

Karl KASER*

AUSTRO-HUNGARY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF MONTENEGRO

ABSTRACT: Until the outbreak of the Balkan Crisis in 1875, the Monarchy's foreign politics of non-intervention into Balkan conflicts aimed at enabling the Ottoman Empire to solve its problems on itself. At the beginning of 1875, the minister for foreign affairs, Andr assy was alarmed by a not unlike intervention of Serbia and Montenegro in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its eminent consequences for the security of Dalmatia. Therefore, the occupation of the two Ottoman provinces became an open aim of his foreign policy. Another aim was to prevent a potential unification of Serbia and Montenegro. A sovereign status of Montenegro was a much better option. The paper's first section will provide a short sketch of the Habsburg Balkan policy from about the Congress of Vienna (1814/15) to the Congress of Berlin (1878); the second will present an overview of the bilateral relations between the Habsburg Empire and the emerging state of Montenegro until 1878; the third section, finally aims to shed light on the Empire's ambitions related to Montenegro at the Congress of Berlin.

KEY WORDS: *Austro-Hungary, Habsburg Balkan policy, Montenegro, Congress of Berlin*

Habsburg Balkan policy in general and towards the emerging state of Montenegro is relatively fair researched. However, a profound and comprehensive study of the complex relations between the European Great Power of the Habsburg Empire and the little Balkan power of Montenegro is still missing. Since the author of this paper has not conducted specific

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archival research on this topic, this paper can only summarize research that has been conducted until now. The first section will provide a short sketch of the Habsburg Balkan policy from about the Congress of Vienna (1814/15) to the Congress of Berlin (1878); the second one will present an overview of the bilateral relations between the Habsburg Empire and the emerging state of Montenegro until 1878; the third section, finally aims to shed little light on the Empire's ambitions related to Montenegro at the Congress of Berlin.

1) Habsburg Balkan Policy 1815-1878

The Habsburg ruling elite could be satisfied with the results of the Congress of Vienna. After the shock of the Napoleonic wars, Austria's international position was again territorially consolidated (Bridge, 196) but experts of foreign relations consider its territorial extension on the long run as obviously overstretched. Compared to the Atlantic powers the Monarchy was economically relatively weak – a predominant agrarian state, which was lagging behind in industrialization. With a population of only about 30 million and an army of maximal 230,000 soldiers, the Monarchy was not able to keep its territorial position in Central Europe completely and permanently (Bridge, 197). Its position was limited by the strong continental powers of France in the West and Russia in the East and was threatened by internal nationalistic movements. The only comfortable neighbor was its former arch-rival, the struggling Ottoman Empire. One of the guidelines of the Monarchy's statesman and foreign minister since 1809, Count Metternich was not to weaken the Ottomans additionally because this would only open the field for Russia's expansion in the Balkans (Bridge, 198). This architecture included, of course, the Monarchy's resistance against the emergence of independent Balkan states out of the Ottoman Empire. This negative attitude is understandable from the Monarchy's own multiethnic background but constituted also an obstacle for achieving impact on the newly emerging states in the Balkans such as Greece and Serbia.

The expanding Russian Empire became the Habsburg's main rivalry in the continental Balkans since the second half of the 18th century. Both imperial powers considered the Balkans as their natural sphere of interest and expansion, since it became more and more likely that the Ottoman Empire was not permanently able to keep its European provinces together. Because of its Orthodox basis, Russia had a better reception among the mainly Orthodox population of most of the Balkan countries compared to the Catholic Habsburg Empire, although it had demonstrated its ability to integrate successfully Orthodox (Serb) population since the early 18th century.

The Congress of Vienna provided the Habsburg Monarchy with the territory of Dalmatia, which potentially constituted the basis for further political and territorial advances in the Balkan region. The question of security for the long coastal strip of Dalmatia, interrupted only by a narrow access to the Adriatic Sea for the Ottoman Empire in Herzegovina, became one of the motivations of the Monarchy's engagement in the region – especially in the neighboring Ottoman provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro (Bridge, 213).

After the forced retreat of the Habsburg Monarchy from Italy and Germany and the reorganization of its internal structures in 1867, since about 1871 (when Count Julius Andrassy was appointed the Monarchy's foreign minister – he served until 1879) also its foreign politics began to focus more strongly on the Balkans than before. In his first years in power, Andrassy's foreign policy was very conservative in the sense that he wanted to achieve and maintain a strong alliance with the Ottoman Empire. This included a politics of non-intervention into Balkan conflicts in order to enable the Ottoman Empire to solve its problems on itself (Vranešević, *Serbien*, 354; Bridge, 245p.). The situation, however, was complicated. The future of the Ottoman Empire became more and more uncertain; Russia also played an offensive role; and – maybe most crucial – there was the problem of the future of the South Slavic population – within and without the Monarchy. The more South Slavic territories under Monarchy's domination, the bigger the potential problems in the era of nationalism. The Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Andrassy and parts of the ruling elites were completely aware of this problem (Heer, 129). Therefore it seemed to be more comfortable to control the Balkan area politically and economically than to occupy areas. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the only exception from this rule – and became the beginning of the Monarchy's end.

Andrassy's foreign policy of remaining passive and of securing the stability of the Ottoman Empire failed. This became already obvious before the outbreak of the Balkan Crisis. At the beginning of 1875, Andrassy was alarmed by a not unlike intervention of Serbia and Montenegro in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its eminent consequences for the security of Dalmatia. Therefore, the occupation of the two Ottoman provinces became an open aim of his foreign policy (Haselsteiner, 229p., 232). In the Balkan Crisis of 1875-1878, when a series of uprisings from Bosnia to Bulgaria could not be controlled by the Ottoman Empire any longer, Austro-Hungarian foreign politics had to make profit from the anyhow crumbling Empire, especially in Bosnia. Three arguments spoke for an engagement in the neighboring country: (1) The Ottoman Empire was obviously unable to keep the order upright in the province; (2) this would create a permanent danger for the position of

Dalmatia; (3) the perspective of a united advancement of Serbia and Montenegro in Bosnia-Herzegovina and a final unification of the three regions to a South Slavic state with Russia as possible protection power was an alarming vision for the Ballhausplatz (Bridge, 249p.). This vision came close to reality with the treaty of San Stefano between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in March of 1878, which foresaw a Greater Bulgaria under Ottoman suzerainty, but without Ottoman troops, with borders at the Aegean coast and with the Albanian territories and an autonomous status for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Montenegro's territory, however, should be increased threefold including the territory of the Sandjak of Novi Pazar as biggest territorial extension (Geiss, XVI; Heer, 154).

Belonging to its forefield, the Monarchy's relations to Serbia and Montenegro became essential. The relations to Serbia showed ups and downs until 1878 but generally it was clear to Serbia's ruling elite of that time that it was not able to conduct an open anti-Habsburg politics because realistic political alternatives were not at hand. Russia demonstrated in San Stefano with the promotion of Greater Bulgaria that it always had various options, and that Serbia was only under certain circumstances able to play out the Russian card against Austro-Hungary.

In 1876, in the course of the Balkan uprisings against the Ottoman Empire, Serbia and Montenegro concluded a kind of military agreement, which aimed at the mutual assistance in the liberation of the South Slavic countries from Ottoman domination (Heer, 133). From an Austro-Hungarian perspective a unification of Serbia and Montenegro constituted an absolute danger for the existence of Habsburg Empire because the reaction of its South Slavic population was not predictable. On the other hand the question remains open whether a voluntary unification of the two "Serbian" countries constituted a realistic option. The countries' ruling elites already had developed different plans and concepts for their future foreign policies, which were by far not only in accordance (see Jovanović).

The Congress of Berlin constituted a significant turning point in the Balkan affairs of the second half of the 19th century. Russia was made clear that it could not overstretch its political aims in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire's weakness was documented by the formal international acknowledgment of the sovereignty of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro, the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary and the practical loss of its sovereignty over most of Bulgaria. Austro-Hungary could be satisfied because its territorial position in the region had improved – and, at least for the moment – Serbia and Montenegro could be kept under control.

2) Relations between the Habsburg Empire and Montenegro until 1878

On the Congress of Vienna in 1815 the Habsburg Monarchy received not only the Dalmatia but especially the Boka Kotarska and became therefore definitely neighbor of the Ottoman province of Montenegro after a temporary control of the region from 1797 to 1805 (Vranešević, 376; Tischler 52-54). Montenegro and Habsburg had to establish neighborly relations, which included political, strategic as well as economic questions.

Since the Boka consisted only of a small coastal strip, the question of stability in its mountainous hinterland became of high priority for the Monarchy. Therefore from the very beginning the Habsburg-Dalmatian authorities were paternally interested in Montenegrin internal affairs with the aim of "civilizing" its population and improving security and stability as well as to dominate the country indirectly (Tischler, 357p.). One of the methods to achieve this aim was the education of selected young men at Austrian schools, which provide orthodox religious education (Tischler, 362). This should help to create a Montenegrin elite that was, at least partly, oriented towards the Monarchy and to break with tendency to send young men to Russia for higher education.

One of the most important problems was legal conflicts between inhabitants of Montenegro and the Boka, since the Montenegrin customary law and its practices was not in accordance with the Austrian civil and criminal law (Tischler, 359pp.). One of the most evident successes of the mentioned Austrian training efforts was the work of Valtazar Bogišić (1834-1908). The Catholic Serb, born in Cavtat attended Law School in Vienna in 1859 and received his degree in 1862. In 1872 he was invited by Nikola I to create a new Civil Code for Montenegro, which could be published in 1888 and, in a revised version, in 1898 (Vekarić/Kapetanić, 74).

Because of the predominant Orthodox population of the Boka, the 19th century witnessed a series of smaller conflicts with the Habsburg administration, and the Monarchy began to intervene into Montenegro's internal politics. Especially in the period of the definite demarcation (1837-1841) – a result of a personal conversation between Metternich and Vladika Petar I in 1837 – (Heer, 43p.) of the border between the two countries conflicts were frequent, and it was not easy to settle a series of territorial matters.

These conflicts were also a result of the unresolved question of the Vladika's territorial competence as spiritual and worldly leader of the Montenegrins as well as of the traditional rights of Montenegrin tribes to use coastal territories for winter pastoral purposes; especially the Paštrovići community with its traditional rights on using pastures in the Primorje has to be

mentioned in this context. The predominant problem was the competences of the Montenegrin Vladikas in Southern Dalmatia – especially in the Boka Kotarska and over the monasteries of Stanjevići and Majini close to Budva. The Orthodox community of the Boka Kotarska could be relatively easily attached to the Habsburg-Serbian Metropolitanate of Karlovac, but the situation of the monasteries of Stanjevići and Majini was much more complicated, since the Austrian administration could consider them as points of departure for further Montenegrin expansion in the coastal areas. Finally, in 1837 the Austrian administration bought the monasteries as well as its territories at a satisfying price (Heer, 33-43). It has to be made clear that all these treaties between Austria and the Ottoman province of Montenegro did not include an explicit or implicit acknowledgement of Montenegrin sovereignty (Heer 48; Roberts, 209p.).

Another question was the strategic interests of the Monarchy in the Boka, since it was designated to become a prominent war harbor for the Monarchy. Therefore the border between the two countries – according to Austrian desires – should be defined as high as possible above the sea level, which again crossed with the winter pasture interests of Montenegrin communities (Heer, 44). Finally, most of the Montenegrin pasture aspirations on Austrian territory were eliminated by the payment of compensation in 1841 (Heer, 47, 49, 50). The border drawn in 1841 remained unchanged until 1918. Although for the Montenegrin rulers Russia was the most important international partner, especially Bishop Petar II (1830-1851) was eager to establish correct relations between the two countries (Vranešević, 377).

One of Austria's aims in Balkan politics since Metternich had been to support the existence of the Ottoman Empire. This included the re-integration of Montenegro fully into the Ottoman administrative system and to prohibit a Montenegrin expansion to Southeast Herzegovina (Heer, 97). But the battle of Grahovo (1858) changed the situation, and the Ottoman Grand Vizier agreed to border negotiations without asking for the formal acknowledgement of Ottoman domination by the Montenegrin authorities in advance (Heer, 98). The Austrian delegate to the demarcation commission, however, as well as the Ottoman delegation created problems for the Montenegrin side (Andrijašević/Rastoder, 101p.). Practically an independent state since 1860, Austria's main aim now was to control Montenegro politically and not to let it cause political problems for the Monarchy (Vranešević, 378p.).

The field of economic relations was the less developed. Montenegro had a completely non-developed market. It was in a pre-capitalistic and pre-industrialized state. Industry, railroads and a modern road infrastructure did not exist. In short, Montenegro was much less developed than its neighboring Balkan countries (Preshlenova, 41).

In 1815 the country came basically into the economic sphere of interest of the Austrian neighbor, the economy which was underdeveloped compared to the Atlantic powers. Missing colonies, losing impact between 1848 and 1866 in Central Europe, it began to penetrate the Balkans economically as part of a self-declared civilization project. Economically, the Montenegrin market was unimportant for the monarchy. Austro-Hungarian entrepreneurs did not invest in Montenegro, and the annual trade was close to zero. The share of Montenegro of the Monarchy's overall external trade was 0.01% and 0.5% of its Balkan trade (Preshlenova, 55). In 1890 the Monarchy, e.g., imported only 7,000 livestock from Montenegro (Preshlenova, 53). In the second half of the 19th century 90% of the Montenegrin export constituted of livestock and animal products (Preshlenova, 58). Montenegro imported from the Monarchy mainly cereals since its poor soils could not provide sufficiently for the growing population, textiles, leatherwear, and clothes (Preshlenova, 58). A discussion whether the economic relations between the two countries were colonial in this context obviously does not make sense.

If the Habsburg Monarchy concluded economic agreements with Montenegro, then because of political reasons. The only commercial treaty between the two countries was concluded in 1911, when Montenegro interrupted temporarily its basically good relations to Russia. Montenegro received concessions for border exchange of stock and meat (Preshlenova, 51, 53).

3) Congress of Berlin 1878

In the Balkan Crisis (1875-1878), which opened the field for various kinds of Serbian and Montenegrin interventions in the conflict, the tensions between the Monarchy and the two Balkan states increased. The Monarchy felt forced to express implicit and explicit threats vis-à-vis Serbia and Montenegro not to support the insurgents in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Vranešević, *Serbien* 355). Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro were Russia's allies in its military campaign against the Ottoman Empire. With the Treaty of San Stefano the Russian allies were compensated by significant territorial extension. Montenegro's territory was tripled, including an access to the Adriatic Sea and acknowledgement of its sovereignty, Serbia's territory was almost doubled (Batowski, 55).

Finally, at the Congress of Berlin Serbia and Montenegro, which were present at the Congress, but without voting power (Batowski, 56p.), decided to come into good terms with the Habsburg Monarchy. Vice versa, the Monarchy opted finally for a controlled upgrading of the international status of Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia's sovereignty was accepted under the condition that the country renounced an extension to Kosovo and the Sanjak

of Novi Pazar, accepted the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and promised the conclusion of a commercial treaty with the Monarchy (Vranešević, *Serbien* 357). Montenegro lost territories already occupied by its troops (Batowski, 57).

Montenegro had not a good standing at the Conference: a russophobic ground tenor was prevailing, and for Russia the Montenegrin question was of no superiority. In territorial questions Austria-Hungary was often on the side of the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in a decreased Montenegrin territory compared to San Stefano (Heer, 156p.); Montenegro lost three quarters of the territories promised in San Stefano (Batowski, 60). Austria-Hungary on the other hand tried to secure its impact on the Western Balkans – geostrategically as well as commercially (Heer, 158). The Monarchy received the right to co-occupy the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, the conquest of which was one of the aims of the Montenegrin uprising against the Ottoman Empire, and to establish garrisons there. The aim of this step was to prohibit the establishment of common borders between Serbia and Montenegro and to secure Austrian traffic lines to the Ottoman Empire (Vranešević, 380).

But this was not the only restriction of the Habsburg Monarchy for Montenegro. Art. 29 stipulated the Monarchy's right to control the harbor of Bar militarily and sanitarily the acquisition of which was on Montenegro's positive side in the Berlin negotiations. Montenegro was forbidden to establish a war fleet, to station warships there or to use it for military purposes. It was also not allowed to establish roads in the coastal area without permission of the Monarchy. No warships of other nations were allowed to be stationed, but only ships with commercial ambitions. Austria-Hungary was allowed to extend its Dalmatian territory slightly to Spič in order to be able to control the harbor of Bar (Vranešević, 380; Heer, 162; Geiss, 294p.).

The territorial ambitions of Montenegro were reduced by Habsburg, although the Great Powers agreed in doubling of its territories (paragraphs 26 – 33 of the Berlin Treaty) (Heer, 162p.). Especially the area of Nikšić because of its fertile plain constituted an important extension of Montenegrin territory. But it was clear that Austria would prohibit any further extension to the north. The only realistic extension was therefore directed towards the North Albanian territories (Roberts, 253)

In summing up, Montenegro was very successful in establishing its own state, although the social and infrastructural preconditions and the immediate neighborhood to the European Great Power of the Habsburg Empire were rather unfavorable. Montenegro was even able to keep upright an active diplomatic role until the eve of the Balkan Wars but could not take immediate advantage of the disintegrating Habsburg Empire. From a Habsburg perspective the relations between the two states could be controlled by it

until 1878 but not so successful afterwards. The year of 1878 insofar constituted a kind of turning point in the bilateral relations between the Habsburg Empire and Montenegro. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 provoked pronounced disappointment in Serbia but especially in Montenegro (Roberts, 274). The Dual Monarchy, however, was not any longer able to control its territorial forefield in the Balkans efficiently.

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Summary

The territorial ambitions of Montenegro at the Berlin Conference of 1878 were reduced by the Habsburg Empire, although the Great Powers agreed in doubling of its territories. But it was clear that Austria would prohibit any further extension to the north. A future unification of Serbia and Montenegro could be prevented by the Monarchy's right to occupy the Sanjak of Novi Pazar. Further restrictions of the Habsburg Monarchy for Montenegro were the Monarchy's right to control the harbor of Bar, the prohibition to establish a war fleet and to station warships there. In addition, Montenegro was not allowed to establish roads in the coastal area without the permission of the Monarchy. From a Habsburg perspective the relations between the two states could be controlled by it until 1878 but not so successful afterwards. The year of 1878 insofar constituted a kind of turning point in the bilateral relations between the two countries. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 provoked pronounced disappointment in Serbia and especially in Montenegro. The Dual Monarchy, however, was not any longer able to control its territorial forefield in the Balkans efficiently.