

THE BALKAN CURSE: AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S POLICY IN THE VIEW OF THE ENTENTE POWERS ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR I

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Abstract

As a great power and a member of the Concert of Europe, Austria-Hungary was an indispensable element of the pre-World War I international system. Therefore, professional diplomats and academic community of the Entente powers (Russia, Great Britain and France) attached a substantial importance to a foreign policy of the Danube Monarchy, a participant of the hostile Triple Alliance. Due to multiethnic composition of Austria-Hungary, its government attributed exacerbation of national issues within the empire, inter alia the South Slav question, to unfavorable Balkan environment, namely a rise of the Serbian Kingdom. Diplomats and scholars of the Entente powers managed to outline core factors which caused a regionalization of the Austro-Hungarian foreign policy.

Key words: Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Russia, France, Great Britain, Balkans, Entente, Triple Alliance, Southern Slav question.

Alfred Dumaine, the French ambassador in Vienna, labelled a one-direction foreign policy of Austria-Hungary, with a phrase of the Roman senator Cato the Elder: "Carthage must be destroyed".¹ But unlike Cato, who called for a complete destruction of the geopolitical rival and spreading Roman domination over the Mediterranean, ruling circles of the Danube Monarchy pursued more moderate goals. They sought an annihilation of Serbia, a small country in the Balkans. This regionalization of the Austro-Hungarian foreign policy could not be ignored by the Entente powers. It was subjected to a scrupulous analysis of Russian, British, and French diplomats as well as of humanitarian intellectuals, deeply immersed in history and politics of South-Eastern Europe. This interest was due to a fact that Austria-Hungary was an indispensable element of Europe's alliance system of the early 20th century. Correct information regarding the Monarchy's internal turbulence gave a clue for a proper understanding of its international behavior.

A structure of their strategic, military, political and economic interests defined a different degree to which Britain, Russia and France were preoccupied with Balkan affairs. However, this heterogeneous perception of the Dual Monarchy helps us to form a more nuanced picture of decision making process within Austria-Hungary. Attention of the Entente diplomats and scholars was attached to three major sets of issues. The first set encompassed national perplexities within the Danube Monarchy with special stress on the South Slav question. The second group of problems covered an interrelation between real and illusionary threats to Austro-Hungarian security in the Balkans. The third one dealt with Vienna's cooperation with its Triple Alliance partners –Berlin and Rome – as

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¹ Alfred Dumaine, *Dernière Ambassade de France en Autriche. Notes et souvenirs*, Paris : Impr.-libr.-éditeurs Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1921, p. 81.

well as Monarchy's eventual offensive against Serbia. A purpose of the paper is to understand how the Entente powers interpreted the above-mentioned problems, hence these interpretations shaped their behavioral strategies during the July crisis of 1914.

The Habsburg Monarchy was for a long time a preponderant force in the north-west part of the Balkan peninsula due to combination of historical, civilizational and geopolitical factors. Western observers highlighted mediatory functions of Austria-Hungary in the interaction between Balkan peoples and outer-European world. The French military expert of the late 19th century lieutenant-colonel A. Niox called Austria-Hungary a nexus between the Balkans and "European civilization",² while R. W. Seton-Watson, a prominent specialist in Slavonic studies, known for his anti-Habsburg activities during WWI, stated that it was a mission of the Dual Monarchy "with its many races" to present a true European culture in South-Eastern Europe.³

Foreign ambitions of Austria-Hungary were limited to one region, comparing to those of other great powers. The Dual Monarchy associated its great power status with a capacity to dominate in the Balkans. However, a rise of Serbia and augmentation of its role in inter-Balkan relations were perceived by the Austro-Hungarian establishment as an obstacle towards hegemony in South-Eastern Europe. Considerations of wider Balkan strategy along with fragile domestic stability pushed Vienna and Budapest to look at Serbian Kingdom as a menace to national security of the Monarchy. This alarmist mood seemed to be backed up by the Serbian aspiration for an independent foreign policy. Serbia was supposed to stimulate irredentist tendencies in South Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary.

The Bosnian crisis of 1908-1909 transformed the South Slav question into the key domestic and international dilemma of the Danube Monarchy. It is hard to disagree with A.J.P. Taylor who noted that having annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria-Hungary did not settle the Yugoslav problem but created it:

...Aehrenthal (Monarchy's Minister for foreign affairs – O.A.) taught the Serbs to be Yugoslavs... The Bosnian crisis did not humiliate Serbia, though it ended in her defeat; it humiliated Austria-Hungary, for it pulled her down to the Serb level.⁴

Vienna, in its turn, was inclined to advertise an outcome of the Bosnian crisis as a foreign policy success. The Russian liberal newspaper *Rech* referred to Aehrenthal's words that incorporation of Bosnia had made the Habsburg Monarchy "a Balkan power".⁵ Thereby, occupation and annexation of the former

² G. L. Niox, *Géographie militaire. Autriche-Hongrie et péninsule des Balkans*, Paris: L. Baudoin, 1887, p. VI.

³ R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy*, New York: Fertig, 1969, p. VIII.

⁴ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918: A History of the Austrian Empire and Austria-Hungary*, London: Hatmish Hamilton, 1948, p. 217.

⁵ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter – GARF) [The State Archive of the Russian Federation], fond 539 (V. V. Vodovozov), opis 1, delo 3, list 8.

Ottoman *vilayet* reflected Austria-Hungary's intention to fix its core role in the political developments of the Balkans.

However, hegemonic designs of the Danube Monarchy collided with regional realities. As the grave international crises of the late 19th and early 20th century (the Eastern crisis 1875-78 and the Balkan Wars 1912-13) had proved, a rise of national movements in European Turkey and resolution of the local small states to implement their national programs were a crucial factor for "regional building" in the Balkans. As a result, the multinational Ottoman Empire stopped being a pillar of the Balkan regional order. A question concerning existence of another multiethnic empire in South-Eastern Europe remained open.

European observers did not consider Austria-Hungary, unlike Turkey, to be a doomed empire, or terminally "sick man of Europe". A vague but rather optimistic forecast given by the Russian publicist Vasilevsky to the destinies of the Habsburg monarchy in 1906 remained up-to-date in 1914: "It is impossible to predict whether it would collapse to pieces or it would be centralized. It is more correct to request whether Austria was declining or whether it had yet been rearranged."⁶ This vision was partly shared by H. W. Steed, *The Times* correspondent in Vienna. He revealed Austria-Hungary's capacity to resist internal and external challenges, and pointed at its hidden vital forces.⁷

This mild treatment of Monarchy's internal conditions owed to its long-lasting viability. The latter was due to smooth interaction of political, social and economic institutions of the Danube Empire such as dynasty and aristocracy, bureaucracy and army, Catholic Church as well as a common imperial market. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 20th century national awakening of peoples inhabiting Austria-Hungary and growth of their economic capacity diminished integrating potential of the above-mentioned institutions.⁸ Centrifugal tendencies became a prime topic of the Monarchy's political discourse. It was immensely exacerbated by the Balkan Wars. On the one hand, Serbia and Romania, states adjacent to Austria-Hungary, enlarged their territories and strengthened their international standing, thus challenging Monarchy's Balkan policy. On the other hand, Austro-Hungarian government had to take into consideration a feedback of its Romanian and South Slav subjects as regards military victories of their brothers on the other side of the border. A situation was worsened by a split within Austro-Hungarian ruling elite. A lack of consensus of how to reform a system of dualism hindered articulation of a balanced policy towards the Balkans. Foreign observers fixed a tight correlation between domestic instability and international behavior of Austria-Hungary, and it was a crux of the matter. Pointing out a blurring line between internal and external politics of the Danube Monarchy, Sir Eyre Crowe, assistant under-secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, instructed British ambassador in Vienna and consul-general in Budapest to

⁶ L. M. Vasilevsky, *Avstro-Vengriia. Politicheskii stroi i natsionalnie voprosy* [Austria-Hungary. Political order and National Questions], Saint-Petersburg, 1906, p. 51-52.

⁷ H.W. Steed, *The Hapsburg Monarchy*, London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1914, p. 282-283.

⁸ Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1929, p. 133.

prepare monthly reports covering local developments.⁹ Crowe's approach was similar to that of the Russian chargé d'affaires in Vienna Prince Koudashev who stated that in case of Austria-Hungary "it is difficult to omit those facts which should not have been mentioned in diplomatic dispatches from any other country".¹⁰ Therefore, both diplomats supposed that it was necessary to understand perturbations that were taking place on the Austro-Hungarian political scene as they could have imprint on the Monarchy's foreign policy.

National controversies, which were breaking asunder the Empire of the Habsburgs, were a common place in reflections of the Entente diplomats and intellectuals. Such issues as a dual system, language question, suffrage reform in Transleithanien, Italian, Romanian and South Slav irredentism were not unknown to wider European public. Even this half-full list demonstrated multi-dimension of the national question and its projection on the foreign policy of the Empire.

No one would deny that the political existence of the Danube Monarchy revolved around the pivot of nationalism. Whereas throughout the bulk of the 19th century Austro-Hungarian antagonism shaped a domestic politics, the early 20th century witnessed a rise of questions regarding a status and rights of non-German and non-Magyar peoples. National disputes within the Hungarian part of the Monarchy were the most troubled issue as Serbs, Croats, Slovaks were oppressed by Magyarization. According to Seton-Watson, "it is not much to say that the racial question in Hungary reacts upon all problems of the Near East, and that the manner of its solution will exercise a decisive influence upon the balance of power in the Balkans".¹¹

It was evident that Austro-Hungarian establishment had to launch a reorganization of the Empire's political system putting it on a more rational and modern basis. One of the possible modernization scenarios was a transformation of Austria-Hungary from Dual to Triple Monarchy with Slavs possessing equal rights with Germans and Magyars. British diplomats extensively reported about such projects. As for the South Slav aspect of the Triality, various reform schemes proposed to form a South Slav Kingdom through uniting Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, Istria, Bosnia and Herzegovina. It meant separation of Croatia-Slavonia from Hungary. The British consul in Budapest Grant Duff attached a significant importance to special memorandum prepared by the former member of the Croatian Diet Mr. Zagorac and member of the Austrian Reichsrat Sefordić. They both referred to the Patent of the Emperor dated 26 February 1861, where Franz Joseph "held out hope of future union of Dalmatia to Croatia and Slavonia thus restoring of the ancient Kingdom Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia".¹² Considering a

⁹ The National Archives, Kew, UK (hereafter – TNA), FO 120/894/636, Crowe to Cartwright, 23.12.1912; FO 371/1297/12, Min. by Crowe, 29.03.1912.

¹⁰ Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii (hereafter – AVPRI) [The Archive of the foreign policy of the Russian Empire], f. 172 (Embassy in Vienna), op. 514/2, d. 859, l. 140, a dispatch of the chargé d'affaires in Vienna, 28.08/11.09. 1913.

¹¹ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, London: Archibald Constable and Co Ltd., 1908, p. 418.

¹² TNA. FO 371/1296/206-208. Grant Duff to Grey. 9.02.1912.

fact that Hungarians did not exceed a combined number of other nationalities populated Transleithanien, Budapest furiously criticized any initiatives that could deprive Magyars of their privileged position within the dual system.¹³ That's why the Heir-Apparent Franz Ferdinand who supported federalization schemes, was a persona non-grata among Hungarian nobility.

London considered a prospective Serbo-Croatian cooperation the most decisive factor for resisting a Hungarian pressure. At the beginning of 1912 British consuls in Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Sarajevo reported on joint Serbian and Croatian demonstrations condemning suppressive measures of the Hungarian authorities and manifesting a solidarity with their kin-brothers living in Transleithanien. Such actions commonly ended in burning of the Hungarian flag.¹⁴ However, British diplomats and intellectuals looked upon constructive Serbo-Croatian cooperation as an unclear and dubious matter. Evaluating effectiveness of these manifestations, the British consul in Sarajevo stated that "they help to show how deeply the love of politics is ingrained in the Southern Slavs, how effervescent they are and how hopelessly divided by their religions".¹⁵ This phrase echoed earlier conclusion of Seton-Watson who supposed that historic memories of medieval "empires" of Zvonimir and Stefan Dušan were incompatible.¹⁶ Therefore, the Yugoslav question being theoretically destructive for the stability of the Danube Empire did not menace its territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, redrawing the map of South-Eastern Europe during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 had a profound impact on the realignment of forces within Austria-Hungary. Along with excitement among the Serbian population of the Empire and its eagerness to join the Serbian army, one could fix an overall rise of the Yugoslav movement. Moreover, the Slav subjects of the Habsburgs did not conceal their pro-Serbian sympathies. The Paris journal *Revue des deux mondes* described a scene where a Czech infantry threw out a gun shouting "Vive la Serbie".¹⁷ Transferring these alarming tendencies to the Balkan situation, the Austro-Hungarian government had to keep army in combat readiness. A partial mobilization was carried out. As the majority of the reservists had not been dismissed, a lot of adult men were distracted from their working places. This laid additional burden on the Austro-Hungarian budget and damaged economic condition of the Empire, as reported the Russian consul in Budapest Priklonsky.¹⁸

¹³ The prominent Russian (Soviet) military expert marshal Boris Shaposhnikov referred to a following statistics of the ethnic composition of the Hungarian Kingdom: Hungarians – 45,4%, Germans – 11,1%, Slovaks – 10,5%, Ruthenians – 2,2%, Serbs and Croats – 14,2%, Romanians – 14,5%. B. A. Shaposhnikov, *Mozg Armii*, vol. 1, Moscow, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo. Otdel voennoi literaturi, 1927.

¹⁴ TNA, FO 371/1296/271-272, Lucas Shedwell to Cartwright. 22.01.1912; FO 371/1296/281, Freeman to Grey, 26.02.1912.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ R.W Seton-Watson, *Die Zukunft Österreich-Ungarns und die Haltung der Grossmächte*, Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1908, p. 31.

¹⁷ R. Pinon, 'L'Autriche et la guerre balkanique', *Revue des deux mondes : recueil de la politique, de l'administration et des mœurs*, période 6, t. 13, p. 592.

¹⁸ AVPRI, f. 172, op. 514/2, d. 605, l. 4, Priklonskii to Giers, 13/26.02.1913.

Moreover, the Austro-Hungarian authorities pushed matters from bad to worse applying martial measures. According to the British consul in Sarajevo Freeman, spy fever reached an apogee in Bosnia: a local administration instigated detention of innocent civilians.¹⁹ His Russian colleague Igilstorm compared the province with an armed camp. Troops were accommodated in colleges, museums and other public buildings. This heavy atmosphere pushed the Entente observers to further reflections and inquiries. They tried to understand to what extent these bellicose actions were justified. In other words, were these fears grounded, or were they intentionally exaggerated by the Austro-Hungarian officials to have a free hand in tackling the Serbian question?

The French and British diplomats supposed that territorial extension of the Serbian kingdom put the Danube Monarchy in stalemate. In this light the war was perceived as the only means to curb centrifugal tendencies within the Empire. The French ambassador Dumaine stated that the Serbian vigorous movement towards Adriatic provoked Vienna's fervent desire to wipe of the map this Slav Kingdom.²⁰ Unlike the French diplomat, who had been noticed for his pro-Serbian feelings, the British representatives in Belgrade and Vienna, F. Cartwright and R. Paget, found Austro-Hungarian military alert reasonable and predicted disastrous consequences for the Monarchy in case of its passive stance. Incorporation of the Sanjak into Serbia was supposed to block Austro-Hungarian expansion towards Salonika while acquiring a seaport in the Adriatic could weaken economic dependence of Serbian kingdom from its powerful northern neighbour. These unfavourable developments were predicted to strike a heavy blow to the Austro-Hungarian prestige, and an eventual outcome would have been a secession of the South Slav provinces from the Danube Monarchy and their unification with Serbia and Montenegro.²¹ Therefore, the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and his permanent-assistant Sir Arthur Nicolson supposed that Vienna was partly right threatening to stop Serbian expansion using military measures.²²

These views of the Foreign Office high profile officials indicated several critical issues of that time international relations: perplexities of coexistence of a great power and small states within one region, limits of a great power's expansion and tutelage, and a small state's right to defend its sovereignty and national interests. It is not uninteresting that professional diplomats and humanitarian intellectuals had different approaches to the above-mentioned questions. In conformity to widespread concepts, F. Cartwright was not inclined to interpret Austro-Hungarian hawkish policy towards Serbia as an expression of aggressiveness. In his opinion, like other great powers, the Danube Monarchy used "le droit de voisinage" to maintain an order in its "backyard", that was the western part of the Balkan peninsula. According to the British diplomat, It meant that,

¹⁹ TNA, FO 120/911, Freeman to Palairat, 9.02.1913.

²⁰ A. Dumaine, *op. cit.*, p. 45-46.

²¹ British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898 -1914 (hereafter – BD), vol. 9 (2). London, 1934, № 104. Paget to Nicolson, 2.11.1912; №347, Paget to Grey, 19.12.1912.

²² BD, vol. 9 (2), № 176, Paget to Grey, 26.11.1912, Minutes by Nicolson and Grey.

a great power cannot allow herself to be annoyed by the anarchy prevailing in, or by the inflated ambitions of a small neighboring country: it is on this principle that Russia claims the right to interfere in Manchuria, Mongolia and Northern Persia... Austria therefore cannot understand why this right should be denied to her as regards Servia, and she claims to be treated in this respect on the same footing as other great powers.²³

On the contrary, the British and French scholar and journalists stated that the Balkan Wars engendered new tendencies in international relations having revealed viability of the small states, their determination to fight for their national ideals. It was especially true about Serbia. In one of his articles for "The Fortnightly Review" Seton-Watson described national revival of the Serbian Kingdom as the most remarkable feature of the modern Balkan history.²⁴ Austria-Hungary was criticized for its unwillingness to accept changes in the international life. The French journalist René Pinot characterized the Balkan policy of Austria-Hungary as primitive and abundant with stereotypes. Pinot noted sarcastically that "it is talked about Serbia's resistance in Austria in the same way as the French talk about mutiny in Dahomey".²⁵

It was common for the British and French periodicals to present Vienna as a defeated side in the Balkan Wars. Meanwhile, the Habsburg monarchy did not lose territories, and its hardline policy of the war brinkmanship bore fruit in form of the independent Albanian state. So, what was a cause of such discrepancy between a "real" situation and its assessment in the press? Pinot, Steed and Seton-Watson argued that outcomes of the Balkan Wars, and particularly a rise of Serbia, though being an external event as regarded the Dual Monarchy, destabilized its political organism.²⁶ Serbia, "this constant object of derision for the Viennese bureaucracy", became a centre of gravity for the South Slavs of the empire.²⁷ And enhancement of the gravitational field between the Yugoslav core – Serbia – and the Yugoslav elements within Austria-Hungary threatened to explode the latter from within. However, unlike the laws of physics, the British and French experts considered the major reason of Yugoslav movement not only formation of the powerful core, but to a greater degree a weakening and collapse of former political ties and structures within the Habsburg Monarchy as well as inclination of its ruling circles to ignore this process. Whereas politicians were impotent to control physical forces, Vienna, as it seemed to the Entente observers, was apt to prevent Southern Slav gravitation towards the Serbian Kingdom by initiating transformation of the Dual Monarchy.²⁸

²³ TNA, FO 800/358/82-83, Cartwright to Nicolson, 27.08.1912.

²⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson, 'New Phases of the Balkan Question,' *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 104, 1913, p. 323-225.

²⁵ R. Pinon, op. cit., p. 585.

²⁶ H. W Steed, op. cit., p. 282. As Steed recollected, throughout the empire it was a widespread belief that the victory of the Balkan allies over Turkey stroke a mortal blow to the Habsburg Monarchy.

²⁷ R. Pinon, op. cit., p. 588-596.

²⁸ R.W. Seton-Watson, 'New Phases of the Balkan Question', p. 328.

Using abstract categories like “national revival” and “moral right” goes within a sphere of the humanitarian community, while Foreign and War Ministries are responsible for key decision making. The Entente diplomats were mostly preoccupied with how a shift of balance of power in South-Eastern Europe would influence general strategy of Austria-Hungary, both in terms of its further steps in the Balkans and its interaction with the Dreibund partners – Germany and Italy.

After the Second Balkan War a political landscape of South-Eastern Europe was dominated by a coalition of Serbia, Greece and Romania striving for the maintenance of regional status-quo. Creation of counterweight to this coalition seemed of a vital importance to the Austro-Hungarian decision-makers. They aimed at utmost weakening Serbia through undermining its internal stability. This Slav Kingdom had to integrate new territories populated by non-Serbian nations. The tool for implementation of this policy was a revisionism of Bulgaria and Albania, which had territorial disputes with Serbia as well as Bulgarian and Albanian elements incorporated into the Serbian kingdom in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. The Russian diplomats reported that Austria-Hungary had supplied generously the Albanians with arms.²⁹

Vienna tried to find an appropriate pretext that would justify its intervention in Albania in the eyes of other great powers. Having emerged as an independent state during the London conference of ambassadors in December of 1912, the Albanian principality functioned under the auspices of the great powers, responsible for elaboration of its administration, finance and security system. The newly-fledged principality was torn out by the factional strife. According to the Russian military intelligence, the Danube Monarchy was going to launch a wide agitation in Albania in order “to trigger domestic complications in this country which were to create a pretext for intervention”.³⁰ Moreover, the Austro-Hungarian government looked for an opportunity to send its troops to Albania if Serbo-Albanian frontier conflict continued to aggravate. Belgrade wanted a rectification of the Serbian south-west border in accordance of its vision of security while the opposing side claimed territories populated by Albanians but granted by the great powers to Serbs during the London conference.³¹ *The Ballplatz* supposed that Austria-Hungary’s traditional protection of the Catholic Albanians and its participation in establishment of the Albanian principality enabled the Monarchy to switch to more assertive actions to ensure independence of Albania in case of a third party’s intention to violate it. New clashes that had outburst along the Serbo-Albanian frontier in October 1913 prepared, as it seemed in Vienna, feasible ground for a unilateral showdown of the Dual Monarchy. It presented

²⁹ AVPRI, f. 151 (Politarkhiv), op. 482, d. 2281, l. 77. Dispatch of the Commissioner in Albania, 29.12.1913;

³⁰ Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (hereafter – RGVA) [The Russian State military-historical archive], f. 2000, op. 15, d. 324, l. 76, 18.05.1913.

³¹ P. A. Iskenderov, *Serbia, Tchernogoriia i Albanskii vopros v nachale 20 veka*, Saint-Petersburg: Aleteia, 2013.

Belgrade an ultimatum demanding to evacuate the Albanian territory.³² Prince Koudashev, the Russian *chargé d'affaires* in Vienna, outlined threefold goal of the “power diplomacy” practiced by Count Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs. First, he wanted Belgrade “to feel the might” of the neighbouring empire, namely to mark the limits of Serbia’s territorial expansion. Second, Berchtold hoped to raise prestige of the Habsburg Monarchy in Europe through imposing on the Balkan player its rules of the game. Third, this demarche was made to satisfy Austro-Hungarian public opinion which was far from approving Balkan policy of *the Ballplatz*.³³ Both the Russian diplomats and military experts stressed Berchtold’s risky manner of dealing with the Albanian issue as it could provoke interference of Italy which acted simultaneously as a European ally and Balkan rival of the Monarchy. Rome’s intervention would have led Italian occupation of Southern Albania. This eventuality meant Italy’s domination on the both shores of the Adriatic. But Vienna could not tolerate Adriatic Sea becoming an “Italian lake”.³⁴

The Balkan Wars highlighted another alarming facet of Austria-Hungary’s politics: a factor of the public opinion began to exercise a substantial influence over the Monarchy’s decision-making process. The Russian and British diplomats reported that the fiercest debates concerning Vienna’s Balkan entanglements broke out in Transleithanien. Hungarian delegations exposed Berchtold to hard criticism for not having conducted a coherent and persistent policy during the Balkan Wars. He was blamed for failing to defend Monarchy’s vital interests in the region and excessive war expenditures caused by partial mobilization.³⁵ Some representatives of the Hungarian opposition even urged the Government to revise the Monarchy’s alliance obligations: to loosen ties with the Dreibund and to move towards a rapprochement with the Entente. The most active proponent of these views was Count Mihály Károlyi, a leader of the Party of Independence.³⁶

A press of Transleithanien mirrored a disappointment of the Hungarian public opinion in Vienna’s approaches to the Balkans as well as a lack of consensus within Hungarian society regarding foreign policy issues. The Russian consul-general in Budapest Priklonskii fixed two main tendencies in the press coverage of the Austro-Hungarian policy in the Balkans: on the one hand, adherence to the confrontation with Russia and its Balkan “protégé” (Serbia and Montenegro) and, on the other hand, condemnation of this provocative stance. The Budapest media drew a line between national interests of Hungary and that of the Danube Monarchy: “Our Fatherland is Hungary, but not the Monarchy; the

³² O.I. Aganson, ‘Global’noe videnie lokal’noi problemy: podhody Velikobritanii k uregulirovaniu albanskogo voprosa v nachale 20 veka’, in *Nezavisimost’ Albanii v obshebalkanskom kontekste. K 100-letiiu obrazovaniia Albanskogo gosudarstva*, Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN, 2014, p. 269.

³³ AVPRI, f. 172, op. 514/2, d. 859, l. 199, a dispatch of the *chargé d'affaires* in Vienna, 10/23.10.1913.

³⁴ AVPRI, f. 172, op. 514/2, d. 859, l. 160 (reverse), a dispatch of the *chargé d'affaires* in Vienna, 12.09.1913.

³⁵ TNA, FO 371/1898/412, Max Mueller to Grey, 5.01.1914.

³⁶ TNA, FO 371/1898/477, Summary of political events in Hungary during the month of May, 8.06.1914.

more powerful is the Monarchy, the weaker is our Fatherland".³⁷ Vienna had to validate its Balkan policy and demonstrate community of interest in the region between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Empire. It meant that narrowing positions of Transleithanien and Cisleithanien depended on deterioration of the situation in the Balkans, as Budapest and Vienna needed to consolidate their efforts in order to repel Serbian threat using military methods. Thus, as reports of the Entente diplomats revealed, the public opinion of Austria-Hungary rendered decision making of the government more unpredictable.

Meanwhile, in the opinion of the Russian diplomats and military agents, there were constraints that prevented Vienna from starting a war in the Balkans. The first constraint was a complicated financial situation in the Monarchy. During the October crisis of 1913 Russian military experts prognosticated a very low eventuality of the Austro-Hungarian mobilization even in case of Serbian refusal to yield to Vienna's demands.³⁸

The second crucial restraint for the warlike mood of the Austro-Hungarian ruling circles was a position of Germany. International relations of the last pre-war years were marked by the Anglo-German "détente", and the Balkans became an appropriate ground for the cooperation between London and Berlin as the two sides needed more time and effort to settle their controversies in a colonial sphere and navy race.³⁹ That's why *the Ballplatz* did not have confidence in German support in case of being involved in conflict with Serbia backed by Russia.⁴⁰ Moreover, the British representatives in Vienna and Berlin reported a divergence in views of the Central Powers as regards the Balkan policy of the Dreibund. Wilhelm II criticized Berchtold for his attempt to win Bulgaria for the Triple Alliance thus alienating Romania and Greece from the Central Powers. The German Kaiser supposed that a formation of a coalition including Romania, Greece and Serbia corresponded to Austro-German interests to a greater degree than Bulgaria's loyalty. A serious friction between Vienna and Berlin was caused by Wilhelm's II telegram to Carol, the King of Romania, congratulating him on the conclusion of the Bucharest peace. Berchtold argued that "in formulating the foreign policy to be pursued by the Triple Alliance in the Near East, it is an understood thing that the wishes of Austria-Hungary shall prevail over those of Germany".⁴¹

As we have seen above, the Russian, British and French diplomats and academic experts fixed almost a total Balkanization of Austria-Hungary's foreign policy. For, Vienna its international standing and internal dilemma exemplified in the form of the Southern Slav question were interwoven and at the same time inseparable from domination in the Balkans. Installation of the

³⁷ AVPRI, f. 172, op. 514/2, d. 605, l. 25, Priklonskii to Giers, 13/26.03.1913.

³⁸ RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 15, d. 256, l. 8, 16.10.1913.

³⁹ R.Y. Crampton, *The Hollow Détente: Anglo-German Relations in the Balkans 1911-1914*, London: Prior, 1980.

⁴⁰ TNA, FO 800/370/19-20, Goschen to Nicolson. 27.09.1913.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 800/370/19-20, Goschen to Nicolson. 27.09.1913.

Austro-Hungarian hegemony in South-Eastern Europe could be accomplished only with inclusion of Serbia in the Habsburg sphere of influence and therefore annihilation of the very idea of the "Yugoslav Piemonte". This over-prioritization of the Balkan direction in Monarchy's foreign policy limited a space for Vienna's diplomatic maneuvering and pushed it to apply military measures for implementation of its goals which were a preservation of the Monarchy's territorial integrity and the great power status. Meanwhile, there were mechanism to prevent a depart of Austria-Hungary from the Concert of Europe. These were specific features of the pre-WWI international system, namely its multipolarity, an unclear line between opposing great powers blocs, contradictions within the blocs themselves (Austro-Italian rivalry in the Balkans for example). All these created an impression of unevenness and multi-optionality for a development of the situation in the Balkans.

Another important moment to stress is unwillingness of the British, French and Russian diplomacy to see the Habsburg Empire disappeared and the geopolitical vacuum in Central Europe emerged, though the Entente powers struggled for the undermining international positions of the Triple Alliance. This viewpoint was widespread within the British establishment. It was supposed that a collapse of the Danube Monarchy would lead to further strengthening of the German Empire through the latter's absorption the German provinces of the Monarchy and its gaining access to the Mediterranean as well as formation of a lesser Slav states on the Austro-Hungarian ruins. Those states were to be would form a belt of instability in Europe. In this light the existence of Austria-Hungary was a core factor for maintenance of the European equilibrium.⁴² However in the summer of 1914 the Dual Monarch, plunged in the Balkan politics and gradually transforming into the regional power, made unconsciously a first step towards breaking the European peace.

⁴² TNA. FO 800/366/42-43. Cartwright to Nicolson. 25.04.1913.

Öz

“Balkan Laneti: I. Dünya Savaşı Öncesinde İtilaf Devletlerinin Gözünde Avusturya-Macaristan’ın Politikası”

Avusturya-Macaristan Avrupa'nın bir parçası ve büyük bir güç olarak, Birinci Dünya Savaşı öncesinde uluslararası sistemin kaçınılmaz bir unsuruydu. Bu nedenle profesyonel diplomatlar ve İtilaf devletlerinin akademik camiası, düşman ittifak güçlerinin bir parçası olan Tuna monarşisinin dış politikasına önem verdiler. Avusturya-Macaristan'ın çok uluslu yapısı nedeniyle hükümet imparatorluk içerisindeki milli meselelerin uyanmasını ve dahi Güney Slavları sorunu Sırbistan Krallığı'nın doğuşuna, uğursuz Balkan ortamına bağladı. İtilaf devletlerinin diplomatları ve bilim adamları Avusturya-Macaristan'ın dış politikasının bölgeselleşmesine neden olan temel faktörleri belirlediler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avusturya-Macaristan, Sırbistan, Rusya, Fransa, Birleşik Krallık, Balkanlar, İtilaf, Üçlü İttifak, Güney Slavları Sorunu

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