

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE “BALKAN ALLIANCE”

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### **Abstract**

The Balkan Peninsula has never been short of ideas for the establishment of an alliance of Balkan peoples and states with an anti-Ottoman character. All Balkan states, without exception, perceived the success of the Albanian revolutionaries as a hazard to their interests. Most foreign and Balkan authors think that the Balkan Alliance was formed under Russia's initial incentive. The agreement between Serbia and Bulgaria became the backbone of the Balkan alliance, which was divided into three parts: the political agreement, the secret annex and the military convention. The “secret annex” of the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement was primarily oriented against Albanian interests. Representatives of the Great Powers rated the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement as a war instrument. The role of the judge, known to Russia, further complicated the situation. The Balkan Alliance was established contrary to the Austro-Hungarian and the Tripartite League interests.

*Keywords:* Balkan Alliance, political agreement, military convention, Great Powers

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### **Introduction**

Balkan wars of 1912-1913 represent events of an utmost importance to the history of Southeast Europe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The long-term consequences of these wars have had an influence on the political, economic, social and cultural developments of the region for several consequent decades. The Alliance of Balkan States had its own goals and strategy, with its commonalities and specifics, which related directly to the reasons of its creation. The position of the lands inhabited by the Albanian majority, made them become as a “shield” against the Slavic claims to access the Adriatic and realization of the Russian geopolitical plans. The Great Powers, particularly Russia, realized that a war in the Balkans could pave the way for a European war for which it was unprepared, so they were interested in maintaining peace and the status quo in the Balkans.

### **Description of research methods**

The historiographies of the Balkan Alliance countries have provided contradictory interpretations, which differ not only from one state to another, but also within the same state, therefore selecting relevant and general literature has been quite challenging. Due to the nature of the paper, the two main research methods used are: analysis and descriptive methods.

Sultan Abdylhamid II himself admitted that the Ottoman power in the Balkans was built on disagreements between the Balkan states and that it would be difficult for Russia to establish a joint alliance between them (Sulltan Abdylhamiti (2010):156).

The great Albanian uprisings (1910-1912) clearly exposed the Ottoman army's incapacity to withstand a probable attack by the coalition of Balkan states in the near future. They brought this moment closer than any forecast of the political and military circles of the Great Powers and even of the Balkan monarchies themselves, which were making preparations in this direction. Until then, the war preparations of the Balkan states went hand in hand with the preparations of their great allies (G. Shpuza (2002): 144).

All Balkan states, without exception, perceived the success of the Albanian revolutionaries as a hazard to their interests (F. Shabani (1996): 84-86), thus the Serbian diplomat, Spalajkovic, and the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Geshov, instructed the Ottoman ambassador to Sofia for the Sublime Porte not to allow anything to Albanians. The First Balkan War did not allow a fair solution to the Albanian issue (Xh. Shala (2002): 175).

Most foreign and Balkan authors think that the Balkan Alliance was formed under Russia's initial incentive (N. Rich (2006): 425-426; L. Stavrijanos (2005): 507; Ш. Димитров- К. Манчев (1975) 357; J. Томик (1913): 99-100).

When the Italo-Turkish war began, talks between Bulgarian representative Dimitar Rizov, former ambassador to Belgrade, and M. Milovanovic, a representative of the Serbian government (F. Shabani (1996): 71-72) took place in Belgrade, with the mediation of the Russian Ambassador to Belgrade Nikola Hartvig (L. Stavrijanos (2005): 508) and his counterpart in Sofia, Nehludov (*Историја на македонскиот народ*, IV (2000): 20), while the first meeting between the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Geshov and his Serbian counterpart, Milovanovic, took place on November 11, 1911. Milovanovic was later replaced by the former Serbian Ambassador to Sofia Spalajkovic (R. Poincaré (2007): 78-79).

The issues requiring resolutions were numerous and difficult. Serbia had first submitted proposals in which nothing about Macedonia's autonomy was stated, as it feared a scenario similar to that of Eastern Rumelia (J. Томик (1913): 103-104).

According to the Serbian project, three areas were to be created in this province: the first Serbian, the second Bulgarian, the third debatable, which would be put under the arbitration of the Russian tsar. By the end of December 1911, Spalajkovic brought Geshov a reviewed text (R. Poincaré (2007): 79-80).

The agreement between Serbia and Bulgaria became the backbone of the Balkan alliance, which ended on March 13, 1912, (A. Христов & J. Донеv (1994): 165; A. Mullai (2008): 233), and was oriented against the Ottoman Empire and Austro-Hungary (J. Томик (1913): 100; К. Манчев (2002): 128), and was divided into three parts: the political agreement, the secret annex and the military convention (F. Shabani (1996): 77).

The reached compromise is reflected in the "Secret Annex" of the Treaty, which was its most important part. According to its second article, Bulgaria recognized Serbia's right to annex Albanian lands north and west of the Sharr Mountain, while Serbia reserved the territories east of the Rhodopes and the lower course of the Struma River for Bulgaria. This way, the treaty not only provided Serbia with vast Albanian territories, but access to the Adriatic Sea as well. As for its part, Bulgaria would also gain access to the Aegean Sea.

The territories between Sharr, Rhodopes and Lake Ohrid with the main cities Kumanovo, Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Kicevo, Struga remained as disputed areas. As for their sharing, both sides pledged to accept the line that would be set by the Russian tsar, in the capacity of the arbitrator, as the final border (Ш. Димитров- К. Манчев (1975): 359; A. Христов & J. Донеv (1994): 166; A. Mullai (2008): 234).

As it can be noticed, the "Secret Annex" of the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement, was primarily oriented against the Albanian people (F. Shabani (1996): 78) it also projected the possibility

of Macedonia being organized as an autonomous province (*Историја на македонскиот народ*, IV (2000): 176).

Geshov hasn't been less active towards the Greek side compared to the Serbian side. He also took the first step in September 1911, encouraged and assisted by the Balkan Committee in London (Ш. Димитров- К. Манчев (1975): 360).

Geshov required the autonomy of Macedonia and Thrace only, and the rights that Article 23 of the Berlin Treaty had theoretically guaranteed to Christian populations (R. Poincaré (2007): 83), the talks entered a deadlock due to the partition of southern Macedonia, particularly the city of Thessaloniki (*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944*, III (1997): 231), thus no preliminary agreement between Bulgaria and Greece on the share of territories that would be separated from the Ottoman Empire was reached (A. Mullai (2008): 235), the talks ended by signing a Defensive Alliance Treaty on May 29, 1912. According to the Treaty, the two states pledged to help each other with all their military forces in case of an attack by a third power, this defensive treaty would last for three years, with the possibility of continuing for another year and would be secret (A. Христов & J. Донеv (1994): 168).

In mid-September 1912, Bulgaria and Montenegro agreed on a joint action against the Ottoman Empire. The Serbo-Montenegrin agreement and a military convention were signed on October 6, 1912. By this, the establishment of the Balkan Alliance was finalized (*Историја на македонскиот народ*, IV (2000): 24).

A military convention was signed between Bulgaria and Greece on October 5, 1912, according to which Bulgaria would mobilize 300,000 soldiers, while Greece would mobilize 120,000 soldiers for the succeeding war (К. Манчев (2002): 128).

Istanbul, as the European capitals, was aware of the core of these talks, but the Sublime Porte was paralyzed by the difficulties of domestic politics and the army crisis, which was facing the Italian attack in Libya and the Albanian uprising, categorized this Serbo-Bulgarian agreement as entirely offensive (R. Poincaré (2007): 206).

### **The attitude of the Great Powers towards the establishment of Balkan Alliance**

On August 19, 1912, the Russian ambassador to Paris, Sevastopulo, submitted a note indicating that Bulgaria and Serbia were concerned that the Ottoman Empire was giving some privileges to the Albanians in the rebellion, if necessary, they required similar rights in favor of their Macedonian compatriots (R. Poincaré (2007): 158).

The head of the French diplomacy, Poincaré, right after being introduced to the content of the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement, said it was a war instrument. The role of the judge, known to Russia, further complicated the situation, therefore France warned Russia not to expect its military support in the Balkans, even if attacked by Austro-Hungary. Sazanov also reported this news to the Russian tsar himself (R. Poincaré (2007): 112-113; 190-192).

The Balkan Alliance was established contrary to the Austro-Hungarian and the Tripartite League interests (F. Ramadani (2009): 51) thus the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy tried to dismantle it through Bulgaria, aiming Serbia's isolation (Ш. Димитров- К. Манчев (1975): 363; J. Томиќ (1913): 110).

The Paris and London cabinets began supporting and encouraging the rapprochement of the Balkan states, hoping that this would draw Russia into an alliance with them. France perceived the Serbo-Bulgarian alliance as the Balkan Peninsula protection from Austro-Hungary and Germany. Unlike France, Great Britain was more restrained in developing anti-Ottoman policy since it could provoke opposition and revolt of Muslims in India and Egypt (J. Донеv (1985): 89-92).

With the establishment of the Balkan military-political bloc, Russia wanted to prevent the Austro-German “*Drangnach Osten*” in the first place and strengthen and broaden its influence in the Balkans, as well as to resolve the issue of the straits in its favor. The forecasts and desires of the Russian government to take advantage of the Balkan Alliance as its tool were not met (Д. Зорграфски (1970): 61-63).

Unlike the Entente countries, the Tripartite Alliance members were not up to date and did not even believe in the Balkan Alliance establishment. They got informed of the Serbian-Bulgarian alliance in April. Official Berlin accentuated Germany’s “*lack of interest*” in Balkan issues. Austro-Hungary was interested in an independent Albania and was against the formation of a large Slavic state that could fall under Russian influence, excluding Bulgaria, which was considered as an ally. Official Vienna emphasized that the Ottoman Empire is nothing to them, on the contrary, Albania is everything. The only thing that made Austro-Hungary speculate on the issue of changing the status quo in the Balkans was the issue of Serbia’s territorial extension (J. ДОНЕВ (1985): 97-101).

The only thing which made Austro-Hungary doubtful regarding the issue of changing the status quo in the Balkans was the issue of Serbia’s territorial extent (J. ДОНЕВ (1985): 97-101); it insisted on two issues, namely: “*No land exit of Serbia to the Adriatic*” and “*Albania with existence and development opportunities*” (R. Poincaré (2007): 298).

In the eyes of the Balkan peoples, there were two groups in Russia: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Sazanov who required them to develop a peaceful policy, and the Official Russia, which required them to pursue militarist policy. The second group indeed gave hope and valor to the Balkan states (J. ДОНЕВ (1985): 107).

## Conclusion

The Balkan Alliance, although it represented unison of the “*four*” against the Ottoman Empire, was very fragile in fact, since its foundations were based on smaller, secret two-partite alliances of the participating countries, which contained ambitious plans for the occupation, partition and annexation of the “*Ottoman heritage*” in the Balkans.

Not that the Balkan Alliance did not help the righteous resolution of the Albanian issue, but it even obstructed it. Of the Great Powers of the time, Austro-Hungary was the first to have started to feel the Slavic pressure as a threat to its interests in the Balkans. This Austro-Hungarian and Tripartite Alliance interest was decisive on the fate of Albania at the London Conference.

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