

Great Powers and Albanian National Movement (1878-1914)

Petr Akhmedovich Iskenderov

Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

The history of the Albanian national movement is closely connected with two key factors: internal development in the Albanian-populated areas in the Balkans as well as politics of the Great Powers. Berlin Congress of 1878 totally neglected interests of the Albanians. Subsequently, Treaty of Berlin became the starting point for creation of the Albanian League of Prizren (1878-1881) as well as future development of the Albanian national movement. Russia as well as other Great Powers played a controversial role in that context.

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The history of the Albanian national movement is closely connected with two key factors: internal development in the Albanian-populated areas in the Balkans as well as politics of the Great Powers. The Congress of Berlin 1878 totally neglected interests of the Albanians. As a result, the League of Prizren was established as the mean to promote the goals of the Albanian national movement. That League confronted with some Balkan states and Great Powers. But at the same time, it created the first program of Albanian national unification.

By that time, serious unsettled disputes among the Great Powers themselves affected discussions concerning the present and the future of Albania—first of all, contradictions between Vienna and Saint Petersburg. The secret Reichstadt agreement between Russia and Austria-Hungary, concluded on 8 July, 1876 following the meeting of the Russian Emperor Alexander II and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince A. M. Gorchakov with their Austrian colleagues Franz Joseph and D. Andrassy in the Reichstadt castle in Bohemia, was made in such a way that the Russian and Austrian records differed just in relation to Albania. According to Andrassy's record, Albania had to become an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire as Bulgaria and Rumelia. In the Russian version, the mention of Albania was absent (1952).

Another secret Russo-Austrian Convention signed on 15 January, 1877 in Budapest as well as supplementary Convention signed on 18 March of the same year, but dated 15th of January, also had not clarified the situation with Albania (1952).

Those documents only mentioned “expected results of the upcoming war” (Potemkina, 1945, p. 38).

What was typical—at the time, as Russian diplomats and international negotiations and agreements generally were not paid necessary attention to the Albanian problem, was that the Russian public opinion showed increasing interest in Albanian stories. Among others, well-known assessment of the issues under consideration in February 1878 was made by then young journalist V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko: “We have somehow resolved the issue of the Bulgarians, but for a change it was put forward a number of new ones,

Petr Akhmedovich Iskenderov, M.A., senior researcher, Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, editor-in-chief of Russian history journal “Voprosy Istorii”, Russia.

among which not the last place should be given to Albanian issue” (1992, p. 170).

In the context of growing disillusionment with the provisions of the Great Powers, the Albanian national movement began to push forward the idea of Albanian League designed to promote the unification of all Albanian lands into a single autonomous entity, but also to prevent the expansion plans of the Great Powers and especially of the Balkan States. On the latter point, the views of the Albanians, in principle, were consistent with the interests of the Turkish government (which sought to exploit the Albanian movement in the interests of preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire), as well as with the foreign policy strategy of some of the Great Powers, primarily Britain and Austria-Hungary. Both Powers insisted on the need for revision of the San Stefano agreement and planned to use the discontent of the Albanians as a lever of pressure on Russia.

It should be stressed that the weakness and inconsistency of the decisions of the Berlin Congress, in turn, were a consequence of attempts to draw in the Balkans balanced picture—including the definition of boundaries. The Balkans is one of the classic regions of the world where borders drawn on the basis of ethnic principle cannot solve the ethnic problems, but only establish new “time bombs”. After all, these ethnic boundaries are very often arbitrary. They do not take into account ethnic “overlapping”, complex process of ethno-genesis and exist the nations divided by internal and external natural, political, economic, ethnic, and religious boundaries and other lines.

From this point of view, the Congress of Berlin was an example of artificial and conscious “Balkanization from above” when from one Bulgaria two Bulgarian states were made and their boundaries were artificially narrowed at the expense of Macedonian land; when Serbian ethnicity was divided to three parts, when national-state integration aspirations of the Albanians were not taken into account at all.

Political and military activities of Albanian League of Prizren were one of the results of Great Powers’ controversial attitude towards the Balkans. First meeting of that League took place in Prizren (Kosovo) on June 10, 1878—just three days before the opening of Congress of Berlin.

Among delegates gathered in the Prizren Albanian feudal lords, leaders of powerful local clans and representatives of the Muslim clergy were dominated. They came from Kosovo, Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Macedonia and Sancak of Novi Pazar. Turkish officials also attended the meeting. Participants adopted a program written in Turkish language and entitled “Karnama” (“Book of decisions”). It included such key position as “unconditional loyalty to Turkish Sultan”, “fight until the last drop of blood against any annexation of the Albanian territories”, “the unification of all Albanian-populated territories in one province, managed by Turkish Governor-General”, “granting the Albanian language official status and the introduction of a national army under the supreme command of a Turkish officer” (Reuter, 1982, p. 18).

At the same time, delegates of League of Prizren sent a special memorandum to the participants of the Congress of Berlin, as well as to the Turkish government and diplomatic representatives of the Great Powers in Istanbul. They drew Europe’s attention to the above-mentioned provisions. Memorandum addressed to Britain Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli declared: “We are not and we do not want to be Turks, but at the same time we will fight against those who want to turn us into Slavs or Austrians or Greeks; we want to be Albanians” (Skendi, 1967, p. 45).

Delegation of the Albanian League led by Abdyl Frasheri left Prizren for Berlin. In addition, petitions contained the requirements of the League were distributed in London, Paris, and Berlin.

However, representatives of the Albanian national movement failed to participate in the work of the European forum along with representatives of their Balkan neighbors and even to include Albanian problem

into the agenda for discussions. The Great Powers have denied the very existence of the Albanian nation. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck declared that “the Albanian nation does not exist” and European diplomats continued to consider the territory with Albanian population only as a geographical pattern and as an element for mutual territorial exchanges by other Balkan states (Castellan, 1980, p. 10).

As a result of above-mentioned attitudes, approaches, and speculations, the Great Powers made in the Balkans a mosaic of independent, self-contained, occupied and other states, territories, provinces, and regions. Simultaneously—in the best traditions of geopolitics—they took care of keeping intact the “holy of holies”—the transport routes. The main water artery—the Danube—was declared neutral and free to shipping. The passages of warships through the Black Sea Straits were still forbidden, and even passed on to Russia port of Batum has received the status of Porto Franco (free shopping haven) and was to be used exclusively by merchant ships.

Congress of Berlin also became a starting point for growing American interests in the Balkans. Initially US policy in the Balkans “to some extent proceeded from similar assumptions and principles associated with ‘Splendid Isolation’ of Great Britain” (Iskenderov, 2017, p. 116).

However, by the beginning of the World War I, the Balkan direction in American foreign policy began to acquire self-importance.

After Congress of Berlin Balkan, countries had to use all their efforts in the field of economic development of acquired territories. They had to overcome financial-economic impact of the three-year international crisis, to find solutions for accumulated political issues and new inter-state disputes. Serbian government called that “consolidation of military conquest”. But those problems still are not solved even today.

On the other hand, activities of the League of Prizren shortly got an anti-Ottoman trend. The opposition between the committees of the Albanian League and Turkish authorities has reached much tension in Prizren, Debar, Djakova, and Lum, where it sometimes took an armed character. Russian General Consul in Thessaloniki M. K. Ulyanov reported that the Albanian authorities—in particular, in Debar—are actually carried out judicial and police functions:

The members of the League strictly pursue the robbery and murder, often sentencing offenders to death or the burning of houses and property, whereas the Turkish government in their provinces in no way can stop the robbery and ensure the lives of innocent villagers. (1992, p. 184)

A number of Russian diplomats in their reports not only informed Saint Petersburg about the current political and military situation in the areas of the activity of League of Prizren, but also analyzed the historical and ideological roots of the Albanian national movement. So, the Russian Consul in Prizren I. S. Yastrebov (who was one of Russia’s leading experts on Albanian affairs) expressed the widespread view of the Russian foreign policy circles, that Albanian League was largely a creation of the authorities of Istanbul. However, he pointed out that the League was created at the suggestion and on the basis of the development of one of the ideologists of the Albanian movement Pashko Vasa, who was at that time advisor to the Kosovo Vali. According to the Russian diplomat, Pashko Vasa himself borrowed this idea from a prominent figure in the Paris Commune of 1871 General Gustave Paul Cluseret who visited the regions of European Turkey. Yastrebov even called supporters of League of Prizren “Communards”, although the direct analogies still looked doubtful because of the deep differences in socio-economic and socio-political conditions in France and in the Albanian lands (1992).

Second period of the Albanian national movement development was closely connected with the Albanian uprisings 1908-1912 resulted in the proclamation of independence on November 28, 1912 in Vlora. During that period, Austria-Hungary and several other Great Powers—to a very significant extent Italy—already paid particular attention to Albanian matters—but refused to support independence of Albania.

First All-Albanian Congress in Bitoli in November 1908 was a first very important sign of “restart” of the Albanian national movement after crushing League of Prizren by Ottoman Empire. Delegates from Albania, Italy, Egypt, Bulgaria, Romania, and the USA took place in that forum. Its importance in the context of the Albanian national movement was described by Russian Consul to Bitoli P. Kal:

Congress' main goal was not even to create Albanian alphabetic system, but in the first place to unify all the Albanians. That wish repeated in all speeches of the participants without exceptions during open-door sessions. The same wish was in no doubts one of the main themes of the secret sessions of the Congress. (Smirnova, 2003, p. 41)

By the summer of 1909, one should note first military actions of the Albanians against the new regime of the “Young Turks”. In the spring of the following year, such actions turned into a massive armed rebellion of the Albanians of the Kosovo vilayet. It was provoked by the military action by Turkish regular army led by Turgut Sevket Pasha and the introduction of siege throughout the territory of Albania in the late summer. Head of the Russian Vice-Consulate in Prizren S. P. Razumovsky pointed out in his diplomatic report dated 4 May, 1910 that “the Albanian movement, which began because of the failure of the introduction of a city tax not in time, bought recently purely fundamental nature of the struggle against the ‘Young Turks’” (Archive, d. 2082).

Position of the Turkish authorities was complicated by a very important factor. That factor was mentioned in a thorough article in the Russian newspaper “Novoye vremya” (“New Times”) of May 30, 1910 under the title “The Value of the Albanian Movement”. The author of the article stressed that the territorial boundaries of the Albanian question covered in one way or another all the provinces of European Turkey, and the area of the uprising even could easily expand, drawing into its orbit many of the Albanian tribes both Catholic and Muslim.

On the other hand, the Great Powers, especially Austria-Hungary and Italy, formally entered into a single military-political bloc, actively strengthened their economic positions in Albania, and gave this region an increasingly important place in their separate foreign policy plans. Italy began to value the Albanian direction as an independent and promising since the beginning of the 1880s (since the occupation of Tunisia by France in 1881, when Italy not only lost hopes to acquire it or get some compensation, but also understood her diplomatic isolation and a certain “inferiority” of her status as a Great Power). At that time, the problem of the place of Italy in the system of international relations in Europe and her strategic role in the Mediterranean has become particularly relevant for the Italian leadership. The basic meaning and content of the struggle between two Powers for economic and political control over Albania was quite clearly noted in 1904 by Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs T. Tittoni:

Albania itself has no importance whatsoever, all of its special significance lies in the harbours and coast, the possession of which for Austria and Italy is equivalent to the unrestricted domination on the Adriatic Sea. However, Austria will not allow this to Italy, and Italy will not allow this to Austria, and if one Power strives for it, another one will resist it by all her forces. (Arsh, Senkevich, & Smirnova, 1965, p. 125)

That Italian view was directly resonated with the opinion of the Tittoni's Austro-Hungarian colleague A. Goluchowski, who said: “Austria has no interest to this province [Albania], but cannot let the capture of her by

other Power. The Adriatic Sea should remain free” (Archive, d. 2081).

The degree of the Austro-Italian contradictions around Albania was periodically increased, and world media seriously considered even the possibility of military conflict between them. For example, American newspaper *The Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City) published in December of 1910 the article under the catchy title “Are Austria and Italy on the Brink of War?”. The article stressed that “Austria thinks of the March on Salonika, and Italy—about the capture of Albania”.

Balkan leaders also tried to use Albanian national movement in their own interests. In the first place, one should note the role of Montenegrin King Nicholas. His closest associates have developed a far-reaching program of action for the transition of Albanian tribes under the jurisdiction of Montenegro. War Minister of Montenegro M. Martinović openly admitted in his interview with the Russian military agent in Cetinje N. M. Potapov that “attitudes of the Great Powers concerning the desirability of speedy updates of Turkey and of the consolidation of her new political system do not coincide with current views and thoughts of Montenegro”. He did not rule out the possibility that as long as Turkey does not get stronger, the principality “will try to make a mess in the Balkans, in order to reward herself by parts of Albania and Old Serbia [Kosovo] for the loss of hope for acquiring Bosnia and Hercegovina” (Archive, d. 2082).

Russia was also guided in her Balkan as well as Albanian policy by own geopolitical interests. It considered Serbia and Montenegro as traditional allies in the Balkans and therefore treated the Albanian national movement primarily as a threat to the stability of the overall situation on the Peninsula and to the security and territorial integrity of the Slavic States. Pan-Slav intentions also played a significant role—not only in the Balkans. One of the leaders of the Slovenian national movement within Austria-Hungary Janko Lavrin was a staunch supporter of Russia and the idea of creation a broad Slavic Union—at least in cultural and national sense.

The language spoken by 2/3 of all Slavs, understood from the Balkans to the Arctic Ocean, from Austria and Germany to the borders of China, the language that gave the world one of the best literature, more than anyone has the right to become a language of mutual relations of the Slavs. (1908, pp. 43-45)

But at the same time, Saint Petersburg condemned the expansionist ambitions of the Montenegrin leadership, which could lead to a sharp worsening of relations and even military conflict between Montenegro and Turkey as well as to the collective intervention of the Great Powers. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs A. P. Izvolsky in a secret telegram to Russian Chargé d’Affaires at Cetinje on May 13, 1910 stressed the need to give Montenegrin King Nicholas urgent advice to abandon his plans towards Albania and “to stop any action” in that direction (Archive, d. 2082).

In this context, it is important to stress that Russian diplomats took an active part in fierce discussions about ethnic roots of the Albanians. Some of them traced Serbian roots of Albanians. Among them, Russian delegate to the International Control Commission in Albania (1913-1914) A. M. Petryaev was one of the most prominent Russian experts on Albania (Iskenderov, 2018).

He underlined that Albanians lived in Kosovo and Macedonia “in the vast majority of cases should be considered as “Turkish Slavs” and “Albanized Slavs”. “Albanian people never played a political role, but under the Turkish domination becomes a force that comes out of their field, expanding its borders to absorb another nation, which is the glorious historical past”, wrote Petryaev about Serbs and Albanians in 1912 (Archive, d. 5296).

Russian Consul to Prizren I. S. Yastrebov also saw the transition of the Kosovo Serbs into Islam an important factor in creating the Albanian ethnos (Archive, V-A2).

However, the point of view of the Serbian roots of a considerable part of the Albanian ethnic group was strongly opposed by some other Russian diplomats in the early twentieth century. Russian Consul to Mitrovica Tuholka in the comprehensive report dated 1915 stated that the Albanians “undoubtedly have the Aryan origin. Apparently they have lived for a long time in the mountains on the Western side of the Balkan Peninsula”. However, he also recognized the process of “Albanization” of Serbs (Archive, d. 5338).

Another important factor for Russian politics in the Balkans since the Congress of Berlin 1878 was the opposition to the creation of one dominant state in the Balkan region. In that context, one should agree with Russian diplomatic representative to Montenegro N. A. Obnorsky who was totally against the very existence of powerful Balkan states. In February 1913, he prepared a diplomatic report entitled “Russia and the Balkan Problem”. Obnorsky described two possibilities in the Balkans. First option was creation of unique state of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro under the “patronage” of Russia. That option would be contrary to Russian interests because it can cause problems in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Russian Empire, stressed Obnorsky. Second option was that weak Balkan states still preserved their contradictions between each other but also functioned under Russian “patronage”. Such option would be better for Russia, according to above-mentioned diplomat. Obnorsky thought collapse of the “status quo” in the Balkans dangerous, because “Greater Bulgaria” or “Greater Serbia” would be Russia’s regional rivals.

Obnorsky’s points of view were challenged by Russian Vice-Consul in Vlora and representative to the International Control Commission in Albania A. M. Petryaev—who supported creation of united Yugoslav state including Serbian areas of Austria-Hungary. Such a state could be populated by 14 million people and possessed Adriatic Sea harbors (Archive, d. 61).

One should agree that among the Great Powers, Russia for a long time was a supporter of integrity of Ottoman Empire. As The New York Herald rightly wrote on July 12, 1878, Russian emperor Nicholas I in the 1850s “stated clearly his own opinions of the condition of the Ottoman Empire and of the necessity the Great Powers were under of providing against the event of its actual collapse”.

Meanwhile understanding of Albanian issues in the international community had risen to a new level in 1911. First of all, that was connected with the fact that a new Albanian revolt broke out in March, had a wider scope, and by the summer of that year spread throughout Albania. Russian envoy to Serbia N. G. Hartwig noted that new uprising “apparently organized by experienced hand and directed with unusual tactical sequence”; in addition, “despite the significant concentration of government troops in fighting the Turks met serious difficulties with the Albanians” (Archive, d. 2084).

The leaders of the Albanian national movement succeed in establishing sustainable contacts with different social and political circles and movements in other states, in particular in Italy, Bulgaria, and Montenegro.

On June 23, 1911, Albanian members of the local committee in Podgorica published a memorandum called “The Red Book”, which was the first holistic program of struggle for a broad territorial-administrative and economic autonomy of the Albanian lands. It was conveyed to the Turkish leadership and the governments of leading European powers.

Serbian Consul in Pristina M. Rakić pointed out in his report on July 24, 1911 that “the most significant hallmark of today’s motion is the desire for autonomy” (Rakić, 1985, p. 270).

At the same time, according to Serbian Consul, such factor objectively contributes to the escalation of Serbo-Albanian relations in these areas, as the Serbs living there were forced to sit on the fence and largely neutral stance so as not to give rise to any repressive measures in relation to them from the Albanians as well as from Turkish authorities. According to his observations, a considerable part of the Serbs directly opposed the aspirations and demands of the Albanians (Rakić, 1985).

At the same time, Montenegrin support for the Albanians with arms, money, and volunteers became more active. That led to serious complications of the Montenegro-Turkish relations as well as overall situation in the Balkans. The Great Powers in that period had already anticipated the discussion of the Albanian question at the international level.

Temporarily Manager of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs A. A. Neratov wrote on July 27, 1911 to Russian Ambassador in Istanbul about his conversation with diplomatic representative of Austria-Hungary to Russia Count Turn. That report ended with the following conclusion: "The problem of solving Albanian crisis belonged to the internal affairs of Turkey should not be excluded from the program of the upcoming [international] discussions, since it would be acceptable for Turkey" (Archive, d. 2084).

The Balkan States also began to take into account events in Albania in the context of their foreign policy courses. An ambivalent attitude to them in Greece was determined by numerous circumstances. Russian Chargé d'Affaires in Greece Tatishchev pointed out in his report dated July 28, 1911: "Any inner turmoil in the Ottoman Empire is found by the Greeks with a sense of fun. This however is understandable because these troubles serve as evidence of the precariousness of the 'Young Turks' regime hated by the Greeks" (Archive, d. 2084).

On the other hand, the deterioration of the relations between Turkey and Montenegro due to the uprising in Albania could threaten the global political course of the Greek government, designed to maintain the existing situation in the Balkans, at least until re-organization of the Greek army started under the leadership of English and French instructors. Finally, almost decisive importance for Greece had the aggravation of the situation in areas of Southern Albania (Northern Epirus according to Greek terminology) claimed by Athens. The rise of the Albanian national movement in these areas could prevent the implementation of those expansionistic plans. Therefore, as Tatishchev reported, the Greek ruling circles and public opinion preferred "to continue the current domination of the Turks in Epirus, rather than the seizure of that region by Albanian propaganda" (Archive, d. 2084).

Russian diplomatic representatives in the Balkans recognized the rise of the Albanian factor. Vice-Consul in Vlora A. M. Petryaev wrote to Saint Petersburg in 1912, that "Albanian nation never played political role actually get force under Ottoman rule and go out of its area and expand its boundaries" (Archive, d. 5296).

At the same time, Russia understood that interests of the Albanian national movement and those of Turkey became more and more contradicted. In Russian archive one should find very interesting appeal issued in February 1912 by Albanian leaders of Malessia (North Albania) and received in Russian Vice-Consulate in Shkoder. They accused the Turks and blamed her for the failure of promises and "abdicated responsibility for the unrest if their requirements would not be fulfilled immediately" (Archive, d. 2084).

In 1913 during so-called "Scutari Crisis", Russia firstly tried to support Montenegrin claims towards the city of Shkoder (Scutari) but finally decided to act together with other Great Powers with the goal to avoid military conflict and even European war.

In July 1912, correspondent for the Saint Petersburg newspaper “Rech” (Speech) V. Viktorov (who had an objective and professional knowledge about Albania and Albanians) visited the headquarters of one of the leaders of the Albanian uprising, Riza Bey and had a long conversation with him and some other leaders including Bajram Curri and Hasan Bey. Riza Bey said to Viktorov:

We are fighting for the natural rights for great Albanian nation. We are not rebels. We want peace ruling all over the Ottoman Empire. We wish our Sultan to live in harmony with Russia, because we only know two great nations: our people and the Russian people... Our current struggle is only the first stage. We demand special rights for the four vilayets: that of Shkoder, Ioannina, Bitoli, and Kosovo. As for the fifth—that of Thessaloniki—we have not yet come to certain conclusions. The Albanians live in that vilayet too. The entire Albanian people with us are in this fight. It is a fight against bullying of [“Young Turks”] Committee over our just and legitimate demands. (Archive, d. 2084)

However, finally Albanian question raised from internal to international level in late 1912, when a new upsurge of the liberation struggle of the Albanian people led to the proclamation of the independence of this country on November 28, 1912. On 17 December of the same year, the conference of diplomatic representatives of the Great Powers in London began a comprehensive discussion of Albanian matters.

The next day after the declaration of independence was adopted Ismail Qemali sent telegrams to Foreign Ministers of leading European countries and Turkey, in which he informed them about decisions made in Vlora and asked to recognize Albanian independence and protect Albanians “from any infringements of their national rights and territory from the dismemberment”. The document said that

The Albanians are included in the Family of Nations of Eastern Europe and proud of the fact that they are an ancient people. They pursue only one goal: to live in peace with all the Balkan States and become a stabilizing basis in the region. (Smirnova, 2003, p. 56)

Ismail Qemali also sent telegrams to the countries of the anti-Turkish Balkan Union. They contained the requirement to cease hostilities and withdraw troops from Albanian territory.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S. D. Sazonov promptly informed Russian diplomatic representatives in Belgrade, Sofia, Paris, London, Vienna, and Berlin about the decisions made in Vlora. He stressed the particular importance for Serbia in this difficult situation to observe the caution in the Albanian question and in the first place to abandon plans of joining the coastal areas of Central Albania: “The Serbs should not put us before necessity to renounce publicly solidarity with them supporting what we believe is unnecessary” (Smirnova, 2003, p. 56).

However, from practical point of view, the Great Powers ignored the appeal of All-Albanian Congress in Vlora. The only available answer came from the Turkish government, but that was negative. Moreover, on December 3th, the Greek fleet attacked Vlora. But both Austria-Hungary and Italy had warned Athens against the capture of the port—thus demonstrating further evidence of the complex interplay of interests of Great Powers and the Balkan countries of Albania (Vickers, 1995).

After long discussions, the meeting of Ambassadors of the Great Powers in London rejected Turkey’s plans to keep Albania as her province. On the other hand, they also refused to recognize Albania as an independent state—which was consistent with the plans of Austria-Hungary and Italy prepared a joint project (Puto, 1988).

According to the decision on the legal status of Albania accepted on July 29, 1913 at the London international forum, it was proclaimed “a sovereign, neutral and hereditary Principality under the protectorate

of the Great powers". This protectorate was to carry out a special commission composed of seven members—six from the Great Powers and one from Albania, which was assigned the duty to disband the existing authorities, to develop the country's "Organic Statute" and organize an international corps of gendarmes (Castellan, 1980, p. 23).

Albania herself became a place of struggle between various internal military and political group—but one should agree that religious factor did not play a dominant role. That situation had a lot in common with actual processes across the world. As Russian researcher M. A. Sapronova truly noted,

Coming to power of the Islamists is not identical to the creation of an Islamic state, that shows the political process in the Arab world after 2011. Their victory often leads to erosion of the very idea of Islamism, demonstrates the instability of Islamic political structures. While in the specific political situation, the greatest success achieved by those militant religious organizations does not care about ideological nuances. (Sapronova, 2015, p. 37)

That was characteristic for Albania on the eve of World War I to a very significant extent.

The main struggle at the London meetings in 1912-1913 took place on the issue of the borders of Albania. Serbia presented its own map. It demanded inclusion into the enlarged borders of the Serbian state Decani, Djakovica, Prizren, Ohrid, and Debar. Montenegro claimed Shkoder, San Giovanni di Medua, and Lesh.

On October 21 of 1912, the Montenegrin troops began shelling the mountain Tarabos with the ultimate goal to capture the heavily fortified fortress of Shkoder.

Germany strongly condemned the policy of Montenegro. England, France, and Austria-Hungary threatened to take military action against Serbia and Montenegro and against Russia, if that will support them. The acuteness of the discussions about the fate of Shkoder was demonstrated by well-known statement of one of the participants in the London meeting of the ambassadors of the Great Powers, the Austrian diplomat M. Mensdorf likening them to "buying a carpet at the Istanbul Bazaar" (Puto, 1982, p. 163).

Russia also put a tough diplomatic impact on Montenegro at the final stage of discussions. As a result, Montenegrin army left occupied fortress of Shkoder. British historian Kenneth Morrison rightly wrote that as a result of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913, "Montenegro's military power had been significantly eroded, and it was increasingly uncertain who in diplomatic circles it could trust. What is more, domestic opposition remained" (Morrison, 2009, p. 35).

Serbia also for a long time refused to fulfill obligations made by the Great Powers and withdraw her army from Albanian territory. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia A. A. Neratov declared in Belgrade that he had been speaking to Italian Chargé d'Affaires in Russia, which stressed the solidarity of Italy with Austria-Hungary concerning the continuance in force of the decisions of the London Conference. He and also diplomatic representative of the Austro-Hungarian Empire accused Serbian Prime-Minister Nikola Pasić of insincerity, citing his statements about the undesirability for Serbia to be considered with the decisions of the Conference made at the meeting with members of his party. In this regard, Neratov instructed head of the Russian diplomatic mission in Belgrade to state categorically to the Serbian government that "it cannot count on the sympathy of Russia resisting already accepted decisions" (Archive, d. 531).

Russian Chargé d'Affaires in Belgrade has also received a secret telegram to the Russian Ambassador in Paris, A. P. Izvolsky with the "urgent councils" transferred to Serbian representative in France M. Vesnić by Russian and French Foreign Ministers S. D. Sazonov and S. Pichon to comply with the requirements of the Powers of the Triple Alliance. Immediately after that, he contacted head of the Serbian government

encouraging him to seek some other way to protect Serbia from Albanian incursions, without occupying “strategic points” on the Albanian territory. Pasic understood well the indication of the Russian representative and promised to discuss the matter with the Army chief R. Putnik. But before Pasic managed to report this conversation to the other members of the Serbian leadership, Chargé d’Affaires of Austria-Hungary in Belgrade presented on 18 October the ultimatum of his government, in which Serbia was proposed within eight days to clear Albanian territory, under the threat of making by Austria-Hungary more decisive action in case of unsatisfactory response (Archive, d. 530).

Following this, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary, L. Berchtold invited Serbian envoy in Vienna and categorically told him that the Habsburg Monarchy would take decisive action against Serbia “in the case of abandonment of at least one Serbian soldier outside borders specified by the Conference” (Archive, d. 531).

The ultimatum caused great excitement in Serbia. A number of members of the government called for a categorical rejection of the demands of Austria-Hungary. But at the end, more moderate position of the head of government prevailed over. Visiting the Russian mission immediately after the meeting of the Council of Ministers, Nikola Pasić said that his Cabinet decided to withdraw Serbian garrisons from Albania as a result not of the threats by the Habsburg Monarchy, but only of the benevolent advice by Russia. Pasic added that the garrisons will be transferred to the Serbian side of the border line and placed in such a way that at the first appearance of armed groups from the Albanian side the latter could be subjected to a massive attack by the Serbian forces. At the same time, Prime minister said that his government had decided in the near future to appeal to European powers for speed establishment in Albania of international police and gendarmerie—which are an essential guarantee of peace on the Serbo-Albanian border (Archive, d. 530).

According to the notice, the Serbian Supreme military commanded, at ten o’clock in the morning of October 25, 1913—24 hours before deadline fixed by the Austrian ultimatum—the Serbian troops had left Albanian territory (Archive, d. 530).

In this context, it is quite interesting to compare military power of Austria-Hungary and Serbia. On the eve World War I, the number of personnel of the Serbian army in time of peace amounted to 52,000 people (as for Montenegro—2,000 people), in the case of a military threat that numbers could arise up to 247,000 people in Serbia and 60,000 in Montenegro. The number of pre-war army at the disposal of Austria-Hungary amounted to 478,000 people. In the case of start of military operations, Vienna could account on 1,421,250 people (Zayonchkovskiy, 1938).

At the end, a compromise around the borders of the new European state was achieved. Albania secured Shkoder. On the other hand, vast territories with a majority of Albanian population, including Kosovo and plateau Dukagjin with the cities of Prizren, Debar, Pec, and Djakovica were transferred to Serbia, as well as cities of Plav and Gusinje—to Montenegro. That had negative consequences for the further development of the situation in the Balkans and in Europe in general. According to some estimates, in 1913 Albania has obtained only half of the Albanian lands if we consider the territory and the Albanian population living in the former Ottoman Empire (Castellan, 1980).

One should agree in this context that Russia’s approach toward the borders of Albania was quite complex. For example, Russian prominent diplomat A. M. Petryaev supported delimitation between Albania and Greece according to Albanians’ plans. In March 1913, he wrote a private letter to Head of the 2nd political department

in Russian foreign ministry G. N. Trubetzkoy and stressed that for Russia it would be better to enlarge Albania's territory to the south (towards Greece) with the goal to neutralize Albanian territorial aspirations towards Serbia and Montenegro and oppose the rise of Albanian nationalism.

Petryaev has also criticized position of Serbia in his territorial dispute with Albania. He pointed out that Serbian demand for acquiring Djakovica simply provokes Austria-Hungary and complicates the work of the Balkan peace conference in London: "I think the Austrians will concede Djakovo [Djakovica] and may be already could do it if there were not different irrelevant statements and speeches by the Serbs 'qui indisposent les autrichiens'" (Archive, d. 2087).

In accordance with the provisions of the London Peace Conference, Great Powers sent to the Balkan states collective Declaration, which stressed the need for the adoption of all appropriate measures to protect the rights and interests of national minorities. In regard to Serbia, the diplomatic representatives of the Great Powers in Belgrade made official representation in the above-mentioned sense on 17 August 1913. They also underlined the fact that Serbian troops continued to stay on Albanian territory, contrary to the relevant resolutions of the London conference. Serbia refused to take into account Russian arguments for leaving Albanian territory and to prevent conflict with Austria-Hungary. Serbian diplomats stressed that Austria-Hungary will not take any decisive action because she "missed too many cases to cause serious harm to Serbia during the Balkan crisis" (Archive, d. 530).

Serbia's actions have provoked a new escalation of the problems along Serbo-Albanian border, which forced the Great Powers to take active measures. Powers of the Triple Alliance presented in Belgrade an ultimatum. Russia at the crucial moment forced the Serbian government to make concessions that prevent European war in autumn of 1913.

The relations between Russia and Serbia on one hand and between Austria-Hungary and Albania on the other hand were to a very significant extent pattern of the "Axle and Spokes" principle. That principle was later actively used by the US foreign policy towards East Asia as well as Spain and successfully helped to prevent dangerous expansionist ambitions of regional states (Cha, 2016).

After World War I, the Great Powers finally recognized Albania's independence, but her borders remained unsolved by Albanian leaders' point of view. That "burden" seriously undermined situation in the Balkan during XX century and resulted in conflicts in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Preshevo Valley (1998-2001). The role of international actors in those conflicts was controversial. "Double standards" were imposed on Kosovo, Macedonia, and Preshevo Valley and actually Albanian national problem to a very significant extent remains unsolved.

"An inherent property of human nature is to interpret the unknown by using the previously familiar", but this approach is simplistic—rightly emphasizes the French expert of the international relations Bertrand Badie. He urges "to go to the inclusive vision of the new international relations" (Badie, 2016, p. 20).

That "inclusive vision" is the main option that could help to understand the Albanian matter in past, present, and future.

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