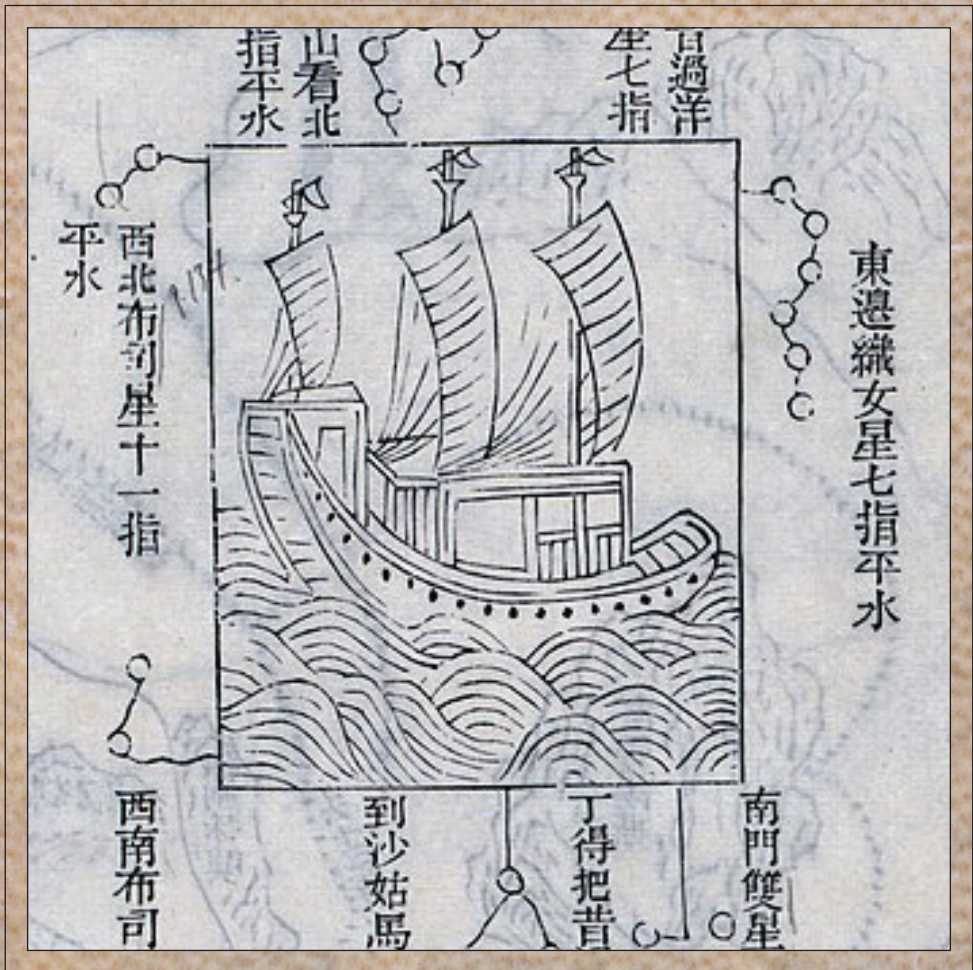




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IMPLEMENTING THE RUSSIAN INITIATIVE: MONTENEGRIN DIPLOMATIC ACTION AMONG BALKAN NATIONS IN 1896

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ABSTRACT

In response to the instability in the Ottoman Empire, which became particularly evident in the mid-1890s, Austria-Hungary adopted a plan in late January 1896 to occupy part of the territory in the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, provided it received consent from the Porte. On the other hand, Russia launched an initiative in February of the same year aimed at bringing the Balkan nations closer together, entrusting Montenegro with its implementation, precisely to prevent the Vienna government from exploiting the newly emerged situation in the neighboring empire to fulfill the Dual Monarchy's territorial ambitions. To this end, Montenegrin Foreign Minister Gavro Vuković visited Belgrade, Sofia, and Constantinople, with the tangible results of his actions culminating in a secret agreement known as the Ugodba.

Keywords: Montenegro, Balkan states, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, Gavro Vuković, Ugodba

ATTUAZIONE DELL'INIZIATIVA RUSSA: L'AZIONE DIPLOMATICA DEL MONTENEGRO TRA LE NAZIONI BALCANICHE NEL 1896

SINTESI

In risposta all'instabilità dell'Impero Ottomano, emersa soprattutto a metà degli anni Novanta del XIX secolo, l'Austria-Ungheria, alla fine di gennaio del 1896, adottò un piano per occupare una parte del territorio del Sangiaccato

di Novi Pazar, a condizione che la Porta desse il suo consenso. D'altro canto, nel febbraio dello stesso anno, la Russia lanciò un'iniziativa per unire i popoli balcanici, affidando la sua attuazione al Montenegro, proprio per evitare che il governo viennese sfruttasse la situazione creatasi nel vicino impero per realizzare le aspirazioni di espansione territoriale della Duplice Monarchia. A tal fine, il Ministro degli Esteri montenegrino, Gavro Vuković, visitò Belgrado, Sofia e Costantinopoli e gli effetti concreti delle sue azioni si espressero in un accordo segreto, noto come Ugodba.

Parole chiave: Montenegro, Stati balcanici, Russia, Austria-Ungheria, Impero ottomano, Gavro Vuković, Ugodba

INTRODUCTION

Montenegro's diplomatic efforts to bring the Balkan states closer together in 1896 took place in light of differing strategies by Russia and Austria-Hungary regarding the Eastern question, specifically the future of the waning Ottoman Empire in Europe.

Unlike Austria-Hungary, which aimed to occupy Ottoman possessions on the Balkan Peninsula when the time came, Russia wished for the Balkan peoples, after liberation from Ottoman rule, to re-establish their independent states, through which it could assert dominance in that part of Europe. Russia's primary goal was to secure unrestricted passage for its ships from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and to control the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, which would not be possible if any of the great powers occupied the Ottoman European territories (Skoko, 1968, 46–47; Gotlib, 1960, 56; Mijušković, 1997, 115–116; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, 2006, 555, 557).

The situation in which both Russia and Austria-Hungary intended to secure themselves from the possibility that the other side would gain a decisive advantage in the Balkans, which would enable it to solve the Eastern question in its favor, led these two countries to mutual understanding. Thus, on July 8, 1876, after the flare-up of the Great Eastern Crisis, as a result of the war that Serbia and Montenegro waged against the Ottoman Empire at the end of June of the same year, Russia and Austria-Hungary signed the corresponding agreement in the Reichstag. The following year, on January 15, a convention was signed between Saint Petersburg and Vienna in Budapest, according to which Russia ensured the neutrality of Austria-Hungary with regard to its intention to declare war on the Ottoman Empire, whereby the Dual Monarchy was in turn authorized to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina at an opportune moment (Jelavich, 1974, 179–180).

The military successes and territorial gains of Russia and the Balkan states, formalized in the San Stefano Peace Treaty signed on March 3, 1878, enabled Saint Petersburg to achieve its foreign policy goals and control the further fate of the Ottoman Empire. However, Austria-Hungary and the other great powers did not want to allow the establishment of a state of Russian domination. Therefore, they made sure that at the Berlin Congress (June 13–July 13, 1878), at which the Great Eastern Crisis finally had its epilogue, the achievements of Russian victories on the battlefield were reduced to an acceptable measure for them (Jelavich, 1991, 175–178).

The fear that the order established at the Berlin Congress could be called into question came to the fore in the mid-1890s, due to the increased state of instability in the Ottoman Empire, which was a consequence of the national-revolutionary movements of the Armenians and Greeks in Crete, as well as the actions of the Macedonian committee based in Thessaloniki.¹ The possibility that the entire situation could spiral out of control, leading to a larger conflict over the inheritance of the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, depended on the willingness of Austria-Hungary and Russia to act in that direction, that is, to use the emerging crisis to achieve their own interests. However, the steps that Vienna and Saint Petersburg took in response to the turbulent events in the Ottoman Empire were very deliberate and cautious. Thus, at the end of January 1896, Austria-Hungary adopted a plan to advance its army into the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, along the line Lever-Tara-Bijelo Polje-Nova Varoš to Berane, which was to be implemented only if an agreement could be reached with the Porte for the withdrawal of Ottoman forces from that territory (Kapidžić, 1970–1971, 418–419, 421, 424–429). Conversely, in February of the same year, Russia launched an initiative through Montenegro to bring the Balkan peoples closer together, precisely to prevent the Vienna government from exploiting the crisis in the Ottoman Empire to further its ambitions of expanding the Dual Monarchy toward Thessaloniki.

1 In response to the liberation aspirations of the Armenians, the Turks carried out several massacres against them in the summer of 1894, in the fall of 1895 and in the summer of 1896. Wanting to free themselves from Ottoman rule, the Christians of Crete raised several rebellions on their island. Raising an uprising in 1897, they declared the unification of Crete with Greece, which was the prelude to the thirty-day Greco-Turkish War. Regardless of the fact that the armed conflicts ended with the defeat of Greece, which was saved from complete ruin by the Great Powers, its territorial losses were reduced to only one village. The Great Powers, with the leading role of Great Britain, resolved the Cretan issue by giving Crete full autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, and the island became an integral part of Greece in 1913. The Macedonian Committee, which acted under the direct influence of the Bulgarian court and government, was founded in March 1895, and had the task of fighting for the autonomy of Macedonia under the auspices of the Great Powers. The committee organized companies, which, after being transferred to Macedonian territory, carried out a series of armed actions. As the Great Powers were against provoking a crisis in Macedonia, the Bulgarian government carried out the disarmament of these companies; their last actions were carried out in the first half of July 1895 (Guč, 1933, 195–213; Greene, 1895; Kurt, 2018; Dinçer, 2013; Melson, 1982; Eldarov, 2015; Vojvodić, 1999, 94–95, 99–100; Radojičić, 1898; Klog, 2000, 85).

INSTRUCTIONS FROM CONSTANTINOPLE

The Russian plans in the event of potential changes in the Ottoman Empire were shared with the Montenegrin envoy in Constantinople, Mitar Bakić, by his Russian colleague Nelidov. In a dispatch that Bakić sent to Cetinje on February 12, 1896, regarding this matter, he wrote:

After so many years of broken diplomatic relations with Bulgaria, Russia reconciled with it. It recognized Ferdinand as the heir of the Bulgarian prince, and thus a regular state of affairs was established between the two countries.² Russia is equally suspicious of Bulgaria's duplicity, and Russia will not interfere in the internal affairs of any Balkan state, but it cannot tolerate the interference of other states not only in their internal affairs, but also in their foreign affairs. Russia would like to maintain the integrity of Turkey; but since this is rotten, the possibility of surprise is not excluded. Therefore, Russia wants the Balkan nations to come together and mutually agree on the details of the aspirations of each individual nation and accordingly agree on the division of territories under Turkish rule. That agreement and that division would serve as a basis for solving the Eastern question. In this way, the Eastern question could be resolved without war and without the intervention of [other] powers. Russia, by not interfering in the settlement of the Eastern question, would eliminate the interference of other powers, only that it would strive for the execution of a fait accompli. Therefore, it is necessary to quickly work on an agreement with the other Balkan states, so as not to be late to its own detriment, and to the benefit of those who would have agreed earlier, or a third party (Vuković, 1996, 625–626).

In connection with the received dispatch, in Cetinje, it was decided to ask for an explanation from Nelidov, above all when it came to the urgency of action on the rapprochement between the Balkan states. In addition, they wanted to check whether the Russian diplomat was acting according to the instructions of his government or whether these were his personal recommendations (Vuković, 1996, 626).

Soon a reply arrived from Constantinople, the content of which, apart from the part that referred to the urgency of the action, did not fundamentally differ from the one presented in the previous address to Cetinje. The message said:

2 Alexander Battenberg, who was elected Prince of Bulgaria on the recommendation of Saint Petersburg in 1879, accepted the revolutionary unification of the principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in September 1885 (Plovdiv coup). As Russia opposed it, Battenberg was forced to abdicate on August 21, 1886. However, on July 7, 1887, the Austro-Hungarian exponent Ferdinand Coburg was elected Prince of Bulgaria, whom Saint Petersburg did not recognize until the beginning of 1896. The recognition came after Bulgaria's foreign policy orientation turned towards Russia and after the Bulgarian heir to the throne, Boris, was converted to the Orthodox faith (Popov, 2010, 254–256; Šulek, 1938, 65, 69, 92, 118–119; Vojvodić, 1999, 97).

Russia wants to maintain European peace and the current situation in Europe as long as it can, because the circumstances, specific and general, in Europe are not favorable for raising the Eastern question. Russia advises the Balkan states to avoid raising the Macedonian and Albanian issues and any other issues. But as the situation in Turkey is never certain and various complications can arise at any time, Russia wants the Balkan states to come closer to each other and come to an agreement in time, so that they are not surprised by events, but that they themselves, without foreign intervention, resolve the Eastern question. In order to achieve a solution to the Balkan problem, Russia proposes that states do not interfere in anything but limit themselves to preventing foreign intervention. In order to reach an agreement among the Balkan states, it is not necessary to rush it, but to work with great caution and in deep secrecy (Vuković, 1996, 627–628).

THE MISSION OF GAVRO VUKOVIĆ

Implementing the instructions of Saint Petersburg, Prince Nikola appointed the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Duke Gavro Vuković,³ to visit Serbia and Bulgaria in order to start work on bringing the Balkan countries closer together. However, apart from Sofia and Belgrade, Vuković was also supposed to go to Constantinople.

Namely, before Bakić conveyed the Russian instructions to Cetinje, the Sultan, through the Ottoman diplomatic representative in Montenegro, invited the then ailing Prince Nikola to come to Constantinople, to be treated by his personal physician, from where he would go to Brusa, where the “miraculous

3 Duke Gavro Vuković was born in 1852. He completed elementary school in Cetinje and high school in Belgrade in 1869, where he also studied law. He graduated in 1873 and became the first law graduate from Montenegro. He began his distinguished career on May 5, 1874, when he was appointed Secretary of the Senate. He became a member of the Supreme Court in 1879. He served as Montenegro's diplomatic representative to the Ottoman Empire twice: from the end of 1879 to July 23, 1880, and from March to the end of December 1884. He was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs on June 29, 1890, and held this position until December 19, 1905. He was the President of the State Council from December 20, 1905, to May 16, 1907, when he retired. He served two terms as a member of the Montenegrin National Assembly, following the parliamentary elections held in 1906 and 1914. After the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, he was, for a time, its plenipotentiary minister in Constantinople. Duke Gavro Vuković passed away in Berane in 1928 and was buried near the Đurđevi Stupovi Monastery. His memoirs are a work of exceptional significance for shedding light on the course of Montenegrin history in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Montenegro, after recognition at the Berlin Congress, sought to establish itself as a modern state and find its place on the international political stage. As an active participant in Montenegro's foreign policy activities for a long period, Vuković, recalling his political and diplomatic career, provided a wealth of valuable information about Montenegro and its relations with other countries, particularly the great powers. His memoirs also recorded many interesting moments from the life of Prince, later King, Nikola, and his family (Bakić, 2011, 51–53, 123–124; Vuković, 1996).

waters” were located. In order to persuade the prince to be treated in his country instead of in Vienna, the sultan told the Montenegrin ruler that he would send him a special steamship with which he would set out on his journey, as well as that he would give him the best castle in Brusa at his disposal (Vuković, 1996, 624, 629, 632).

Gavro Vuković considered that it would be beneficial for Montenegro for the Montenegrin sovereign to accept the Sultan’s invitation and visit the Ottoman capital. Explaining his position, he pointed out in the conversation with Prince Nikola that Russia, compared to all other great powers, currently had the greatest influence with the sultan, and that therefore one should use the existing opportunities, since everything is unpredictable in Constantinople, so Russian influence could suddenly decline.⁴ The Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs also highlighted Constantinople’s fear of a Bulgarian invasion of Macedonia and Austria-Hungary’s agitation in Albania.⁵ This state of affairs, according to Vuković, gave Montenegro the opportunity to, during the negotiations, possibly highlight the request that, under the guise of rectification of the border, territories in which it was interested be allocated to Montenegro.⁶

The prince replied to Vuković that he had taken note of his proposal and that he would act in accordance with it, as soon as a suitable opportunity arose (Vuković, 1996, 625).⁷

The Montenegrin ruler agreed to travel to Constantinople, after the Sultan sent him a handwritten letter inviting him to visit the Ottoman capital.⁸ However,

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- 4 The strong influence of Saint Petersburg on the Ottoman ruler, which Vuković spoke about, stemmed from the fact that Russia, unlike England, did not take into consideration the application of more radical measures against Constantinople, due to the crisis caused by the massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (Guč, 1933, 195–205).
 - 5 The Ottoman envoy to the Montenegrin court, on behalf of the Sultan, confidentially asked Prince Nikola whether he would invade Herzegovina, if Prince Ferdinand invaded Macedonia. The Montenegrin sovereign replied that Montenegro should not engage in such an action alone, but rather that arrangements should first be made for Muslims and Orthodox Christians to move against Vienna, since both are dissatisfied with its rule. The prince pointed out that only in the event that this assumption was fulfilled, in Cetinje it would be possible to think about what could be done further in the whole matter (Vuković, 1996, 624–625).
 - 6 The process of negotiations regarding the specification of the Montenegrin-Ottoman border after the Berlin Congress resulted in the signing of the corresponding agreements in 1881, 1883, and 1884. However, these documents did not cover a small part of the border line, which remained unregulated until the beginning of the First Balkan War, when this issue became irrelevant (Ražnatović, 1994; 1995; 1979, 294).
 - 7 The official gratitude of Prince Nikola and Princess Milena to the Sultan, for the attention he gave them during the illness of the Montenegrin ruler, was delivered through the Montenegrin diplomatic representative in the Ottoman Empire, Mitar Bakić. On January 20/February 1, 1896, he informed Cetinje that he had delivered the princely couple’s dispatch to the court the previous day (DACG-MID, 56, 64).
 - 8 The Ottoman sovereign handed this letter to Prince Nikola through his personal physician, whom he sent to Montenegro to treat the Montenegrin ruler. However, his main task was to persuade the prince to go “to Brusa via Constantinople to the miraculous waters” (Vuković, 1996, 628).

unforeseen circumstances prevented Prince Nikola from leaving Cetinje, leading him to send Gavro Vuković to Constantinople in his stead.⁹

Vuković began his mission, during which he was to visit the capitals of Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire, with a visit to Constantinople in September 1896 (Vuković, 1996, 631; Vojvodić, 1969, 70). There, he discussed with the Sultan the establishment of Montenegrin-Turkish cooperation to prevent a possible change in the status of Albania, on which an agreement in principle was reached. In the Ottoman capital, there was no mention of the territories, which were the subject of Montenegro's interest, but this was certainly kept in mind. Vuković wrote in his memoirs that, on behalf of Montenegro, he proposed to the Ottoman Empire that the two countries jointly defend Albania from any external appropriation, with the final idea that the Empire, in the form of a reward, cede Đurđevi Stupovi and Berane to the Montenegrin state (Vuković, 1996, 602, 630, 635–636).

After Constantinople, Duke Vuković visited Sofia, where he met Prince Ferdinand. Then he traveled to Belgrade to introduce his mission to King Alexander. Prince Ferdinand and King Alexander agreed in principle with the need to bring the Balkan states together and reach an agreement on the division of the territories of European Turkey.¹⁰ Of course, an agreement would be reached on the sensitive issues of the territorial claims of each of the states in subsequent negotiations (Vuković, 1996, 603, 606–607, 609).

9 Accepting the invitation, the Montenegrin ruler replied to the sultan that he would visit him upon his return from Moscow, where he was going for the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II. However, since Prince Mirko fell ill during the coronation festivities, the prince had to postpone the announced visit, and later the marriage of Princess Jelena finally prevented him from traveling to the Ottoman capital (Vuković, 1996, 628–629; Özcan, 2012a, 171–172). However, Prince Nikola visited the Sultan again in the summer of 1899. The prince and his entourage set sail from Bar on August 14/26, on the Ottoman ship *Ismir*. This ship was accompanied by the yacht *Timza* (called *Zmaj* in Montenegro), which the sultan presented to the Montenegrin ruler at the beginning of the same year. In 1904, the Ottoman sovereign gave Prince Nikola another yacht, named *Zaza*. In January 1908, the prince gave this yacht a new name – *Rumija* (Petrović-Njegoš, 2007, 385; Jović, 2010, 170; Özcan, 2012b, 120–121; Glas Crnogorca, 6. 3. 1899, 1; 13. 3. 1899, 1; 14. 8. 1899, 1; the publication dates of this newspaper are according to the Julian calendar, which in the nineteenth century was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar).

10 That diplomatic activities are often in conflict with ethical principles was also confirmed by the mission that Gavro Vuković had to perform in Constantinople, Sofia and Belgrade. While in Constantinople, he discussed the common defense of Albania with the Sultan, while in Sofia and Belgrade plans were presented for the division of the Ottoman territories in the Balkans. Vuković writes: “Let the reader of these lines judge what a difficult and delicate diplomatic role I played. In a secret mission, I offer Montenegrin help to the Sultan, so that together with them we can defend Arbania [sic] from joining any other state. I also offer that we do not allow Arbania to gain autonomy, and that unconditionally, without our benefit. On the other hand, at the same time, I am going to create a Balkan agreement on the division of European Turkey among the states. What kind of morality is there that is absent in diplomacy? Its old motto is: the end justifies the means” (Vuković, 1996, 632).

TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN MONTENEGRO AND RUSSIA

Why did Russia entrust the implementation of its initiative to Montenegro? Explaining to the rulers of Bulgaria and Serbia why Russia entrusted Montenegro with launching the mission of rapprochement of the Balkan states, Vuković said that Saint Petersburg acted in this way keeping in mind the character of the regime in Montenegro. Namely, Montenegro, unlike their countries, lacked both a constitution and a parliament, and therefore its government was stable, while in Serbia and Bulgaria the governments often changed, which was not conducive to such a mission, since its implementation required a long time period (Vuković, 1996, 605–606, 608).

However, Cetinje's unwavering foreign policy orientation towards Russia, unlike Sofia and Belgrade, was of great importance. From his ascension to power in 1860, Prince Nikola was entirely loyal to the Russian court, a quality that was highly valued in Saint Petersburg. This sentiment was best expressed by Russian Tsar Alexander III in a toast on May 30, 1889, during a formal dinner honoring the engagement of Princess Milica, daughter of Prince Nikola, to Grand Duke Peter Nikolayevich Romanov: "I drink to the health of my only, faithful, and sincere friend, the Prince of Montenegro"¹¹ (Glas Crnogorca, 4. 6. 1889, 1–2; 21. 5. 1889, 1–2; Nikiforov 2011, 7; Petrović-Njegoš 2007, 363; Škerović, 1964, 30).

The marriage between Peter and Milica (the wedding took place on August 7, 1889) broke the tradition of Romanovs marrying German princesses, which also represents a striking expression of deep respect for Montenegro and its ruler by Saint Petersburg. Additionally, it is worth noting that the groom was not a distant relative of the Tsar but rather his first cousin. This significantly raised the prestige of the Montenegrin dynasty in the eyes of European royal families, with some later establishing close ties¹² with the Petrović-Njegoš family (Strunina, 2011, 189; Škerović, 1964, 29, 35).

11 In addition to this statement, which resonated strongly throughout the Slavic world and Europe in general, Tsar Alexander extended a great honor to the Montenegrin ruler during his stay in Russia by appointing him honorary commander of the 15th Rifle Guard Regiment, which was subsequently named "The Regiment of His Highness Prince Nikola" (Glas Crnogorca, 21. 5. 1889, 3; Škerović, 1964, 30, 36).

12 Princess Jelena married the Italian heir to the throne, later King Victor Emmanuel III, in 1896. Princess Ana married Franz Joseph of Battenberg, brother of Bulgarian Prince Alexander I of Battenberg, in 1897. Crown Prince Danilo wed Princess Jutta of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, daughter of Grand Duke Adolf Friedrich V of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, in 1899; upon converting to Orthodoxy, she took the name Milica. Prince Mirko married Natalija Konstantinović, a distant relative of Serbian King Alexander Obrenović, in 1902. Prince Nikola's eldest daughter, Zorka, had married Prince Peter Karađorđević in 1883, who became King of Serbia in 1903, thirteen years after her passing (Strunina, 2011, 176–178; Glas Crnogorca, 6. 10. 1896, 1–2; 3. 5. 1897, 1; 14. 7. 1899, 1–2; 28. 6. 1902, 1).

The sister of Grand Duchess Milica, Princess Anastasia (Stana), was married to a member of the Romanov family as well, Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich, with their marriage formalized in 1907.¹³

By forging familial ties with the imperial family, Prince Nikola further solidified Montenegro's position in Saint Petersburg, and his daughters were well-placed to advocate for Montenegrin interests in the Russian capital, a mission they and their husbands undertook with dedication (Vitte, 1924, 217–218).

Around the time the initiative to foster closer Balkan alliances was underway, Russia reaffirmed its favor toward Montenegro. During his coronation in May 1896, which Prince Nikola attended, Tsar Nicholas II echoed sentiments similar to those of his father seven years prior, declaring Montenegro as Russia's most faithful ally (Lakić, 2012, 297).

The friendship between Montenegro and Russia was deeply rooted. The first ties between the two countries were established during the reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725), who in 1711, during the Russo-Turkish War of 1710–11 called upon Montenegrins and other Balkan Christians to rise against the Turks—a call answered only by Bishop Danilo (1697–1735) with his Montenegrin followers.¹⁴ In 1715, Danilo visited Russia, where he received aid from Peter the Great for Montenegro, which had suffered severe retribution from the Turks for its defiance (Stanojević, 1955, 61–116; Petrović, 1997, 29, 51–60).

Successive Montenegrin leaders fortified and further developed their ties with Russia. In pursuit of this goal, Bishop Sava resided in Russia from 1743 to 1744, while Bishop Vasilije made three visits (1752–54, 1757–59, 1765–66) and passed away there in March 1766. He was buried at state expense with a grand church and military ceremony in the Saint Petersburg Annunciation Church of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra, resting alongside notable Russian figures, including the celebrated general Suvorov (Petrović 1997, 104–107; Stanojević, 1978, 69–70, 101–105, 149–158, 180–183).

The deeply rooted Montenegrin reverence for Russia allowed the self-styled Šćepan Mali, who claimed to be the assassinated Russian Tsar Peter III—believed by the Russian people to be alive—to be accepted as their ruler. Šćepan even succeeded in instilling order among the independently-minded Montenegrins during his rule (1767–73). The Montenegrins so fervently wanted to believe in the story of the Russian tsar that they paid little attention to the words of Empress Catherine II's emissary Dolgorukov, who clarified that Šćepan was not who he claimed. Recognizing the "tsar's" authority among the people and his loyalty to Russia, Dolgorukov handed him the aid he had brought from Saint Petersburg (Jovanović, 2001, 107–110, 113–119).

13 Anastasija married Nikolay Nikolayevich (brother of Milica's husband, Peter Nikolayevich) after divorcing Russian Prince Georgy Maximilianovich Romanovsky, whom she had married in 1889, shortly after her sister Milica's wedding (Strunina, 2011, 204–208, 211; 2013, 36–38; Glas Crnogorca, 3. 9. 1889, 1–2).

14 Together with the Montenegrin tribes, the Grbalj people, Paštrovići, Brđani, and Herzegovinian tribes around Grahovo and Nikšić rose against the Turks (Jovanović, 2001, 79).

During the reign of Bishop Petar I Petrović Njegoš (1784–1830), Montenegrin and Russian flags flew side by side. In 1806 and 1807, Montenegrin and Russian forces fought together against Napoleon's troops in Boka and against the combined Turkish-French army in Herzegovina (Pavićević, 2007, 339–387; Popović, 1951, 69–74). Bishop Petar I's dedication to Russia was most clearly demonstrated in his final words to his successor, Petar II, seeing him burdened by the immense responsibility of governing: "I cannot help you now, but let these be my last words: pray to God and hold on to Russia" (Petrović-Njegoš, 1995, 791).

Bishop Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1830–51) truly honored his uncle's counsel. During his reign, Montenegrin-Russian relations flourished even further, with Russian assistance aiding the organization and strengthening of Montenegro's governmental institutions. Tsar Nicholas I, in whose presence in Saint Petersburg the Montenegrin leader was ordained as a metropolitan in 1833, promised to staunchly advocate for Montenegrin interests as if it were one of Russia's provinces. In his charter, the Tsar urged Montenegrins to be obedient to their bishop, whom he referred to as his friend and brother, and provided Montenegro with substantial financial support (Popović, 1951, 144–145; Jovanović 2001, 164–165, 167, 169; Milić, 2016, 494).

Relations between Montenegro and Russia cooled during Prince Danilo's reign (1851–60) as he misunderstood Russia's weakened post-Crimean War position and resented its lack of support for Montenegro's international recognition at the 1856 Paris Congress, leading him to pivot toward France. However, by late 1857, relations between the two countries improved, and in 1858 they normalized. After the rise to power of Nikola I Petrović Njegoš (1860–1918), Russia and Montenegro reached a level of exceptional mutual friendship and cordiality (Jovanović, 2001, 209–218, 256–308, 315, 343–348, 366–370).

THE DRAFT AGREEMENT BETWEEN MONTENEGRO AND SERBIA AND THE OPENING OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS OF THE BALKAN STATES IN CETINJE

Since the Sanjak of Novi Pazar was outside Bulgaria's sphere of interest, Montenegro and Serbia had to agree on it. In this regard, Vuković said in the meeting with King Alexander that it was self-evident that it was necessary to divide the Sanjak, fraternally between two states, which would jointly defend it in the event of an attack, since they should not forget the German doctrine of *Drang nach Osten* (Vuković, 1996, 609).

As for the other areas that were the subject of mutual interest between Montenegro and Serbia, Vuković proposed to King Alexander that Skopje should belong to Serbia, and Prizren, Gjakova/Đakovica and Peja/Peć to Montenegro, while Cetinje and Belgrade would work together to achieve greater territorial gains in Macedonia. To this, King Alexander replied that Prizren had always belonged to Serbia's sphere of interest, which supports the seminary, the Serbian Metropolitanate, schools and other institutions there, and that therefore it is not easy

for Belgrade to give up this city. However, when the two sides would negotiate on this issue, each of them would present their arguments, after which a final agreement would be reached (Vuković, 1996, 609).

How the division of the Ottoman territories between Montenegro and Serbia should look like was also discussed during the return visit of King Alexander to Prince Nikola, in the beginning of May 1897.¹⁵ Then, in Cetinje, Prime Minister of Serbia Đorđe Simić and Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs Gavro Vuković, considering the possibility of reaching an agreement on an alliance between the two countries, signed the appropriate draft agreement. According to Article 4 of this project, which essentially represented the elaboration of the aforementioned proposal submitted by Vuković to King Alexander, it was foreseen that in the event of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the border between Serbia and Montenegro would be drawn in the middle of the Sanjak of Novi Pazar in such a way that Nova Varoš, Sjenica and Novi Pazar belonged to Serbia, and Pljevlja and Peja to Montenegro. A straight line would be drawn from the border of Sanjak to the south, so that Serbia would get Skopje, Tetovo and Ohrid, and Montenegro would get Gjakova, Prizren and Debar. To the south of Lake Ohrid, the border of Serbia would go eastward, encompassing Bitola, Vodena and Yenidze-Vardar, after which it would descend to the Aegean Sea below Thessaloniki, so that this city would belong to Serbia. The Montenegrin border line would lead from Lake Ohrid west to the Adriatic Sea in the direction of Valona.

However, this agreement between Belgrade and Cetinje did not come to fruition, since King Alexander remained of the opinion that Prizren could not be seen as a sphere of interest of Montenegro, but that this city, in the final division of the Balkan territories of the Ottoman Empire, should be part of Serbia (Vojvodić, 1970, 138; Ražnatović, 1968, 221).

The insistence of the Montenegrin prince on Prizren stemmed from the fact that Montenegro at the time saw itself as the successor to the former Serbian Empire, given that it was the first territory of the medieval Serbian Empire to liberate itself from Ottoman rule. Since the late seventeenth century, specifically since the founder of the Petrović dynasty, Bishop Danilo, came to power, Montenegro had existed as an independent state. Over the ensuing centuries, through continuous conflict with the Ottomans, it not only preserved its freedom but also achieved substantial territorial expansion. Due to its marked bravery, patriotism, and defiance, a cult of Montenegro as the “Serbian Sparta”¹⁶ took root among the Serbian people. It is therefore unsurprising that the prince believed he and the Petrović dynasty should

15 Prince Nikola visited King Alexander at the end of June 1896 (Ražnatović, 1968, 197–224; Vuković, 1996, 543–591).

16 This cult was primarily created by Serbian intellectuals from Austro-Hungary, led by Svetozar Miletić. Around the same time as the concept of the “Serbian Sparta” emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, the term “Serbian Athens” also appeared, referring to Novi Sad as the cultural center of the Serbian people (Vasin, 2023).

play a leading role in the unification of the Serbian people.¹⁷ The prince expressed this viewpoint, and his desire to rule the imperial capital Prizren, in the verses of his patriotic song *Onamo 'namo! (There, Over There!—“There, over there... to see Prizren! That is mine—I'll come home! My beloved heritage calls me there; I must one day go there armed”)* (Petrović-Njegoš, 1990, 40)

In order to implement the initiatives of the Russian government as easily as possible, i.e. to coordinate future joint actions of the Balkan states as simply as possible, Montenegro insisted that they have their own diplomatic representations in Cetinje (Vuković, 1996, 606, 608, 628; Vujović, 1971, 299–300). Thus, in January 1897, Bulgaria opened its representative office in the Montenegrin capital, and Serbia did the same in April of the same year (Glas Crnogorca, 11. 1. 1897, 1; 11. 4. 1897, 1). A year earlier, also at the insistence of Cetinje, Greece renewed the operation of its diplomatic mission in Montenegro,¹⁸ as it was planned for Athens to join the negotiations after Montenegro, Serbia, and Bulgaria reached an agreement on their spheres of interest and the division of the Ottoman Empire's European territories (Vuković, 1996, 605).

THE UGODBA

The concrete effects of the cooperation of the Balkan states were reflected in the secret agreement known as the *Ugodba* (Treaty). This agreement, which provided for the consensual action of Serbia and Bulgaria in Macedonia, was signed by the representatives of the two countries on March 3, 1897.¹⁹

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- 17 Prince Nikola's intention to ascend to the Serbian throne was bolstered by the intense hostility between the Serbian Karađorđević and Obrenović dynasties, which were constantly struggling for power. Additionally, his aspirations were especially favored by the fact that the last Obrenović rulers of Serbia, Kings Milan and Alexander, were discredited among Serbs due to various court scandals, their pro-Austrian orientation, and unstable conditions within the country. To pursue his ambitions, in 1902, Prince Nikola arranged the marriage of Prince Mirko to Natalija Konstantinović, a relative of the Obrenović family, establishing familial ties between the two dynasties and positioning his son as a potential heir to the Serbian crown. In this context, it was particularly significant that King Alexander had no descendants. However, with the election of Petar Karađorđević as King of Serbia following the bloody May Coup of 1903, which overthrew the Obrenović dynasty, it became clear to the Montenegrin ruler that his plans would be difficult to realize (Rakočević, 1981, 21; Ilinčić, 2012, 17; Tredvej, 2005, 19; Popović, 1995, 388; Vuković, 1996, 765, 767–768; Ražnatović, 1979, 682, 689; Antić, 2018, 41; Glas Crnogorca, 6. 7. 1896, 1; 28. 6. 1902, 1; 6. 7. 1902, 1–2).
- 18 Greece established relations with Montenegro at the beginning of January 1881, appointing Alexander Logotetis as its representative at the Montenegrin court. He left Montenegro in 1883, only to return to Cetinje three years later (Raspopović, 1996, 366–367).
- 19 Turbulences in the Ottoman Empire caused by the Greek uprising in Crete from February 1897, led Bulgaria to believe that the right time had come to raise the Macedonian issue in addition to the Cretan one. Thus, Sofia asked Belgrade to start a joint action to implement the idea of creating an autonomous Macedonia. When Serbia did not accept this, the Bulgarians proposed that the two countries at least raise the issue of implementing reforms in Macedonia. Belgrade replied that before that, it is necessary for Serbia and Bulgaria to agree on the distribution of spheres of interest in the territory. However, the Bulgarian side believed that it was not yet time to determine spheres of influence. Thus, since the two countries could not agree on specific solutions, they agreed that they will make decisions on the basis of mutual consent regarding all issues related to their interests in Macedonia (Jovanović, 1990, 336–338; Ćorović, 2009, 204–206; Guć, 1933, 206).

King Alexander sent the text of the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement, along with his handwritten letter, to Prince Nikola through his special envoy. After becoming acquainted with the contents of the agreement, the Montenegrin ruler decided to support the actions of Serbia and Bulgaria in Macedonia and to join the treaty (Vojvodić, 1970, 135–136).

Austria-Hungary saw any possibility of joint action by the Balkan states as a threat to the realization of its projections in relation to the Ottoman Empire. That is why Vienna did not want to allow the Cretan crisis, which culminated in the outbreak of the Greco-Turkish War on April 17, 1897, to be a pretext for the other Balkan countries to initiate military actions against the Ottomans. The Dual Monarchy's fear for its status in the Balkans was reinforced by the fact that at that time, in addition to Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria were also pro-Russian, which provided Saint Petersburg with political superiority in European Turkey (Vojvodić, 1999, 109).

In contrast to Austria-Hungary, whose foreign policy focused on the Balkans, Russia oriented itself towards the Far East from the beginning of the 1890s. In order to successfully carry out the Far Eastern expansion, it was also in Saint Petersburg's interest that the Balkan states did not launch offensive actions against the Ottoman Empire (Vojvodić, 1999, 109–110; Hitrova, 1993, 154). As noted, Russia made such a request to the Balkan countries in 1896, asking them to act in a coordinated manner, so that at the right time they would be able to inherit the positions of the Ottoman Empire on the Balkan Peninsula, and thus stop the Dual Monarchy in its march to Thessaloniki.

The strategy of Russian action in the Balkans was clearly contained in the instructions, which on March 20, 1897, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Muravyov, prepared for the newly appointed diplomatic representative of Russia in Bulgaria, Behmatyev.

The Russian diplomat was made aware that any consideration of Balkan issues should be based on the basic principle of Russian Balkan policy, which was aimed at preventing any complications in that part of Europe, which certainly implied the preservation of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Maintaining the authority of the Sultan, the instructions said, was "the best means of achieving the much-desired peace in the East" (AODMC-PR, XLV). Otherwise, if one carelessly embarked on the path of dismembering the Ottoman Empire, at a time when turmoil was evident in all its parts, it would only give impetus to the various pretensions of the Balkan states and peoples living within the Ottoman state, which would provoke and strengthen their mutual rivalry (AODMC-PR, XLV).

Wanting to inform Behmatyev as best as possible about the state of affairs in the Balkans, Muravyov thought it appropriate to present to the Russian envoy in Sofia the views of Saint Petersburg on the recently signed treaty between Bulgaria and Serbia. Interpreting this agreement, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the two sides agreed that the riots in northern Macedonia should serve as a basis for their intervention, but that any measures in this regard could only be taken with the prior agreement of Belgrade and Sofia. The agreement also envisaged respect for the

immutability of the territorial status of the Ottoman Empire, emphasizing that it must be protected from possible encroachments by Austria-Hungary. Likewise, Muravyov said that the annexation of Crete to Greece, in accordance with the *Ugodba*, cannot be the basis for making any demands to Constantinople by the signatory states, while the conflict between Greece and the Ottoman Empire cannot be a reason for the military intervention of Bulgaria and Serbia (AODMC-PR, XLV).

After introducing Behmatyev to the basic provisions of the *Ugodba*, Muravyov pointed out that this document protected the “inviolability of the sultan’s possessions” and implied that Balkan states should abstain from any adventurous policy, and that as such, in general, it is in complete agreement with the basic aspirations of Saint Petersburg in the Balkans (AODMC-PR, XLV).

However, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out that a closer reading of the *Ugodba* shed a different light on that document, which primarily referred to the part of the agreement that concerned Austria-Hungary. He noted the tendency of the contracting parties to take on a role that could hardly correspond to their position, since they were not called upon to protect the Ottoman Empire from anyone’s pretensions, but rather that this should be the responsibility of Europe. All this leads one to think, said Muravyov, that the basis of this agreement was not a sincere desire to preserve the integrity of the Empire, but an effort to arrive at the division of Macedonia through compromise and mutual assistance.²⁰

Commenting on the treaty, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs also said that the adoption of this agreement did not mean the end of the rivalry between Bulgaria and Serbia, but that its implementation could contribute to calming the local situation, because both countries had agreed to recognize each other’s freedom of religious and cultural propaganda in Macedonia (AODMC-PR, XLV).

Nevertheless, Muravyov continued that it was impossible not to notice in the agreement the aspirations of Bulgaria and Serbia to neutralize each other, “bearing in mind the alarming state of affairs in the East”, which represented a suitable ground for political adventurism, i.e. for the realization of the hidden

20 By looking at the content of the *Ugodba*, it can be noticed that Austria-Hungary is not mentioned in any of its articles, and therefore neither is the protection of the Ottoman Empire from its actions, which Muravyov talked about. However, it is quite possible that he had knowledge that the contracting parties had reached an agreement on that issue during the negotiations themselves, but that, probably out of consideration for Vienna, that part was not included in the text of the agreement. Other provisions of the *Ugodba* were also more freely interpreted by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and we will therefore state them in their original form: “1. All questions concerning the interests of the Serbian and Bulgarian people in the Ottoman Empire, both governments—Serbian and Bulgarian—will be discussed by agreement. 2. None of the mentioned governments will undertake unilaterally and without prior agreement with the other anything that could disrupt the current status quo in the East, therefore no political or military action. 3. Until the spheres of Serbian and Bulgarian interests in the countries of the Ottoman Empire are determined by mutual agreement, both governments undertake not only not to hinder each other, but to mutually support each other in national, church and school matters in those countries. 4. This agreement will be communicated to His Highness the Prince of Montenegro, and he will be invited to accede to it.” (Stojković, 1998, 216–217; Perazić & Raspopović, 1992, 317–318)

plans of these countries (AODMC-PR, XLV). In this respect, the actions of Bulgaria caused concern, said Muravyov, instructing Behmatyev to carefully take care that the relations between Sofia and Belgrade were always “within the limits of a peaceful and moderate policy”, which only corresponded to Russia’s interests (AODMC-PR, XLV).

This mistrust of Saint Petersburg towards Bulgaria’s intentions, which Nelidov once pointed out, is confirmed by Muravyov in his instructions. On that occasion, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, among other things, emphasized Bulgaria’s aspirations to actualize the issue of Macedonia’s autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, and therefore instructed Behmatyev to let Sofia know “that the current time is unfavorable to raising such issues” (AODMC-PR, XLV). As the most impressive proof of the insincerity of the Bulgarian government, Muravyov cited its “recent” proposal to the Sultan, which included the creation of a defense alliance between the two countries, but on the condition that Constantinople recognized the independence of the Principality of Bulgaria. In this regard, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs underlined that Sofia had to give up any thought of using the complex state of affairs in the East in order to realize its ambitious plans. Otherwise, it could not count on any support from Russia (AODMC-PR, XLV).

At the end of his instructions, Muravyov pointed out that Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro were in much greater danger from Vienna, which dreamt of expanding the Austro-Hungarian state in the Balkans, than from the Ottoman Empire, which had no intention of entering into conflicts with them. Therefore, these states had the obligation to protect themselves from Austria-Hungary in every way, avoiding giving it any reason to interfere in Balkan affairs, so as not to complicate the general course of the Eastern Question, and the possibility of it obtaining a favorable outcome for the Slavic countries would depend exclusively on the “powerful participation of Russia” (AODMC-PR, XLV).

AGREEMENT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AUSTRIA-HUNGARY FROM 1897

Suspicious of each other and not wanting the ongoing fluctuations in the Ottoman Empire to lead to greater complications in the Balkans, the Dual Monarchy and Russia were convinced of the need to reach an appropriate agreement. This was discussed at the end of April 1897, when the Austro-Hungarian ruler Franz Joseph, together with his Minister of Foreign Affairs Golukhovski, paid a return visit to the Russian Emperor Nicholas II Romanov.²¹

In the talks held at the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg, the two sides immediately reached an agreement that the Balkan states must not disturb the peace and status

21 The Russian emperor visited Vienna at the end of August 1896. During his stay in the Austro-Hungarian capital, the Ottoman Empire and how to preserve the existing situation in the East were also discussed, which established the basis for conducting future negotiations on this matter (Vojvodić, 1999, 111).

quo in the Balkans. As a result of their identical positions on this issue, the Austro-Hungarian and Russian foreign ministers Golukhovski and Muravyov congratulated the Serbian, Bulgarian and Montenegrin governments for their correct behavior during the Greco-Turkish War. It was, in fact, a form of warning to the Balkan states that they were expected to continue to adhere to a peaceful political course.

When it came to reaching an agreement on Balkan policies of the two powers, the Russian government proposed that the Austro-Hungarian side present its position in writing. However, as the official visit of Emperor Francis Joseph to the Russian ruler was coming to an end, the proposal of the Russian government was to be implemented upon the return of the Dual Monarchy's delegation to their country. Thus, the agreement between Saint Petersburg and Vienna was to be reached in the form of an exchange of notes.

The Austro-Hungarian government expressed its position in a note sent by Golukhovski to the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Saint Petersburg, Liechtenstein, on May 8. It stated, among other things, that the two countries would renounce any territorial claims on the Balkan Peninsula, while also demanding that other powers respect this principle. In the event that the status quo in the Balkans could not be maintained, Austria-Hungary would annex Bosnia and Herzegovina and part of the Sanjak of Novi Pazar. The rest of Ottoman European territories would be divided between the Balkan states, but in such a way as not to upset the balance between them. In doing so, an independent Albanian state would be formed between Janjina and Lake Skadar (Vojvodić, 1999, 112).

In the Russian government's response, contained in the note that Muravyov sent to Vienna on May 17, an agreement was expressed with the points of Golukhovski's note, which related to respect for peace and the status quo in the Balkans. As for the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, Russia pointed out that this would imply a change of the Berlin Treaty, which was not only a matter of the two great powers, but of Europe in general. Regarding the provisions related to the creation of Albania and the division of the Ottoman European possessions, the Russian government's position was that it was a question for the future and that it should not be resolved prematurely.

Thus, in the end, Austria-Hungary and Russia reached an agreement only on the need to preserve the existing situation in the Ottoman Empire (Vojvodić, 1999, 112–113).

Therefore, turbulent events in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1890s did not lead to border changes on the Balkan Peninsula. The small Balkan states, which were constantly waiting for favorable circumstances to continue the struggle for liberation from their age-old enemy, were not yet ready for such an action. Vienna also did not consider that the moment had come to act in order to realize its expansionist aspirations, and Russia, engaged in the Far East, firmly stood by its calls to preserve the status quo in the Balkans.

However, such a situation did not last long. In 1908, the Dual Monarchy annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, so its strategy of penetration towards Thessaloniki began to be implemented in practice. In response to the Austro-Hungarian act of annexation, Russia, wanting to prevent further expansion of the Dual Monarchy, began to work intensively on creating an alliance between the Balkan states. This process was concluded in October 1912, right before the beginning of the First Balkan War, in which the members of the alliance (Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece) in a euphoric rush forced the Ottoman Empire to withdraw from the Balkan Peninsula after so many centuries. Its European territories, with the exception of East Thrace and Albania, which became an independent state by the will of the Great Powers, were divided between the Balkan states, so that Austria-Hungary did not succeed in inheriting the positions of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, as was Russia's goal when it started the rapprochement action of the Balkan states in 1896.

IMPLEMENTACIJA RUSKE POBUDE: ČRNOGORSKA DIPLOMATSKA PRIZADEVANJA V BALKANSKIH DRŽAVAH LETA 1896

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POVZETEK

Namen tega članka je osvetliti vlogo Črne gore v implementaciji ruske pobude za spravo med balkanskimi državami, ki jo je leta 1896 za Sankt Peterburg sprožil ruski odposlanec Nelidov, preko Mitra Bakića, črnogorskega zastopnika v Osmanskem imperiju. Izsledki raziskave kažejo, da je poslanstvo Gavra Vukovića, ki ga je črnogorska vlada zadolžila za realizacijo ruske iniciative, dejansko stimulirala dinamiko procesa sprave med balkanskimi narodi. S tem namenom sta bili na Cetinju kmalu vzpostavljeni diplomatski misiji Srbije in Bolgarije. Podobno bi veljalo podpis tajnega sporazuma, Ugodbe, med Srbijo, Bolgarijo in Črno goro videti v luči črnogorske predanosti ruski pobudi, ki je bila v celoti uresničena tik pred začetkom prve balkanske vojne. To pobudo je vsekakor treba razumeti v kontekstu nasprotujočih si interesov Sankt Peterburga in Dunaja glede prihodnosti evropskega dela Turčije, konflikta, ki se je prav tako manifestiral med okrepljeno nestabilnostjo v Osmanskem imperiju sredi 90. let 19. stoletja. Pričakovanja, da bi turbulentni dogodki v Imperiju zaradi revolucionarnih teženj Armencev in Grkov na Kreti, kot tudi zaradi dejanj Makedonskega odbora, lahko vodili v podobna gibanja med drugimi neturškimi ljudstvi, je dvojno monarhijo leta 1896 spodbudilo, da pripravi načrt za napotitev avstro-ogrskih sil v Novopazarski sandžak. Da bi Avstro-Ogrski preprečila morebitno eskalacijo krize v sosednjem imperiju izkoristiti za njeno ozemeljsko širitev, je Rusija istega leta spodbudila začetek sprave med balkanskimi državami, da bi s koordinacijo njihovega delovanja Dunaju prekrižala načrte.

Ključne besede: Črna gora, balkanske države, Rusija, Avstro-Ogrska, Osmanski imperij, Gavro Vuković, Ugodba

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