The Balkans and Austria-Hungary 1908–1912[1]

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For Austria-Hungary, the Balkans was the last possible region where they could apply an active great power foreign policy. Furthermore, the Habsburg monarchy could also promote its economic, and more or less also its political and cultural, influence there, but at the beginning of the 20th century, it could do so only with great difficulties. This was due to South Slavic nationalism, which permeated the entire Balkan Peninsula and was also closely involved in the existential problems of the Habsburg monarchy. The organisation of political power within the relatively new Balkan states was based on a concept of a modern, dynamic and nationally homogenous state, and formed an opposition to the traditional approach to the state and power in the form of the Habsburg monarchy. As such, the integrity of Austria-Hungary was under threat from its immediate neighbours. Any rise of the Balkan states would be a danger for Austria-Hungary both in terms of the territorial aspirations of its neighbouring countries, and also in the form of national and irredentist aspirations within the state. Furthermore, the Habsburg monarchy's great power status was dependent on Austria-Hungary being able to maintain its position on the peninsula and being able to continue to engage in Balkan affairs. From this perspective, any rise of the Balkan states could be fateful for the monarchy's great power interests. As such, the paramount objective of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy was to limit any further strengthening of the Balkan states, which would necessarily weaken the monarchy's position and undermine its great power status.

This study's timeframe reflects the author's objective to cover the general development of events in the Balkans in relation to the approaching Balkan Wars (1912–1913) from the perspective of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy. As such, the author has logically defined the observed period to that between the Bosnian Crisis (1908–1909) and the outbreak of the First Balkan War (1912). Due to the importance of the subsequent Balkan Wars, it was also necessary to describe the causes of this later conflict and the forming of the Balkan bloc.

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THE BOSNIAN CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Austria-Hungary received its mandate to occupy the Ottoman Bosnia Vilayet and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar through the decision of the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina first arose through the division of the vilayet into two regions of occupational administration. The territory, however, continued to fall under the Sultan's sovereignty.[2] It was not until the Bosnian annexation crisis (1908–1909), which almost led Europe to the edge of war, that the status quo of 1878 was disturbed, definitively bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Habsburg monarchy.

The annexation was preceded by diplomatic preparation, which still today raises a number of questions, in particular in regard to the timing and method of its implementation. Apart from Germany, its ally, which had been told of the planned step just ten days in advance, nobody apart from Russia was to know in advance. Austria-Hungary was planning to impose a *fait accompli* on the world. In order to secure the annexation, Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal[3] met only with his Russian opposite number, Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky in Buchlovice Castle, South Moravia in mid-September, 1908. Here, an informal agreement was made with Izvolsky agreeing to the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in return for Austria-Hungary's support in amendments to statutes regarding the Straits.[4] Aehrenthal thus deftly took advantage of Russian diplomacy's well-known objective of acquiring the ability to move their Bosphorus and Dardanelles naval fleet to the Mediterranean Sea. While, however, Izvolsky considered this agreement as the basis for future negotiations of the Great Powers, Aehrenthal acted immediately and began annexation. Izvolsky heard about this in a somewhat unfortunate manner on 4 October 1908 from French newspapers on his journey to Paris,[5] where he had wanted to begin to sound out the other Powers. When it was demonstrated that neither France's nor Great Britain's agreement would be acquired, Izvolsky felt Aehrenthal had deceived him. The Russian Foreign Minister's defeat was further augmented by the fact that he did not have the consent of the government, nor of Emperor Nicholas II for his actions.[6] Izvolsky attempted to turn the situation around by holding a conference of the Great Powers. He tried to gain the Western Powers' agreement to this idea with reference to the protests of states concerned. Not only did the Ottoman Empire express its dissent, but Serbia too vehemently demanded compensation. The Western Powers eventually coalesced behind the Russian proposal and prepared a list of points for discussion at any eventual conference. Vienna, however, fiercely rejected the idea,

2 L. HLADKÝ, *Bosenská otázka v 19. a 20. století*, Brno 2005, pp. 72–75.

3 To Aehrenthal cf. A. SKŘIVAN, *Muž, který mohl zachránit monarchii? Alois hrabě Lexa von Aehrenthal (1854–1912)*, in: Historický obzor, Vol. 22, No. 9/10, 2011, pp. 207–217.

4 B. JELAVICH, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy 1814–1914*, Philadelphia, New York 1964, p. 265.

5 A. SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika: Rakousko-Uhersko a Německo v evropské politice v letech 1906–1914*, Praha 1996, p. 62.

6 F. R. BRIDGE, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary 1866–1914*, London, Boston 1972, p. 305.

and gave the impression that it considered the whole affair to be closed. Nevertheless, it became increasingly clear over time from the response of the Ottoman Empire that the High Porte was willing to settle the whole affair with a financial agreement.[7] With intensifying international pressure, Austria-Hungary also came to accept this option at the turn of 1908–1909. Mutual agreement was reached on 26 February 1909 when a protocol was signed. The Ottoman Empire agreed to financial compensation worth 2.5 million Turkish pounds (roughly 54 million Austrian crowns).[8] This agreement finally helped to end the lengthy international crisis. The Austro-Ottoman Protocol also took the wind from the sails of annexation opponents. They could no longer demand a conference in the interests of damaged players and demand compensation in their names, because the only damaged player was the Ottoman Empire, for whom the affair was now officially closed.[9] While Russia had begun to face up to diplomatic defeat and the Great Powers began to grasp the conclusiveness of the situation, Serbia decided not to acquiesce to the annexation. From the beginning of the crisis, it had been amongst the most ardent of opponents to the annexation, in no small part a result of the large Serbian minority in Bosnia. As such, Serbia demanded the annexation be annulled, or there be territorial compensation.[10] It was only once partial mobilisation of the monarchy was threatened that it realised that without Russian support, its demands could never be fulfilled. Furthermore, Germany had become involved in events, fully supporting its ally. On 22 March 1909, Germany submitted its request that the annexation be recognised to St Petersburg. Circumstances forced the Russians to respond conciliatorily. An isolated Serbia was forced to submit. Given an ultimatum by Austria-Hungary, Belgrade was forced to send Vienna a declaration on 31 March 1909 in which it recognised the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and promised to remain *"on good neighbourly terms with the monarchy"*.[11] Subsequently, all the other Great Powers recognised the annexation.

Despite the particularly serious international crisis, further exacerbated by the almost simultaneous declaration of Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman Empire, and Crete's declaration of union with Greece, it represented a clear diplomatic victory by Austria-Hungary. In the long-term, however, this diplomatic success would prove to be somewhat of a Pyrrhic victory.[12] Any kind of benevolence from Russia towards the Habsburg monarchy would be impossible in future, in spite of Aehrenthal's original conviction that it was necessary to maintain the best possible relations

7 R. KODET, *Rakousko-Uhersko a Osmanská říše před první světovou válkou*, Plzeň 2014, pp. 144–146.

8 K. VOCELKA, *Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, in: A. WANDRUSZKA — P. URBANITSCH (Eds.), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918: Die Habsburgermonarchie im System der internationalen Beziehungen*, Band VI, 2. Teilband, Wien 1993, pp. 269–270.

9 KODET, p. 145.

10 R. MÖHRING, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Österreich-Ungarn und dem Osmanischen Reich 1908–1912*, Ph.D. Thesis, Wien 1978, p. 50.

11 M. HLAVAČKA — M. PEČENKA, *Trojspolek: Německá, rakousko-uherská a italská zahraniční politika před první světovou válkou*, Praha 1999, p. 210.

12 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 120.

with Russia in the interests of the monarchy's international status remaining stable.[13] The Bosnian Crisis didn't just have serious consequences in Austria-Hungary's relation to Russia, however. The annexation permanently dogged its relations with its Balkan neighbours, and with Serbia in particular. Serbia's promise to live with the monarchy on good neighbourly terms was just *"a necessary empty gesture. Nationalist passion and desire for retribution could no longer be contained. The annexation simply energised the activities of nationalist and terrorist organisations* [...]. *Subsequent to 1909, anti-Austrian propaganda flooded the whole of the Balkan peninsula and the monarchy's southern territories"*.[14] As such, the Balkan Crisis had a fundamental impact on the Balkan nations' perception of the Habsburg monarchy.

AN EMPIRE IN DECAY, AND THE CAUSES OF THE BALKAN WARS

At the beginning of the 20th century, the European part of the Ottoman Empire was made up of Macedonia, Thrace and Albania. These regions, however, were the focus of permanent tensions in relation to the ethnic, denominational and national diversity of its citizens, and the inability of the central government to implement necessary reforms and achieve law and order. A nationalist campaign organised in neighbouring countries which succeeded in freeing them from the Ottoman yoke also played its part in the separatist tendencies and frequent revolts. These relatively young countries shared the objective of bringing Ottoman power to a definitive end in Europe, and capturing its remaining territory.[15] As well as the individual objectives of these Balkan states, which were more or less incorporated within the policies of the Great Powers, the Great Powers themselves defended their own interests on the peninsula. Understandably, the most interested in Balkan issues, besides Russia, was Austria-Hungary. As long as the policies of both powers did not conflict in Balkan issues, and as long as it was in the interests of both powers to maintain the status quo, peace was in no great danger. The Bosnian Crisis, however, clearly undermined the possibility of a long-term entente between both powers. Mutual mistrust was bound to project itself into the Balkans. Subsequently, the idea of initiating the creation of a Balkan bloc (including the Ottoman Empire) came to the fore of Russian diplomacy, a bloc which would work as a system of "collective security" against further Austro-Hungarian penetration into the Balkans.[16] Although Russian diplomacy's original intention was quite different, this initiative led to the settling of disputes between Balkan states and accelerated the formation of the future war alliance against the Ottoman Empire. The course of Russian foreign policy which prevailed after the Bosnian Crisis can be seen as one of the causes of the later Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.

13 A. SKŘIVAN, *Aehrenthal — das Profil eines österreichischen Staatsmanns und Diplomaten alter Schule*, in: Prague Papers on the History of International Relations, Vol. 11, 2007, p. 184.

14 HLAVAČKA — PEČENKA, p. 217.

15 M. PEČENKA, *Makedonské reformy: Evropský pokus o řešení krize*, in: S. BALÍK — V. DRŠKA — F. STELLNER (Eds.), *Pocta Aleši Skřivanovi: Sborník příspěvků jeho žáků k 50. narozeninám*, Praha 1994, p. 35.

16 M. GLENNY, *Balkán 1804–1999: Nacionalismus, válka a velmoci*, Praha 2003, p. 185.

The internal political situation within the Ottoman Empire can also be justifiably considered another cause of the conflicts. An opposition gradually took shape against the despotic rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II which was not just made up of national minorities in the European provinces and Armenia, but also of the Turks themselves. The atmosphere became unbearable, especially due to the Sultan's paranoia, which affected his absolutist style of rule.[17] General disaffection led in 1889 to the founding of the secret organisation, the *Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti)* in Istanbul. The objective of this organisation was nothing more than the overthrow of absolutism, the reinstatement of the constitution of 1876 and the establishment of a liberal constitutional regime. Under government pressure, however, most of the group's protagonists were forced to emigrate.[18] Paris became the most important centre of emigration, and here the group became known as the Young Turks. Opposition forces were also further strengthened by the formation of the *Ottoman Freedom Society* (*Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*) in 1906 in Salonica (Thessaloniki), which soon had a number of junior army officers on its side in Macedonia. A year later, the organisation joined the *Committee of Union and Progress*, which subsequently definitively formulated its objectives as unseating the Sultan *"by all means, including if necessary revolutionary force"*.[19]

The situation in Macedonia became a kind of catalyser for events, which had become markedly worse at the beginning of the century. In fear of unforeseen developments, the Great Powers had been forced to intervene in 1903. The powers' attempt at organising extensive reforms in Macedonia ended, however, in fiasco. Instead of the entrusted Inspectorate-General, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, trying to calm the situation in the province, he used his powers to crush local resistance. The seriousness of the situation continued to grow. An open uprising in the Bitola *vilayet*, known as the *Ilinden* unprising,[20] took place on 2 August 1903. A day later, this was followed in Thrace by the so-called *Preobrazhenie*[21] uprising in the Adrianople (Edirne) region. Both were bloodily repressed.[22] When Europe began to learn of the methods of Ottoman repression, executions and burning of villages, the Great Powers had to intervene. After mutual consultation between representatives of Austria-Hungary and Russia, the Mürsteg Agreement put pressure on the Sublime Porte to accept extensive reforms for the Macedonia region.[23] The Porte had no option but to submit to the pressure. It is no wonder, however, that after their previous experience the citizens were very sceptical towards the promise of reforms. Ultimately, even after approval of the reform programme, the situation in Macedonia did not improve.[24] There were still secret

17 KODET, pp. 117–118.

18 J. RYCHLÍK et al. *Mezi Vídní a Cařihradem: Utváření balkánských národů*, Vol. 1, Praha 2009, p. 308.

19 E. GOMBÁR, *Moderní dějiny islámských zemí*, Praha 1999, pp. 291–293.

20 According to St Ilindin (Elijah) day, which falls on 20 July according to the Orthodox calendar (2 August according to the Julian calendar).

21 The Feast of the Transfiguration (*Preobrazhenie*) falls on 19 August (6 August according to the Julian calendar), hence the reason for the name *Preobrazhenie*.

22 RYCHLÍK, pp. 305–307.

23 S. K. PAVLOWITCH, *A History of the Balkans 1804–1945*, London 1999, pp. 168–169.

24 RYCHLÍK, p. 307.

organisations operating in the territory using guerrilla tactics and terrorist methods to provoke further Great Power interventions. This was in order that they could gain autonomy, or their land could be joined to a different country.[25]

The situation in Macedonia escalated once again in spring 1908. This negative development led at the end of May to a meeting between British King, Edward VII, and Emperor Nicholas II of Russia in Tallinn (Reval), Estonia. Here, the sovereigns agreed upon a joint approach towards further amendments to the Macedonian situation. The Young Turk patriots, however, were alarmed by the Tallinn meeting, considering it a further encroachment into the sovereignty and overall integrity of the Ottoman Empire.[26] Another key factor which added fuel to the fire was the widespread rumour that Abdul Hamid's government was planning to act against the Young Turks and purge the army.[27] From the perspective of the Young Turks, it was clear that time played to the Sultan's regime's hands and against "the interests of the homeland". This overall configuration of internal political and foreign factors triggered revolution.

On 3 July 1908, the Resne garrison unit commanded by Ahmed Niyazi Bey, numbering 200 soldiers, defected, and beginning an armed revolt from the nearby mountains against the government. The rebels' declared demand was an immediate reinstatement of the constitution of 1876. The extent of the rebellion quickly grew. Another 700 men soon joined the rebels, mostly Albanians, as did Major Enver Bey's troops numbering 800 men.[28] The uprising gained wide support. Not only did the troops of the 2nd and 3rd armies deployed in Macedonia reject their allegiance to the Sultan, but so did units called up from Anatolia to quell the uprising. By the second half of June, the rebels' standing was so strong that the government justifiably feared they might advance to Istanbul. The circumstances finally forced the Sultan to climb down. In order to preserve at least some of his status, he anticipated developments and issued a decree on the reinstatement of the constitution and the calling of elections to parliament for the end of 1908.[29] He then declared a general amnesty and disbanded the secret police. Although the new constitutional establishment didn't remove Abdul Hamid from the throne, it significantly limited his powers.[30]

However, the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution threatened Austro-Hungarian interests in the Balkans. At elections, each of the Empire's provinces would send their representative to parliament, something which Bosnia and Herzegovina would also naturally do. This scenario was unacceptable for Austria-Hungary, because it directly threatened the monarchy's position in the occupied territory. If the occupying statute were to be withdrawn, then three decades of construction

25 GOMBÁR, pp. 293–294.

26 M. S. ANDERSON, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations*, London, Melbourne, Toronto, New York 1966, pp. 272–273.

27 M. S. HANİOĞLU, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, Oxford 2008, p. 149.

28 I. DESPOT, *The Balkan Wars in the Eyes of the Warring Parties: Perceptions and Interpretations*, Bloomington 2012, p. 21.

29 RYCHLÍK, p. 309.

30 GOMBÁR, p. 295.

and investment in the region would be lost forever.[31] It was this threat to the monarchy's position which forced Aehrenthal to accede to the acceleration of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, triggering the international crisis.

Not even revolution improved the situation in the Ottoman Empire in the long term, however. Mehmed Kamil Pasha's appointed cabinet of reformers did not meet the Young Turks' expectations, and was replaced in February 1909 by a government of Macedonian Inspectorate-General, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha. The Young Turks' objective of transforming the empire into a modern centralised state, however, did not find sympathy in the conservative circles of the Muslim clerics and certain officers. Furthermore, arrival of the new regime was also linked with tragic territorial losses during the international crisis, which didn't help it in gaining in popularity.[32] Last but not least, not even the sovereign was satisfied with his new position, as he *"considered instatement of the constitution as merely a temporary concession and was preparing for removing the Young Turks from power"*.[33] As a result of these circumstances, which aroused the dissatisfaction of the population, student demonstrations took place in Istanbul beginning in spring 1909. Over time, workers and small traders joined them, incited by radical religious leaders. A deciding factor was also the latent dissatisfaction of urban military garrisons.[34] A turnaround occurred in the night from 12 to 13 April 1909 when the capital's garrison soldiers joined the demonstrators. The crowd demanded the resignation of the government and the creation of a fundamentalist regime which would strictly maintain Islamic *sharia* law and respect the Sultan's authority.[35] Abdul Hamid was naturally willing to accede to the demands, and in order to re-establish the former situation, he named a new ad hoc loyal government headed by Grand Vizier Ahmed Tevfik Pasha. The hopes of the rebels and the new government, however, came to nothing. As soon as the news of what was happening in the capital arrived in Salonica, the centre of the Turks' movement, the commander of the Third Army, General Mahmud Sevket Pasha, ordered that units move to the outskirts of Istanbul.[36] Sevket's army secured the protection of the Young Turk members of parliament in San Stefano, where they issued a manifesto condemning the Sultan's acts.[37] On 24 April 1909, the army occupied the capital without encountering much resistance. In three days, Sultan Abdul Hamid II was deposed. He was replaced on the throne by his younger brother, Reshad, as Medmed V. Along with the Sultan, Ahmed Tevfik Pasha's ad hoc government was also disbanded, with Huseyin Hilmi Pasha returning to its head.[38] This unsuccessful attempt at a countercoup boosted the Young Turks' position. Although the situation gradually calmed, it wasn't long before

31 B. M. BUCHMANN, *Österreich und das Osmanische Reich: Eine bilaterale Geschichte*, Wien 1999, p. 248.

32 More in detail cf. A. PALMER, *Úpadek a pád Osmanské říše*, Praha 1996, pp. 215–218.

33 RYCHLÍK, p. 311.

34 KODET, p. 154.

35 PALMER, p. 218.

36 The operation was entrusted to Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938), later known as Atatürk (Father of the Turks).

37 GOMBÁR, p. 298.

38 PALMER, pp. 219–220.

a wider section of the population, especially the Empire's non-Turkish nations, felt let down by the Young Turk government.[39]

The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire left nobody in any doubt that it was merely a question of time before there would be open hostility in the Balkans. Instability and violence committed on co-religionists represented a huge challenge, and not just for the Balkan nations and their governments. For the time being, however, neighbouring states were not ready to strike a blow to finally divide up the "Turkish prey", not least due to the Great Powers' unwillingness to change the status quo. One of the triggers which fundamentally forced the Balkan states to act was the Italo-Turkish War at the end of September 1911. This war was preceded, however, by an escalation of the situation in Albania, where there had been a whole number of local uprisings since 1909. The cause of local resistance was disappointment in the Young Turk revolution, which resulted in a number of centralising measures and did not accommodate Albanian national demands.[40] Tensions in the region led in spring 1910 to open rebellion, which spread from Kosovo and northern Albania. In order to restore order, around 50,000 soldiers were sent to the region.[41] The use of brute force, however, had the opposite effect. It confirmed to the Albanians that it needed complete independence from the Ottoman Empire, and emboldened it to fight on. By April of the following year, an uprising broke out again. Once again, it was cruelly suppressed. Despite this, Albania's uprising was supported by Italy, who helped smuggle weapons to the rebels.[42] Not only did Rome wish to take advantage of the opportunity to boost its influence in the region in this way, but above all it wanted to help destabilise the Empire in the interests of its colonial ambitions. When the Italo-Turkish War finally broke out on 29 September 1911 over the North African provinces of Tripoli and Cyrenaica, Italy become the first power to begin open conflict with the Ottoman Empire since the Congress of Berlin in 1878. This declaration of war in essence *"had loosed the first stone in what for the next decade would turn into the avalanche which would overwhelm the Ottoman Empire"*.[43]

FORMATION OF THE BALKAN BLOC

The idea of creating a military alliance of Balkan states against the Ottoman Empire was not a new one. It had been around since the time of the Congress of Berlin, but it was only in the first decade of the 20th Century that it began to take clearer form,[44] due to the overall situation in the Ottoman Empire, which was unable to cope with its internal problems (especially the rise of national movements etc.) and reform its system of administration. Essentially, Istanbul's only measure, if consistently applied,

39 RYCHLÍK, pp. 311–312.
40 More in detail cf. ibidem, pp. 316–321.
41 PALMER, p. 222.
42 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 144.
43 R. J. B. BOSWORTH, *Italy and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, in: M. KENT (Ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of Ottoman Empire*, London, Boston, Sydney 1984, p. 60.
44 RYCHLÍK, p. 321.

against the growing chaos was the violent pacification of resistance in its provinces. But not only did these severe measures not deal with the situation, but they also undermined the legitimacy of the Ottoman government itself. The Balkan states were naturally aware of the difficulties of its neighbouring empire, but it took a number of years before events created the circumstances for agreement on a joint approach.

From a political and strategic perspective, an understanding between the two regional powers, Bulgaria and Serbia, was most important for the creation of a Balkan bloc. As such, a number of historians[45] see the beginnings of the creation of the bloc in 1904, when both states concluded a treaty of friendship, which was followed the following year by a tariff agreement. This agreement, however, brought a range of problems for Serbia. The Austro-Hungarian government considered it a breach of its trading interests, and responded with an embargo on Serbian exports, which became known as the "Pig War".[46] The policy of customs war, however, proved short-sighted in the long term for Vienna. Despite initial difficulties, in the end the Serbs managed to find other outlets for its goods. As a result of the embargo, Serbia thus rid itself of a one-sided economic dependence on the Habsburg monarchy.[47]

At that time, however, the potential of both agreements between Bulgaria and Serbia fell through. While Belgrade was dealing with the consequences of the economic embargo, Sofia was trying to achieve rapprochement with Austria-Hungary, which estranged both countries so much that until the Bosnian Crisis, the agreements were in essence worthless.[48] Furthermore, there was marked disagreement between the countries regarding the future configuration of Macedonia. Serbia demanded it be split up, counting on receiving the towns of Skopje and Kumanovo and adjacent regions. In contrast, Bulgaria originally demanded autonomy for the whole Macedonian territory, which Belgrade took as an attempt by Sofia to ensure future incorporation of the whole territory within Bulgaria.[49] Despite mutual disagreement, it should be stressed that it is true that the Serbo-Bulgarian treaties of 1904 and 1905 *"created an important precedence of co-operation between the Balkan states disregarding the great powers"*.[50]

A key advance in the process of creating a Balkan bloc was the Bosnian Crisis. The diplomatic defeat suffered by Russia forced it to reassess its previous Balkan policy. St Petersburg now undertook major efforts to make the Balkan states co-operate with it and create mutual agreements which would limit further Austro-Hungarian expansion. It seems evident, however, that Russia did not entirely appreciate the expansive nature of the Balkan states. The original objective of St Petersburg's diplomatic efforts

45 E.g. GLENNY, p. 184.

46 More in detail cf. B. VRANEŠEVIĆ, *Die aussenpolitischen Beziehungen zwischen Serbien und der Habsburgermonarchie*, in: WANDRUSZKA — URBANITSCH (Eds.), *Habsburgermonarchie*, pp. 366–369.

47 GLENNY, p. 184.

48 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 167; A. SKŘIVAN, *Die Entstehung des Balkanbundes und die internationale Stellung Österreich-Ungarns am Vorabend der Balkankriege*, in: Prague Papers on History of International Relations, Vol. 7, 2003, p. 123.

49 M. PAULOVÁ, *Balkánské války 1912–1913 a český lid*, Praha 1963, pp. 17–18.

50 GLENNY, p. 184.

was to create a union of a purely defensive nature. Because they were unprepared militarily, the Russians did not want to cause a military conflict, as this would risk intervention by Austria-Hungary and they would be unable to adequately respond. As such, the status quo was to be preserved in their relations with the Ottoman Empire.[51] The result of St Petersburg's initiative, however, was completely opposite to what they had originally planned.

It wasn't long before the results of Russia's new foreign policy were seen. The will for mutual agreement also undoubtedly accelerated the approaching conflict between Italy and the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of war at the end of September 1911. Last but not least, it contributed to acceleration of agreement and changes in the make-up of the Bulgarian government, which from the end of March of that year was headed by pro-Russian, Ivan Evstratiev Geshov, someone with whom the idea of Serbo-Bulgarian union had found a decisive advocate. By October, the adept Geshov had managed to overcome the reserved stance of sovereign, Ferdinand I towards the Serbs. The monarch agreed with an initial Serbo-Bulgarian alliance treaty proposal which came from the Bulgarian envoy in Rome, Dimitar Rizov (also an advocate of alliance with Serbia). Geshov acquired the Tsar's permission under quite bizarre circumstances. It occurred on Austro-Hungarian territory during their joint trip by train from Bohumín to Vienna. Under similar circumstances, this time on the train between Belgrade and Lepovo during the night of 11–12 October 1911, Geshov met with Serbian Foreign Minister, Milovan Milovanovich. A key advance was made during this journey. Both statesmen agreed on the division of the Ottoman Empire's remaining dominions in Europe. On the basis of these discussions, by the end of 1911 all points for mutual agreement were essentially agreed. The final shape of the treaty of alliance between both countries came into force on 13 March 1912.[52]

The treaty of alliance[53] bound both countries to assist each other in the event of aggression against one of the signatories. Further, joint action was to be taken if any of the Great Powers attempted, even temporarily, to occupy any part of the Ottoman Empire's remaining European territory. Thus, the treaty itself was clearly more defensive in nature. However, this was not the case for its secret appendix. This dealt directly with any attack on the Ottoman Empire, should unrest break out on its territory, as stated by one major Czech historian, *"which would threaten the state and national interests of both allies or one of them"*.[54] In such a case, military operations were to begin upon mutual agreement. If, however, one of the parties to the alliance decided to attack the Ottoman Empire of its own volition, the second party was to remain neutral. Only if another country was to stand with the Empire was the second party to come to aid its ally. This secret appendix also dealt with the division of captured territory. Following military occupation, a temporary Serbo-Bulgarian administration was to be set up, with the territory divided up within three months at the latest of the

51 PAULOVÁ, p. 16.

52 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 168.

53 Cf. M. BOGHITSCHEWITSH (Ed.), *Die auswärtige Politik Serbiens 1903–1914: Geheimakten aus serbischen archiven*, Bd. 1, Berlin 1928, pp. 206–213.

54 J. ŠUSTA, *Světová politika v letech 1871–1914: V soumraku světové srážky*, Vol. 6, Praha 1931, p. 132.

peace treaty being concluded. In this sense, Serbia recognised Bulgaria's rights to territory east of the Rhodope Mountains and downstream of the Struma river. In return, Bulgaria recognised Serbia's rights to territory north and west of the Šar Mountains. An autonomous region was to be created in the territory between the Šar Mountains, Lake Ohrid, the Rhodope Mountains and the Aegean Sea (essentially the territory of today's Macedonia). Should, however, the "interests" of Serbia and Bulgaria not permit such a solution, then this territory too was to be divided on the basis of arbitration by the Russian Emperor.[55] His decision was to determine whether the contentious regions were to fall to Serbia or Bulgaria. It was assumed that the Emperor's decision would take account of the overall results of the military operation, and especially Serbia's need for access the sea. This makes it clear that the idea of leaving Macedonia as an autonomous whole was *"dead in the water, as there was no doubt that the interests of Serbia and Bulgaria would not permit it to be realised"*.[56] The treaty also led to a military convention on co-operation between the General Staffs, signed in Varna on 11 May 1912. The convention also contained general figures of numbers of soldiers deployed by both parties to the alliance in various scenarios for possible conflict developments.[57] Nevertheless, the agreement did not specifically deal with the issue of the future division of Macedonia. This unsolved problem would later become the main reason for the schism in the alliance of Balkan states, which led to the Second Balkan War.

The wording of the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of alliance was kept strictly secret, especially the secret appendix. As such, 1912 was a period of high activity in the Balkans for the intelligence agencies of all the Great Powers. Preserving secrecy was a condition for springing a successful surprise on the Ottoman Empire. Despite the Great Powers' attempts, the allies succeeded in keeping the mutual agreement secret. The Ottoman Empire itself only found out about the secret appendix to the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty in September 1912.[58]

In parallel with the Serbo-Bulgarian discussions, there were also talks between Bulgaria and Greece. On 29 May 1912, a treaty was signed between the countries on a similar basis to the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty. The Greco-Bulgarian pact, however, did not contain any secret clauses on the division of captured territory, which also made the agreement potentially explosive. On the eve of war, on 5 October, a military convention was added to the Greco-Bulgarian treaty.[59]

In the end, Montenegro also added itself to the agreements signed between Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. Its previous hesitation was mainly a result of Serbo-Montenegrin antagonism. As such, during 1911 Cetinje had first attempted rapprochement with Italy, and subsequently with Austria-Hungary.[60] Only after the failure of these diplomatic attempts did it decide to join the Balkan bloc taking shape. It first attempted to achieve its objectives through bilateral discussions with Bulgaria.

55 The secret appendix of the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of alliance, March 13, 1912, BOGHITSCHEWITSH (Ed.), pp. 208–211; cf. RYCHLÍK, p. 322.

56 RYCHLÍK, p. 322.

57 DESPOT, p. 41.

58 PAULOVÁ, pp. 19–20.

59 DESPOT, p. 44.

60 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 169.

The first such discussions took place by coincidence during a visit of both monarchs, Montenegrin King Nicholas I, and Bulgarian Tsar, Ferdinand I, to Vienna. As such, the future alliance began to take shape right in the guest rooms of the Emperor's palace in Hofburg, without the Austrians having the least idea of what was happening.[61] This fact can rightly be *"considered a complete failure of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy and intelligence"*.[62] Following further meetings, the Bulgarian government ratified the Montenegrin proposed treaty of alliance on 26 August 1912.

The final step in the formation of the Balkan bloc was the overcoming of mutual distrust between Montenegro and Serbia. Mutual discussions between representatives of both countries in Lucerne, Switzerland, finally led to signature of a treaty of alliance on 6 October 1912.[63] As such, this final treaty in the Balkan bloc was agreed just two days before the outbreak of conflict. In general, however, the basis for the alliance was not solid and contained many unresolved issues. For this reason, *"any victory over the Ottoman Empire would necessary result in conflict between the Balkan states"*.[64]

Only Romania did not join the Balkan bloc. Besides the marked ambitions of Serbia and Bulgaria, it was aware of its scant chances of achieving real territorial gain. The Balkan allies justly feared that Romania's omission could result in it acting against them. On the recommendations of the Great Powers, however, Bucharest decided to remain neutral for the time being.[65] In terms of the overall nature of the system of alliance, we can concur with the idea that the Balkan bloc was a *"flawed and flimsy diplomatic instrument, accomplished in haste and based uponself-interest"*.[66] Nevertheless, this "tool" proved fatal for the Ottoman Empire.

AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN POLICY ON THE EVE OF WAR

Despite clear signs of an approaching conflict in the Balkans, the Great Powers did not at first express any great alarm.[67] Besides, apart from Russia, only very few knew any relevant information. Austro-Hungarian leaders had only a very hazy idea of the true objectives of the Balkan states and the contents of their agreements. Representatives of the monarchy were only informed of the existence of the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty by their German ally in late May 1912. Nevertheless, Vienna remained unaware of the contents of the secret appendix and its hostile nature.[68]

With the ongoing conflict in Libya and repeated increases in tensions in Albania, which in a relatively short time once again grew into an armed uprising,[69] the threat

61 E. C. HELMREICH, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912–1913*, Cambridge 1938, pp. 85–86.
62 KODET, p. 185.
63 HELMREICH, p. 88.
64 GLENNY, p. 186.
65 RYCHLÍK, p. 323.
66 R. C. HALL, *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War*, New York 2000, p. 13.
67 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 169.
68 Ibidem, p. 170.
69 More in detail cf. GLENNY, p. 187.

of an uncontrollable conflict in the Balkans breaking out became ever more real. The insecurity of this sudden situation led Vienna to respond to the negative situation by attempting to initiate another intervention by the Great Powers in the Eastern question. They did this with a diplomatic note from the Habsburg monarchy's foreign minister, Count Leopold Berchtold, sent to the powers on 13 August 1912.[70] Any mutual pressure from the Great Powers on Istanbul was meant to calm the situation in Albania, and potentially to force the Balkan states to preserve peace. Although Vienna's effort was politely acknowledged by the other powers, it achieved no specific results. The Austro-Hungarian initiative thus only irritated representatives of allied Germany that Vienna did not first consult its measures with Berlin.[71]

Vienna's diplomatic efforts make it clear that Austro-Hungarian representatives were well aware of the danger which threatened not just the territorial status quo in the Balkans, but also threatened the interests of the monarchy. Austria-Hungary's options for facing the danger on the peninsula were dealt with by a meeting of the Ministerial Council in Vienna on 14 September 1912 chaired by Berchtold. The Foreign Minister began by informing those present of the existence of an agreement between Bulgaria and Serbia which bound the signatories to eventual military collaboration. He presented the genesis of the agreement in relation to Russia's attempts at creating a union of Balkan states, which had been clear since the Bosnian Crisis. Berchtold also stated that the current state of the Ottoman Empire meant there was a real danger the Balkan states would act against it. He proposed two options for the monarchy to deal with any such occurrence. The first, less risky, option would be limited to a call to remain calm, and should a war outbreak to contain it at a local level. The second, bolder, option would be to consider pressure on the monarchy in Belgrade in the sense that should Serbian forces cross the border with the Ottoman Empire, Vienna would *"reserve the right to act as they see fit"*.[72] This proposal, however, did not meet with the consent of those present, who feared that such an intervention might lead to the monarchy being pulled into the conflict in the Balkans, and consequently into conflict with Russia.[73]

The Ministerial Council meeting thus induced Austro-Hungarian political and military circles to further hold discussions regarding their approach. Although military leaders were in favour of a more active approach by the monarchy, political representatives were more in favour of a conciliatory response. A poor decision could have fatal consequences at a Europe-wide level.[74] Events, however, would soon take on a course of their own.

70 Berchtold's telegram to St Petersburg, Berlin, London, Paris, Rome, Istanbul, and Bucharest, August 13, 1912, L. BITTNER — H. UEBERSBERGER — F. PRIBRAM et al. (Eds.), *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914: Diplomatische Aktenstücke des österreichisch-ungarischen Ministeriums des Äussern* (hereafter ÖUA), Vol. IV, Wien, Leipzig 1930, pp. 339–340.

71 More in detail cf. SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, pp. 170–171.

72 Protocol of the meeting of the common ministerial conference, September 14, 1912, ÖUA, Vol. IV, p. 429.

73 Ibidem, pp. 428–429; cf. KODET, pp. 183–184.

74 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 172.

OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST BALKAN WAR

As has already been mentioned, the situation in Albania during 1912 began once again to spiral out of control. Concurrently with the unsatisfactory status of the Albanian population, there was also a threat from neighbouring Balkan states. If their plans for expansion were to bear fruit, this would mean the definitive end of Albanian territorial entitlements and the end of prospective Albanian independence, with it falling victim to the territorial ambitions of neighbouring states as a dominion of the Ottoman Empire. Yet the Albanians formed the majority population in the vilayets of Kosovo, Ioannina and Scutari, which the Balkan allies claimed entitlement to.[75] These extremely unfavourable prospects incited the Albanians to another armed uprising, which culminated on 11 to 15 August 1912 when roughly 20,000 Albanian rebels took possession of Skopje without a fight, and decided to continue their campaign on to Salonica.[76]

Exhausted by war with Italy and disabled by Albanian uprisings, the situation in the Ottoman Empire provided the Balkans states with a unique opportunity for a final settlement. Furthermore, the Albanian uprisings themselves essentially met the conditions of the secret appendix to the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of alliance, which spoke of joint intervention should disturbances break out which threatened the allies' interests. The first step in the course of events which ended in the outbreak of the First Balkan War was surprisingly made by the Ottoman Empire. Its government decided to respond to the general threat by sending 100,000 reservists to Thrace. The response of the Balkan allies was to declare mobilisation on 30 September and 1 October 1912.[77]

Together with declaring mobilisation, representatives of the Balkan bloc gave the Porte an ultimatum demanding the immediate granting of autonomy for Christian areas on the peninsula. Istanbul, however, had to reject the ultimatum's demands because they affected the very sovereignty of the state, and furthermore they could not be implemented in time. The Balkan allies, however, had assumed they would be rejected. They had already firmly decided for war, as the mobilisation which took place proved.[78] The passion of the population and their enthusiasm for war could not be ignored either. War was inevitable. Nevertheless, the Ottoman government tried to force the Great Powers to undertake a joint intervention in the capitals of the Balkan bloc. In parallel, representatives of the Ottoman Empire probed whether Austria-Hungary could make a declaration about Serbia. Vienna wasn't prepared to risk such a measure, however, and waited for the declarations of the other powers.[79] At the last minute, Russian diplomacy also began to make efforts to preserve peace, since St Petersburg had begun to lose grip on the situation. Since mid-1912, Russia had failed to dissuade the Bulgarians from declaring war prematurely. There were fears in St Petersburg that a successful Bulgarian campaign might lead to the capture

75 GLENNY, p. 187.
76 RYCHLÍK, p. 321.
77 HELMREICH, p. 115.
78 RYCHLÍK, p. 323.
79 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 172.

of Istanbul, which could threaten Russian plans regarding the Straits.[80] For this reason, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Dimitrievich Sazonov, journeyed to Western Europe to try to gain the Great Powers' support for a joint intervention to preserve peace. In the end, Sazonov succeeded in getting the Great Powers to entrust Austria-Hungary and Russia to compose a joint diplomatic note for the leaders of the Balkan states. The final version of the note was sent to representatives of the Balkan bloc on 8 October 1912. It called for peace to be maintained with the promise that the Great Powers would ensure reforms were undertaken and improvements would be seen in the situation for the populations in the Ottoman Empire's European dominions. At the same time, it declared that changes to the territorial status quo in the Balkans would not be permitted, even in case of war.[81] Not even the Great Powers' joint action, however, brought the peace so coveted. On the same day the note was sent to the allies, Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Since the other Balkan states entered the war on 18 October, there is a question as to why Montenegro decided to act in advance. This fact is often explained as the Montenegrin ruler, Nicholas I, wishing to attain personal wealth on the basis of market speculation. There is insufficient evidence, however, for this explanation.[82]

At the start of the conflict, nobody could have had any idea what direction war events would take. As such, the Great Powers kept to a policy of neutrality, with hope remaining that the status quo would be maintained in the Balkans should the Ottoman Empire win. Nevertheless, the dramatic course of events that followed destroyed all chances of the current order being maintained on the peninsula. In terms of the overall strength of both sides of the war, however, to begin with there was no great difference. But the strength of the Balkan bloc wasn't in terms of its greater numbers, but rather in its resolve. As has been mentioned, the population of the Balkan states were very enthusiastic about the mobilisation. This fact gives the impression that in the eyes of the Balkan nations, the upcoming conflict was almost a kind of "holy war", whose objective was to *"finally achieve national liberation"*.[83] As such, the Balkan bloc's soldiers were marked out by a much greater resolution to fight, which necessarily had to express itself during the course of the conflict.

Austria-Hungary was diplomatically unprepared for the outbreak of the First Balkan War. The Great Powers' attempts at preserving peace failed and representatives of the Habsburg monarchy at first were not entirely sure how to tackle the conflict. It was only when war began that Vienna, whose objectives remained a great mystery for other countries, took an active policy. Nobody knew what Austria-Hungary was going to do. Representatives of the monarchy, however, were dealing with the same dilemma. They had to choose between a policy of non-intervention which it had followed since the Bosnian Crisis, and a policy of direct intervention and expansion.[84] Another key question asked internationally was what changes in the Balkans

80 R. P. BOBROFF, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits*, London, New York 2006, pp. 43–44.

81 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 173.

82 Ibidem, p. 174.

83 RYCHLÍK, p. 324.

84 HELMREICH, p. 165.

the Habsburg monarchy would be prepared to tolerate, and what changes it would not tolerate,[85] with a new territorial alignment in the Balkans able to significantly strengthen potential enemies to Austria-Hungary.[86] In the end, however, the monarchy chose a policy of non-intervention, which de facto left the course of further events in the hands of fate. As a result of this, it found it difficult to promote its key interests at peace conferences, and face up to the unfavourable configuration which arose following the Balkan Wars.

ABSTRACT
The position of Austria–Hungary on the Balkans changed considerably due to the Bosnian crisis in 1908/1909. The effort of the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal to establish cooperation with Russia on the basis of the previous entente was ruined due to this event. The annexation also completely destroyed Vienna's prestige in Belgrade and made the Serbs a mortal enemy of the monarchy. Austria-Hungary therefore had to change its policy on the Balkans. Its main effort was the preservation of the status quo on the peninsula. One of its prerequisites was the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Austria-Hungary therefore tried to cautiously cooperate with the Porte and to force it to conduct reforms. This effort was however unsuccessful. In the meantime Vienna was not able to hinder the creation of an alliance of the Balkan states, which threatened to destroy the status quo. When these countries began their long prepared war against the Ottomans the interests of the Habsburg Monarchy on the Balkans were in mortal peril.

KEYWORDS
Austria-Hungary; Balkans; Russia; Serbia; Diplomacy; International Relations

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85 SKŘIVAN, *Císařská politika*, p. 176.
86 KODET, p. 192.