

## Balkan alliance- – project on renewal of mediaval empires

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### Abstract

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire was faced with great economic and political difficulties. The Balkan monarchies would try to use this situation, and the same would do the two antagonist parties, the Russian empire and the group of dualistic monarchy. Those two groups were waiting for the most convenient moment to benefit from the territory of the European Turkey. Even the diplomacies of the Balkan monarchies had intentions of annexing the Albanian and Macedonian territories.<sup>1</sup> In those circumstances, "... a role with a specific importance had the continuous rebellions in Albania (Luarasi, 1973, 75)". This situation was seen as an opportunity for Serbia, for the realization of the project of Ilija Garašanin for the renewal of the medieval state of Stefan Dušan. This project could be realized easier by approximation of the politics of the Balkan monarchies. In these conditions, an alliance between Serbia and Bulgaria was necessary, in order to create optimal conditions for the approximation of politics between Serbia and Bulgaria.

This situation was seen as an opportunity even from the Great Powers and Slavic states, which had their long-lasting dreams of expanding their territory. The Great Powers among themselves were in antipodal positions. Each of them aimed at extending the hegemony in Balkans. Main objective of this article is the analysis of the Balkan Alliance after WWI.

**Keywords:** *Balkan, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Bulgaria, WWI.*

### Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century found the diplomacy divided in two antagonist blocks. In such conditions, the tsarist Russia (The Russian Empire) was interested to extend their hegemony in Balkans. They tried to realize this intention through the Slavic states of Balkans. With the intervention of the Russian diplomacy, the first disruptions for the Serbo- Bulgarian deal began. The Serbo-Bulgarian negotiations were always held with the acknowledgement of the Russian, Nikollaj Hartvig in Belgrade and Alexander Nekludovit in Sofia. It is understandable that this happened with the approval of Tsar Nicholas II. In October of 1911 Cheskov and Milovanovic created the preliminary conditions for a political and military alliance. The first negotiations for the alliance were held between Serbia and Bulgaria. They were focused on having a deal for the inheritance of the Balkan states after the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. The created conditions dictated the deals among the Slavic-Orthodox states. Albanians necessarily would face with "storm clouds" that would bring bloodshed. The deal would "provide, among others the division of the Albanian land in east and northeast" (Puto, 1978). This way, the lands in the north and west of the Sharr mountains, where the vilayet of Kosovo and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar were situated, would be annexed by Serbia, while Bulgaria would be allowed to annex the territory in the east of the Rhodope mountains and the Struma River. According to

<sup>1</sup> Први Балкански рат 1912-1913, трећа књига, Београд, 1960, стр.18.

the treaty, it was foreseen that Serbia, would have a path to the Adriatic Sea.

So the Italo-Turkish war and the rebellions of the Albanians in 1911 urged the Balkan monarchies to think about the future of their own countries. Except the commitment of Serbia and Bulgaria to build an alliance, it was Greece that showed the idea of an alliance with Bulgaria. Regarding this negotiation, Russia advised the Bulgarian government of being careful, because Greece would urge a war with Turkey because of Crete".<sup>2</sup> The representative of Russia, Nekludov, informed Petrograd (Petersburg) about the Greek proposal. Petrograd recommended that the Bulgaro-Greek alliance could happen with the condition of keeping the status quo. They were in continuous contacts with Serbia and they had begun to align their attitudes. This meant that they did not have to keep the back from each-other.

While Albanians were committed to protect their land with armed resistance, the neighboring states firstly through their hidden diplomatic channels worked to strengthen and assure their attitudes and to benefit in the future on the Balkan territory, that still were under the administration of the Ottoman Empire.

One important role on the grouping of the events in favor of Serbia and the Slavic-Orthodox states played the Serbian Minister and diplomat, Milan Milovanovic. He managed to convince Russia that it was necessary that the Slavic-Orthodox states must align their political attitude in order to prevent expanding the hegemony of Austro-Hungary Empire in the Balkans.

The Bulgarian government, advised by the Russians, accepted to enter the negotiations with Serbia: "in basis of the brotherly restrictions and the common interests of both states..."<sup>3</sup>

On October, 3<sup>rd</sup> and October, 4<sup>th</sup> 1911, began the negotiations between the Serbian and the Bulgarian parties. The Serbo-Bulgarian agreement would cancel the idea about the autonomy of Macedonia, whereas they would know to Serbia the rights for the part of the Macedonia in the south of Sharr Mountains and Skopje. According to Rizov, this division limits the territory claims of both states.

Both sides had territorial claims. The land in the north and the west of the Sharr mountains, so the Vilayet of Kosovo and the Sandjak of Novi Pazar would go to Serbia, whereas Bulgaria would get the land in the east of the Rhodope mountains and the Struma River. The middle provinces of Macedonia "that lie among the Sharr mountains and the Rhodope mountains, Aegean Sea and the Ohrid Lake" had to form possibly an autonomous province for the common interests of Serbian and Bulgarian nationalities. In case of an impossible entity, Bulgaria would get the Ohrid province, Serbia would get another part of the land in the upper part of Macedonia, whereas the part left would be divided with an arbitration decision of the Russian Tsar" (Puto, 1978, 75).

The Serbian and the Bulgarian parties agreed to create the alliance. Milovanovic thought that with the annexing of Macedonia, Serbia would create the conditions to "...secure influence in Albania and to secure a linking way to the Adriatic Sea ...".<sup>4</sup> However, the case of defining the border line between Serbia and Bulgaria was not finished. After the diplomatic negotiations, both parties decided that Russia would have the last say about the borders. Serbia was pleased with such a proposal, because

<sup>2</sup> Prvi Balkanski Rat, Beograd, 1959, prva knjiga, str.120.

<sup>3</sup> Prvi Balkanski Rat, Beograd, 1959, prva knjiga, str. 86

<sup>4</sup> Prvi Balkanski Rat, Beograd, 1959, prva knjiga, str. 89.

they knew that Russia would be on their side.

Seeing the development of the situation in Balkan and Europe, it was necessary to accelerate the deal between Serbia and Bulgaria. That is why Milovanovic and Rizov formulated the agreement this way:<sup>5</sup>

“The deal will be a deal of common allies for defense and attack”<sup>6</sup>

... The alliance offensively opposes Turkey according to the preliminary deal for the case of liberation of Kosovo (“The Old Serbia”) and of Macedonia without the need of a preliminary deal, if one or the other side goes into war for protecting its own population against the Ottoman Empire. Serbia recognizes to Bulgaria the full rights in the Vilayet of Edirne, while Bulgaria recognizes to Serbia, full rights for the Vilayet of Kosovo in the north of the Sharr mountains and the Vilayet of Scutari (Shkodra); as for the Vilayet of Kosovo in the east of the Sharr mountains and the Vilayets of Bitola and Salonica, if the two sides could not have an agreement than the Russian emperor would have the last decision. The same applies even for accepting them to the alliance”.<sup>7</sup>

The Serbo-Bulgarian alliance was a trade of two Slavic states for the annexation of the Albanian and Macedonian lands, whereas neither Albania, nor Macedonia, was considered.

After five months of discussions between Serbia and Bulgaria, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, they signed the agreement. Its first paragraph implied that:

“On the fellowship and the alliance between the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Bulgaria”<sup>8</sup>...

The deal consists of seven articles. In the first article is expressed the solidarity for mutual help. Article two specifies the bilateral obligations. According to the content of the Articles I and II, it is seen the impossibility of the contracting parties to face separately with the Ottoman Empire, so they are obligated to be unique, “in case of eventual interventions of any great power for annexation or occupation of any Balkan territory”. Article III foresees the obligation of the two parties for peace with the consent of the two contracting parties.

Article IV foresees that the military convent will decide what they would do in case of war.

Article V determines that the deal will be in power from the day of signature until 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1920.

Then, articles VI and VII foresaw that the deal must be written in two languages, Serbian and Bulgarian, and that they would be signed by the rulers and Ministers of the Foreign Affairs of the two states.

Serbia was afraid that the Great Powers could accept the autonomy of Albanians. According to them, autonomy would be under the protectorate of Austro-Hungary. If such autonomy was realized, Serbia would lose the opportunity of occupying the Albanian territory that was foreseen even on the notorious project of Ilija Garasanin.

Article II of the Annex emphasizes:

“Serbia recognizes the right to Bulgaria in the territory in the east of the Rhodope

<sup>5</sup> Arhiv v. I. I. mikroteka NI, br 1, snimci 18 -21

<sup>6</sup> There should be noticed the determinant role of the Tsarist Russia.

<sup>7</sup> Prvi Balkanski Rat, Beograd, 1959, prva knjiga, str.93.

<sup>8</sup> Prvi Balkanski Rat, Beograd, 1959, prva knjiga, str. 106

mountains and of the Struma River, whereas Bulgaria recognizes to Serbia the right in the territory in the north and the east of the Sharr Mountains".<sup>9</sup>

The deal between Serbia and Bulgaria had a hidden addition... There was written exactly what would happen to Macedonia. Kosovo automatically belonged to Serbia. The Russian diplomat in Sofia, Urosov, saw the Agreement as a "daylight of the Serbo-Bulgarian deal, but, that does not represent the daylight of peace". This deal was born in war and it was born for war.

The Serbo-Bulgarian alliance was created with the purpose of the occupation of the Albanian and Macedonian lands. Serbia had claims over the Albanian territory, while Bulgaria claimed to occupy the Macedonian territory. The claims of the Serbian and Bulgarian politics about the Balkan territories after the expulsion of the Turkish army from Balkans are well-known ones. In this aspect, Serbia and Bulgaria were rivals, because of their predatory aspiration.

### **The accession of Greece and Montenegro in the Balkan Alliance**

The alliance is completed with other deals: between Bulgaria and Montenegro, between Serbia and Montenegro, and between Montenegro and Greece. These deals entered into force by the end of September and by the beginning of October of 1912. In those deals" any date, even any close one, was not set for the beginning of the military actions. The immediate cause for the beginning of the attacks would be given by the Albanian movement in a specific way, with the Great Rebellion of spring of 1912, that was especially spread in Northern Albania (Apostolski, 1978).

The Balkan states took their decisions about alliance exactly at the time when the House of Osman had gone into an armed conflict with Italy in Libya and at the time when the rebellions of Albanians against Turkey had picked up almost in all the Albanian regions. While Albanians were fighting continuously against the Ottoman Empire, Serbia kept Albanians with the hope of supporting them morally and materially. At the same time, they kept a "friendly" attitude with the Ottoman Empire. In conclusion, the Balkan alliance was a tendentious project that foresaw eviction of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkan territory, and annexation of them by the Slavic-Orthodox states.

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<sup>9</sup> "Prvi Balkanski rat", Beograd, 1959, page 109