

Research Article

Fathoming the warm waters: The Russian Mediterranean adventure in the age of the Napoleonic wars, 1798–1807

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Abstract: The French advances in Europe during the age of the Napoleonic wars, as well as Napoleon Bonaparte’s Egyptian expedition, paved the way for a previously unthinkable alliance between the Russian and Ottoman empires. Both militarily and ideologically, France had become a threat to both monarchies, so in late 1798, for different reasons, the interests of both monarchies coincided. As a result of the defensive alliance between St. Petersburg and the Sublime Porte, the Russian fleet was granted passage through the Black Sea Straits, and the joint Russian-Ottoman naval fleet launched a military expedition against the French in the Mediterranean. The Ottoman-Russian forces subsequently ousted the French from the Ionian Archipelago off the west coast of continental Greece, and Russia gained de facto control over the Ionian Islands and established a naval base in the Adriatic Sea, where it stayed until 1807. The present article draws from a variety of published and unpublished primary sources to analyse and briefly outline the circumstances behind the creation of the Septinsular Republic on the Ionian Islands and the short-lived Russian residency in the Central Mediterranean during the discussed period.

Keywords: Mediterranean, Septinsular Republic, Russia, Ottoman-Russian relations, Napoleonic wars

Sıcak denizlerin derinliklerini ölçmek: Napolyon savaşları çağında Rusya'nın Akdeniz macerası, 1798-1807

Öz: Napolyon savaşları çağında Fransızların Avrupa'daki ilerlemeleri ve Napolyon Bonapart'ın Mısır seferi, o ana kadar Rus ve Osmanlı imparatorlukları arasında düşünülemez ittifakın yolunu açtı. Hem askeri hem de ideolojik olarak, Fransa her iki monarşi için de bir tehdit haline geldi. Bu nedenle 1798'in sonlarında farklı nedenlerle her iki monarşinin çıkarları ortak bir noktada birleşti. St. Petersburg ile Bab-ı Ali arasında yapılan savunma ittifakı sonucunda, Rus donanmasına Karadeniz Boğazlarından geçme fırsatı verilmiş ve Rus-Osmanlı filosu, Akdeniz'de Fransızlara karşı bir askeri sefer başlatmıştır. Osmanlı-Rus kuvvetleri, Fransızları, Yunanistan karasının batısında yer alan İyon Takımadaları'ndan çıkardı. Rusya fiilen İyon Adaları üzerinde kontrol kurmayı başarmış ve 1807 yılına kadar kaldığı Adriyatik Denizi'nde bir deniz üssü kurmuştur. Yayınlanmış ve yayınlanmamış çeşitli birincil kaynaklara dayanan bu makalenin amacı, tartışılan dönemde İyon Adaları'nda Yedi Ada Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluş koşullarını ve Orta Akdeniz'de kısa ömürlü Rus varlığını analiz etmek ve kısaca özetlemektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Akdeniz, Yedi Ada Cumhuriyeti, Rusya, Osmanlı-Rus münasebetleri, Napolyon Savaşları

Introduction: The background of the Ottoman-Russian alliance

The landing of Bonaparte's expeditionary force in Egypt in 1798, as well as the French occupation of the Apennine Peninsula, and especially the Ionian archipelago (under the Treaty of Campo Formio, 1797), gave rise to serious concerns not only in Constantinople, but also in many European courts. The highly strategic importance of the Ionian islands off the western coast of continental Greece was underlined in the famous and often-quoted words of General Bonaparte, who in the summer of 1797 wrote to the Directory from his headquarters in Milan that the islands of Corfu, Zante and Cefalonia were of more interest to France than even the whole of Italy, and the possession of the Ionian Islands would enable France either to support the existence of the Ottoman Empire or to take its share as it fell apart (Bonaparte 1859, 235). Having taken control of the islands, France was able to establish a convenient base for its

naval forces and gain a strategic foothold for a possible attack against the Balkan possessions of the Ottomans.

At this point Russia opted to support the preservation of the integrity of the possessions of the Sultan by trying to contain the growing threat posed by the French republican armies to the rest of Europe, favouring an idea of having a “weak neighbour” on its southern borders. The Russian authorities seriously contemplated the outcome of the disintegration of the Ottoman state, though in view of the shift of the balance of power in Europe, it tried in earnest to prevent it. The creation of the Ottoman-Russian military alliance (signed on 3 January, 1799) was an extraordinary event that was very much a surprise even for its participants. It is safe to say that without the French aggression in Egypt, the alliance between the Porte and St. Petersburg most probably would have never occurred.

General Bonaparte was not the sole father of the Ottoman-Russian alliance, however, as very important in this respect was also the death of Catherine II – a quite odious person for the Ottomans – and the ascension to the throne of the new Russian Emperor Paul I. This change in the monarchy in Russia paved the way for further rapprochement between the two states, and eventually created the necessary preconditions for practical cooperation. Should the relations between the Ottoman and Russian Empires remain as they had been under Catherine II, such alliance would have been all but impossible.

The Ottoman-Russian alliance had all but been established by late 1798, giving the Russian side right of passage for its naval vessels through the Black Sea Straits, and a joint Ottoman-Russian naval expedition was duly despatched to the western coast of continental Greece. The combined fleet was charged with attacking the French positions on the Ionian Archipelago and taking control of the islands, and after achieving its goal, the Ionian Islands would for several years serve as a naval base for the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean.

The Ionian campaign of the Ottoman-Russian forces

The very important strategic location of the Ionian Islands, as the coastal edge of the Ottoman Balkan possessions, cemented the decision to send a joint fleet of Russian and Ottoman ships, under the general command of Fyodor Ushakov, to oust the French from their positions. The Ionian campaign was launched in October 1798 (even before the official alliance treaty was signed), and by mid-November 1798, the allied Ottoman-Russian forces, led by Ushakov, had captured six of the seven islands, with only Corfu, the biggest and the most important of the Ionian Islands, remaining in French hands. Considering that the smaller islands had been defended by only modest French garrisons, it was not

that difficult for the large Russo-Ottoman fleet to quickly take over almost all of the archipelago. The military operations at this time, while not extensive, could be considered symbolic, being the first time in history Ottoman and Russian soldiers had fought shoulder to shoulder against a common enemy.

The taking of the island of Corfu was the final and hardest part of the Ionian campaign. Corfu was well fortified and defended by a strong French garrison, and so could not be captured in one blow. By the end of 1798 the allied squadron of Ushakov had laid siege to Corfu, and was waiting for an opportune moment to launch their assault. The Ionian Islands were eventually cleared of French on 3 March, 1799, the date of capture of the fortress of Corfu (Miliutin 1857, Vol.1, 112). The joint Russo-Ottoman forces thus took possession of the last and largest island of the Ionian Archipelago, and the flags of the Russian and the Ottoman Empires were raised over the Corfu fortress.

Elaboration of the future political status of the Ionian Islands

Upon the successful completion of the Ionian campaign, Admiral Ushakov remained on Corfu with the bulk of his joint Russo-Ottoman forces from March until July 1799. After fulfilling the military objectives, the Russian Admiral was also tasked with taking care of a large number of organisational issues that involved not only meeting the needs of his own squadron, but also nothing less than the establishment of a provisional Ionian government, and defining the principles of the future political existence of the islands. While the Russian and Ottoman governments continued to debate the fate of the Ionian archipelago, Ushakov found himself in the position of having to make practical decisions on the spot.

To ensure the maintenance of civil peace and stability, one Ushakov's first actions after capturing Corfu was to proclaim a general amnesty. On 4 March, 1799 the joint proclamation of Ushakov and Kadir Bey, issued both in Italian and Greek, guaranteed all the inhabitants of the islands a full pardon for any collaboration with the French, and respect for their religion and their private property (Stanislavskaia 1983, 132). Upon the orders of the Russian commander, a constituent assembly comprising 15 members, termed the Senate, convened on Corfu in May and drafted what was known as the "Ushakov Constitution". The final version of the Constitution, which was approved on 27 May, 1799, was distinctive in its giving of suffrage to both the nobility and commoners (who met the income qualification requirements) (Stanislavskaia 1983, 139–140). It was necessary to wait, however, to see what kind of decision regarding the future of the Ionian Islands would be taken by the Russian and Ottoman governments.

Ushakov left Corfu with his squadron on 4 August 1799, sailing to Messina to continue the campaign in Italy.

Before concluding the Ionian campaign of the Russo-Ottoman naval forces the allied governments had to decide upon the future political status of the islands, for which negotiations began as early as October 1798 when the Sublime Porte proposed three alternative solutions. These were: 1) to transfer the islands to a secondary state (which could mean only the Kingdom of Naples), 2) to establish an aristocratic republic (like that of Ragusa, bound by nominal vassalage to the Ottoman Sultan, but having independent self-administration and enjoying the right to devise its own foreign policy), or 3) to organise the administration of the isles on the model of the Danube principalities dependent on the Ottoman Empire (McKnight 1962, 151-152; Stanislavskaja 1976, 68). As regards to the abovementioned solutions, the preferences of the Sultan and the Tsarist government were rather different.

Whereas St. Petersburg spoke in favour of the establishment of an aristocratic republic on the islands, on the shores of the Bosphorus it was considered preferable to give the Ionian islands status similar to that of Moldavia and Wallachia, i.e. in a vassal tributary relationship with the Porte, with the right of the latter to appoint the rulers of these dependent territories at its discretion. In accordance with the long-established tradition, the hospodars of the Danube principalities were chosen from among a small group of rich Greek families in the Ottoman capital with close associations with the Sultan's court – the so-called Phanariotes (from the name of a district on the European side of Constantinople). In practice, as evidenced in the Danube principalities, such appointments were a serious source of corruption, ensuring the enrichment of the Ottoman ruling elite through bribes from those vying for the position of hospodar. Sure enough, as stated by Russian ambassador V. S. Tomara, the Russian ambassador at the Porte, (*Arkhiv kniazia Vorontsova 1870-1895, Vol. 20, 249-250*), the idea of turning the Ionian Islands into yet another milch cow for the Ottoman treasury and certain high-ranking officials appeared to be the most inviting option for the Porte and its zealous supporters among the Greek elite of Constantinople.

It further became clear during the negotiations that the Sultan's government wanted to add the island of Santa Maura (Lefkada) to the Ottoman borders based on its proximity to the mainland, arguing that it should be considered firm land rather than an island, and so should be excluded from the Ionian archipelago. The Ottomans also contested that the islands of Cerigo (Kythira) and Cerigotto (Antikythira) should not be counted among the Ionian Islands, being too remote from the rest of the archipelago.

Regarding these issues, Ambassador Tomara had to engage in special discussions in Constantinople to secure the incorporation of the mentioned islands into the future Ionian state (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI), V. S. Tomara to F. F. Ushakov, 23 / 12 June 1799. Fond 89. Russia's Relations with Turkey. Op. 89/8. Delo 892, L. L. 63-63 ob.). For some Ottoman government officials, the unwillingness of Russia to accept the establishment of a principality on the Ionian Islands that would be dependent on the Porte, based on the status of Moldavia and Wallachia, was a source of growing discontent. The muted grumbling in Constantinople concerned the large sums of money spent on the upkeep of the Russian naval squadron in the Mediterranean and the participation of the Ottoman navy in the military operations in Italy, from which the Porte stood to gain no tangible advantages (AVPRI. Zapiska Konstantinopol'skikh vestey i razglasheniy. Fond 89. Relations of Russia with Turkey. Op. 89/8. Delo 891, L. 63). Around one year after the joint Russo-Ottoman naval expedition took place within the framework of the Second anti-French coalition, the Septinsular Republic was created on the seven islands of the Ionian archipelago.

Russian foothold in the Mediterranean

The course of the negotiations and the growing tension¹ can be understood from the fact that the final Russo-Ottoman Convention establishing the status of the Ionian Republic could be signed only on 2 April (21 March) 1800. The Convention of 2 April (21 March)² 1800, concluded between Russia and the Porte, stipulated the establishment on the islands of an autonomous republic under the protection of the Russian and Ottoman empires. As agreed by both sides, the Ionian Islands were to be placed under the formal suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan whereas the position of the principal guarantor of the rights and territorial integrity of the newly founded republic was delegated to the Russian Tsar (PSZRI 1830, 88-92). In this way, the Ionian Republic, which emerged in the maelstrom of the European coalition wars of the late 18th- early 19th centuries, set the first precedent of the creation of the national Greek state in modern times.

¹ The twists and turns of the negotiations, as well as the internal affairs on the Ionian Islands at this time, are detailed in the MA and PhD dissertations of J. L. McKnight: James Lawrence McKnight, *Russia and the Ionian Islands, 1798-1807*. (MA Thesis). The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1962; James Lawrence McKnight, *Admiral Ushakov and the Ionian Republic; The Genesis of Russia's First Balkan Satellite*. (PhD Dissert.). The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1965), and in the abovementioned works of A. M. Stanislavskaja.

² The date corresponding to the Gregorian calendar has been listed first, the following date (in brackets) relates to the Julian calendar, or, for the French documents, the French Republican calendar.

It was the will of the Russian side that eventually prevailed, with St. Petersburg advocating autonomy for the Ionian Islands under Ottoman suzerainty and Russian guarantorship. The nominal dependence on the Sultan netted the court in Constantinople only a fixed sum of 75,000 piastres every three years (Article 4 of Convention: PSZRI 1830, Vol. XXVI, 90). The Ionian vassals, on the other hand, gained the right to fly their own flag (Article 6 of Convention: PSZRI 1830, Vol. XXVI, 90), and the Republic could open its own consulates in the Ottoman Empire (Article 3 of Convention: PSZRI 1830, Vol. XXVI, 90). The Ionian coastal mainland, the so-called Venetian Albania, on the other hand, passed under the direct rule of the Porte with the guarantee of all the rights of the local Christian population of mixed Slavic-Greek origin (Article 8 and 9 of Convention: PSZRI 1830, Vol. XXVI, 91).

Alongside the negotiations over the political future of the Ionian Islands that lasted for more than a year, the Russians and the Ottomans would also agree on the issue of garrisoning the fortress of Corfu. As the allied Russo-Ottoman squadron of Ushakov took control of each of the islands, one by one, during the Ionian campaign, the Russian commander would leave a mixed garrison of an equal, even if very small, number of Russian and Ottoman soldiers to hold the position. The fortress of Corfu, on the other hand, after being liberated from the French, was garrisoned only by Russians, while the Ottoman forces stayed outside the fortress walls. Ottoman Rear Admiral (Patrona) Şeremet Mehmet Bey was appointed governor of the city of Corfu, although the duties were actually fulfilled by Lieutenant Colonel Skipor (Stanislavskaia 1983, 137).

After the departure of the last squadrons to Italy in August 1799, overall military command of the islands passed to Captain A. P. Aleksiano, the commander of "Bogoiavleniie Gospodnie", one of the two Russian ships that were docked at Corfu for repair. For the same reason, two Ottoman frigates and two Ottoman corvettes were also left behind on Corfu (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 80-81). The ongoing negotiations regarding the Corfu garrison resulted finally in an agreement by both sides to maintain a force of 700 Russians and 700 Ottomans.

Ambassador Tomara instructed Ushakov not to allow Ottomans within the walls of the fortress other unless there was the same number of Russian soldiers (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 111-112). In addition, the regiment of Lieutenant General Mikhail Mikhailovich Borozdin, consisting of 1,656 men, eight cannons and 200 horses, who had previously been appointed to guard the Neapolitan court, arrived in Corfu on 27 November, 1799 (V. S. Tomara to Paul I. 27 / 16 September 1799. AVPRI. Fond 89. Russia's Relations with Turkey. Op. 89/8. Delo 895, L. 78; A Note of the Russian Ambassador V. S. Tomara to the Ottoman

government, regarding the permission for the passage of 13 Russian battleships of Captain Pustoshkin through the Bosphorus, transporting a force of 1,600 men under the command of Major General Borozdin. 27 / 16 1799. *Ibidem*, L. 80). Waiting for departure to Naples, Borozdin assumed the post of the commandant of the Corfu fortress (Arkas 1863, 881).

Throughout the summer of 1799, as long as the conditions of the season allowed in the Black Sea, the Ottoman capital witnessed the constant arrival of Russian transport ships loaded with provisions and other necessary materials for Ushakov's squadron stationed on Corfu. By the end of 1799, however, Emperor Paul I, disillusioned with his British and Austrian allies and their numerous insults of Russian conduct, decided to leave the Second coalition and recall all his troops from Europe. At the beginning of 1800, the army of Suvorov that had been engaging the French in Northern Italy and Switzerland, marched back to Russia (Miliutin 1857, Vol. 3, 641-642). Similarly, the squadron of Admiral Ushakov, which throughout 1799 had been engaged in hostilities against the French in the Adriatic and Italy, was ordered to leave the Mediterranean and return to the Black Sea ports.

In accordance with the order of Paul I, dated 4 December (23 November), 1799, which was received by Ushakov on 5 January, 1800, the Russian Admiral on 8 January left Messina for Corfu, arriving on 19 January (Arkas 1863, 883-884). Also in January, but somewhat earlier than Ushakov, the newly appointed Ottoman representative Kapıcıbaşı Mustafa Ağa arrived in Corfu with 250 Ottoman soldiers (McKnight 1962, 207). Judging by the letters of Ushakov to Tomara, relations between the Russian Admiral and the Ottoman official from the very outset were far from cordial.

Among the complaints of Mustafa Ağa that incurred the displeasure of the Russian Admiral were those concerning the belated allocation of a house for the Ottoman representative and the alleged confiscation by the Russians of all the cannons in the fortress. Ushakov, for his part, reported that Mustafa Ağa had demanded the best house in the fortress, that the house the Ottoman official was eventually given was kept for Ushakov until the Russian Admiral would arrive at Corfu, and for that reason Mustafa Ağa could not be provided with the house earlier. As for the cannons in the Corfu fortress, according to Ushakov, the Russians did not take anything except for some cannons that were broken and needed replacement (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 251-253). The petty misunderstandings between the Russian and the Ottoman commanders continued, spurred by such snubs as Mustafa Ağa's refusal to stand upon Ushakov's departure after an audience, or his demand that the Russian squadron

fire a salute on the occasion of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 263-264).

In no time, Ushakov's patience was exhausted. In a letter to Ambassador Tomara, he said "this man (i.e. Kapıcıbaşı Mustafa Ağa) appears to be being bribed by someone to cause trouble and upset the friendship" (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 253). Speaking about the demands of Mustafa Ağa for the Russians to fire a salute for Ramadan, Ushakov said: "... his various incongruous demands make me believe that he is insane" (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 263). In the end, Ushakov asked Tomara to report Mustafa Ağa's behaviour to the Porte, and to ask them to send someone with more manners (Mordvinov 1951-1956, Vol. 3, 253). Furthermore, the majority of the Corfiotes were in general dissatisfied with the presence of Ottoman troops on the island. Finally, it was agreed that the Ottoman part of the Corfu garrison would comprise 300 men, and any additional Ottoman troops beyond this would not be supported at the expense of the local population (McKnight 1962, 210).

On 1 February, 1800, two weeks after his return to Corfu, Ushakov received new orders from the Tsar instructing him to remain on the Ionian Islands and patrol the waters of the Central Mediterranean as a precaution against the possible escape of General Bonaparte from Egypt (McKnight 1962, 214). The two battalions of Borozdin, in the meantime, left Corfu. On 15 March 1800 they embarked on the ships under command of Captain Pustoshkin, and in four days they landed on Italian soil in Otranto where they were to serve as the palace guard of the Neapolitan King Ferdinand IV (Arkas 1863, 886). Soon after the departure of Borozdin's forces from Corfu, the Russo-Ottoman Convention of 2 April, 1800 was signed, establishing the autonomous Republic of the Seven Islands.

With the continuation of the siege of Malta (it surrendered only on 4 September, 1800) after rumours of its fall proved to be false, Paul I on 3 June, 1800 confirmed his earlier orders to Ushakov instructing him to sail with his entire fleet back to the Black Sea ports. Ushakov thus instructed the squadrons of Pustoshkin, Kartsov, Sorokin and Voinovich, which were still operating in Mediterranean waters, to return to Corfu. The first of these arrived respectively on 11 and 14 June, while the latter could not come in time, and remained in Italy. The council of war assembled by Ushakov on 13 July, 1800 decided to leave the two battalions of Borozdin together with three frigates of Captain Sorokin in Naples, while Corfu was left with only 170 artillerymen and engineers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hastfer, who was appointed commander of the Corfu fortress (Arkas 1863, 889-890). On 16 July, 1800 Ushakov sailed from Corfu,

and after stay for a month in the Ottoman capital, he returned with his squadron to Akyar (Sevastopol) on 7 November, 1800 (Miliutin 1857, Vol. 2, 505-506).

In 1801, the following year, early in the reign of Aleksandr I, the State Council decided on 15 June to recall the last remaining Russian troops from Corfu and Naples (Miliutin 1857, Vol. 3, 656-657), and by the summer of 1801, all Russian troops had departed from the Ionian Islands. France, with the signing of a peace treaty with Russia (on 8 October, 1801) (Vneshniaia politika Rossii 1960, Vol. 1, 95-97) and a preliminary peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire (on 9 October, 1801) (Noradounghian 1900, 47-48), under a special Russian-French secret convention, became a co-guarantor of the independence of the Ionian state with Russia. The convention stipulated that no foreign troops should be stationed on the islands (Vneshniaia politika Rossii 1960, Vol. 1, 98-101), and so after the Russian Commander in Chief had wielded the highest administrative authority over the islands from 1799–1800, St. Petersburg lost, for a while, all of its interests in the Ionian Islands.

Leave cannot stay

The withdrawal of the Russian troops from Corfu resulted in a state of anarchy. The majority of population were openly antagonistic towards the Ottomans, and were greatly displeased with the fact that the islands had been placed under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. The opinion of Uzunçarşılı that the majority of the population of the Republic of the Seven Islands desired to be under the Ottoman protectorate, while Russia was supported only by a “group of Jacobines” (“...*Yedi Ada Cumhuriyeti halkı iki kısma ayrılmıştı. Bunların çoğu Osmanlıların himayesini istiyorlar ve Yakubin taifesi de Rusların emellerine hizmet ediyorlardı*”) (Uzunçarşılı 1937, 635) seems to be somewhat debatable. Apparently, the Ottoman suzerainty was supported by only a narrow circle of noblemen, who, like the Ottomans, were seeking the establishment of a state system close to that of the Danube principalities, while the majority of the insular population was more inclined to their Russian coreligionists.

The inhabitants divided into various groupings of pro-French, pro-British and even pro-Ottoman orientation. To restore internal order on the islands, Aleksandr I, at the beginning of 1802, took the decision to deploy Russian troops to the Ionian Islands under the command of Lieutenant General Borozdin, who was at the time stationed in Naples (Vneshniaia politika Rossii 1960, Vol. 1, 167-68; 175-76), and to appoint a special Russian representative to the Republic of the Seven Islands, Count Mocenigo, with respective instructions. Particularly noteworthy are the closing words of Aleksandr I in a letter to Mocenigo, stating that it was the wish of the Russian monarch to keep Russian troops “on the Ionian

Islands as little as possible, so that they could “in the short term to return via the Black Sea to Russia” (Vneshniaia politika Rossii 1960, Vol. 1, 184).

As documents show, neither immediately after the conquest of the islands nor later did Russia express any wish to retain the islands under its control by any means, contrary to the traditional Turkish historiography. Uzunçarşılı, however, believed that Russia, sought to prolong its stay on Corfu under every pretext in order to increase its influence over the Republic of the Seven Islands (“*muhtelif bahanelerle Rusların Korfoda ikametlerini uzatmak istemeleri pek aşikâr olarak yeni cumhuriyet üzerindeki nüfuzunu arttırmak içindi*”) (Uzunçarşılı 1937, 637).

According to Karal, another outstanding Turkish historian, after the threat of the French aggression had been dissolved, there was no longer a need to maintain a friendship with Britain and Russia. The Porte had another task now, which was “to free its territories (apparently, Karal refers here also to the Ionian Republic, which was still under the formal suzerainty of the Sultan; V. M.) occupied by the friendly powers” (*Babı-âli için mevzubahis mesele dost devletlerin işgalinde bulunan toprakları kurtarmak... idi*) (Karal 1999, 81). Among the two main allies of the Ottomans, Russia deployed its forces to the Ionian Islands and Britain continued to occupy Egypt, even after the withdrawal of the French. One cannot deny the existence of the first unseen, and then growing ever more evident discontent of the Ottomans, which was based on the fact that the two Russian grenadier battalions staying in Naples were since September 1802 redeployed on the Ionian Islands (Shapiro 1956, 266-67). Once again, after less than a year, a Russian garrison was stationed on Corfu.

The possibility of the French landing on mainland Greece seemed not only quite real, but even expected, which was voiced time and time again in the Russian diplomatic communications at the time (Arkhirv kniazia Vorontsova 1870-1895, Vol. 20, 292-94; Vneshniaia politika Rossii 1960, Vol. 1, 433, 513-17, 530-531, 557; SIRIO 1891, 410-17). The Russian side believed that the Ottoman Empire would be in no position to counter aggression from the French, and so if the domains of the Sultan were to be protected, it would be necessary to increase the number of Russian forces on the Ionian Islands. At the end of 1803, the number of Russian troops on Corfu started to be steadily increased, and would continue to increase throughout 1804–1805. To support the troops on the ground, in September 1805 the Russian government dispatched a squadron under the command of Vice Admiral Dmitrii Nikolaievich Seniavin comprising five ships of the line, one frigate and two brigs, from the Baltic Sea to Corfu (Arkas 1867, 368).

The Ottomans, who could only guess at the possible aims of their potential enemies and allies, considered both the Russian and French threats to be very realistic, and found it difficult to ascertain which of the two threats should be taken more seriously, and what, in fact, should be expected. For Russia, on the other hand, in words of Shapiro “the Tsarist government did not know for sure whether it would have to defend Turkey from Bonaparte’s aggression or to fight with it as an ally of Bonaparte” (Shapiro 1956, 277; Shapiro 1951, 117-18). In both cases, however, Russia’s Ionian foothold was gaining more importance for St. Petersburg.

For the Porte, the presence of the Russian fleet and Russian troops in the Mediterranean continued to be a source of constant and growing concern. Karal, commenting on the Ottoman foreign policy preferences, notes that after the French threat was over and the French troops were removed from Egypt, the Ottomans started to consider the friendship of its allies to be a burden, and to seek rapprochement with France (Karal 1999, 81-82). On the other hand, the Sultan’s government was certainly aware of the worth of the promises of friendship made by Napoleon, as the memory of the Egyptian expedition was too fresh to be forgotten. For this reason, the Ottomans were in no hurry to break away from their Russian allies. At this time, the Russian naval base on Corfu, which was host to more than 12,000 thousand men by the beginning of 1806 (Shapiro 1951, 301), continued to be a significant source of Russian influence in the Mediterranean.

In fact, the Russian military presence on the Ionian Islands was of serious concern not only for the French, but also for the Ottomans. Despite the declarations of friendship made by St. Petersburg, the Porte, based on past experience, had good reason not to put too much trust in Russia. Sultan Selim, his statesmen or the ordinary Ottoman public could hardly be bursting with joy to see Russian warships constantly going to and fro through the Black Sea Straits, so close to the Ottoman capital.

As France sought to augment its strength and influence in Europe in the wake of Napoleon’s decisive success at Austerlitz in December 1805, the Ottomans gained the courage to mount a challenge against Russia and declare war at the end of 1806. Russian forces found themselves isolated on the Ionian archipelago in the midst of the Mediterranean, at war with both the French and the Ottomans, thousands of kilometres away from Russia and with no chance of communication or reinforcements. In 1807, Russia, according to the Treaties of Tilsit, was to evacuate its positions on the Ionian Islands and leave the Adriatic region.

Conclusions

During the first years of the Ottoman-Russian alliance, in the background of the growing antagonism between St. Petersburg on one side and Austria and Great Britain on the other, relations between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires continued to be quite friendly. Throughout the winter of 1798–1799, a mixed Russian-Ottoman squadron under the command of Fyodor Ushakov continued to hold siege to the last stronghold of the French on the Ionian Islands – the fortress of Corfu. Due to the lack of auxiliary troops and provisions, a direct assault was delayed, and the Russian and the Ottoman ships only blockaded Corfu from the sea, patrolling all approaches to the island. The internal crisis in the Ottoman Empire and the ineffectiveness of the Ottoman state apparatus had largely influenced the siege. In early March 1799, only just a three-and-a-half-month blockade, the French garrison on Corfu capitulated, and the primary task of the joint Russo-Ottoman naval expedition was duly accomplished.

After the end of the campaign, however, disagreements between the Russians and Ottomans started to grow, including debates over the sharing of the spoils of war, the garrisoning of the fortresses and the future political status of the Ionian Islands. The final Russo-Ottoman Convention related to the Ionian Republic could be signed only on 2 April (21 March), 1800, one-and-a-half years after the start of the Ionian campaign. All this aside, it would be fair to say that the birth of the Republic of the Seven Islands became possible due to the alliance between the Porte and St. Petersburg in the wake of their joint military operations against France.

Following the resumption of war in Europe in 1803, Russia's apprehensions about a potential French attack against the Balkan possessions of the Sultan once again increased. For this reason, in mid-December 1803 the Tsar decided to reinforce the Russian garrison on Corfu, raising suspicions in the Porte. It is hard to say whether the French or Ottoman governments were more alarmed by the increasing Russian military presence in the Mediterranean. After the French successes at Ulm and Austerlitz, followed by the Franco-Austrian Peace Treaty of Pressburg, the balance of power in Europe had noticeably shifted to France. In these circumstances the Ottoman state in late 1806 declared war on Russia, which at this point had to fight already both against the Napoleonic France and the Ottomans. For the Russian garrison stationed on Corfu, this meant isolation, with no chance of support either from the main Russian bases in the Black Sea or in the Baltics. Later, under the terms of the Treaties of Tilsit (1807) the Russian forces left Corfu, and the Ionian Islands were again occupied by the Napoleonic France. The Russian military presence in the Central Mediterranean, while short-lived,

set a historical precedent that would agitate the minds of later generations of Russians.

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