembrie către generalul Al. Cernat în care se arată că el, Candiano, a fost cel care a solicitat comandantului colonelului A. Anghelescu „onoarea de a conduce batalionul 2 vânători la asaltul redutei Grivița și *cum acest batalion se arătase în două rânduri slab în foc din cauza puținei energii a comandantului său* (subl. S.C.) a scris colonelul, am prezentat pe numitul oficer batalionului în ziua asaltului...”¹⁵. Colonelul l-a propus la avansare pe maiorul Candiano și a încheiat raportul său arătând: „Cu această ocazie, îmi permit a vă aduce la cunoștință că batalionul al 2-lea de vânători care era corpul pe care contam cel mai puțin până aici, din cauza a două greșeli consecutive, a recâștigat stima întregii divizii și îi poate servi chiar de exemplu.”¹⁶

Interesant este faptul că Al. Candiano-Popescu nu vorbește în niciun fel de eroarea de recunoaștere a terenului din fața redutei Grivița 1 care a costat viața atâtor soldați români. Se mulțumește să scrie: „Știm cum luptară în ziua de 30 august vânătorii conduși de maiorul Candiano. Teribila

¹³ Al. Candiano-Popescu, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Memoriile...*, p. 147.

¹⁵ Al. Candiano-Popescu, *op.cit.*, p. 22 și 32.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

împușcătură¹⁷ a armelor superioare la Grivița îi decimă în valea ce erau nevoiți să străbată, așa că după asaltul care ilustră numele oștenilor noștri, comandantele batalionului mai avea 200 de oameni din 580. Trei ofițeri mai dejunară a doua zi cu maiorul vânătorilor.”¹⁸

Relatează apoi momentul propriu-zis al cuceririi redutei Grivița: „Atacaseră reduta de mai multe ori trupele române; viteazul batalion al II-lea de vânători era decimat, către seară sosește și un batalion din reg. Arhanghelgorod¹⁹ din armata rusă.

Maiorul Candiano-Popescu, căci era maior pe atunci, luă brațul unui căpitan rus și repezindu-se departe înaintea trupelor, ce în mare majoritate erau române, mergând la atac zise ofițerului:

– Pentru că suntem aliați, să mergem la asalt braț sub braț și coastă lângă coastă!

Iar coborându-se în redută sub ploaia infernală de fier și de foc, se întoarse spre ofițerul strein și, puind mâna în buzunar, scoase o cartă de vizită pe care o dete căpitanului rus zicându-i:

– Căpitane, pentru că nu știi cui am dat brațul în această ocazie și fiindcă este probabil că am să mor aici, permite-mi să-ți dau cartă mea de vizită.

Căpitanul surprins de locul și de ocazia în care se aducea acest tribut etichetei, luă cartă de vizită și o băgă cu o mișcare nervoasă în buzunar.

După luarea redutei, acest ofițer ce din întâmplare era adjutantul generalului Krüdner²⁰, comandantul Corpului V din

¹⁷ În sensul de tir susținut, intens.

¹⁸ Al. Candiano-Popescu, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁹ Regiune administrativă din apropierea orașului Arhanghelsk.

²⁰ Nikolai Pavlovici Krudener sau Kridener (1811–1891), general rus care la comanda corpului IX de armată a cucerit cetatea Nicopole la 4/16

care făcea parte și batalionul rus, zbură la generalul său spre a-i da fericita nuvelă.

Generalul Krüdner pornește imediat pe acest adjutant la marele duce Nicolae spre a-i anunța luarea Griviței. Marele duce sta la Bogot, la opt kilometri cel puțin departe de generalul Krüdner.²¹

În felul acesta explică Al. Candiano-Popescu în paginile următoare faptul că a fost decorat cu Ordinul rusesc Sf. Gheorghe, așa cum i-au povestit colonelul Gaillard și generalul Zefcari.²²

În 1887, apare o lucrare oficială despre Războiul de la 1877 semnată de Teodor Văcărescu²³, *Luptele Românilor în resbelul 1877–1878* (Editura Tipographiei Curții Regale, F. Göbl & Fii, București, vol. I, 1886, vol. II, 1887). În anul următor, lucrarea a fost tradusă în limba germană de Mitte Kremnitz (*Rumäniens Anteil am Kriege der Jahre 1877 und 1878*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1888) și premiată de Academia Română.

În paginile consacrate zilei de 30 august, Th. Văcărescu a scris: „O groaznică surprindere adăsta aci pe năvălitori. Abia Abdul-Kerim ce trebuia să atace nu forma o singură întărire cum timp de o lună și jumătate fusese recunoscută de statul major rusesc și cum era însemnată pe planul acestuia comuni-

ie 1877. Ulterior, a luat parte la bătăliile de la Plevna de la 8/20 și 18/30 iulie unde a fost învins, dar a rămas în funcție de comandă pe toată durata asediului de la Plevna. Ulterior, a comandat corpul de armată din zona Varșoviei.

²¹ Al. Candiano-Popescu, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 34-35. Alexandru Zefcari a fost primul director al Cercului Militar Național (1876–1877).

²³ Theodor Văcărescu (1842–1914), general și diplomat român, mareșal al curții principelui Carol I din 1873, a participat la Războiul de Independență cu gradul de căpitan milițian atașat pe lângă marele Cartier General al armatei române. Memorialist.

cat românilor. Din liniile noastre de pe muchiele văilor Bucovei și Griviței, tabia turcească se vedea, este adevărat, ca o singură și mare redută care se numise reduta Griviței, cum era indicată și de ruși, și așa se presintase recunoașterilor ce făcuseră oficerii noștri de stat-major în cele patru zile numai de când armata românească era înaintea Plevnei. Dar lucrarea turcească consta, realmente, din două redute legate printr-un șanț care forma un fel de curtină, și configurația terenului cu încovăitură aproape de șanț nu punea în evidență decât fețele nord și sud; fața est era astfel acoperită încât întărirea părea a nu forma decât una și aceeași redută. Această situațiune care nu se putu lămuri decât în momentul atacului făcu ca armata română în loc de a lupta cu o singură redută, cum prescriau dispozițiile, avea să lupte în contra a două redute deopotrivă de puternice.

Aceasta fu uimitoarea descoperire ce făcură trupele coloanei diviziunii a 3-a când sosiră pe muchea dealului și văzură în fața lor o redută nouă la poalele căreia se aflau, și la stânga acesteia, la 300 metri, altă redută asupra căreia se îndreptase coloana diviziunii a 4-a. În această gravă împrejurare ce era de făcut? A schimba frontul atacului și a se dirige către reduta din stânga? La aceasta nu era de gândit nici din cauza terenului, nici a focului redutei și drumului acoperit între ambele întăriri sub cari se aflau coloane. A da înapoi, a se retrage fără a da asaltul? Nu, iubită țară, n-aveau fiii tăi să-ți aducă astă necinste!

«Nainte copii!» comandă cu toată fatala descoperire colonelul Ipătescu²⁴, șeful coloanei de atac și la glasul său batalioanele române se avântară cu nepăsare de rănilile și moartea

²⁴ Grigore Ipătescu (1836–1895), colonel în 1874, general de brigadă în 1883 și scriitor militar; în 1876 comandase Regimentul 8 de line și în 1881 va comanda Regimentul 17 dorobanți Mehedinți și din 1890 divizia de Dobrogea. Cf. Dimitrie R. Rosetti, *Dicționarul Contimporanilor*, București, 1897, p. 104.

ce loveau în tovarăși dinainte și din juru-le. Când văzură pe ai noștri dând năvală asupra lor, turcii deschiseră deodată focul tunurilor cari azvârleau șrapnele, pe când infanteria lor, trăgând din șanț, de pe banchetă și de pe parapetul redutei, forma trei caturi de unde pornea o nesfârșită grindină de gloanțe, căci fiecare trăgător avea lângă sine o ladă de tinichea plină cu cartușe, din care își umplea neconținut pușca Peabody și Winchester și întreținea un foc neîntrerupt.”²⁵

Stufoasa descriere a lui Văcărescu, accentuând eroismul românilor, menționează cum „apropierea batalioanelor rusești cresc în trupele române aprinderea și mânia luptei cu orice preț. Ațâțate și mai mult de îndemnul mai presus de orice laudă al oficerilor, de cuvintele și de pildele bărbătești ale lt.-colonel Voinescu, maior Candiano-Popescu, căpitanii Groza, Pruncu și toți acei cari mai rămăseseră în picioare, rândurile române se alcătuiesc de isnoavă. *Nu vă lăsați băieți că vin muscalii să ia reduta și ne fac de rușine!* strigă într-un glas acești viteji și se reped a treia oară dinspre vest, pe când rușii vin dinspre est. Și batalioanele rusești și batalioanele române fură iarăși respinse; dintre ruși cad o mulțime de ofițeri și soldați, șeful regimentului Arhanghelgorod este ucis”²⁶.

În cele din urmă, „colonelul Angelescu A. însărcină pe la 6³/₄ seara pe lt.-colonelul Voinescu și pe căpitanul Groza, din statul-major, a strânge încă o dată trupele și a le duce la un ultim atac. Pentru a patra oară deci, în timp de patru ore, acești neînfricoșați ostași porniră la asalt. Soldații din batalionul al 2-lea de vânători, grupându-se cu aceia ai batalioanelor din regimentele al 14-lea, al 16-lea de dorobanți și al 5-lea de linie, se asvârliră încă o dată pe redută. În sfârșit, împizmata împotrivi-

²⁵ Theodor Văcărescu, *op.cit.*, p. 328-329.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 335-336.

re a vrăjmașului se clătină de atâta stăruință, se surpă de atâta îndârjire: trupele noastre, cu maiorul Candiano-Popescu A. în frunte, intră în redută. Un moment de scurtă, dar învierșunată luptă se petrecu atunci, luptă la care iau parte și batalioanele rusești cari, pe când românii atacaseră fața vest, atacaseră și ele fața sud-vest a redutei și pătrunseră înăuntru cu maiorul Kwitka²⁷. Românii și rușii dobor tot ce rezistă și nu se predă, multe leșuri de dușmani umplură atunci reduta. Turcii își caută în fugă scăparea, și învălmășeala și înfrângerea îi silesc să lase în mâinile noastre cinci tunuri și un steag pe care-l cucerii luptând cu port-drapelul și cu cei ce-l apărau soldatul Grigore Ion ajutat de sergentul Stan Gheorghe și de caporalul Nică Vasile, căteștrei din batalionul al 2-lea de vânători. Acestea fură trofee biruinței, răsplata strălucitei purtări a ostașilor noștri²⁸.

O descriere mai puțin eroică, dar probabil mai apropiată de adevăr ne-a lăsat unul din cei care nu au participat personal la cucerirea redutei Grivița, dar care a hotărât să scrie cele ce-a consemnat în acea zi. Este vorba de *Memoriul...*²⁹ generalul de brigadă Ion Cotruț³⁰. În prefața lucrării sale, generalul spune:

²⁷ Numele este Kwastov în Al. Candiano-Popescu, *Războiul Neatârării...*, p. 45.

²⁸ Theodor Văcărescu, *op.cit.*, p. 340-341.

²⁹ General I. Cotruț, *Memoriu pentru a servi la istoria Războiului Independenței*, București, Tipografia Al. Lefteriu & C. Ispășescu, 1895 și o a doua ediție Galați (Tipo-lit. Modernă, Ap. P. Antoniadu), 1898.

³⁰ Cercetând *Anuarele Armatei* din acei ani, se pot urmări etapele carierei lui Ion Cotruț (așa este trecut în aceste anuare): născut la 23 ianuarie 1834, sergent la 8 ianuarie 1852, sublocotenent la 1 octombrie 1853, locotenent la 6 noiembrie 1859, căpitan la 6 iunie 1862, maior la 26 septembrie 1868, locotenent-colonel la 1 ianuarie 1876, colonel la 8 aprilie 1880, comandant al Regimentului 11 dorobanți și al Brigăzii 12 infanterie. La 16 octombrie 1891, a fost demis din armată, de la 8 iunie 1895, trecut în rezervă, la 28 noiembrie 1895, avansat general de brigadă în rezervă (*Anuarul oficial al Armatei* din 1901, p. 528). În *Anuarul* din 1877, p. 26, este trecut ca

„După stăruințele câtorva prieteni buni, m-am hotărât să public acest mic memoriu asupra Războiului Independenței. El cuprinde numai ceea ce am văzut eu însumi, povestesc numai evenimentele la care eu însumi am luat parte. Și fiindcă în tot timpul m-am găsit în capul Regimentului al 6-lea de linie, fie în calitate de comandant al lui, fie în aceea de comandant al brigadei din care a făcut parte, acest memoriu povestește partea glorioasă ce a luat regimentul citat în Războiul Independenței. Încolo, dacă ofițerii ce au luat parte la acest război unii sunt arătați altfel decât în povestirea oficială³¹, rog pe toți să creadă că n-am vrut nici să laud, nici să critic pe nimeni; singura mea dorință a fost de a povesti faptele așa după cum mi s-au înfățișat, fără să lingușesc pe nimeni, dar fără să denaturez nimic, ca să plac cutăruia sau cutăruia. Ba am avut grijă să menajez persoanele, pe cât am putut să o fac, fără să denaturez faptele.”³²

În partea dedicată intrării efective în război, generalul Cotruț ne lasă o relatare interesantă despre Ion C. Brătianu și Eugeniu Carada³³: „Am intrat cu regimentul în Turnu-Măgu-

locotenent-colonel la Regimentul 6 Dorobanți, comandant onorific de domnitorul Serbiei Milan Obrenovici al IV-lea și efectiv de colonelul Constantin Budișteanu (care va fi avansat general de divizie în 1892). În *Anuarul* din 1888, este trecut comandant al Regimentului 17 dorobanți și al Brigăzii 1 infanterie. A fost decorat cu ordinul Steaua României de război clasa a IV-a în 1878, Virtutea Militară clasa I în 1878 și Coroana României clasa a III-a în 1886. Memoriul său este citat în *Istoria României*, Editura Academiei R.P.R., București, 1964, vol. IV, p. 622.

³¹ Teodor Văcărescu, *Luptele Românilor în resbelul 1877–1878*, Editura Tipographiei Curții Regale, F. Göbl & Fii, București, vol. I, 1886, vol. II, 1887; lucrare tradusă în limba germană de Mitte Kremnitz *Rumäniens Antheil am Kriege der Jahre 1877 und 1878* F. A. Brockhaus, , Leipzig, 1888.

³² Ioan Cotruț, *op.cit.*, p. 3-4.

³³ Eugeniu Carada (1836–1910), economist și scriitor român, membru marcant al Partidului Național Liberal, cunoscut pentru activitatea sa ca director al Băncii Naționale (1880–1910).

rele și m-am dus la d. Brătianu, ministru de resbel. Cunoșteam mai dinainte pe d. Brătianu; avusesem onoarea a-l însoți la Sibiu, unde a mers să felicite pe împăratul Austriei, care venise să asiste la manevrele ce executau lângă Sibiu³⁴.

Făcusem o bună impresie d-lui Brătianu, prin atitudinea mea față cu ofițerii austriaci la manevrele militare. Dânsul însărcinase fără știrea mea oarecari persoane să observe ce impresie face ofițerul român austriacilor. Se pare că rapoartele fuseseră favorabile, căci la întoarcerea mea de la manevre, d. Brătianu m-a întâmpinat cu multă satisfacție și simpatie.

Astfel acum, la Turnu-Măgurele, eram o veche cunoștință. După ce i-am prezentat raportul și situația regimentului, m-a recomandat la un domn civil care să-mi comunice marșul ce urmam a face. Acest domn era foarte la curent cu toate mișcărilor trupelor, avea aerului unui șef de stat-major degheizat. Îmi aducea aminte istoria Revoluției Franceze și-l asemănam cu un fel de reprezentant al poporului pe lângă armată. Curiozitatea m-a făcut să întreb cine era acel domn și mi s-a spus că este Eugeniu Carada, un *alter ego* al d-lui Brătianu. De atunci nu l-am mai văzut.”³⁵

Autorul consacră un spațiu amplu relatării zilei de 30 august/11 septembrie, văzută de la o anumită distanță, dar arătând toate momentele dramatice; o socotim cea mai interesantă: „Sosisem în ajunul unui mare eveniment. În ziua de Sf. Alexandru, ziua Împăratului Rusiei, se hotărâse a se da asalt redutei Grivița, acea redută teribilă ce sfărâmasse un corp de armată rusească cu vreo lună de zile mai înainte³⁶. Statul-ma-

³⁴ La 28 august/9 septembrie 1876, vezi *Memoriile...*, p. 58, unde nu se spune despre faptul că Ion C. Brătianu și E. Stătescu ar fi fost însoțiți și de ofițeri români.

³⁵ Ioan Cotruț, *op.cit.*, p. 6-7.

³⁶ Este vorba despre încercările eșuate ale rușilor de a cuceri Plevna la 8/20 iulie și 18/30 iulie, care l-au determinat pe marele duce Nicolae, co-

jor făcuse recunoașterile necesare și le credea îndestulătoare, cu toate că turcii, geloși pe lucrul lor, nu prea lăsau pe nimeni să-și vâre nasul de aproape. De aceea recunoașterile s-au făcut de departe, afară din bătaia armelor de foc, mai mult cu binoclu și numai cât se poate vedea din depărtare³⁷. Divizia 4-a³⁸ și a 3-a³⁹ trebuiau să dea asaltul, a 2-a rămânea în rezervă. Diviziile cari trebuiau să atace făcuseră mari pregătiri. La batalioanele din linia I fiecare om din rândul 1 trebuia să poarte un maldăr de fascine și o scară, fascinele pentru astuparea șanțului redutei și scara pentru a escalada parapetul. Și pentru a face fascine se devastase toate păpușoaiile Bulgarilor.

Atacul. Mersul trupelor. Grivița. În zori de ziuă, la 30 august, canonada începe îngrozitoare pe toată linia. Diviziile își ocupă locurile destinate. Din cauza terenului și mai cu seamă a dispozițiilor tactice ale comandatului⁴⁰, ele nu se vedeau una pe alta. Divizia a 2-a din care făceam parte se așezase pe

mandantul armatei ruse, să solicite principelui Carol I ajutorul de urgență al armatei române.

³⁷ La câteva zile după bătălia din 30 august, corespondenții de presă străini au transmis că maiorul Iacob Lahovary (1846–1907), șeful secției de operații din Marele Cartier General, a fost scos din acest serviciu „neobservând a doua redută de la Grivița”. *Apud Nicolae Iorga, Istoria românilor prin călători*, București, 1929, vol. IV, p. 135-136. Acest lucru nu a împiedicat însă să fie avansat locotenent-colonel după căderea Plevnei și ulterior să ajungă la cele mai înalte demnități militare și civile: șef al Marelui Stat Major (1 octombrie 1894–1 octombrie 1895) și de două ori ministru de război (1891–1894 și 1899–1901) și ministru al afacerilor străine (22 decembrie 1904–8 februarie 1907).

³⁸ Divizia a 4-a infanterie era alcătuită aproape în totalitate din militari din Moldova, cf. General Radu R. Rosetti, *Ambulanța doamnelor din Iași în 1877–1878*, București, 1940, p. 6-7. Era comandată de generalul Alexandru Angheliescu.

³⁹ Divizia a 3-a infanterie era condusă de generalul George Angheliescu.

⁴⁰ Este vorba de principele Carol I.

un platou, la sud de comuna Verbița⁴¹. Era adăpostită de vederea inamicului și deci nici ea nu vedea nimic. Soldații așezaseră armele în piramidă și stau tolăniți pe câmp printre rândurile de arme. Ofițerii grupați în capul fiecărui batalion stau de conversație, făcând coniecturi [presupuneri, ipoteze – n.a.].

Urându-mi-se cu astă ședere fără nicio ocupație, cer permisiune comandantului de brigadă ca să mă duc singur spre baterie și să observ lupta. Mi se permite; mi s-a pus însă în vedere că este pericol, că poate să fiu lovit de un obuz, dar eu nu am ținut niciodată seama de pericolele posibile. Plecai pe câmp în direcția bubuiturii tunurilor. Înaintând astfel, observai un mic traseu [tranșeu – n.a.] și acolo doi ofițeri pitulați erau în observație. Pitularea lor într-un șanț mi s-a părut de prisos, căci niciun obuz inamic nu se vedea căzând prin prejur. Mă apropiai și recunoscui pe colonelul Dabija⁴² și pe lt.-colonelul Pastia⁴³ cu binoclurile în mâini.

– A, bună ziua! Dar ce faceți voi aci? îi întrebai.

– Observăm lupta, îmi răspunse colonelul Dabija.

– Apropos, amicii mei, explicați-mi și mie poziția, sunt venit de aseară și nu știu nimic.

Colonelul Dabija, plin de amabilitate, îmi explică cu multă gentilețe ce vedeam înaintea. Eram pe muchea unui deal, în față se întindea o vale. În fundul văii și în partea de jos a coastei opuse se vedeau mai multe, cari se mișcau în dreapta și în stânga cam fără rost. Acestea erau batalioanele din divizia 1. Mai jos, pe coastă, o linie lungă de tiraliori cari înaintau la deal dând focuri. Dar se părea că împușcă în lună, căci nu vedeam focuri răspunzând din muchea opusă a dealului. Pe culme însă

⁴¹ Azi Vârbița, localitate la 13 km nord-est de Plevna și la 40 km sud-vest de cetatea Nicopole de pe malul drept al Dunării.

⁴² Nicolae Dabija (1837–1884) general român, ministru de război (8 ianuarie–10 iulie 1879).

⁴³ Mihail Pastia (1839–1899), general român.

se vedea forma unei movile de pământ din care din când în când fumegau focuri de tun.

– Aceea este reduta ce atacăm, îmi zise colonelul Dabija.

Și eu îndreptai binoclul cu mai multă atenție asupra acelei movile. Dar îmi păru extraordinar că nu distingeam nimic și tiraliorii, cari la început se vedeau pe la jumătatea coastei, acum erau pe culme și se vedeau bine siluetele lor, cari se desprindeau pe orizont, alături cu reduta.

– Iată tiraliorii, sunt lângă redută, observai eu colonelului Dabija.

– O! Da, și acum reduta este ca și luată.

Știre falsă și știre adevărată. În același moment un călăraș sosește:

– D-le colonel, m-a trimes d. general să vă întreb cum merge lupta?

– Spune-i că merge bine, tiraliorii sunt la redută și ea trebuie să fie luată.

– Dar unde este generalul? întrebai eu.

– Iată colo, îmi răspunse.

Și într-adevăr, observ la vreo doi kilometri pe muchea dealului, într-o pădurice, o grupă de ofițeri descălecați, șezând ascunși în tufe. Bucuros de succesul trupelor noastre, mă întorc la brigadă și anunț camarazilor mei fericita noutate.

Dar, vai! Amară decepție! Peste vreo oră sosește colonelul Algiu⁴⁴ consternat, comunicând un ordin ca toți sanitarii să meargă cu brancardele să aducă răniți.

– Ei bine, îl întrebai eu, reduta s-a luat?

⁴⁴ Ioan Algiu (10 noiembrie 1834–1904), general român care a participat la Războiul de Independență. La 27 martie 1874, avansat locotenent-colonel. La 28 noiembrie/10 decembrie 1877, a intrat cu unitatea sa în Plevna și a fost primul comandant al garnizoanei orașului Plevna. La 1 mai 1880, a fost avansat colonel cu data de 1 decembrie 1877 (prin dedicație). Avansat general de brigadă la 1 decembrie 1891, la 1 aprilie 1896, demis și trecut în rezervă (*Anuarul Armatei*, 1898, p. 424).

– Nicidecum, îmi răspunse, atacul nu a reușit, cinci batalioane sunt zdrobite.

Fusesem cu toții victima unei iluzii! Silueta redutei ce văzusem pe muchea dealului era mult mai departe. De la acel deal începea iarăși o vale și pe celălalt deal era reduta care se proiecta pe orizont deasupra dealului.

Recunoaștere greșită. Recunoașterile dar fuseseră defectuos făcute. Generalul degeaba se ascunsese în tufe cu tot statul său major, căci era afară din bătaia eficace a tunurilor de 9 centimetri. Și bateriile noastre de la divizia 3-a trăgeau ca de nuntă, căci obuzele cădeau toate în valea dinaintea redutei. Și noi degeaba ne ascunsesem în groapă, era un exces de precauțiune, nici cu telescopul nu ne puteau vedea turcii. Dacă ar fi știut că stăm acolo, așa de pitiți, ar fi răs grozav de noi. În fine, în loc de o redută erau două, cari se mascau una pe alta crezându-se că este o singură redută asupra căreia se îndreptau și divizia 3-a și divizia 4-a.

În realitate, fiind două redute, divizia 4-a Anghelescu s-a îndreptat către Grivița No. 1 și divizia 3-a spre Grivița No. 2. Cu chipul acesta, trupele dintr-o divizie nu se mai vedeau cu trupele din cealaltă; fiecare divizie credea că cealaltă lipsește de la atac, ceea ce influențează foarte mult asupra moralului trupelor și asupra vigoarei atacului.

Atacul Griviței No. 1. Am văzut ce s-a întâmplat cu atacul Griviței No. 2, pe care-l dedese divizia 3. Iată acum ce se petrecea la reduta No.1, pe care o ataca divizia 4-a comandată de Alexandru Anghelescu.

Au fost vreo trei batalioane destinate să dea asaltul: un batalion din al 5-lea de linie, comandat de maiorul Iarca⁴⁵, unul

⁴⁵ Leonida Iarca (1843–1926), maior, comandantul batalionului 2 din Regimentul 5 infanterie. Va fi avansat colonel în 1883 și general de brigadă

de vânători comandat de maiorul Candiano și unul din al 16-lea de dorobanți comandat de nu mai știu ce căpitan.

Dar aceste batalioane îndată ce au trecut muchea dealului și au ieșit în vederea redutei, care le-a primit cu focuri de la vreo 2 000 de metri aproape, au început să șovăiască și unele au mers înainte fără energie și fără avânt.

Șefii de batalion n-au știut să-i întărească și trupa a mers singură. Ba unii au rămas în muchea dealului, însă îmbrăcați cu mantale de cauciuc și chipiu învelit cu mușama, ca în timp de ploaie, deși era timpul frumos, numai ca să nu poată fi ochiți de turcii din redută.

Astfel, ofițerii superiori nu urmau de aproape trupa pentru a o încuraja, ci se țineau cu prudență afara din bătaia eficace a puștii, ofițerii inferiori se uitau și ei înapoi și soldații nu înaintau decât prin propria lor energie naturală și prin obișnuința disciplinei. De aceea când ajungeau în zona unde focul inamic le făcea rău, rănind pe unii, ucigând pe alții, se puneau în retragere singuri, neavând cine să-i stimuleze ca să meargă înainte.

Această manevră s-a repetat de vreo trei ori, trimițându-se trupele din nou la asalt. În zadar maiorul Candiano, care luase în ajun comanda batalionul al 2-lea de vânători numai pentru a merge la atac, în zadar se zbuțuia să-și aducă trupele din nou la atac, căci ele grămădite în dezordine după o movilă, se mulțumeau a trage focuri inofensive asupra redutei.

În fine, maiorul Candiano, observând un regiment rusesc care sta neactiv în vale, lângă comuna Grivița, ceru de la colonel a le da și concursul său. Acesta trimise două companii ca ajutor și trupele noastre, stimulate de prezența rușilor, au luat reduta dintr-un singur elan.

la 10 Mai 1893, comandant al Corpului 4 de armată, cf. Dimitrie R. Rosetti, *Dicționarul Contimporanilor*, București, 1897, p. 100.

Vorbesc de atacul Griviței pe scurt, căci neluând parte la acest atac și nefiind martor ocular, relatez ceea ce se spunea pe atunci.

Observații asupra conducerii trupelor. Era un obicei detestabil că ofițerii superiori aveau prea multă grijă a pune la adăpost de orice pericol persoana lor. Soldatul nu este dispus a înfrunta primejdia când vede că șeful său nu împărtășește riscul cu dânsul. Este o mare eroare a crede că soldatul poate să fie o mașină inertă care să se miște după ordin. Este o ființă morală, care are nevoie de un stimul moral, exemplul șefului, ca să-l facă să înainteze; ordinul nu privește decât direcția. De aceea numai generalii curajoși au avut mai totdeauna victoria, fiindcă au dat exemplul de bravură și toată știința militară, fără bravură nu prețuiește nimic.

Elementul bravurei primează, dar totul în rebel și cu toată perfecțiunea modernă a armelor de foc, o trupă care atacă înaintând cu repeziciune chiar fără a trage, dispusă în eșaloane ca să ajungă succesiv și în ordine subțire spre a nu da mult priza la focurile apărării, va triumfa în contra apărării celei mai bine organizate, căci apărătorii, orice s-ar face, se găsesc într-o inferioritate morală, dacă nu materială, prin faptul că sunt nevoiți a suferi agresiunea și a se apăra contra ei, pe când atacatorii sunt animați prin încrederea ce au în forța lor, fie reală sau imaginară, astfel că pe măsură ce înaintează, forța lor morală crește, iar a apărătorilor scade repede.

E adevărat că întâiele eșaloane vor suferi pierderi mari, dar succedându-se repede, sacrificiile acestora facilitează succesul celor ce urmează. Pentru aceasta însă, trebuie ca ofițerii, toți fără excepție, să fie plini de energie și să disprețuiască pericolul, căci soldații înaintând repede nu pot să-și dea socoteală de pierderile suferite, iuțea marșului îi înfierbântează.

Numai ofițerii pot să-și dea seama de pierderile făcute [suferite – n.a.] și numai timiditatea lor face să se înmoaie elanul soldaților, îi face să se oprească, să bată în retragere care îndată degenerază în fugă.

Greșeli de tactică. Vitejia batalioanelor trimise la atac. Vestea sinistră ce ne-a adus colonelul Algiu despre înfrângerea trupelor noastre ne-a umplut pe toți de întristare. Am plecat la bivuac cu inimile zdrobite. Ce fel de luptă a fost asta? Și ce combinație tactică a fost aceea în care, din trei divizii de câte 10 până la 12 mii de oameni, numai cinci batalioane au fost aruncate, ca niște copii pierduți, în prăpastie? Și cui se atribuie faptul, ineptia, că pe când camarazii noștri erau în foc, noi stam tolăniți pe câmp, dormitând, fără să dăm cu pușca? Și toți eram [am fi fost – n.a.] bucuroși să luăm parte la luptă. Dacă cel puțin camarazii noștri ar fi fost victorioși, am fi zis că al lor a fost norocul. Dar zdrobiți, era de datoria noastră să-i ajutăm. Însă nu! Ei au fost abandonați fără ajutor și poate, dacă luam toți parte la luptă, am fi luat pe sus victoria. Căci toată lumea era dispusă pentru luptă, și cei care au intrat în foc s-au dus ca niște eroi.

Cu asemenea idei triste am intrat seara în bivuac. Maiorul Eftimie Ulescu⁴⁶ avea un frate sublocotenent în Regimentul al 8-lea, în batalionul care fusese în luptă. Acest ofițer căzuse rănit; ordonanța lui a voit să-l ridice, dar turcii trăgeau din re-

⁴⁶ Eftimie Ulescu (1843–1883), ofițer român participant la Războiul de Independență. Avansat locotenent-colonel la 1 ianuarie 1880, a comandat Regimentul 4 dorobanți Argeș (1880–1883), cf. Cornel Carp, Manea Vasilica, Cornel Țucă, *Istoricul Regimentului 4 Argeș 1877–1946*, Editura Pământul, 2008, p. 25. Vezi și Maior Eftimie Ulescu, *Scrisori din Războiul Independenței 1877–1878*, Editura Militară, București, 1977, 218 p., dar nu a scris nimic despre luptele din ziua de 30 august 1877.

dută. A stat culcat lângă dânsul până când a expirat. Atunci i-a luat ceasornicul și punga cu câțiva franci ce avea și a venit târându-se de le-a adus fratelui său, maiorul, povestindu-i întâmplarea.

Ordin de retragere. Cauza dezastrului. Maiorul Ulescu a plecat noaptea la divizia a 3-a să ia informații despre fratele său. Iată ce se petrecuse: cele două batalioane, unul din al 8-lea de linie, comandat de căpitanul Valter⁴⁷, și altul din al 10-lea de dorobanți, comandat de maiorul Șonțu⁴⁸, pornesc la atac. Li s-a arătat ca obiectiv silueta redutei ce se vedea deasupra dealului. Ajungând însă în muchea dealului, văd că reduta era pe celălalt deal și înaintea lor se deschidea o vale ce-i despărțea de redută. Cu toate acestea, ei scoboară cu bravură valea până în fundul ei și înaintează pe coasta opusă spre redută. Turcii trag cu violență atât din reduta Grivița, cât și din reduta de la Bucov, cu obuze. Dar aceste brave batalioane disprețuiesc pericolul și înaintează cu energie spre redută. Deja tiraliorii ajuseseră până aproape de șanțuri. Turcii, înspăimântați de atâta îndrăzneală, începuseră să evacueze în dezordine reduta, fugind în partea opusă.

Când deodată se aud gorniștii dând semnalele de retragere. Batalionul se oprește și se pune în retragere. Turcii, mirați de această mișcare nemotivată, rămân un moment în nedumerire dar, după ce se conving că scapă așa de ușor, se întorc

⁴⁷ Nicolae Valter Mărăcineanu (n. 30 mai/11 iunie 1840, la Craiova) comandat al Batalionului 1 din Regimentul 8 infanterie, a căzut eroic la cucerirea redutei Grivița. O stradă din București îi poartă numele. Vezi Dimitrie R. Rosetti, *Dicționarul contemporanilor*, București, 1897, p. 123.

⁴⁸ Gheorghe Șonțu (n. 5/17 octombrie 1841, la Focșani), comandat al Batalionului 1 din Regimentul 10 dorobanți, a căzut eroic la cucerirea redutei Grivița. Vezi Dimitrie R. Rosetti, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

în redută. Ofițerii lor au cea mai mare trudă de a-i face să se întoarcă. Ne-au spus prizonierii turci în urmă că ofițerii erau nevoiți să bată cu sabia pe soldații lor ca să-i facă să se întoarcă. Cei mai îndrăzneți se suiră în picioare pe parapet și trăgeau în nefericitele noastre batalioane, ce se retrăgeau cu inima îndoită, văzând că sunt nevoite a lăsa să le scape prada din mâini. În astă retragere nenorocită s-au pierdut mai toți oamenii.

Amândoi șefii de batalioane, maior Șonțu și căpitan Valter, cad morți. Cea mai mare parte din ofițeri rămân morți sau răniți în valea fatală. Și infirmierii nu pot să se apropie să ridice pe răniți, căci turcii, îmbătați de succes, trag asupra tuturor pe cari îi zăresc. Astfel amândouă aceste batalioane au fost complect distruse.

Dar care a fost cauza acestei retrageri nemotivate și care a avut consecințe așa de fatale? Iată ce se întâmplase: șefii de regimente și șeful de brigadă nu se preocupaseră să urmeze sau să susție batalioanele trimise în atac și, după ce batalioanele au dispărut în vale, d-lor s-au ținut cu prudență pe partea opusă a dealului, la adăpost de orice lovituri. Din când în când, câte un soldat ușor rănit se întorcea înapoi. Un maior le ținea calea:

– Ce este, mă? Cum este acolo?

Soldatul, ca să motiveze oarecum părăsirea luptei, acoperea realitatea:

– Vai de mine, d-le maior, o prăpastie grozavă, dincolo de deal, pădurea e încălțită cu sârmă de fier. Toți s-au prăpădit, abia am scăpat eu, rănit⁴⁹.

Bietul maior nu prea era din cei cari le place a înfrunta pericolul și de aceea era luat în răs de doctorul regimentului, pe care, ca să se răzbune, îl numea doctorul iatagan. Maiorul

⁴⁹ Recunoaștem scena din filmul regizat de Sergiu Nicolaescu, *Pentru Patrie* (1977).

se duce la colonelul care comanda brigada⁵⁰ și raportează cu o voce plângătoare:

– Domnule colonel, s-au sfărâmat amândouă batalioanele, dincolo de deal este o prăpastie grozavă, ar fi bine să dați retragerea.

Maiorului îi era teamă să nu-i vină în gând colonelului să dea ordin batalionului din linia a doua să meargă în susținerea celor din I-a, după cum mai cu seamă era dator a o face, și atunci bietul maior ar fi fost nevoit să dea și dânsul cu nasul de acea prăpastie.

Dar colonelul era tot așa de prudent ca și maiorul și, fără să stea mult pe gânduri, a dat ordinul de retragere!

Observații critice. Aceasta era o greșeală și o lașitate. Căci, după toate regulamentele militare, nu era permis a retrage trupele angajate în luptă. Dacă atacul nu reușește, ele se retrag de la sine prin slăbirea pornirii lor și datoria comandantului superior este sau a le susține cu trupele din linia a doua, sau a dispoza rezervele pe poziții convenabile spre a aduna și reforma unitățile celor ce se retrag.

Dar care a fost acțiunea comandantului de divizie⁵¹ în astă împrejurare? Unde a fost el? Cum a permis retragerea? Cea mai mare parte din răspundere îl privește. Dacă comandantul

⁵⁰ Colonel Ipătescu (*n.a.*).

⁵¹ Divizia a 4-a comandată de colonelul Alexandru Anghelescu (1836–1911), care va fi avansat general de brigadă în 1881, apoi general de divizie, ministru de război (27 februarie 1886–5 noiembrie 1887), comandant al Corpului 3 de armată. A demisionat din armată la 8 februarie 1888, iar prin Înalt Decret nr. 3793/21 decembrie 1888 i se ridică gradul și este șters din controalele armatei, fiind condamnat trei luni la închisoare corecțională pentru mituire și violare de lege, ca ministru. Era văr sau frate cu generalul Gh. Anghelescu, comandantul Diviziei a 3-a infanterie în bătălia de la Grivița.

brigadei a dat retragerea fără aprobarea sa, pentru ce nu l-a trimis înaintea consiliului de rezbel în loc de a face un raport mincinos, cerând a-l decora pentru bravura ce a arătat în lupta la care n-a luat parte! S-a zis că s-a împușcat calul sub dânsul; dar nu era adevărat, căci acolo unde se afla comandantul brigadei, cu batalioanele din linia a 2-a nici șuieratul gloanțelor, nici vâjâitul obuzelor nu se auzeau, afară de aceasta nu s-a văzut niciun călăreț sau cal singur trecând muchea dealului. Și dacă într-adevăr acel cal a fost împușcat, sărmanul animal a fost asasinat. Cu toate acestea, comandantul brigadei a fost decorat, comandantul diviziei avansat general, desigur nu atât pentru bravura ce au arătat, ci pentru frica cea mare ce au pățit.

Retragerea nu e permisă decât la atac simulat. Și atunci trupele ce simulează atacul nu se angajează în fond.

Ce probă mai învederată că nechibzuința și lipsa de curaj a comandanților de brigadă și de divizie au transformat în dezastru un atac care ar fi fost o victorie sigură după vitejia dezvoltată de ofițerii inferiori și de soldați.

Dar când batalioanele trimise în atac, chiar fără să fi fost susținute de batalioanele din linia a doua, au mers cu atâta bravură până la redută, când nu le mai trebuia decât câțiva pași ca să se arunce într-însa, a le da ordin de retragere în acel moment era o greșeală fără nume. Când peste o lună, turcii ne-au permis să îngropăm morții, s-au găsit cadavre ale soldaților din regimentele 8 linie și 10 dorobanți chiar lângă șanțul redutei turcești. Ce probă mai vădită că acești bravi au mers ca niște eroi și că numai ordinul cel nechibzuit de retragere nu i-a lăsat să ia reduta și să culegă roadele eroismului lor?

Răspplată nemeritată. În fine, sacrificiul a fost consumat. Cei culpabili au fost decorați și considerați în rapoartele oficiale ca eroi, pe când cadavrele adevăraților eroi zăceau neîngropate

aproape o lună de zile. Un singur individ a fost ȋapul emisar, locotenent-colonel Mareș. Asupra capului acestuia s-au aruncat toate invectivele, toate blestemele, și cu toate acestea el nu a fost cel mai fricos; cel puțin nu frica lui a adus pierderea oștirii.

Era însă o nevoie, o considerație politică ca să se ascunză, să se cocoloșească toate mizeriile acestea. Eram alături cu rușii. Aceștia, la început, ne arătau un dispreț suveran. Era dar trebuință să le probăm că le suntem un ajutor prețios. De aceea ministrul era silit să exagereze înaintea lor calitățile noastre și să ne ascunză slăbiciunile. Afară de aceasta, ministrul de resbel era civil și nu era dificil în chestiuni militare, se mulțumea cu buna voință.

Mai mult decât atâta, în cercurile politice, unii puneau în îndoială calitățile militare ale Armatei Române; unii chiar credeau că, la întâiul foc, soldații noștri vor întoarce spatele. Cu toate acestea, soldații au arătat o bravură fără seamăn, un dispreț de pericol admirabil.

Dacă s-au observat slăbiciuni, acestea s-au văzut numai la aceia originari din orașe. Astfel, la Regimentul 6 dorobanți, care era compus numai din locuitorii Bucureștilor, s-au văzut câteodată slăbiciuni. Lucrul îmi pare explicabil. Populația din orașe este mai în genere un amestec de toate naționalitățile: ovrei, greci, sârbi, bulgari etc. Este natural ca să dea un contingent militar amestecat și, în mare parte, fără valoare militară. Pe când populația de la țară, fiind curat românească, dă un contingent militar în care calitățile gintei latine, aptitudinea militară și bravura sunt cu deosebire dezvoltate.”⁵²

Relatările mai sus-prezentate au avut categoric o influență asupra *Memoriilor regelui Carol I*. Acestea au început să fie publicate din 1892 în limba germană, la Stuttgart, și la titlu li

⁵² Ioan Cotruț, *op.cit.*, p. 8-25.

s-a adăugat mențiunea *de un martor ocular*, la fel ca titlul relatării lui Al. Candiano-Popescu. Volumul al III-lea consacrat războiului independenței a apărut în 1897. Spicuim pasajele cele mai interesante despre ziua de 30 august: „De două ori se aruncă coloanele române la asalt disperat până în șanțurile redutei omorâtoare Grivița, însă de două ori sunt respinși. În momentul acesta, principele nu mai are răbdare pe punctul său de observație, el aleargă pe jos în mijlocul trupelor pentru a le încuraja prin prezența sa, el le vorbește, le încurajează la o nouă încercare zicând: *Trebuie să reușim! Sacrificiile îngrozitoare să nu fie în zadar făcute! E o datorie de onoare de a ajunge la redută!*”

Câmpul de luptă e acoperit cu morți și răniți; mulți ofițeri au căzut.

Soldații înconjoară entuziasmați pe principele lor și sunt gata de a se arunca încă o dată pe drumul îngrozitor; principele Carol ordonă colonelului Anghelescu de a face o ultimă încercare cu ajutorul tuturor forțelor disponibile și ordonă a se provoca și generalul Schilder-Schulder să țină gata o coloană de atac pentru susținere. [...]

Insuccesele și marile pierderi ale aripei drepte sunt consecințele unei greșeli fatale la care erau supuși toți până acum, căci nu *singură* redută Grivița există, după cum arată harta rusească, ci sunt *două*, astfel coloanele destinate pentru o singură redută trebuie să se dezbină [despartă – n.a.] și să înainteze în același timp în contra frontului de răsărit al primei redute și în contra frontului de nord al redutei a doua.

Această a doua redută se putea numai atunci vedea, când s-ar fi trecut o vale și s-ar fi ajuns pe înălțimea care se afla înapoi. [...]

Un ofițer de stat-major sosește în momentul acesta de acolo și raportează principelui: colonelul Ipătescu, al cărui cal

căzu împușcat sub el, încurajă brigada și înaintă cu ea până în șanțul fortificațiilor. [...]

O nouă încercare asupra redutei a doua a Griviței pentru ziua de azi trebuie să se suspende. Principele Carol se duce călare la primele locuri unde se legau răniții și care se aflau încă pe linia de foc; aici aude îngrozitoarea veste că turcii au respins atacul pe întreaga linie.

Este ora 5½. Principele Carol se duce la Împărat, care rămăsese Marele Duce pentru a-i raporta. [...]

Se face un mare foc și împrejurul acestuia se așază ambii Domni⁵³ împreună cu toate suitele lor. Pe toți îi apucase o oboseală mare în urma zilei iritate și nimeni nu știa ce se va întâmpla, fiecare își face combinațiile sale. Fără o țintă oarecare se încrucișează gândurile în mințile cele active ale conducătorilor și nicio conversație nu se poate aduce în curs.

Seara, la ora 9, se aude deodată venind un călăreț în galop, el aduce neașteptat dar mult dorita știre că la ora 7½ s-a cucerit prin ultimul asalt de către Batalionul 2 vânători, regimentele 14 și 16 dorobanți și 5 linie reduta Grivița împreună cu un drapel și trei tunuri. Patru batalioane ruse au înaintat victorios în același timp spre frontul de sud al aceleiași redute.”⁵⁴

Al. Candiano-Popescu ne-a lăsat o lucrare memorialistică realizată evident în ultimii ani ai vieții sale centrată pe bătălia de la 30 august 1877, intitulată *Războiul Neatârnărei. Istorie critică. Asaltul și luarea redutei Grivița* (280 de pagini), care a văzut lumina tiparului în 1913. De data aceasta, motivul era dorința lui Candiano de „a se război” pe zeci de pagini cu un alt general, Ștefan Fălcoianu, autorul lucrării *Istoria resboiu-*

⁵³ Principele Carol I și marele duce Nicolae. Acesta din urmă era fratele țarului Alexandru al II-lea.

⁵⁴ *Memoriile...*, p. 237-239.

lui din 1877-1878 (*ruso-româno-turc*). *Curs profesat la Școla Superioră de Resboiu de Generalul de divisiune adjutant St. I. Fălcoianu* (Tipografia Voința Națională, București, 1895), cu toți cei care contestau meritele sale dobândite în ziua de 30 august și cu cei care considera el că fuseseră decorați și avansați pe nedrept. Așadar, pe Candiano îl interesează mai mult ce s-a întâmplat *după* 30 august 1877.

În ceea ce privește acea zi extraordinară, Candiano a scris: „Turcii apărau întărirea cu o îndrăzneală și îndărătnicie nemai-pomenită. Puterile lor crescuseră și din altă împrejurare. Coloana de asalt, comandată de colonelul Ipătescu, formată din trupe din Divizia a 3-a, nefăcând recunoașterea tărâmului pe care urma să atace, înșelată și de un fel de miragiu, produs de curtele văilor din Bulgaria, ce se țin una după alta de la Dunăre până în Balcani, această coloană socotind că merge spre Grivița No. 1 apucă spre Grivița No. 2. Ajungând pe o înălțime unde se vedea reduta, trupa crezu că are înaintea o singură vale. De aci porni atacul. Coborând în vale și suind dealul, ofițerii și soldații s-au pomenit cu o altă vale în fața lor, largă cam de 600 metri, în care au fost siliți să se scoboare și apoi să urce al doilea deal cu o pantă foarte repede, acoperită cu tufiș mărunț, ce împiedica mersul năvălitorilor. [...]

Focul distrugător al vrăjmașului de o parte, greutatea suirei pantei de alta, nesprijinirea coloanei de asalt Ipătescu de către coloana de flanc comandată de colonelul A. Gramont alcătuiau destule elemente de confuzie și de neizbândă peste cari, spre nenorocirea năvălitorilor, se mai adaugă și semnalul de retragere dat trupelor Diviziei a 3-a tocmai când o parte din ele, apropiindu-se de redută, era pusă la adăpostul primejdiei.

Coloana de asalt No. 1 în retragere a pierdut mai multă lume decât înaintând, ceea ce se întâmplă totdeauna.

Semnalul retragerii a fost dat chiar de colonelul Ipătescu, după cum o mărturisește singur prin raportul No. 550, dosarul 459 din arhiva companiei cu data de 1 septembrie 1877, către comandantul Diviziei a 3-a, unde spune: *Și văzând că nu mai era nicio speranță de rezistență, am dat ordin a se suna adunarea regimentului, dispunându-mă a lua o poziție cu rezerva spre a protege retragerea.*⁵⁵

Așadar, Candiano-Popescu confirmă spusele lui Cotruț, „cel cu inimă de leu” scrie autorul, pentru vitejia sa dovedită la Smârdan și „tăcere adâncă înconjoară fapta sa”⁵⁶.

Alexandru Candiano-Popescu consemnează și pierderile acelei zile: „Pierderile suferite de amândouă diviziile românești în această zi se urcă la 1 333 morți și 1 176 răniți. Morții au fost mai numeroși decât răniții, ceea ce dovedește înverșunarea luptei.”⁵⁷

În finalul relatărilor ajungem la concluzia că acestea sunt rezultatul deciziei luate la cel mai înalt nivel de a nu se face nici o anchetă și nici o cercetare despre ceea ce s-a întâmplat „în acea zi de sânge udă” – după versul bardului de la Mircești – și acest lucru a făcut ca dezbaterile și dezvăluirile să se succedă cu vehemență și nu se încheie decât odată cu moartea protagoniștilor. Chiar dacă a fost sărbătorită an de an și a rămas o pagină de splendid eroism în istoria românilor, ziua de 30 august 1877 a intrat în conștiința națională prin tragedia jertfelor de atunci, ajungând să fie cântată în versurile marilor poeți precum Vasile Alecsandri și George Coșbuc.

⁵⁵ Al. Candiano-Popescu, *Războiul Neatârănării. Istorie critică. Asaltul și luarea redutei Grivița*, București, 1913, p. 18-19.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

INTERFERENȚE ROMÂNNO-ITALIENE ÎN AJUNUL INDEPENDENȚEI ROMÂNIEI. INTERESELE STRATEGICE ALE ROMEI ÎN 1875-1878 ȘI IMPERATIVELE BUCUREȘTIULUI

Mihail Dobre*

Abstract

The interests of Italian foreign policy in the Balkans, shaped by the Great Eastern Crisis, foreshadowed the framework of Italian-Romanian diplomatic relations in the next century. This article aims to analyse the evolution of Rome's positioning towards Romania's independence, in line with its great power aspirations and its particular interests in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: *Great Eastern Crisis, Emilio Visconti Venosta, Agostino Depretis, independence, Constitution, I.C. Brătianu*

Deși între România și Italia s-a creat în timpurile actuale o relație de parteneriat cu totul specială, trebuie spus că, totuși, nu a fost întotdeauna așa. Cu aproximativ un secol și jumătate în urmă, relația nu era nici atât de caldă, nici nu era stimulată de contacte semnificative, pentru simplul motiv că stilul de viață, mizele și interesele celor două țări nu aveau decât puține puncte de intersecție. Ne place să spunem, inclusiv în manualele de istorie, că avem o suprapunere temporală a proceselor de uni-

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ficare națională în România și în Italia după mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea, dar elementele de asemănare s-au estompat aici, întrucât România avea un statut internațional cu date puternic diferite de acela al Italiei, după cum avea și o proiecție diferită a aspirațiilor sale în jocul politic internațional. Demersurile diplomatice legate de Marea Criză Orientală din 1875-1878, eveniment care a adăugat elemente noi la declinul ireversibil al Imperiului Otoman, au scos la iveală raporturi și atitudini care au fost de natură să anticipeze modul de configurare a relațiilor româno-italiene în tumultul secolului următor.

1. Locul României în cadrul obiectivelor de politică externă ale Italiei unificate

După cum este cunoscut, Italia a realizat unitatea națională – numită *Risorgimento* – numai în secolul al XIX-lea, pe fondul deținerii unui statut independent în viața internațională de către mai multe entități statale din peninsula. Rolul politic preponderent era jucat de Regatul Piemontului (devenit, din 1720, Regatul Sardiniei, după ocuparea insulei omonime), stat aflat deja în cercul select al marilor puteri europene, deși cel mai mic dintre acestea. Prin strategia Piemontului, în jurul acestui stat s-a derulat procesul de unificare, care a culminat cu proclamarea Regatului Italiei la 17 martie 1861¹. Era succesul politicii prim-ministrului Camillo Benso di Cavour, principalul sfetnic al primului rege italian Victor Emanuel al II-lea, care îmbinase forța cu diplomația, mizând pe sprijinul Franței lui

¹ Unificarea a însemnat, de fapt, mai mult lărgirea Piemontului, decât crearea unei entități statale noi, fapt ilustrat și de realitatea că primul rege al Italiei unificate și-a păstrat titulatura specifică succesiunii piemonteze, anume Victor Emanuel „al II-lea”. Vezi Giuliano Procacci, *Istoria italianilor*, Editura Politică, București, 1975, p. 352.

Napoleon al III-lea în vederea eliberării teritoriilor din nordul Italiei, deținute până atunci de Imperiul Austriac.

Rămăneau în afara regatului doar Veneția, aflată în continuare în posesia Vienei, și deja minusculul stat papal, care însă deținea orașul Roma, adică locul simbolic pentru identitatea italiană, și era protejat de o garnizoană franceză. Ambele obiective naționale au fost realizate în deceniul următor. Primul, adică includerea Veneției în statul italian unificat, s-a realizat în 1866 în urma alierii Italiei cu Prusia (și a coordonării diplomatice cu Franța) în contextul războiului austriaco-prusac, care a așezat la Berlin centrul de putere al viitorului stat german unificat, dar a și condus la reorganizarea monarhiei austriece, prin asocierea la guvernare a factorului politic ungar și crearea pe această cale a monarhiei austro-ungare². Cel de-al doilea a fost tot rezultatul speculării abile a contextului internațional de către conducerea statului italian, astfel încât fixarea capitalei Italiei în Cetatea Eternă s-a realizat în septembrie 1870, când, după înfrângerea lui Napoleon al III-lea în războiul franco-prusac, Franța nu a mai putut menține garnizoana (retrasă deja în timpul războiului) care asigura protecția papei Pius al IX-lea³. Unificarea italiană se realiza, deci, mai mult prin abilitate politică și diplomatică decât prin forța armelor.

Politica externă a statului italian unificat în anii care au urmat stabilirii capitalei la Roma a reprezentat o afirmare trep-

² Preluarea Veneției de către Italia a fost înscrisă în articolul 3 al tratatului italo-austriac semnat la Viena, la 3 octombrie 1866. Vezi *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (DDI), seria întâi: 1861-1870, volumul VII, Roma, 1983, doc. 603 (raport confidențial din 3 octombrie 1866, Luigi Menabrea pentru Visconti Venosta), p. 431-436.

³ Armata regală italiană a pătruns în Roma la 20 septembrie 1870, prin „breșa de la Porta Pia”, adică prin locul în care află Villa Bonaparte, reședința de altădată a Paolinei Bonaparte Borghese (sora lui Napoleon I) iar în prezent a ambasadorului Franței pe lângă Sfântul Scaun.

tată a dorinței de inserare în jocul marilor puteri, dar nu în calitate de spectator atent, ci mai ales ca protagonist activ⁴. Exprimată mai întâi într-o formă mai precaută, această dorință a putut să iasă în evidență în contextul mării crize orientale începute în 1875, cu precizarea că aceasta a fost constant legată de nevoia resimțită de factorii de putere de la Roma de a privi spre acțiunile Austro-Ungariei și de a lua pulsul vieții politice europene în funcție de relațiile dintre Germania și Franța. Este semnificativ, din această perspectivă, modul în care marchizul Emilio Visconti Venosta – ministru de externe de mai multe ori între 1863 și 1876, aflat la cârma diplomației italiene în cea mai mare parte a perioadei cât dreapta italiană s-a aflat la putere după unificarea statală – a clarificat interesele Italiei la mijlocul anului 1875, într-o scrisoare adresată unuia dintre cei mai apropiați colaboratori ai săi, ambasadorul italian la Viena, contele Carlo Felice Nicolis di Robilant. Ministrul italian se arăta preocupat de o previzibilă victorie a Germaniei în cadrul unui război preventiv împotriva Franței, întrucât „ar rezulta probabil o Europă în care Occidentul ar aparține Germaniei, iar Orientul Rusiei”, pentru a susține că pentru Italia conservarea păcii era o exigență vitală. Pacea era pentru Visconti Venosta „un interes absolut al țării noastre, atât pentru condițiile sale interne, cât și pentru cele externe”, dar mai ales era „un interes absolut ca ea să fie cel puțin menținută cât mai mult timp posibil, până când într-o criză europeană Italia va putea acționa ca o mare putere și nu va apărea dominată de

⁴ Alberto Basciani, *Le relazioni diplomatiche fra l'Italia e i Principati romeni dalla Mica Unire al Congresso di Berlino (1861-1878)*, în Francesco Guida (ed.), *Italia e Romania verso l'Unità nazionale: Convegno di studi in occasione del 150° anniversario dell'Unità d'Italia (Università di Bucarest, 16-17 giugno 2011)*, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 74.

acea specie de fatalitate care este legea celor slabi”⁵. Pacea dorită de demnitarul italian era însă chiar atunci pusă în pericol în Europa balcanică, cu perspectiva unor schimbări teritoriale de interes pentru marile puteri⁶.

Venirea la putere a stângii italiene, în luna martie 1876, nu a schimbat abordarea generală a politicii externe puse în practică de Roma, chiar dacă s-au schimbat actorii decidenți. Totuși, noul ministru de externe, Amedeo Melegari, în primul guvern condus de Agostino Depretis, a împărtășit ideile apărute în unele curente ale stângii care postulau ideea ca Italia să încerce să profite de o eventuală creștere teritorială a monarhiei austro-ungare în contextul mării crize orientale (în sensul intrării Bosniei și Herțegovinei sub controlul Vienei) pentru a revendica Trentino și Trieste, regiuni aflate atunci încă sub stăpânire austriacă. Viena a reacționat, așa cum era de așteptat, cu multă duritate, astfel încât ambasadorul di Robilant a raportat mesajul primit de la ministrul de externe Gyula Andrásy, prin care i se comunica fără echivoc că „orice discuție, chiar de natură teoretică, cu privire la dreptul nostru de a obține, în compensație pentru o creștere a Austriei în Orient, o parte din teritoriul austriac unde se vorbește limba noastră, ar conduce fără îndoială la o aproape imediată rupere a relațiilor”⁷. Reacția Vienei făcea necesară implicarea Italiei pentru ca Marea Criză

⁵ DDI, seria a doua: 1870-1896, volumul VI, Roma, 1982, doc. 260 (scrisoare personală din 1 iulie 1875, Visconti Venosta pentru Di Robilant), p. 304-307.

⁶ Vezi înțelegerile dintre marile puteri reflectate în „Nota Andrásy” (30 decembrie 1875) și „Memorandumul de la Berlin” (13 mai 1876), cf. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 234-237.

⁷ DDI, seria a doua, volumul VII, Roma, 1983, doc. 494 (raportul nr. 550 din 17 octombrie 1876, di Robilant pentru Melegari), p. 603-604.

Orientală să se încheie cu îmbunătățirea situației popoarelor balcanice, dar fără modificări teritoriale. Mai mult, ea impunea Italiei să evite izolarea prin apropierea de una sau mai multe din marile puteri ale vremii. Ceea ce Roma a și încercat să facă în relațiile cu Germania și Marea Britanie⁸, dar reacția nu a fost pe măsura așteptărilor Romei. De altfel, este de notat că Bismarck nu avea o părere tocmai bună despre partenerul italian, el mărturisind în 1880 ambasadorului francez la Berlin că „Italia nu este un stat serios. Ea ar trebui să producă pictori, muzicieni, cântăreți și balerini, acesta este adevăratul său rol”⁹.

Ce loc putea să ocupe România în acest cadru de manifestare a intereselor italiene? Este lesne de înțeles că atenția Romei pentru relațiile cu Austro-Ungaria și poziția Italiei în raport cu marile puteri ale vremii lăsau puțin spațiu de afirmare pentru o politică a acestui stat în zona Dunării de Jos și a Balcanilor. După proclamarea regatului în 1861, a existat o singură inițiativă specială față de zona în care se afla România, diplomația italiană încercând să găsească la acea dată soluția pentru una din cele mai urgente probleme teritoriale, anume preluarea Veneției, în strânsă legătură cu dezvoltarea problemei naționale în spațiul danubiano-balcanic. Astfel, au fost promovate între 1861-1866 diverse planuri care conduceau la un eventual schimb de teritorii cu guvernul de la Viena, care ar fi urmat să primească fie Bosnia și Herțegovina, fie Principatele Române în schimbul Veneției. Toate aceste idei, pro-

⁸ Enrico Decleva, *Il compimento dell'unità e la politica estera*, în *Storia d'Italia*, vol. II, *Il nuovo stato e la società civile (1861-1887)*, Laterza, Bari, 1995, p. 172-175.

⁹ Cf. Massimo de Leonardis, *La politica estera. Forze politiche e diplomazia di fronte alle cesure nella storia d'Italia*, în „Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche. Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore”, nr. 2, 2011, p. 49.

movate în formule conspiraționiste, dar care au implicat direct reprezentanții consulari italieni (este în mod deosebit cazul consulului de la București, Annibale Strambio), au dispărut în momentul în care s-a ajuns la înțelegerea militară italo-prusacă din 1866 (prin intermediul căreia Italia a recuperat Veneția ca urmare a înfrângerii Austriei de către Prusia în acel an)¹⁰.

În ansamblu, însă, factorii de putere de la Roma au pus în practică o linie politică în relație cu statul român, dar au făcut-o într-o formă reținută, pentru a nu crea complicații în relațiile cu celelalte mari puteri (în mod deosebit față de linia turcofilă a Londrei). Linia a fost definită încă din 1867, când ministrul de externe Visconti Venosta formula instrucțiuni pentru un nou agent diplomatic și consul general italian în România, Romano Susinno, acesta urmând să acționeze pentru „creșterea simpatiilor între cele două popoare, asigurarea păstrării principiului național deja implementat în România și afirmarea acțiunii diplomatice pe care, în acord cu celelalte puteri semnatare ale Tratatului de la 1856, Italia are dreptul și îndatorirea să o exercite, cu unicul scop de a crește dezvoltarea civilă, socială și economică a Principatelor Unite”¹¹. Acest mod de abordare definea diplomația italiană și în primăvara anului 1877, atunci când era tot mai clară perspectiva ca România să profite de evenimentele aflate în curs în Balcani pentru a înlătura dominația Imperiului Otoman. Astfel, după ce a fost informat că majoritatea parlamentară de la București dezbătea proclamarea independenței, ministrul de externe Melegari

¹⁰ Vezi pe larg la Domenico Caccamo, *L'Italia, la questione del Veneto e i Principati Danubiani (1861-1866)*, în Giulia Lami (ed.), *Risorgimento, Italia e Romania 1859-1879. Esperienze a confronto*, CIRSS, Editura Anima, București, 1992, p. 69-84.

¹¹ DDI, seria întâi: 1861-1870, volumul VIII, Roma, 1986, doc. 206 (instrucțiuni din 25 februarie 1867, Visconti Venosta pentru Susinno), p. 273.

se limita la a solicita reprezentanților săi diplomatici la Berlin, Londra, Paris, Petersburg și Viena să sondeze poziția principalelor puteri europene față de o asemenea evoluție: „Vreau să aflu cât mai curând impresia guvernului pe lângă care sunteți acreditat și aș dori să știu dacă se încearcă în acest moment să se evite complicațiile care ar apărea dacă realizarea unui astfel de proiect ar pune brusc puterile în prezența unei situații de fapt total în opoziție cu situația juridică stabilită de tratate.”¹²

2. Interacțiuni româno-italiene în timpul Marii Crize Orientale din 1875-1878

În ceea ce îl privește, statul român făcuse progrese în perioada scursă de la realizarea unirii din 1859, cu scopul evident al obținerii independenței, chiar dacă marile puteri ale vremii nu împărtășeau un asemenea obiectiv. Aceste progrese au vizat și creșterea capacității de promovare a intereselor statului român pe cale diplomatică. În acest sens, prezintă interes faptul că, încă din 1873, deci anterior obținerii independenței, România deschisese o „agenție diplomatică” la Roma, primul reprezentant în capitala Italiei fiind cunoscutul om politic conservator Petre P. Carp¹³, dar această formă de reprezentare se afla în afara limitelor diplomației, așa cum aceasta era practică de statele europene ale timpului (ea nefiind menționată ca atare în Regulamentul de la Viena din martie 1815). De altfel, Turcia nega României dreptul de a avea reprezentanțe diplomatice în afara celei de la Constantinopol, după cum și dreptul de a încheia acorduri internaționale, ceea ce aducea impedimente în

¹² DDI, seria a doua: 1870-1896, volumul VIII, Roma, 1984, doc. 410 (telegramă nr. 278 din 8 mai 1877, Melegari pentru De Launay, Menabrea, Cialdini, Nigra și Di Robilant), p. 433-434.

¹³ Dan Berindei, *Roma, în Reprezentanțele diplomatice ale României*, vol. I, 1859-1917, Editura Politică, București, 1967, p. 242-243.

activitatea structurilor de reprezentare diplomatică înființate de statul român¹⁴.

Totuși, România a utilizat din plin formele sale de reprezentare externă (anume agențiile diplomatice) și s-a folosit, totodată, de prezența în capitala sa a reprezentanțelor consulare ale marilor puteri. Pe această bază, dispunem în prezent de un vast documentar diplomatic care atestă demersurile întreprinse de autoritățile române pentru obținerea independenței și dialogul cu marile puteri.

Din această perspectivă, Italia a devenit treptat un actor important în bătălia diplomatică purtată de statul român, chiar dacă linia pe care o promova conducerea de la Roma era în general reținută și temătoare. Așa se explică de ce propuneri inițiate de București precum folosirea oficială a denumirii de „România” mai curând decât a termenului de „Principate”, inițiativa privind încheierea unui tratat comercial, sau deschiderea unei agenții diplomatice românești la Roma au fost abordate de partea italiană cu multă prudență, de succes bucurându-se la acea dată numai problema reprezentării diplomatice. Dar și aceasta a fost acceptată cu condiția ca funcțiunile agenției să fie limitate, pentru a nu se crede că s-ar dori să se facă din agenție o mică ambasadă¹⁵.

Abordarea precaută din partea Italiei a continuat în primii ani ai Marii Crize Orientale, fiind receptate cu multă reținere

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 243, 245.

¹⁵ Francesco Guida, *Războiul român de Independență și Italia. Diplomația, opinia publică și corespondența de război*, în „Revista istorică”, nr. 3-4, 2013, p. 259-260. De altfel, reacția italiană era coerentă și, evident, pe linia practicii diplomatice încetățenite încă din secolul al XV-lea, de când misiunea diplomatică temporară și ocazională a făcut loc misiunii diplomatice permanente ca formă modernă de punere în practică a activității de politică externă a statelor, iar aici, precursorii au fost tocmai italienii (vezi în acest sens Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, Washington D.C., 1988, p. 10-14, și, respectiv, *Arta diplomatică*, Editura Politică, București, 1966, p. 22-40).

semnalele pe care autoritățile statului român le transmiteau în sensul hotărârii de a-și obține independența, chiar dacă acestea veneau de la cel mai înalt nivel. De exemplu, în februarie 1876, reprezentantul italian în Turcia, Luigi Corti, relatează despre ecoul în mediul diplomatic din capitala Imperiului Otoman al obiectivului politic de obținere a independenței pe care îl promova șeful statului român din acel moment: „Mi se spune că Prințul Carol al României, vorbind cu agentul uneia dintre marile puteri, a spus că se apropie momentul când statul său se va elibera de orice supunere față de guvernul otoman; că asemenea legături sunt o rușine pentru poporul român; că el este un Hohenzollern și știe ce datorează poporului său. Și după ce interlocutorul l-a întrebat dacă este într-adevăr vorba de o răscumpărare, așa cum s-a dus vestea, Altețea Sa a răspuns că în alte vremuri ar fi discutat de răscumpărare, dar acum este de părere că aceasta ar fi o cheltuială inutilă. Aceste cuvinte ale Alteței Sale nu sunt poate decât o lăudăroșenie deșartă, dar am crezut că merită să le trimit Excelenței Voastre pentru că mi-au fost raportate dintr-o sursă autentică.”¹⁶

Pe de altă parte, în Italia se manifestau diverse forme de apropiere de România, care a început a fi denumită „cealaltă Italie” și „al doilea Piemont”¹⁷. În același timp, însă, în opinia publică italiană exista, sub influență anglo-franceză și ca rezultat al propagandei israelite, un sentiment de nemulțumire față de atitudinea de tergiversare a autorităților române în rezolvarea problemei evreiești, temă foarte dezbătută în țară, cu precădere în Moldova. Diplomații italieni nu au ezitat să

¹⁶ Vezi DDI, serie a doua: 1870-1896, volumul VI, doc. 615 (raportul nr. 102 din 15 februarie 1876, Corti pentru Visconti Venosta), p. 712.

¹⁷ Cf. Raoul Bossy, *Politica externă a României între anii 1873-1880 privită de la Agenția Diplomatică din Roma*, Cultura Națională, București, 1928, p. 60.

încerce să îi convingă pe reprezentanții români că toleranța și egalitatea în drepturi pentru evreii din România puteau să aibă atât merite teoretice, cât și avantaje diplomatice în relațiile cu marile puteri¹⁸.

Într-un asemenea climat, semne de schimbare în poziția reținută a diplomației italiene au început să se profileze treptat, dar numai după ce factorii de decizie de la București au făcut pași decisivi către opțiunea militară în raport cu Imperiul Otoman și și-au afirmat explicit voința prin proclamarea independenței de stat la 9/21 mai 1877. Este de reținut că guvernul italian, deși a dezaprobat încheierea convenției militare cu Rusia la 16 aprilie 1877, nu a condamnat totuși actul proclamării independenței. Mai mult decât autoritățile de la Roma, opinia publică italiană a salutat actul politic curajos de la București și și-a manifestat simpatia față de națiunea română¹⁹, ceea ce putea să constituie un element de presiune asupra decidenților italieni.

Pe această bază, atunci când armata română a intrat în război la cererea părții ruse, în luna august 1877, mare parte din prudența italiană a dispărut. Încheierea operațiilor militare în Balcani, în decembrie 1877, cu victoria forțelor ruse și cu sprijinul armatei române, iar apoi începerea negocierilor de pace au eliberat multe din neliniștile și reținerile diplomației italiene. Așa se explică de ce prim-ministrul Agostino Depretis,

¹⁸ *Independența României: Documente*, vol. IV, Editura Academiei, București, 1978, doc. 101 (raport Mihail Obedenaru pentru M. Kogălniceanu din 31 mai/12 iunie 1877), p. 284-289. Vezi, de asemenea, la William Oldson, *Italy and the Question of Romanian Independence*, în „Il Politico”, vol. 54, nr. 2 (150), Aprile-Giugno 1989, *op.cit.*, p. 197-217.

¹⁹ Cf. N. Corivan, *Lupta diplomatică pentru cucerirea independenței României*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1977, p. 111-112. Pentru relația legației de la Roma cu presa italiană, vezi Raoul Bossy, *op.cit.*, p. 16-17.

atunci când își informa șefii de misiuni diplomatice din principalele capitale europene despre solicitarea guvernului român ca independența proclamată în mai 1877 să fie recunoscută de marile puteri, introducea o notă specială de apreciere: „România și-a apărut cu curaj locul pe câmpul de luptă și poate pretinde recunoașterea independenței sale din ziua în care Poarta nu-și mai poate menține suzeranitatea asupra Principatului.”²⁰

De altfel, în acel context a fost finalizată între România și Italia *Convenția de comerț și navigație*, document semnat la Roma, la 23 martie 1878, de un guvern italian al cărui ministru de externe era (din decembrie 1877) însuși șeful guvernului, Agostino Depretis. Acest act avea să fie interpretat de partea română și ca o recunoaștere *de facto* a independenței României²¹.

3. Italia și demersurile de recunoaștere a independenței statului român

În pregătirea pentru Congresul de pace de la Berlin (desfășurat în perioada 13 iunie–13 iulie 1878), după instalarea la 24 martie 1878 a unui nou guvern al stângii condus de Benedetto Cairoli, gestionarea afacerilor externe a fost încredințată unui diplomat cu multă experiență, dar fără afinități cu stânga italiană, anume contelui Luigi Corti, fost până la acea dată ministru al Italiei la Constantinopol. Corti și-a propus ca Italia să desfășoare raporturi cu Austro-Ungaria „pe picior de francă și onestă cordialitate” și, drept urmare, să nu considere o eventuală ocupare austriacă a Bosniei și Herțegovinei drept „fu-

²⁰ DDI, seria a doua: 1870-1896, volumul IX, Roma, 1985, doc. 528 (telegrama nr. 214 din 24 februarie 1878, Depretis pentru Di Robilant, Tosi, De Martino și Ressman), p. 452.

²¹ Vezi N. Corivan, *op.cit.*, p. 178-179.

nestă pentru interesele italiene”²², ceea ce nu corespundea cu așteptările mediilor politice italiene. Cu toate acestea, în viziunea lui Corti, Congresul de la Berlin trebuia să fie prima ocazie pentru Italia „de a-și ocupa locul între marile puteri europene”, ceea ce a mărit considerabil miza participării italiene la congresul de pace²³. În cursul dezbaterilor de la Berlin, marii jucători și-au văzut apărate interesele: austriecii au luat în administrare Bosnia și Herțegovina, britanicii au ocupat insula Cipru, iar rușii au ocupat o serie de teritorii desprinse de la Imperiul Otoman, dar sub cota pe care ei și-o alocaseră prin prevederile tratatului de la San Stefano. Italienii nu au primit însă nimic, ceea ce a creat o mare nemulțumire în rândul opiniei publice italiene, iar acest fapt avea să ducă la demisia ministrului de externe în luna octombrie 1878 și apoi a întregului guvern în luna decembrie a aceluiași an.

Cu toate acestea, Corti a manifestat interes față de dosarul românesc aflat pe masa congresului de pace, deși tema ca atare era marginală pentru marile puteri europene. Susținerea „platonice” oferită de șeful diplomației italiene nu s-a aflat însă la nivelul așteptărilor guvernului român, care prin vocea prim-ministrului Ion C. Brătianu nu a ezitat să transmită la Roma insatisfacția față de performanța lui Corti. Informat de către prim-ministrul Cairoli asupra faptului că I.C. Brătianu s-a plâns lui Domenico Farini, președintelui Camerei Deputaților, că șeful delegației Italiei la Congresul de la Berlin nu ar fi oferit sprijin părții române și, mai rău, ar fi făcut presiuni pentru acceptarea pretențiilor Rusiei²⁴, Corti a reacționat cu mare iri-

²² DDI, seria a doua: 1870-1896, volumul X, Roma, 1976, doc. 300 (Note ale ministrului de externe Corti), p. 333.

²³ A se vedea comentariile lui Enrico Declava pe această temă, *op.cit.*, p. 177-181.

²⁴ DDI, seria a doua: 1870-1896, volumul X, doc. 205 (telegrama din 25 iunie 1878, Cairoli pentru Corti), p. 203.

tare: „Asta este dovada artei diplomatice a românilor, Brătianu nici nu a venit să mă vadă, dar a venit ministrul de externe Ghika [*sic*]. Și pentru că i-am sfătuit să folosească moderația în exprimarea lor, mă acuză că vreau să fac presiuni. Cert este că, așa cum v-am scris, ei i-au dezgustat pe mulți cu violența lor. Chiar ieri am avut discuții lungi cu (miniștrii de externe englez și francez – *n.n.*) Salisbury și Waddington despre interesele lor (ale românilor – *n.n.*) de a obține cel puțin o tranzacție, pe care Kogălniceanu îmi spusese că vor fi acum dispuși să o accepte, și i-am găsit (pe britanici – *n.n.*) foarte puțin disponibili. Imaginați-vă că Salisbury nici măcar nu examinase această problemă și a trebuit să i-o explic pe îndelete. Românii ar fi avut mult mai mult dreptul să se plângă dacă noi i-am fi încurajat și apoi i-am fi lăsat să se descurce. Cu toate acestea, voi continua să desfășor cele mai calde oficii în numele lor.”²⁵

Este însă incontestabil că Italia a acționat pentru sprijinirea obiectivelor părții române, dar a făcut-o de pe poziția pe care o deținea în cadrul puterilor europene, locul ei nefiind la acea dată de prim-plan²⁶. De aceea, autoritățile de la Roma au fost nevoite să se plieze pe deciziile deja adoptate de marii jucători la Berlin²⁷, României fiindu-i recunoscută independența (art. 43), dar condiționată de modificarea Constituției pentru asigurarea toleranței religioase (în esență soluționarea ches-

²⁵ *Ibidem*, doc. 209 (scrisoare personală din 25 iunie 1878, Corti pentru Cairoli), p. 204-205.

²⁶ Rapoartele făcute de delegația italiană la Congresul de la Berlin menționează explicit atenția particulară acordată „dosarului românesc” la acel conclave al marilor puteri. A se vedea mai ales raportul final trimis de ministrul de externe Corti șefului guvernului italian Cairoli, cf. DDI, seria a doua: 1870-1896, volumul X, doc. 305 (Raport din 14 iulie 1878, Corti pentru Cairoli), p. 351-354.

²⁷ Este evaluarea de ansamblu împărtășită de istoriografia italiană. Vezi în acest sens E. Declava, *op.cit.*, p. 180-181.

unii evreiești, art. 44), la care se adăuga schimbul de teritorii impus statului român de Rusia, prin preluarea Dobrogei și a gurilor Dunării (art. 46) în schimbul cedării către statul rus a celor trei județe din Basarabia care reveniseră în 1856 în structura teritorială a Moldovei prin prevederile Tratatului de pace de la Paris (art. 45)²⁸.

În perioada care a urmat, Italia a făcut eforturi pentru a acomoda dorința de a satisface așteptările părții române privind recunoașterea oficială a independenței cu nevoia de a se coordona cu celelalte mari puteri, care își urmăreau interesele specifice în raport cu statul român. Presată de Germania, Franța și Marea Britanie ca recunoașterea independenței să se producă concomitent din partea marilor puteri, după satisfacerea condițiilor stipulate în Tratatul de la Berlin (la care Germania adăuga și condiția răscumpărării de către statul român a căilor ferate concesionate societății Strousberg), Italia a acționat în final independent de acestea. Modificarea în luna octombrie 1879 a articolului 7 din Constituția României în vederea îndeplinirii condiției din art. 44 din Tratatul de la Berlin a fost văzută diferit de marile puteri, autoritățile de

²⁸ De fapt, în articolul 19 al tratatului de la San Stefano din 19 februarie/3 martie 1878 era prevăzută cedarea Dobrogei către Rusia, care nedorind să o anexeze, „își rezerva facultatea de a o schimba contra părții din Basarabia detașată prin tratatul din 1856”. Mai apoi, la Congresul de la Berlin, Rusia a inclus în articolul 45 al tratatului de pace „retrocedarea” de către Principatul României a „porțiunii din teritoriul Basarabiei detașată de Rusia în urma tratatului de la Paris din 1856” (Cf. Pierre Albin, *Les Grands Traités politiques. Recueil des principaux textes diplomatiques depuis 1815 jusqu'à nos jours*, Librairie Felix Alcan, Paris, 1912, p. 197 și 224). În esență, Rusia, adică aliatul mai mare, nu a ezitat să solicite și să obțină revendicări teritoriale pe seama aliatului mai mic, adică România, recurgând la ceea ce în diplomația română era cunoscut sub numele de „procedeu Gorceakov” (după numele ministrului de externe al Imperiului țarist între 1856-1882).

la Roma considerând-o drept o măsură suficientă pentru a se putea formaliza procedura de recunoaștere a statului român independent. Drept urmare, la 5 decembrie 1879, prim-ministrul Benedetto Cairoli îl informa pe consulul general al Italiei la București, Francesco Saverio Fava, asupra deciziei privind recunoașterea statului român. Decizia succesivă a vizat transformarea consulatului general în legăție diplomatică și acreditarea contelui Giuseppe Tornielli în calitate de trimis extraordinar și ministru plenipotențiar, acesta din urmă având sarcina de „a inaugura relațiile diplomatice dintre Italia și România în noua formă permisă de Tratatul de la Berlin”²⁹. Reținem de aici caracterul scrupulos al procedurii italiene de trecere de la reprezentarea consulară la misiunea diplomatică, tocmai datorită schimbării statutului internațional al României, întrucât atunci – ca de altfel și acum – reprezentarea consulară era și o formă neconvențională de diplomație bilaterală, facilitând în esență stabilirea de relații diplomatice formale³⁰. România a luat, la rândul ei, decizia privind reprezentarea sa diplomatică pe baza noului său statut independent³¹, astfel încât primul șef de misiune diplomatică a României în capitala Italiei a fost Nicolae Crețulescu, acreditat în luna ianuarie 1880 în calitate

²⁹ Telegrama nr. 275 din 5 dec. 1879, Cairoli pentru Fava, în Rudolf Dinu, Ion Bulei (editori), *35 de ani de relații italo-române 1879-1914. Documente diplomatice italiene*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2001, p. 51-52.

³⁰ Cf. G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy. Theory and Practice*, Palgrave, 2010, p. 215-218.

³¹ Cf. *Satow's Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, ediția a 5-a, Longman, 1979, p. 3, diplomația înseamnă „aplicarea inteligenței și tactului la întreținerea relațiilor oficiale între guvernele statelor independente, extinse uneori și la relațiile lor cu state vasale; sau, și mai pe scurt, întreținerea afacerilor între state prin mijloace pașnice”.

de ministru plenipotențiar, șef al recent constituitei Legații a României la Roma.

Italia a anticipat astfel măsura pe care, nu după mult timp, la 8/20 februarie 1880, urmau să o ia și Germania, Franța și Marea Britanie, ceea ce marca încheierea procesului de recunoaștere a independenței de către marile puteri. Cu toate acestea, semnele interesului italian pentru relația cu România nu au produs imediat efecte, fiind necesar să mai treacă câteva decenii până când Bucureștiul să devină un punct important al acțiunii externe a Italiei.³²

³² Aceasta este linia dominantă de gândire în istoriografia italiană (vezi, recent, Alberto Basciani, *op.cit.*, p. 86-87).

THE BULGARIAN CAVALRY SQUADRON DURING THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR OF 1877-1878

Stoyan Nikolov*

Abstract

The Bulgarian cavalry has been part of the Bulgarian army for almost the entire 13-century period of Bulgarian statehood. Its restoration on the political map of Europe was also connected with a new beginning for the Bulgarian cavalry, and the years of the Russo-Turkish War would also highlight some prospects and difficulties for the new Bulgarian army and cavalry.

Keywords: *Bulgarian cavalry, the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps, Bulgarian cavalry squadron, Russo-Turkish War*

The Bulgarian cavalry was an invariable, and in many cases the main combat part of the Bulgarian armed forces until the mid-twentieth century,¹ with one small period in the history of the Bulgarian cavalry being the creation and use of the sotnia in the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps or the Bulgarian Opalchenie in 1877-1878.

The term “Sotnia” is of Russian origin and its much more popular synonym is “squadron”, which is used in most European countries, including Romania. Sotnia in the Russian army usually denotes a Cossack or irregular unit, which

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¹ For an extended bibliography, please check Annex 1.

indicates the difference with regular Russian cuirassier, hussar, dragoon or ulan mounted squadrons. Due to the idea of the greater popularity of the term “squadron”, this report refers to “squadron” as the name of a military unit, rather than a sotnia, as is the term in the original documents of the period. Significantly, even in many dictionaries published in Bulgaria, there is no definition of a centurion, but there is one in the Dictionary of Rare, Obsolete and Dialectal Words in Our Literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, indicating that the word comes from the Russian language and means ‘a military unit of one hundred men’. The situation is similar in Romania, where the Romanian-Russian dictionary states that “sótnie” is an obsolete term, which in Russian is “сотня, эскадрон”. Years later, in the organizational life of the Bulgarian cavalry, sotnias or hundreds would be replaced by squadrons. With the dropping of massed cavalry units by the mid-twentieth century from armies around the world, the term squadron began to be used for certain air, naval, reconnaissance and armoured units.²

² Вж. подр. Английско-български военен речник. English-Bulgarian Military Dictionary. София: Книгоиздателска къща Труд, 2002, с. 486; Большая советская энциклопедия. № 24. Книга 1. Собаки-струна. Москва: Советская энциклопедия, 1976, с. 207; Българско-английски военен речник. Bulgarian-English Military Dictionary. София: Военно издателство, 2004, с. 74; Николов, Стоян. Българската конница 1878–1912 г. София: Военна академия „Георги Стойков Раковски“, 2021, с. 41-53; Речник на редки, остарели и диалектни думи в литературата ни от XIX и XX век. София: БАН, 1974, с. 471; Речник за чуждите думи в българския език. София: Наука и изкуство, 2005, с. 273; Румънско-български речник. София: БАН, 1962, с. 384; Румынско-русский словарь. Москва: Государственное издательство иностранных словарей, 1953, с. 299, 786; Советская военная энциклопедия. № 7. Радиоконтроль-тачанка. Москва: Военное издательство Министерства обороны СССР, 1979, с. 455; Френско-български военен речник. София: Св. Георги Победоносец, 1994, с. 59-60; Энциклопедический словарь. № 30. Слюзь-София

As early as the summer of 1876, the reservist General Fadeev, who was an active Moscow slavophile, in a special note to the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Count Heiden, proposed the creation of a strong Bulgarian corps of the three arms. The proposal was accepted by the Russian war minister Milutin, but in a more limited size and without artillery, but only infantry and cavalry. As a result of this, the basics for the organisation of the Bulgarian army were developed. In General Fadeev's note, the cavalry of the Bulgarian army until the Russian army enters Bulgaria should include several Cossack regiments, and in Bulgaria they should be doubled with the volunteers while according to the project of the headquarters, six cavalry squadrons should be formed under the six infantry companies.³

In Grounds for the organization of the Bulgarian corps of October 1876. the staff of the squadron or mounted company was to consist of 1 company master, 2 junior officers, 1 quartermaster, 1 key-bearer, 1 scribe, 1 veterinary surgeon, 1 blacksmith, 1 bugler, 4 non-commissioned officers, 96 privates, 4 non-commissioned officers for servants, stable and cook, 1 two-horse carriage, and it was allowed to have three horses, but without increasing the staff.⁴

Палеологъ. Санктъ-Петербургъ: Типографія Акц. Общ. «Издательское Дѣло», Брокгаузъ-Ефонъ, 1900, с. 942; Воулгароеλληνικον λεξικον. Българско-гръцки речник. София: БАН, 1960, с. 269; Dicționar român bulgar. Румънско-български речник. Sofia-București: Editura Științifică, 1972, 146; Vojna Enciklopedija. № 2. Brdo-Foa. Beograd: Izdanje Redakcije Voine Enciklopedije, 1971, 701-703.

³ Бендерев, Анастас. Създаване българската конница. Проекти и действителност. (Историческа справка). – Нашата конница, май 1929, № 5, с. 20.

⁴ Бендерев, Анастас. История на Българското опълчение 1877–1878 год. София: Поборническо-опълченско дружество „Шипка“, 1930,

On April 5 1877, in Kishinev, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Danube Army, Nikolai Nikolayevich, issued Order No. 40 for the formation of the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps, consisting of six infantry companies and “six sotnias attached to them, to which is assigned the organization of non-separate Cossack sotnies”. Accordingly, the squadrons were to be given numbers 1 to 6 and were to be included in the composition of the three brigades, the 1st brigade comprising the 1st and 2nd companies with the 1st and 2nd squadrons, the 2nd brigade comprising companies Nos. 3 and 4 with squadrons Nos. 3 and 4, and the 3rd brigade comprising companies Nos. 5 and 6 and squadrons Nos. 5 and 6. The command staff in the Opplitsiya is equated with the commanders in similar Russian units, the centurions having the status of commanders of non-separate Cossack squadrons.⁵

A de facto step towards the creation of the New Bulgarian cavalry was also carried out by one of the Vratsa Volunteers, Mito Ankov, who owned his own horses and assigned to the 6th Volunteer Company. He appeared before the chief of staff of the Volunteer Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Rinkevich, and asked to be enrolled as horsemen. On 30 April, 1877, following a report from Rinkevich to General Stoletov, the general gave his permission.⁶

In order to provide these numerous mounted troops with personnel, 60 Russian officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers arrived in May 1877 in Ploiești, where the Bulgarian

с. 404-409; Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 1. София: Държавно военно издателство при МНО, 1956, с. 10-14.

⁵ Българска военна история. Подбрани извори и документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 23-24.

⁶ Йоцов, Димитър. Мито Анков (от конницата на бълг. опълчение). – Нашата конница, март 1937, № 3, с. 3-4.

Volunteer Corps was being formed. Colonel Stackelberg was appointed general commander of the mounted companies, and of the companies: the 1st – Captain Burago, the 2nd – Rittmeister Yarmolov, the 3rd – Rittmeister Skalon, the 4th – Rittmeister Rizenkamer (in reality it was Dimitri Rizenkampf – author’s note), the 5th – Rittmeister Losev and the 6th – Rittmeister Muratov. The junior officers were Rittmeister Yazikov, who was Bulgarian by origin and later served in the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Neverov, Lukashev, Kovalev and lieutenants Somov and Sukhonin.⁷ Of these, Dimitri Riesenkampf deserves attention,⁸ who continued his service as an equestrian officer

⁷ Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци – 1877–78 год. – Нашата конница, март 1922, № 7, с. 3.

⁸ Dimitri Egorovich Riesenkampf entered military service on 12 June 1869, cornet (second lieutenant) on 21 July 1870, lieutenant on 31 March 1874, staff captain on 30 August 1876. He began his participation in the Russo-Turkish War as an officer of a Guards unit - the Knights of the N. V. regiment. After this formation of six cavalry squadrons in the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps was not accomplished, he was detached and served under General Gurko, commanding the Forward detachment. He took part in the battles of Nova and Stara Zagora and Giuranli, for which he was awarded three Russian orders and three Romanian medals. Transferring from the Guard to the Army under Russian laws, he became a Lieutenant Colonel with seniority from August 1881. Seconded to the War Ministry. On Alexander Mosolov’s dismissal for domestic reasons on 2 November 1883 he was assigned to take command of the Convoy, and was later sent on a mission to Hungary to purchase horses in the formation of the 1st Cavalry Regiment, of which he was the first commander from the end of 1883. In February 1884 he gave a revel at his house, the Russian officers attending amusing themselves by firing at burning candles with their revolvers. As a result, Colonel Longinov’s brother, a supplier, was wounded and later died. In the spirit of Russian traditions is the order issued by him that in connection with the review of the regiment in 1885 by Prince Alexander I and his subsequent award as regimental commander with the oldest Bulgarian order “St. Alexander”, 4th rank, expressed his gratitude to his subordinates and with his own funds granted a portion of wine for each soldier and non-commissioned officer. –

in the Bulgarian army. Officers are exclusively Guardsmen, this mounted cadre arriving with 43 warhorses and 9 stable horses.⁹

Only one mounted detachment was formed in the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps, with great difficulty and delay, and even as late as 16 May 1877, 51 soldiers from this detachment were assigned to supply the 5th Troop. On May 24, 1877, Colonel Count Stackelberg was appointed in charge of the personnel and formation of the mounted companies of the Volunteer Corps. Two days later, a letter was sent from the Field Artillery Department of the Russian active army to the Chief of the Volunteer Corps for the dispatch of 600 cavalry carbines and 600 dragoon rifles for the forming squadrons to Kishinev.¹⁰

The situation of the regimental adjutant Colonel Stackelberg interested the commander of the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps, Major-General Nikolai Stoletov, and on 30 May 1877 he asked for clarification from the headquarters of the active Russian army whether he would have the rights of a regimental commander or whether he would be attached to the Volunteer Army for the formation of squadrons. The same

Вж. Иречек. Константин. Български дневник 1879–1884. Т. II. Пловдив-София: Хр. Г. Данов, 1932, с. 466; Стойчев, Иван. [И. К. С.]. Материали за историята на нашата конница (Бележки, данни и документи). – Нашата конница, декември 1935, № 10, с. 14.

⁹ Бендерев, Анастас. Създаване българската конница..., с. 20.

¹⁰ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 1. ..., с. 371-372, 396, 405. Plamen Petrov, the great researcher of the weapon in the Bulgarian army, specifies that the shashka was a Caucasian dragoon of 1841 c., and after 1878 it was provided by the Russian active army for arming the Bulgarian army. A characteristic feature of this rifle is the two sockets on the scabbard for the bayonet. – Вж. Петров, Пламен. Образци дълго хладно оръжие в българската войска 1878–2009. София: Медия – А. Николова, с. 24-25.

day, General Stoletov received a letter about the forthcoming delivery from Kishinev to Ploiești of the carbines and rifles for the mounted companies. On 7 June 1877, the requested carbines with their accessories and dragoon sabres with scabbards without sockets for the bayonets were sent in 22 chests. The carbines were finally accepted on 24 June, for which the chief of the militia located at Rusche di Vede is known.¹¹

On 12 July 1877, from the former capital of Tarnovo, the Adjutant General and Chief of Staff of the Russian Danube Army, Artur Nepokoichitsky, notified the commander of the Forward Detachment, General Iosif Gurko, that by order of the Grand Duke, the cadres of the Bulgarian cavalry squadron would form the personal escort of the commander of the Forward Detachment, and that the adjutant, Colonel Stackelberg, would be attached to the general. The next day Colonel Stackelberg was ordered to do the same, and the cadres for the forming squadrons.¹²

Objective difficulties for the creation of mounted squadrons included the shortage of horses, which were difficult to transport from Russia, and economic considerations on the Russian side.¹³

Moreover, the horses had to be purchased with funds from the Slavic Committee, but it had no money and the feeding of the horses was not assured.¹⁴

¹¹ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 1. ..., с. 419, 428, 475-476, 534.

¹² Пак там, с. 595, 596, 597.

¹³ Бендерев, Анастас. Създаване българската конница. ..., с. 20.

¹⁴ Бендерев, Анастас. История на Българското опълчение..., с. 78; Язаров, Георги. Формиране на Българското опълчение. – В: Руско-турската освободителна война 1877–1878. Сборник статии по някои проблеми на войната. София: Военно издателство, 1977, с. 72-73.

This change in the large-scale Russian plans to deploy six mounted companies led to the actual creation of a cavalry command of volunteer militiamen riding their own horses. Its cadre were the Vratsians – mounted volunteers who had signed up as horsemen in Ploiești, but only in Zimnich were they provided with horses – Mito Ankov, Ivan Tsvetkov, Ivan and Kosta Boshnakov and Grigor Naydenov.

They took part in the battles of Stara Zagora on 17, 18 and 19 July 1877, after which on 20 August a group including the two Boshnakovs, Ankov, Tsvetkov and Pustovoitov performed the difficult task of finding General Stoletov and obtaining orders for Lt. Col.¹⁵

Major-General Nikolai Stoletov, on 7 August 1877, reported to General Nepokoinitsky that the cavalry officers had been assigned to the Volunteer Corps, and the non-commissioned officers had been assigned to His Majesty's Cavalry Convoy of Honour. At the headquarters of the Regiment, there were 15 mounted men-at-arms, who were on reconnaissance and ordnance duty. During the stay of the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps in Stara Zagora, there were 117 Bulgarian volunteer horsemen who had expressed a desire to join the cavalry, but after the fighting they dispersed. At present, there were 57 horsemen at headquarters and 48 more were expected from Gabrovo, already equipped and armed.

Stoletov makes his case for the creation of mounted units in the Volunteer Corps, citing examples of how the horsemen are proving to be good scouts and couriers. Seven of the horsemen were promoted to the rank of non-commissioned officer and, together with the others, represented an excellent cadre to form a cavalry unit. Some were also presented for awards,

¹⁵ Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци ..., с. 3.

and six deserve production into officers for their education, meritorious service, and military honours. The cavalry officers at the headquarters of the Regiment worked with the cavalry under the general command of the chief of staff. At the end of the report, General Stoletov asked for clarification as to whether these officers can be used to establish cavalry squadrons as their commanders, since only the staff has been disbanded, but the statute for establishing cavalry units in the Regiment has not been repealed. It was also pointed out that the officers and junior ranks available in the Regiment were sufficient and no cadres were required from the cavalry regiments.¹⁶

It should also be clarified here when the squadron was actually created. There are different opinions in the historical literature about the exact date. Despite sending a Russian cadre to deploy 6 squadrons to actually form them, it did not go through. Different authors agree that the creation of the squadron refers to the summer months of 1877, but for some it took place in Gabrovo and for others in Stara Zagora.¹⁷

Ordinance of the Corps No. 79, § 6, August 5, 1877, regulated the establishment of the mounted company. The document stipulates that “as the number of volunteers attached to the Bulgarian Volunteer Force Headquarters for cavalry service amounts to 50 men, a separate squadron is formed as

¹⁶ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. София: Държавно военно издателство при МНО, 1959, с. 50-51.

¹⁷ Benderev defines the cavalry squadron created in Stara Zagora as “unstationary” with 117 men, and after the fighting for the defence of the town only 57 men remained in it and from them the “staff cavalry squadron” was created, while others indicate a much earlier date and place of creation of the squadron – 9 June 1877 in the town of Gabrovo. Вж. Бендерев, Анастас. Създаване българската конница. ..., с. 21; Ц., М. Конен Опълченец Коста Априлов. – Нашата конница, юни 1926, № 10, с. 41.

of today – 5 August 1877”, with effect from 1 August, with Captain Yanovich appointed as its commander.¹⁸

The squadron took part in the defence of Shipka on 9-13 August 1877. On 11 August 1877, during the defence of Shipka, the Russian citizen Nikolai Mikhailov, a volunteer of the squadron, was killed, for which a case was made in November between the commander of the squadron, Major Yanovich, the Chief of Staff of the Regiment and the Headquarters of the Active Army.¹⁹

The squadron, moreover, after the departure of the Russian cadres in the Imperial Horse Convoy and in the 4th Gendarmerie Half Squadron, is also referred to at the Shipka position as a cavalry platoon, but it is the only cavalry unit stationed at the position itself which is shelled from all sides by the enemy with artillery and rifle fire, while the others are in the rear on both flanks. On the critical days of August 9, 10, and 11, the squadron maintained all communications or liaison at the position.²⁰

The problem of the cavalymen was apparently not a vital one for the Russian command, and it was not until a month after Stoletov’s report, on 7 September 1877, that General Nepokoichitsky requested, as a supplement, information as to exactly how many cavalymen the Corps had at his disposal.

¹⁸ Кююмджиев, Николай. Исторически бележки за конните..., с. 34; Подгоров. Николай . Най-старият полк..., с. 7. A certain difference in the text: “... August 5, 1877 – separated from the headquarters of the militia and formed a separate squadron under the command of Captain Yanovich, its formation to be considered from August 1, 1877” is indicated in another study. – Вж. История на 2-й конни..., с. 7.

¹⁹ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 272, 277; Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци..., с. 3.

²⁰ Бендерев, Анастас. Създаване българската конница. ..., с. 21.

Some commanders showed self-initiative to acquire at least cavalry material convenient for them, specifically cavalry “Berdani”.²¹

On 18 September, according to General Stoletov’s report, the number of available cavalrymen was 57. But, on 23 September, the Governor of the Office of the Chief of Staff, who apparently did not receive this information, wrote him asking where the 150 horsemen he had mentioned on 7 August were and who was supposed to be supplying them with clothing, equipment and cartridges.

General Stoletov’s report acknowledges the lack of volunteer horsemen, and that the Gabrovo inhabitants who had expressed a wish to join the cavalry of the Volunteers had not turned up, and he has 56 horsemen on military police and reconnaissance duty. Their uniforms were like those of all volunteers in the Volunteers, and they were armed with carbines and rifles.

On 7 November 1877, the commander of the squadron, Staff Captain Arsenyev, reported to the Chief of Staff of the Bulgarian Volunteer Army that he was enclosing a list with the names of the lower ranks of the unit in his charge. It contained 64 names, including a senior quartermaster or sergeant, two platoon quartermasters or sergeant, nine non-commissioned officers, three non-commissioned officers and 49 privates.²²

Of these, the senior Sergeant Ivan Tzvetkov from Vratsa served initially in the 6th and 2nd Troops, then on 5 August, as a non-commissioned officer, he was brought to the squadron, and in September he was made senior officer.

²¹ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 175, 179, 187, 836, 850.

²² Пак там, с. 187, 190, 218-219, 259-260.

Platoon Sergeant Fyodor Pustovoitov, a descendant of Bulgarian settlers in Russia, was assigned to the 4th and 2nd Troop, after which he was assigned to cavalry service at the Headquarters of the Bulgarian Volunteer Force and was made a senior non-commissioned officer on 6 July 1877.

The other platoon sergeant, Georgy Nikolaev, served in the Volunteer Companies No. 2 and No. 3, was made a senior non-commissioned officer also on 6 July, and was assigned to the squadron on 5 August.²³

All this suggests that measures were taken by General Stoletov and his staff to form a cadre for the squadron, by attracting distinguished volunteers.

The squadron also took part in the fighting at Sheinovo at the end of December 1877. As of January 8, 1878, the horse hundred was located in the village of Imitli, and due to the congestion of the Shipka Pass, the artillery was unable to carry out the order to arrive in Tarnovo.²⁴

Twenty days later Staff Captain Arsenyev, who was commander of the squadron, reported to General Stoletov about three Bulgarians who wanted to volunteer for the company in Kotel.²⁵

In the same month, Bashibozouks were rioting in the vicinity of the town and a cavalry under the command of Junker

²³ Българското опълчение 1877–1878. Биографичен и библиографски справочник в три тома. Т. 3. Седма, осма, девета, десета, единадесета, дванадесета дружина и конна сотня. Съст. и ред. Христов, Иван и др. Стара Загора: Форум, б. г., с. 492, 497; Руменин, Румен. Българското опълчение 1877–1878. Личен състав. София: Военно издателство, 1978, с. 349, 425, 555.

²⁴ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 362; Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци..., с. 3.

²⁵ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 423.

Yurev was sent to help the 1st and 5th Volunteer detachments. During the attack on the village of Kadar Fakli, the horsemen reversed formation and went into retreat under the heavy fire of the determined Bashibozouks. Outraged by this act, Vezenkov, the company doctor and a Bulgarian native of Veles, mounted his horse and led the mounted volunteers in an attack. In the vicinity of the Bashibozouks, he was wounded, but several of the enemy were cut down and the others saved themselves by fleeing.²⁶

On 7 February Staff Captain Vasilyev reported to General Stoletov that he had taken command of the squadron.²⁷

By the beginning of April 1878, the Bulgarian Volunteer Force were in the area of Kotel, and on 2 April Ottoman troops occupied the village of Varbitsa, and from the fleeing peasants, news spread about massacres against the local population. To verify the information and to disarm the Muslim population, a volunteer cavalry platoon was sent under the command of Junker Evgeni Yurev. A letter was also delivered to the commander of the Turkish Tabor in the village to assist in this and to leave it with his unit. Instead, the Turkish officer issued an order to disarm the mounted platoon of volunteers and sent them to the village of Hujaven under the escort of a half squadron of Turkish cavalry.²⁸ The mounted militiamen with their hands tied and on foot, with the exception of Yurev, Ankov, Boshnakov and P. Panteleyev, whom the Turks allowed to ride, arrived at Hujaven, where they were confined in a

²⁶ Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци ..., с. 3-4.

²⁷ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 434.

²⁸ It is also spelled as Hujven, today Ivanovo, Shumen region. Renamed by decree 271 of 11 December 1898. – Вж. Мичев, Николай. Речник на имената и статута на населените места в България 1878-2004. София: Петър Берон, 2005, с. 166, 370.

narrow filthy room in which they did not sleep for three days because of the lack of space.

After a report from escaped Bulgarians that the mounted platoon had been taken prisoner and that “the Turks had cut off their noses and ears”, the 3rd and 4th Troops were sent to Varbitsa, which reached the village at nightfall on 4 April and took up a line of battle, with the Turkish troops facing them. After twice sending a parliamentarian, the Turkish binbashi, under the threat of an advance by the Volunteer detachments, agreed to let them enter the village and have mixed patrols. The next day, the mounted volunteers were interrogated and subsequently released.²⁹

On April 5, 1878, General Nepokoichitzky ordered the personnel of the squadron to be reduced, leaving in the “mounted command” only men of thoroughly reliable conduct and having fine horses, and the rest to be assigned to the foot troops.³⁰

As of April 10, 1878, a list of 61 volunteers from the mounted company with their weapon numbers is available.³¹ They are armed with modern weapons – carbine system “Berdana № 2” – cavalry, model 1870, cal. 10, 67 mm. in contrast to the infantry troops, who after the failures with the “Shaspo” were rearmed with other obsolete weapons – infantry rifles “Krunka”, cal. 15, 24 mm. However, in the course of the fighting, some of

²⁹ Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци..., с. 4.

³⁰ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 509.

³¹ When compared with the above list, this unnumbered list lists 61 men, with the three new volunteers receiving no firearms, the names of the Waqmasters and Yeomen being repeated, and the Unterofficers remaining at six. The probable date of the preparation of this document must be placed about the time of the next surrender of the Squadron by Staff Captain Arsenyev, for he is named as having surrendered the list, and it was Captain Popov who accepted it. – Вж. подр. Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 511-512.

the militia re-equipped themselves with “Berdana No. 1” and “Berdana No. 2” rifles, as well as with trophy Turkish rifles. The “Berdana No 2” carbine was heavily shortened and lightened compared to the equivalent infantry rifle, without the bayonet, and the cartridge had a reduced combat load. Its length is 97.5 cm and weight is 2.785 kg. The rate of fire reaches 20 shots per minute and the range of fire is 500 paces. In the squadron of arms, one can also found the revolver “Smith and Wesson”, model 1869, cal. 10, 67 mm., the Russian army uses six-shot, manufactured in the USA and Russia.³²

Very indicative of the mood among the Russian officers is the memo of Staff-Captain Vasil Nikatov of April 1878, to the Chief of Staff of the Regiment to be brought or at least temporarily seconded from the 10th Infantry to the Mounted Hundred, since he had last served in a Cossack regiment, could be of more use in an equestrian formation and “to transmit to future Bulgarian horsemen the spirit of our Cossacks.”³³

The cavalry never managed to develop as a real combat unit. Significantly, in one of his studies, the great researcher

³² Вж. подр. Нурков, Иван. Сравнителен анализ, динамика и ефективност на употребата на ръчни огнестрелни оръжия в Освободителната война 1877–1878 г. – Военноисторически сборник, 2018, № 2, с. 115-125; Ръчно огнестрелно и хладно оръжие от Руско-турската война 1877-1878. Каталог. Съст. Джипов, Константин. София: Септември, 1978, с. 18, 23-25; Стефанов, Трайчо. Създаване, организация и въоръжение на Българското опълчение. – Известия на Националния военноисторически музей. Т. III, 1977, с. 84-95; Узунски, Йочо. Ръчното огнестрелно оръжие в Освободителната война. – Известия на Националния военноисторически музей. Т. III, 1977, с. 29-43. Some authors point out that cavalry carbines “Berdana 1” and “Berdana 2” were provided for the mounted volunteers or militiamen, 600 carbines having been allocated for this purpose. – Вж. Бендерев, Анастас. История на Българското опълчение..., с. 405, 428, 475-476; Язаров, Георги. Формиране на Българското..., с. 72.

³³ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ... с. 540.

Rumen Rumenin mentions only three cavalymen out of the 225 names of officers in the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps – commanders of the cavalry squadron, namely Staff Captain Arsenyev, Staff Captain Vasilyev, who commanded it from 7 February 1878, and Major Yanovich. All three are shown with surnames only. The list lacks the names of platoon commanding officers, as it should have, suggesting its small size and lack of sufficient officer personnel.³⁴

Yanovich, as a captain of the 1st Liebguard Regiment attached to the headquarters of the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps, took part in the fighting at Stara Zagora, for which he was promoted to the rank of major, and for the fighting at Shipka, where he participated from 9 to 12 August, he and Arsenyev both receiving medals commemorating the war of 1877-1878.³⁵

According to some accounts, more than 100 people passed through the squadron as junior ranks, some of them becoming prominent public figures in the Third Bulgarian State – Toma Khitrov, who opened the first photography studio in Sofia; Ivan Hadzhiberov, who built the first hydroelectric power plant for industrial purposes; the mayors of Vratsa and Gabrovo, Kosta Boshnakov and Georgi Bocharov; Atanas Dukov, who rose to command the 11th Infantry Sliven Regiment in 1886, and later to colonel in the Russian army; Lieutenant Colonel Georgi Yankov, who graduated from the Military School in Sofia and the Military Academy in St. Petersburg; Dimitar Kurtev, one of the prominent figures of the Unionist movement, etc. An analysis of a list of 106 names published in the pages of the

³⁴ Българското опълчение 1877-1878. Съст. Руменин, Румен. ..., с. 25-35.

³⁵ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 184, 584.

magazine "Our Cavalry" reveals that, out of these, only Nikolai Bolman, Alexander Krasovsky, Boris Lovenitsky, Mikhailov, killed at Shipka, who was the only victim of the Squadron, Konstantin Plevak and Ivan Skakunov are listed as Russians,³⁶ i.e. over 94% of the personnel of the squadron were Bulgarian. Moreover, "The men of the Volunteer squadron had their own horses, wore the usual Volunteer clothing and were armed with "Berdanki".³⁷

According to another source, which also has many inaccuracies: "The Squadron numbered 130 men... Their armament consisted of a sabre, revolver, rifles and pouches. Their horses were their own. The service of the mounted men consisted in serving as liaison between the various troops, carrying cartridges and other necessities of war to the soldiers at the front, etc."³⁸

It fought in the Russo-Turkish War at Stara Zagora on 17-19 July 1877 as a mounted command, and as a separate cavalry squadron at Shipka on 9-13 August 1877 and at Sheinovo on 26-28 December 1877, 13 men of the lower ranks of the squadron being awarded the Distinguished Service Badge of the Military Order. Of these, 8 were awarded for fighting at Stara Zagora and 5 for Sheinovo.³⁹ According to other sources, the number of decorated servicemen was 15.⁴⁰

³⁶ Списък на опълченците от конната сотня. – Нашата конница, април 1922, № 8, с. 2; Българското опълчение 1877-1878. Биографичен и библиографски справочник в три тома. Т. 3. ..., с. 480-498.

³⁷ [Стойчев, И.]. Ганчо В. Мацков. – Нашата конница, април 1926, № 8, с. 15.

³⁸ Ц., М. Конен опълченец..., с. 43-44.

³⁹ Българското опълчение. Документи. Т. 2. ..., с. 600; Подгоров. Николай. Най-старият полк., с. 8.

⁴⁰ Стойчев, Иван. Из историята на Военния орден „За храброст“ и неговия знак. – Нашата конница, май и юни 1939, № 5 и 6, с. 1-7.

An important moment in the creation of the Bulgarian cavalry is that it was created under Russian influence and on the Russian model. This was conditioned by the imperial aspirations of Russia to create a large cavalry for the Bulgarian size and capabilities, but, in the course of the Russo-Turkish War, only one cavalry squadron was created in the Bulgarian militia – and that with great difficulty.

Moreover, on the eve of the Russo-Turkish War, the cavalry was considered an elite type of troop in the Russian army, but its training was very backward, the perception being that it was to be used only in mounted formation in reconnaissance and guarding. The experience of the war shows that it was a fast-moving auxiliary formation which, in conjunction with infantry and artillery, could be used for reconnaissance, flank guard and pursuit. In the conquest of the Etropole Balkan, in the liberation of Plovdiv and in the Shipka-Sheinov battles, dragoon units that could also act in emergency formation were prominent.⁴¹

After the actual end of the war, the process of liquidation of the squadron began. Initially, by Bulgarian Volunteer Order No. 73, § 1 of 14 May 1878, the squadron was attached to the 5th Volunteer Company, and by Order No. 118, § 1 of 4 July 1878, it was disbanded and the six mounted Volunteers who had not been dismissed were transferred to the 5th Company.⁴²

As a result of its disbandment after the end of the Russo-Turkish War, the squadron, unlike the twelve foot regiments, which provided the cadre for the formation of the foot

⁴¹ Пенков, Стоян. Развитие на руското военно изкуство през войната. – В: Руско-турска освободителна война 1877-1878. Сборник статии по някои проблеми на войната. София: Военно издателство, 1977, с. 275-277.

⁴² Стойчев, Иван. За конните опълченци..., с. 34.

companies of the Bulgarian Land Army, took no part in the creation of the free Bulgarian squadrons. This is also a kind of harbinger of the difficulties in forming the future cavalry units.

Nevertheless, the short-lived cavalry squadron displayed some of the characteristic features of the subsequent squadrons in the Bulgarian Army, such as Cossack appearance with Cossack uniforms, original Russian officer and non-commissioned officer staff, training according to Russian statutes, problems with material supply, etc.

The difficult and lengthy process of reviving Bulgarian statehood, including one of the foundations of the state – its army, which included the cavalry along with the infantry, artillery, engineers and navy – began. In the decades to come, the Principality of Bulgaria would evolve upwards and the Bulgarian army would be the main pillar for the defence of the internal and foreign security of the Third Bulgarian State.

Annex 1

Вж. подр. БИА–НБКМ, ф. 126 – Иван (Ванката) Попхристов; Академична библиотека на ВА „Г. С. Раковски“, Военноисторическа читалня, ръкописен фонд, № 7743 – Стойчев, Иван. Казак алаят на Чайковски. София, 1944; Ангелов, Димитър, Стефан Кашев, Борис Чолпанов. Българска военна история. От Античността до втората четвърт на Х век. София: БАН, 1983, с. 141-148; Архив на Г. С. Раковски. Т. I. Писма и ръкописи на Раковски. Съст. и ред. Арнаулов, Михаил и др. София: БАН, 1952, с. 377; Бобчева, Любка. Въоръжението на българската войска от втората половина на 9 век до падането на България под

турско робство. – Военноисторически сборник, 1958, № 2, с. 41-77; Българска военна история. Подбрани извори и документи. Т. I. Съст. и ред. Ангелов, Димитър и др. София: Военно издателство, 1977, с. 160; Въчков, Александър. Български военни униформи 1879–1945. София: Военно издателство, 2010, с. 9; Гацов, Недялко и др. Кратка история на България 681–1945. София: Военно издателство, 1977, с. 14-51; Георгиев, Х. Български конни части преди Освобождението. – Кавалерийска мисъл, 1937, № 2, с. 93-107; Дойнов, Стефан. Българското националноосвободително движение 1800–1812. София: БАН, 1979, с. 100-198; Дуйчев, Иван. Цар Калоян. Битката при Одрин през април 1205 г. и нейните сетнини. – Военноисторически сборник, 1979, № 4, с. 107-123; Извори за българската история. Т. II. Латински извори за българската история. Съст. и ред. Дуйчев, Иван и др. София: БАН, 1958, с. 299; Извори за българската история. Т. III. Гръцки извори за българската история. Съст. и ред. Дуйчев, Иван и др. София: БАН, 1959, с. 117; Извори за българската история. Т. VI. Гръцки извори за българската история. Съст. и ред. Дуйчев, Иван и др. София: БАН, 1960, с. 277; Извори за българската история. Т. IX. Гръцки извори за гръцката история. Съст. и ред. Дуйчев, Иван и др. София: БАН, 1964, с. 285; Йорданов, Кръстьо. Войнушката институция в източния дял на Стара планина и прилежащите райони (XVI–XVIII в.). – Времена, № 19, декември 2020, с. 37-57; Йорданов, Кръстьо. Командно-управленски апарат на войнушката институция в българските земи под османска власт през XV-XVI век: йерархична структура, функции и кадрови състав. – Исторически преглед, 2012, № 3-4, с. 33-85; Конобеев, Василий. Руско-болгарские отношения в 1806–1812

г. – В: Из истории русско-болгарских отношений. Москва: АН СССР, 1958, с. 223-225; Кюмджиев, Борис. Българинът хаджи Христо в гръцкото освободително движение 1821–1829 г. – Военноисторически сборник, 1954, № 4, с. 72-81; Митев, Йоно. Сведения за въстаническите действия на вр. Еледжик и дейността на Бенковски през 1876 г. – Военноисторически сборник, 1960, № 2, с. 93-98; Павлов, Пламен. За ролята на куманите в българската военна история. – Военноисторически сборник, 1990, № 6, с. 14-23; Пейчев, Атанас. Българското военно изкуство през феодализма. – Военноисторически сборник, 1958, № 4, с. 115-130; Пейчев, Атанас. Зараждане и развитие на българското военно изкуство 681–1945 г. София: Военно издателство. 1988, с. 29; Стойчев, Иван. Казак алаят на Чайковски (исторически материали и критически бележки). – Кавалерийска мисъл, 1943, № 2-4, с. 1-296; Стойчев, Иван. Материали за историята на нашата конница (Бележки, данни и документи). – Нашата конница, ноември 1935, № 9, с. 22; Тодорова, Мария. Българските доброволци в Кримската война. – Известия на Българското исторически дружество, т. 37, 1985, с. 391-440; Трифонов, Юрдан. Подхранване конния дух у българите през турското владичество. – Кавалерийска мисъл, 1936, № 2, с. 137-140; Фехер, Геза. Военното дело на прабългарите. – Военна библиотека, № 98, март 1938, с. 1-162; Фехер, Геза. Облеклото и оръжието на старата българска войска: принос към бълг.-унг. връзки. София: Фонд Военни музеи, паметници и гробове при Министерство на войната, 1942, с. 1-64; Христов, Димитър. Кратък преглед на бойните действия на руските войски на българска земя през XVIII и първата половина на XIX в. и подкрепата на българския народ. – Известия на Военноисторическото

научно дружество, 1966, № 2, с. 70; Чолов, Петър. Българските въоръжени чети и отряди през XIX век. София: Марин Дринов, 2003, с. 11-48; Чолпанов, Борис. Победите на Стара Велика България. – В: История на българите. Т. V. Военна история на българите от древността до наши дни. София: Знание, 2007, с. 44-46.

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