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ЧЛАНЦИ

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THE BALKAN WARS, 1912-1913, AN AUSTRIAN-HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT: *The paper deals with the position, intentions and perspectives of Austrian – Hungarian Empire at the end of XIX and the beginning of XX century. In order to maintain its status of the Great Power, it sought the area for expansion in the Balkan, as the only direction possible. On the other side, the growing power of the newly formed Balkan states, predominantly Serbia, presented an obstacle to its pretensions on Thessalonica, which was tried to overcome by creation of independent Albanian state under decisive influence of Wienna, as well as through backing the Bulgarian side in Second Balkan war. Failure of this plan led to further escalation of the conflict with Serbia, with clear perspective of the military clash.*

KEY WORDS: *Austrian–Hungarian Empire, Balkan Wars, Serbia, Bulgaria, Thessalonica, Albania*

Regarding its political and military strategy, the situation for the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy on the eve of the Balkan wars was not an easy one. On the one hand, it considered the Balkan region its exclusive zone of influence and the only geographic-strategic area where it was able to try to emulate the other European Great Powers in their colonial attempts; on the other hand, it had been Russia that had created the war alliance of the Balkan states, which for Austria as a would-be colonial power made any influence on the alliance and its goals impossible. At the same time, the monarchy’s room for manoeuvre was restricted in several ways: not just regarding its own economic and military resources, but most of all regarding the international political system of the increasingly dissonant “Concert of the Great Powers” and particularly regarding the existing and competing systems of alliances

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which made the "concert" into background music and gave priority to confrontation.

Keeping within the bounds of possibility, Austro-Hungarian foreign policy set itself realistic goals, which it could only partly realise, however, as the Balkan wars developed dynamics that the monarchy had not foreseen and which questioned its colonial strategy in the Balkans – particularly towards Serbia. The decisive political and military powers drew the conclusion from the Balkan wars that the foreign policy strategy of securing decisive influence on the Balkan countries in the context of the existing alliances could not be implemented any more by political, economic and diplomatic means. Finally, those voices would gain acceptance which already on the eve of the Balkan wars had demanded a pre-emptive war against Serbia in order to regain the political initiative in the Balkans.

The road towards this situation is analysed below under two main headings. Under the first heading, the possibilities and colonial goals of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy on the eve of the First Balkan War will be discussed. Under the second heading is a discussion from Austria-Hungary's perspective of the precarious strategic situation that had been created by the results of the two Balkan wars.

I The colonialist goals of the Habsburg monarchy on the eve of the Balkan wars

In this section, the situation of the Habsburg monarchy within the system of the European Great Powers must first be discussed. After this, the monarchy's colonialist concept of the Balkan countries will be discussed in general and specifically.

From 1815 to about 1878, the "Concert of Great Powers", consisting of Great Britain, France, Russia and the Habsburg monarchy as well as Prussia/Germany, and completed by Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century, created stability in Europe. However, this stability was put in question by the formation of new Balkan states at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and by Russia's, Austria's and Italy's attempts to influence them. This gradually declining system of securing European peace was increasingly eclipsed by the two alliances of the European Great Powers, which led to an increasing danger of war in so far as one partner's war threatened to drag also the other partners into the war. Apart from this fact, this international policy of alliances of the Great Powers was accompanied by armament and investing in armament (Mann, 1998, pp. 185f, 192).

This change happened in two phases: 1. From the late 1880s to 1902 there were two areas of conflict divided from each other: the Triple Alliance

(Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy) versus the Dual Alliance (France and Russia); 2. During a second phase there was the consolidation of the two blocks of states: Germany's continuing rise and Russia's breakdown during the war against Japan lead to a re-orientation in so far as Great Britain partly joined the French-Russian Entente (Mann, 2001, p. 243).

Regarding war and peace, during these decades a "theory of realism" had been accepted. It was based on three assumptions: 1. States have "interests" or at least their "statesmen" articulate them; 2. Clashes of interests between states are part of everyday politics; 3. War is a common if dangerous means of pushing through or securing one's own interests. Thus potentially, as a rational instrument for achieving national goals, waging war became more and more likely (Mann, 2001, p. 238). In this regard, the small states in the Balkans were the Great Powers' equals in every way and the Balkan wars 1912-13 followed exactly this kind of logic.

In this context also the predominant national dogma, which gained acceptance during the late nineteenth century, must be taken into consideration – that is, "geo-policy". Its core was the conviction that the state was a geographic organism. "Vital", strong states were said to have the "natural" desire of extending their territories by colonialisation and conquest. Geo-politicians named four "vital" national interests:

1. defending one's own territory, as the predominant interest;
2. extending control of territories by geo-political formalism (forcing other states into "pacts of friendship" or making them economically dependent);
3. building up a colonial area of strategic control and rule; and
4. securing the first three issues by demonstrating economic and military strength within the system of states. (ibid, p. 241)

Striving for hegemony, rationality of war, geo-policy, the "objective" interests of the Great Powers and a certain constellation of alliances were the factors that led to the extension of a regional war towards a world war. Thus, a century came to its end in which Europe had enjoyed relatively long periods of peace. The Balkan wars were a pre-phase of the First World War in so far as by their results Austria-Hungary saw its interests only insufficiently considered.

Austria-Hungary's possibilities of realising its ambitions in the Balkans were declining at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Concert of the Great Powers was increasingly ready to end the policy of putting a stop to the small and middle Balkan states' expansion against the Ottoman Empire – after centuries-old hostility one of the most important allies against the "Slavic threat". Thus, Austro-Hungarian foreign policy was orientated towards preserving the existence of the Ottoman Empire as long as possible, in order

to reduce Russia's influence on the region on the one hand and on the other hand to prevent the expansion of the Slavic Balkan states (which might also become a problem in home affairs). Thus, the monarchy got into conflict not only with the Balkan states themselves but also with the other Great Powers which already had given up on the Ottoman Empire or were working on its destruction. From the point of view of later historians, the monarchy became thus a burden for the European system of powers. By the annexation of Bosnia in 1908 it implied that it was trying to strike a harsher note for its Balkan policy (Kos, 1996, p. 10; Williamson, 1991, pp. 42f; Bridge, 1989, pp. 324f).

Austria-Hungary's relationship with its two partners in the Triple Alliance over the so-called oriental question – that is, the question of their attitude towards the Ottoman Empire or rather its breaking-up – was more or less critical due to different interests. Germany, which did not have any particular interests in the Balkans but concentrated on Anatolia, feared to be dragged into a Balkan conflict by the monarchy's foreign policy. Thus it was not ready to leave the leading role in oriental policy to Austria (Mommsen, 1991, p. 206). This conflicted with Austrian foreign policy, which considered the Balkans its very own sphere of influence (Kos, 1996, p. 42). But German foreign policy supported those of Austria's interests, as formulated on the eve of the First Balkan War, that were not based on being enforced by military means.

The Italian attitude was different: Italy tried to preserve the status quo as long as it did not change into a direction conflicting with its own interests. Italian foreign policy interpreted Austrian-Hungary's interests as formulated by its foreign policy in such a way that after enforcing them in the Balkans the Habsburg monarchy would be economically superior and would profit to the disadvantage of Italian economy – particularly regarding Montenegro and the Albanian areas of settlement. But as, after the Ottoman-Italian war over the islands of the Dodecanese in 1911-12, Italy was strongly engaged in the Aegean Sea and increasingly in Northern Africa, it was not able to become considerably active in the First Balkan War (Kos, 1996, pp. 45ff).

On the side of the competing Dual Alliance of France and Russia, Russia had massive interests in the Balkans. Russian foreign policy tried to strengthen the Slavic Balkan states, on the one hand to weaken the monarchy, at least on the long run, and on the other hand to improve its own position in the region. While the influence of the monarchy was increasingly declining after the crisis of the Bosnian annexation in 1908-9, Russia succeeded in moving the competing Balkan states of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece towards a war alliance against the Ottoman Empire (Rossos, 1981, pp. 8ff).

Habsburg colonial ambitions were torn between two kinds of colonial policy, between directly exercising power and imposing its cultural and

administrative system – as was the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina after 1878 – and the attempted exploitation of economic resources, as was supposed to happen in the case of Serbia, the latter refusing the demands of the monarchy, however, which led to the so-called Customs War (1904-10) between the two countries. Basically, also the colonial policy of the Habsburg monarchy in the Balkans was based on the mercantile philosophy, as formulated as early as the eighteenth century, according to which one had to start out from the idea of a distributive share of powers in the face of overseas expansion, saying that the world's wealth was limited and its distribution was a zero-sum game: country A was only able to increase its wealth at country B's expense. This thought was supported by the obvious connection between a country's wealth and its ability to win wars (Mann, 1991, p. 357).

Thus, short but intensive colonial wars counted as rational actions; the victor took possession of disputed colonies, the loser had to be satisfied with what was left to him. From the decision makers' point of view these wars had the advantage of not happening on one's own territory. Thus, successfully waging war was to nobody's disadvantage in the victorious state (apart from rising taxes or a general mobilisation); probably it was even to the majority's advantage. For the sake of their own interests, the readiness of the wealthy classes to provide funds for financing aggressive foreign policy was increasing (ibid, pp. 358f).

Regarding this strategy, the task of the state was thus to open up and protect markets for its own enterprising bourgeoisie, with the help of its military potential. For its Balkan policy, the Habsburg monarchy pursued no other strategy – even in the face of the First Balkan War – if it did not want to decline as a Great Power in the face of the fact that Germany had been able to build up colonial empires during the previous decades and that Italy was about to do the same.

It was clear that the First Balkan War, if the Ottoman Empire was not to be victorious, could most probably produce only negative results for the Habsburg monarchy as in this case the Slavic allies as well as Greece would be victorious. A military intervention in favour of the Ottoman Empire would have resulted in Russian counter-action and also would have been strictly rejected by the German and Italian allies. Thus, for those responsible for the foreign policy of the Habsburg monarchy – if not for all its military leaders – it was clear that military intervention was not a serious alternative (Bridge, 1989, pp. 323ff). But still, the monarchy could hope for certain advantages, so to speak as a compensation for staying away from intervention.

On this, during the manifold discussions of experts, which had been called to the foreign ministry in the early autumn of 1912, there crystallised two central goals: 1. securing a decisive influence on the harbour of Thes-

salonica and the railway line leading to it, as well as; 2. preventing any hostile power from establishing itself on the eastern Adriatic Sea in the area of Albanian settlement, such as Italy (rather unlikely) or Serbia (looking more probable). Thus, at first sight everything was mostly about trade and economic demands, but without being covered by political steps they could not be realised (Kos, 1996, p. 231).

Doubtless, these two goals were considered the preliminary stages of realising the great goal of military and colonial strategy – dominating the Balkan regions. Being the great loser in the field of the European Great Powers' colonial policy – and thus comparably far behind in its economy – for the medium term its economic resources were too small to keep up its status as a European Great Power (Kennedy, 1989, pp. 330ff).

When in the autumn of 1912 the situation was escalating and a war of the Balkan alliance against the Ottoman Empire seemed to be unavoidable, in the Austrian foreign ministry basically three possible developments were foreseen after war broke out: (1) keeping up the status quo, if the Ottoman Empire were victorious; (2) determining realistic goals, if the Balkan alliance were victorious; or (3) accepting spheres of influence for the states of the Balkan alliance combined with partly keeping up the status quo (Kos, 1996, p. 19).

Now, regarding the second option one could not believe there was any chance of preventing the victorious powers from distributing the European part of the Ottoman Empire among themselves; and, with the exception of individual military leaders, no military intervention was (yet) being considered. For this case, the most important strategic goals were defined as: 1. creating an autonomous or independent Albania; 2. securing access to Thessalonica (which was supposed to build a free port and if possible become an autonomous region, with the peninsula of Chalkidike, under international administration of some kind); 3. hoping that unacceptable conditions for buying would not be imposed on those directing Austrian tobacco production in the area around the Thracian town of Drama or the harbour of Kavalla (Kos, 1996, pp. 20f). This way, Austria-Hungary could imagine remaining the decisive Great Power in the Balkans.

Albania

The creation of an autonomous or if possible independent Albania, which was supposed to be under the decisive influence of the Habsburg empire, was directed against Serbia, which wanted access to the Adriatic Sea independently of Montenegro, and against Italy, which wanted to make the Adriatic Sea an Italian sphere of influence. The eastern part of the Adriatic Sea was bound to stay under Austro-Hungarian control for undisturbed merchant shipping.

Although during the Berlin Congress in 1878 the Albanian question was considered irrelevant by Bismarck, in the course of the following decades the Albanian-settled regions gradually became a factor also for international politics, particularly for Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia, whose spheres of interests were overlapping regarding the Albanian question. More simply, one could summarise the interests of these European powers as follows: Russia was trying to support the territorial enlargement of the neighbouring Slavic states at the expense of the Albanian regions (and thus indirectly the extension of its own power). Italy was striving for rule over the Albanian regions as a compensation for Austria-Hungary having been given the right of administrating Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878. Austria-Hungary was increasingly striving for independence for the Albanian regions to the greatest possible extent, to stop the expansion of the Slavic states of Bulgaria and Serbia towards the Adriatic coast.

Thus, in Italy and Austria-Hungary there were two influential powers which – if in a mutual alliance – intended to support independence of the Albanian regions in one way or the other due to different interests of their own. Regarding this question, these two states increasingly started to compete without, however, ending up in open conflict. This can also be explained by the fact that at this time neither of the two Catholic states was striving for direct control over the Albanian regions, as this would have confronted them with the problem of a Muslim majority. Particularly for Austria-Hungary this must have been a problem, as since 1878 it was confronted with conflicts between the Muslim and Christian parts of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the face of the threatening decline of the Ottoman Empire's power in Europe, the two states had spoken out for common action on the Albanian regions as early as 1876; there was agreement on supporting autonomy or independence for the Albanian regions if the Ottoman Empire were falling apart.

Regarding Albania, the diplomatic and military alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, existing after 1882, did not leave much room for manoeuvre for the two states. But in 1887 – when there were negotiations about prolonging the alliance – Italy succeeded in pushing through against Austria its demand for compensation in the Balkans if the existing status quo in the Balkans should change in favour of Austria-Hungary. Thus, this included a vague right of compensation regarding the Albanian regions.

Regarding the Albanian regions, the representatives of the two states decided at Monza in 1897 to try to keep the situation in the Balkans stable as long as possible. Should there still be a change of territories, the two states were to agree on common action. This agreement included a provision that both states formally supported Ottoman rule over the Albanian regions. But if the situation started to move, the two states would try to achieve understan-

ding about the future status of the Albanian regions; this did not exclude the possibility of Albanian independence (Gostentschnigg, 1996, pp. 62f).

At the same time a kind of competition on the cultural level started for Albanian hearts and souls. However, it was and had to be restricted to the Catholic population in the northern regions of the Albanian area of settlement. The Catholic population was supposed to be a kind of ticket to the Albanian regions. The methods of the two states were rather similar: building and/or financing schools, influencing appointments of clergy, building churches and other larger or smaller presents that were supposed to keep the population happy. Austria-Hungary was able to point to its official function as a protective power of the Catholic population (the so called "cultural protectorate"). This way, there was a yearly influx of considerable financial support into the Albanian regions. Basically, however, this subsidy policy was a very restricted concept or instrument of foreign policy, not able to make any change one way or the other (Gostentschnigg, 1996, pp. 102-13).

It was clear that the decisive change had to come from the outside. A number of rebellions by the Albanian population had not really been able to endanger Ottoman rule over the Albanian regions. In most cases they were local revolts with very specific demands, such as resistance to the introduction of new taxes or against the despotic rule of single Ottoman administration functionaries. For example, in 1909-10 there were repeated rebellions in Kosovo against newly introduced taxes or recruitments. In the following year, a great rising in the northern Albanian regions finally led to handing over a memorandum to the representatives of the European Great Powers who were accredited in the capital of Montenegro, demanding rights of autonomy within the Ottoman Empire – but not independence; the Muslim parts of the population acted rather cautiously. Also in 1912 there was a similar situation, and again there were demands for autonomy.

Thus altogether, the Habsburg monarchy was able to express its vital interest in a dominating role by founding an autonomous Albanian administration area within the Ottoman Empire or an independent Albanian state. The rivalry with Italy over this question was not a problem due to the fact that the marriage of the heir to the throne (later King Victor Emanuel I) to the daughter of the Montenegrin King Nikola I kept open an alternative option of territorial anchoring in the eastern Adriatic.

Thessalonica

As early as in the 1870s, Thessalonica was considered by Austria-Hungary the most important gate of Austrian-Hungarian world-wide trade (the "Orient trade"). This attitude must be understood in the context of the building of the Suez Canal. On the question of the optimal (or at least the

most reasonable) transport of goods, two schools of thought developed. One was in favour of increasing use of the cheaper but longer route for goods via Trieste. The strategic disadvantage of this option lay in the Strait of Otranto, which could be blockaded by Italy if that country wished to do so and was able to establish itself in southern Albania. The other opinion was in favour of increasing use of the more expensive but faster route via the harbour of Thessalonica. Until the First Balkan War, the advantage of this option lay in the so-called Sandshak line: if this were built, the railway track would lie entirely on territory under Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman control.

In 1874 the stretch from Thessalonica to Mitrovica (Kosovska Mitrovica) – built by the operating company Oriental Railways (in those days still financed by German capital) – was opened; however, it was not yet connected to the Austrian railway network in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The "Sandshak line project was to make the connection to the Bosnian railway system, which was exclusively narrow-gauge at that time. The Morava Valley line via Serbia would have been cheaper to build, particularly since in 1878 the monarchy had gained extensive rights on the Serbian railway network. But after the First Balkan War there was no argument left for a railway track via the Sandshak, because the latter had become Serbian (Kos, 1996, pp. 190-3; Riedl, 1908, pp. 10-13).

According to Austro-Hungarian foreign policy, Thessalonica was to become a free port that would grant certain privileges to Austro-Hungarian trade, and the administration of the port was supposed to be given to an Austrian or Hungarian entrepreneur (Kos, 1996, p. 31).

Kavalla

Kavalla was the export harbour for the tobacco-growing areas of the Thracian region of Drama, which lay north of the harbour. Particularly as regards transport the region was insufficiently opened up, and Kavalla was ideal as an export harbour in that the climate in and around the town was especially favourable for storage. In contrast to the competing harbour of Thessalonica, Kavalla was protected from the north and thus not exposed to the cold northern winds. The "Vardarac" wind was able to considerably affect the quality of tobacco in the harbour of Thessalonica. Already under Ottoman rule about 150 smaller and larger, mostly Austrian, companies had been established here, which bought tobacco from the Ottoman tobacco direction. But for the Austrian tobacco industry, the site of Kavalla was not essential, as 63% of the need could be satisfied by its own production (Kos, 1996, pp. 218ff).

Thus altogether we may conclude that Austria-Hungary was to look towards the results of the First Balkan War with very limited prospects of

success, as the hopes for the Ottoman Empire's further existence in Europe were dashed and the rising strength of the hostile powers of the Balkan alliance became a serious factor. With whom should or could Austria-Hungary form a coalition to enforce its anyway not very ambitious goals?

II First Balkan War and new facts

The strategic counter-offensive (from the monarchy's point of view) against the negative results of the First Balkan War was the attempt by the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry to break up the war alliance by trying to win over one of its members (Kos, 1996, p. 121). One wanted to try Serbia and Montenegro first, and after this Bulgaria. This attempt seemed to be made easier when at the beginning of the year 1913 it became apparent that the Balkan alliance was about to dissolve, as its members Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece were not able to agree on the distribution of Macedonia.

Already at the end of October 1912 – when the defeat of the Ottoman Empire became clearly apparent – Vienna saw three possible ways of enforcing its economic and political goals:

1. a customs union or far-reaching economic agreements with Serbia and/or Montenegro,
2. a customs union with several Balkan states or with the states of the Balkan union, or
3. a co-operation agreement with Bulgaria.

The monarchy tried to realise these options without co-ordinating its actions with the other Great Powers, since it considered this region its own exclusive sphere of influence (Giesche, 1932, pp. 16ff).

Regarding a customs union with Serbia and/or Montenegro, the then common trade agreements including a most-favoured-nation clause were not sufficient to guarantee a trade partner a privileged position on the contracting party's market. A customs union – abolition of the customs border between two countries – could have been a more efficient instrument: it would have secured sales of goods from Austria-Hungary with the contracting party/ies and cheap import of agricultural goods from the contracting countries. Right from the beginning, of course, there was also the thought that this way the Habsburg monarchy was trying to bring Serbia into dependency. At least these were the plans of the foreign ministry; the joint tax and finance ministry definitely rejected such plans of a customs union, as due to technical reasons they were difficult to realise, and a country like Serbia, they said, was not to be brought to its knees by them, as had been sufficiently proved by the so-called Customs War of 1904-10 between the two countries, which had been started on the question of exporting Serbian pork into the monarchy (Kos, 1996, p. 53).

The already mentioned customs war with Austria-Hungary had resulted in re-structuring and diversification of Serbian exports (from livestock to grain and processed products). The Serbian export economy was dependent on access to the harbour of Thessalonica, which was an insecure option as the Ottoman Empire had now and then blockaded the harbour. Thus, Serbia's plan for its own harbour in the northern or central Albanian region arose (Vojvodic, 1987, p. 247). According to this plan, a 40 or 50 km-wide corridor from Mrdare via Prishtina and Djakova to Shengjin (north-west of Lezha) or Durrës was intended. Serbian demands for an Adriatic harbour of its own reach back into the nineteenth century; it was supposed to make Serbian trade independent of foreign countries. As an accompanying measure, a Danube–Adriatic railway through southern Serbia was to be built (Kos, 1996, p. 62). Realisation of this plan would have needed considerable investment, since both the harbours being considered had only a shallow-draught channel, being badly silted up (Kos, 1996, p. 64).

It was quite clear that any economic approach by Serbia to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy would be on condition of the latter agreeing to the building of an Adriatic harbour (Kos, 1996, p. 59). It was also clear that the monarchy could not agree to this. First, this would have endangered the formation of an autonomous or independent Albania; second, it would have given rise to the danger of a possible Italian-Serbian alliance – with the result that Italy might be able to establish itself on (southern) Albanian territory and thus control the Straits of Otranto, which would have affected the monarchy's access to world-wide trade as long as Trieste was the predominant export harbour.

Thus, the interests of the two countries were hardly to be harmonised. Austro-Hungarian policy intended to force Serbia into a customs union by on the one hand definitely preventing Serbia getting an Adriatic harbour and on the other hand bringing the harbour of Thessalonica under Austrian control – thus cutting Serbia off from its export harbour (Kos, 1996, pp. 69f). The Serbian Government, however, firmly resisted this policy. Finally, the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry offered Serbia a compromise, which did not include a customs union any longer but extensive trade relationships instead, as well as the use of a harbour on the Aegean Sea for Serbia (Kavalla, maybe Thessalonica). The monarchy's advantages of such a solution seemed to be in Serbia being able to enforce the access to a harbour on the Aegean Sea only by the monarchy's diplomatic support. Moreover, Serbia's interests would have been shifted away from the Adriatic Sea, and Serbia would have got into conflict with Greece and Bulgaria, which might lead to a breaking-up of the Balkan alliance (Kos, 1996, p. 81). But this offer of compromise would have required the realisation of two conditions, the surrender of Thes-

salonica to Bulgaria and a friendly agreement between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, which then would have had both harbours under its control. But things did not develop that far, as the government of Nikola Pašić firmly rejected this offer (Kos, 1996, p. 82).

On the other hand, even Russia did not support Serbia's demand for an Adriatic harbour since, for the Russian leaders, this would not have been worth a war against the Habsburg monarchy. Thus, this Serbian idea could not be enforced any more, something which was also confirmed at the London Conference of Ambassadors in 1913 where the formation of an independent and territorially coherent Albanian state was decided (Kos, 1996, pp. 90f; Bridge, 1989, p. 326). On the other hand, this also meant the end of Austro-Hungarian attempts at colonising Serbia by peaceful means. Thus the (vague) plans for a customs union with several Balkan states were also dropped; anyway they could only have been enforced against resistance from the two allies, for Italy feared a loss of its economic influence in the region: the Habsburg monarchy would have been able to secure a monopoly for itself. Germany feared to be dragged this way into resulting Balkan conflicts (Kos, 1996, p. 84).

The Habsburg monarchy's only success was the establishment of an independent Albanian state. In the First Balkan War, the Albanian territories had been occupied by the Balkan alliance. In the south, Greek troops occupied the northern Epirus; Serbia occupied the Kosovo, northern Macedonia and central Albania; and Montenegro occupied the town of Shkodra and its environs. After consultations with the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Count Berchtold, Ismail Kemal Bey, one of the Albanian leaders in exile, went to Durrës and on to Vlora, the last of the bigger towns not occupied by foreign troops. A quickly organised provisional government announced Albania's independence on 28 November 1912.

Everything else was now the matter of international negotiations by the ambassadors of the European Great Powers accredited in London. While the distribution of Macedonia led to quarrels among the former allies and finally to the Second Balkan War, there were negotiations about Albania's borders. Among all the negotiating parties, Austria-Hungary most determinedly supported a solution as generous as possible for Albania. On this question, Russia was the most determined opponent. A difficult problem was Shkodra, which was occupied by Montenegrin troops. In this matter, Austria-Hungary brought all its influence to bear and succeeded in pushing through a solution. But Austria-Hungary was not able to force through an agreement on the question of Albania's eastern border. Thus, the whole of Kosovo and western Macedonia came to Serbia (Gostentschnigg, 1996, pp. 74-7). Agreement on the debated southern border with Greece was reached as late as the following spring. Although the creation of Albania was doubtlessly a success for

Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, it was a relative one, however, as at once the young state slipped into a lasting crisis.

Due to the failure of an alliance of any kind with Serbia, of the three strategic options that Austro-Hungarian foreign policy had considered, only the third one was left: an alliance with Bulgaria. This was a delicate matter, particularly as Romania was allied with the Triple Alliance hoping to resolve open territorial questions with Bulgaria in the form of claims to the southern Dobrudsha and the town of Silistra. On the one hand, Bulgaria was ready to accept an Albanian state, and the monarchy on the other hand was more willing to accept a Greater Bulgaria than a Greater Serbia. Bulgaria would have also accepted a free port at Thessalonica – though only after the Greek army had marched into Thessalonica – as well as the building of a railway line to Kavalla (Kos, 1996, pp. 122, 130).

The epitome of the precondition for an alliance of the Habsburg monarchy with Bulgaria was a Romanian–Bulgarian convergence. Bulgaria accepted – despite expecting negative economic aspects – negotiations with Austria-Hungary also because it was the only Great Power promising compensation for the loss of Silistra to Romania – the compensation being to bring Thessalonica under Bulgarian control. For Russia had early spoken out for the port to stay with Greece. Furthermore, the monarchy also supported Bulgarian demands for Ohrid and Bitola to the disadvantage of Serbia (Kos, 1996, p. 159).

Bulgaria's economic concessions to Austria-Hungary, if Thessalonica came under Bulgarian administration, were to be: 1. the harbour should have a free port zone for transit trade; 2. at the harbour the building of huge depots and warehouses as temporary stores for Austro-Hungarian use should be facilitated; 3. Austria-Hungary should contribute to administering the harbour in an appropriate way (Kos, 1996, p. 160).

Control of Thessalonica, which had been occupied by Greek troops at the beginning of November of 1912, was disputed between Bulgaria and Greece from then on. From the monarchy's point of view it did basically not matter which of the two states controlled the city, if only the Austrian plans for access to the harbour could be realised. Basically, both states were willing to grant a special status to the monarchy. Austria-Hungary, however, in order to be able to realise its intentions of an alliance with Bulgaria, backed the Bulgarian horse, which on the one hand required the ceding of Silistra to Romania, and on the other hand compensation for Bulgaria (Kos, 1996, pp. 135ff).

On this, Austro-Hungarian foreign policy succeeded in developing some momentum about the end of January 1913 – a time when the Balkan alliance was under the threat of dissolution. The Austro-Hungarian Government decided to buy from Deutsche Bank the operating company of the Oriental

Railways, which was also running the railway line from Thessalonica to Mitrovica and which owned the majority of shares. This way, the monarchy's engagement in the Thessalonica question was supposed to be emphasised (Kos, 1996, pp. 151f).

Subsequently, however, Austro-Hungarian foreign policy did not succeed in pushing through its point of view on the Thessalonica question. On 31 March 1913, the St Petersburg Conference of Ambassadors started, with the representatives of the Great Powers being present, under the chairmanship of the Russian foreign minister, to solve the territorial conflict between Romania and Bulgaria. Already in the first talks, representatives of the Triple Alliance were unable to reach agreement on compensating Bulgaria's loss of Silistra by Thessalonica, since Italy and Germany voiced their opposition. Furthermore, Russia and France – as well as Germany – strictly rejected the Austro-Hungarian suggestion in the Conference of Ambassadors. Thus the monarchy's economic and political plans for Thessalonica had to be abandoned (Tukin, 1936, pp. 164ff). For Austria, the Petersburg Conference was a heavy defeat. Bulgaria was not compensated by the ceding of Thessalonica, which now was to become Greek for good – and thus Serbia, which meanwhile had reached an understanding with Greece, was to get access to the harbour of Thessalonica. It became clear that the Greek government would not grant Austria-Hungary more favourable rights of access to the harbour of Thessalonica than Serbia (Ebel, 1939, pp. 199ff).

Austria-Hungary's attempts to establish itself by diplomatic means as the decisive European Great Power in the Balkans had thus failed, due to the results of the First Balkan War. Although the monarchy could chalk up the founding of an independent Albania as a success, on the question of controlling Serbia – whether by economic dominance or by an alliance with Bulgaria – it had failed. For the first time, a violent (military) solution to the Serbian question was seriously on the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister's agenda (Tukin, 1936, pp. 164ff).

The results of the Second Balkan War worsened the basic strategic situation of the Habsburg monarchy in two aspects: first, Serbia's status was raised. Second, Bulgaria lost its access to the Aegean Sea and to the Thracian tobacco-growing regions with the harbour of Kavalla. Austria-Hungary was interested in Bulgaria keeping the Kavalla region, which it had been occupying since the First Balkan War – less due to its economic significance (the cigarette industry), as this was only marginal, and more due to political considerations, to draw Bulgaria onto its own side against all odds (Kos, 1996, pp. 221f). During the Bucharest Peace Conference in August 1913, Russia and Austria-Hungary came into conflict with each other on this question, as Greece, supported by Russia, was not willing to give up the

Thracian regions it had conquered during the Second Balkan War. The public considered the Bucharest Conference an Austro-Hungarian defeat (Kos, 1996, pp. 224f; Gostentschnigg, 1996, p. 74).

Conclusions

Among the Great Powers, Austria-Hungary must be considered the great loser in the Balkan crisis of 1912-13, though Russia too had been unable to push through its ideas from a predominant position. But if for Russia the Balkans were only one theatre among others where it might pursue goals of expansion, for Austria-Hungary it was the only theatre, and thus the negative results of the Balkan wars were the more significant. On the one hand, Austria-Hungary had successfully contributed to the destruction of the Balkan alliance and had been able to strengthen its position on the Adriatic; on the other hand the monarchy had neither succeeded in tying Bulgaria to its side nor in eliminating or neutralising Serbia. Just the contrary: Serbia was strengthened by the crisis and the small state became a respectable middle power. Thus, both politically and economically, the monarchy had stayed far behind the goals it had set itself.

Due to this failure, in implementing the colonialist plans the military option came to the fore. As early as the eve of the Balkan crisis, senior officers as well as the heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, had spoken out for a preventive war against Serbia (Hantsch, 1963, pp. 360ff). After the First Balkan War, from the Austro-Hungarian point of view Serbia's economic subordination became improbable, and the foreign policy of the Habsburg monarchy was increasingly pushing towards direct confrontation with Serbia, while the foreign minister, Berchtold, at this time still recoiled from the consequences of such a step, namely, a probable war with Russia. Furthermore, the partners of the Triple Alliance were opposing a military engagement (Kos, 1996, p. 202).

After the Second Balkan War, Berchtold was not sure whether it would not have been better to engage militarily against Serbia and on Bulgaria's side. Now, he did not rule out any more the idea of a preventive war (Kos, 1996, p. 229) and he came to the conclusion that it was better to demand from Serbia withdrawal from certain regions, thus letting the quarrel escalate, and so reach a military solution this way. This change in his attitude must also be seen from the aspect that the alliance partner Romania was increasingly tending towards the hostile powers of the Entente and that an alliance between Greece and Serbia was becoming apparent (Kos, 1996, p. 231).

After the Second Balkan War, the conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia had reached a point of escalation that in the long run was to make

a peaceful solution impossible for either side as both states were trying to rob each other's basis of livelihood. Austria could only imagine peaceful co-existence on the basis of a colonial relationship; Serbia could imagine it only if Austria gave up the attitude of a Great Power. In the face of the escalating conflict, on either side those politicians interested in conciliation had increasingly less chance of pushing through their ideas. While Serbia and Montenegro pursued a policy of "minor stings" towards Austria-Hungary, within the political and military elites of the Habsburg monarchy there was increasingly a tendency to make a fuss over trifles in order to provoke a military conflict (Kos, 1996, p. 235). The assassination of the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 made possible a military solution.

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Prof. dr Karl KASER

THE BALKAN WARS, 1912-1913, AN AUSTRIAN-HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Summary

At the eve of the Balkan wars, the situation in fields of political and military strategy was very difficult for the Austrian – Hungarian Monarchy. Having the Balkan as the only area for colonial expansion, as a precondition for retaining the status of Great Power, the monarchy could not accept the further strengthening of the young Balkan states, especially Serbia. As it was clear that the results of the First Balkan War, with victorious Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria, were to produce only negative effects, the amortization was sought trough creation of the independent Albania under the decisive influence of the Habsburg Empire. It should provide a base for the further engagement on the main goal - control over Thessalonica, the most important harbor for planned Austrian – Hungarian world-wide trade.

After the failure of the plans of alliance of any kind with Serbia, there was only one option left for the enabling its access to this Aegean port – the alliance with Bulgaria and backing its side. The Bulgarian defeat in the Second Balkan War brought another strike to Austrian-Hungarian projections, since the Serbia has grown from the small country to the middle-power state, situated right in the way of the

desired expansion. The conflict between them consistently grew to the point of escalation, when the peaceful solution was rather unlikely to be achieved.

KEY WORDS: *Austrian – Hungarian Empire, Balkan Wars, Serbia, Bulgaria, Thessalonica, Albania*