

UDC 94(497)“1912/1913”:327.2(470)
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.24.264741

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Bibliographical Description of the Article: Mashevskiy, O. & Kondratenko, O. (2022). Russian imperialism in the Balkans during the First Balkan War of 1912 – 1913. *Skhidnoievropeiskiy Istorychnyi Visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 24, 75–89. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.24.264741

**RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM IN THE BALKANS DURING
THE FIRST BALKAN WAR OF 1912 – 1913**

Abstract. *The Russian Empire sought to use the formation of the Balkan League (Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro) in order to weaken the Ottoman Porte before and during the First Balkan War of 1912 – 1913. Due to Russia’s ambitions, such steps were motivated, in order to establish control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, Constantinople, as well as in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions. The purpose of the research is to do historical analysis of the causes / events of the First Balkan War of 1912 – 1913 and the efforts, which were made in order to implement the Russian Empire’s ambitions during it, whose interests collided with the interests of other Great Powers that sought to establish control over the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean region, as well as manipulation of the Balkan peoples’ aspirations for this purpose. The methodology of research is*

based on the principles of historicism, systematicity and scientificity. The following approaches have been used in the course of the study: historical political and historical systemic, as well as methods of macro historical analysis. **The scientific novelty** consists in updating the study of historical events related to the clash of geopolitical interests of big states in the Balkans, the Black and Mediterranean Seas. **The Conclusions.** During the First Balkan War of 1912 – 1913, the contradictions between the big states concerning the influence on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits intensified. The Russian Empire, taking advantage of the Ottoman Porte weakening, tried to influence the course of its confrontation with the Balkan League in order to achieve the expansion of its presence. The tsarist government, emphasizing the support of the Slavic peoples, at the same time tried to hinder the advance of the Bulgarian army to the Ottoman capital in every possible way, since it claimed to subjugate Constantinople and the Straits at a convenient opportunity. In the same way, St. Petersburg reacted very unkindly to the aspirations of Greece to strengthen its own positions in the direction of these strategic points. However, in addition to Russia, Austria-Hungary, the German Empire, as well as Britain and France claimed influence in these regions, which made it impossible to determine the leading subject of influence in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and became one of the important reasons for the beginning of World War I.

Key words: Balkan Wars, Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Balkan League, Bosphorus, Dardanelles, Great Powers, geopolitical interests.

РОСІЙСЬКИЙ ІМПЕРІАЛІЗМ НА БАЛКАНАХ ПІД ЧАС ПЕРШОЇ БАЛКАНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ 1912 – 1913 рр.

Анотація. Російська імперія напередодні та у ході Першої балканської війни 1912 – 1913 рр. прагнула використати формування Балканського союзу (Сербії, Болгарії, Греції та Чорногорії) задля подальшого ослаблення Порту. Такі кроки були зумовлені амбіціями Росії у встановленні контролю над протоками Босфор і Дарданелли, Константинополем, а також в Чорноморському і Середземноморському регіоні. **Мета статті** полягає в історичному аналізі причин / подій Першої балканської війни 1912 – 1913 рр. та намагання реалізації у її ході амбіцій Російської імперії, інтереси якої зіткнулися з інтересами інших великих держав, які прагнули встановити контроль на Балканах, Чорноморському та Середземноморському регіоні, а також маніпуляціях задля цієї мети прагненнями балканських народів. **Методологічну основу** становлять принципи історизму, системності та науковості. У ході дослідження було використано історико-політологічний та історико-системний підхід, а також прийоми макроісторичного аналізу. **Наукова новизна** полягає в актуалізації вивчення історичних подій, пов'язаних із зіткненням геополітичних інтересів великих держав на Балканах, в Чорному та Середземному морях. **Висновки.** У ході Першої балканської війни 1912 – 1913 рр. загострилися суперечності між великими державами за вплив на протоках Босфор і Дарданелли. Російська імперія, користуючись ослабленням Порту, намагалася впливати на перебіг її протистояння із Балканським союзом з тим, щоби домогтися розширення своєї присутності. Царський уряд, наголошуючи на підтримці слов'янських народів, водночас всіляко намагався завадити просуванню болгарської армії до османської столиці, оскільки сам претендував на підпорядкування, за зручної нагоди, Константинополя та Проток. Так само Петербург дуже недоброзичливо поставився і до прагнень Греції зміцнити власні позиції у напрямі цих стратегічних пунктів. Утім, окрім Росії, на вплив у цих регіонах претендували Австро-Угорщина, Німецька імперія, а також Британія і Франція, що не дозволило визначити провідного суб'єкта впливу в Чорномор'ї та Середземномор'ї, й стало однією з важливих причин початку Першої світової війни.

Ключові слова: Балканські війни, Російська імперія, Османська імперія, Балканський союз, Босфор, Дарданелли, великі держави, геополітичні інтереси.

The Problem Statement. At the beginning of the XXth century, in the Balkans the deadlocked geopolitical situation resulted in the Great Powers' ambitions of the empires of that time. The Balkan wars of 1912 – 1913 increased international tensions significantly, deepened the contradictions between the Balkan countries and great powers and European

alliances. Hence, it is not for nothing that the Balkan Peninsula was called the “powder cellar” of Europe, and the Balkan wars were the prelude to World War I. Against the background of the Balkan wars, the geopolitical ambitions of both great empires and national interests of the Greeks and the Southern Slavic peoples, who sought to complete the creation of their own independent states, became intertwined. As a result, the trigger of the first global armed conflict caused the collapse of three empires – the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. Currently, the unsteady situation in the Balkans is also due to the efforts to strengthen the influence of the great powers, primarily the Russian Federation, which, as at the beginning of the XXth century, seeks to use the smoldering instability in this region to its advantage in order to take a geopolitical revenge of the Russian Empire and the USSR, which regained its influence in the Balkans after World War II. The Russian Federation tries to regain its dominance in the Black Sea region and the Balkans once again by resorting to an imperial foreign policy.

The Analysis of Recent Researches. The source base of the research was based on the French-language materials from the series “The French Diplomatic Documents of 1870 – 1914” (Documents diplomatiques français (1871 – 1914)) and diplomatic correspondence from the English-language edition of “The British Diplomatic Papers of 1898 – 1914” (British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898 – 1914), the German-language documents published in the multi-volume collection “The Great Politics of European Cabinets of 1870 – 1914” (Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871 – 1914), as well as a number of other documentary materials.

The above-mentioned issue became the object of research focus of different generations of foreign and domestic historians. The Western European historiography of the first third of the XXth century drew attention to the fact that Russia’s expansion in the Black Sea region posed a threat to the security and economic development of European countries. The following historians K. Phillipson, N. Buxton (Phillipson & Buxton, 1917) and N. Dascovici (Dascovici, 1915) did not avoid the political conjecture, trying to highlight the position of their countries in a better light. At the same time, Western historians pointed at Russia’s significant diplomatic miscalculations, as Russia, in their opinion, failed to take advantage of the result of the creation of the Balkan League in order to strengthen its own positions on the issue of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and moreover, with its treacherous imperial policy, Russia turned Bulgaria, Greece and the Ottoman Empire against itself. As a result, according to the French historian N. Dascovici, who emphasized that the above-mentioned prompted the entry of Porta and Sofia into World War I on the side of Germany (Dascovici, 1915, p. 268). The American researcher R. Bobroff also analyzed the Russian-French contradictions during the First Balkan War in a somewhat favourable way (Bobroff, 2000, p. 81). However, subsequent generations of Western historians, in particular M. Anderson (Anderson, 1965) and A. Macfie (Macfie, 1993) in their works, which are mainly of a review nature, tried to give a more objective analysis of the Great Powers contradictions, but they focused, first of all, on the policy of their own countries concerning this issue.

The approaches of the Russian historians of tsarist Russia, the USSR, and the modern Russian Federation are very similar in their desire to elucidate expansion in the Black Sea-Mediterranean region as concern for the fate of local Slavs or protection of their own vital interests. The exception was the period of the 1920s, when historians of M. Pokrovskiy’s school, having the obvious task of debunking the Russian tsarism as the instigator of war, were also very critical of its assertion in the Balkans (Pokrovskiy, 1931). Attempts to cover

the Black Sea vector of tsarist Russia's policy in a more objective and balanced way were also made by the Russian historians in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, until a new wave of modern Russian chauvinism arose, particularly in historical science. The following works written by P. Kosik (Kosik, 2003) and B. Tupolev (Tupolev, 2003) should be mentioned.

In the Ukrainian historiography, the above-mentioned topic is mostly presented fragmentarily. Only some works bring us closer to the understanding of imperial policy in the context of the Balkan crisis at the beginning of the XXth century. The article, written by I. Lyman and V. Konstantinova, covered the role of the British consulates in the port cities of the northern Black Sea region and the Azov region in the second half of the XIXth and at the beginning of the XXth centuries. The authors made a conclusion that the British Empire itself emphasized diplomatic influence in the region in order to promote its trade and economic interests until the beginning of World War I (Lyman & Konstantinova, 2019). The article, written by O. Potiekhin focuses on the discourse of World War I causes, which were determined also by the results of the First Balkan War of 1912 – 1913. The article deals with the trade and economic relations of the Russian Empire, Great Britain, France and Germany on the eve of World War I – in which the basins of the Black and Mediterranean Seas, as well as the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits played not the last role (Potiekhin, 2021). The Russian-German influence on the politics of the Ottoman Empire on the eve of World War I was covered in the publication of M. Tortika. The scholar substantiated the decisive role of O. Parvus' activity in the activation of the left forces (primarily the social democratic) in Turkey and the Balkans. Hence, emphasis should also be placed on internal political transformations in the Ottoman Empire, which became one of the decisive factors in the negative results of its participation in the First Balkan and World War I (Tortika, 2021).

Among modern Ukrainian researchers, T. Vakoliuk (Vakoliuk, 2006) covered the above-mentioned topic in details, who, considering Russia's Balkan policy in her PhD thesis, rightly claimed that at the beginning of the XXth century the tsarist diplomacy tried to use its influence on the Balkan peoples in order to strengthen its position, particularly in the issue of the Black Sea Straits. However, the works of this researcher are based on the Russian sources, without comparing them with the relevant British, German and French documents.

The purpose of the research is to analyze the causes / events of the First Balkan War of 1912 – 1913 historically and the efforts, which were made in order to implement the Russian Empire's ambitions during it, whose interests collided with the interests of the other great powers that sought to establish control over the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean region, as well as manipulation of the aspirations of the Balkan peoples for this purpose.

The Results of the Research. The weakening of the Ottoman Porte after its defeat in the war with Italy created a convenient basis for the Balkan states to liberate quite significant territories on the Balkan Peninsula from the Ottoman oppression and increase their own possessions at their expense (Hauser, 1929, p. 217; Immanuel, 1913, p. 28).

A significant motive for Petersburg's interest in the consolidation of the Balkan states was the desire to create a powerful counterbalance to Vienna and not only to stop its further expansion in the Balkans, but also to use, in the event of a war with it, the newly created alliance entity to strike Austria-Hungary with its help from the south direction. In addition, the tsarist government, despite the fact that it was worried about the growing militancy in Sofia, Belgrade and Athens, realized that if it did not support these processes of unification of the Balkan peoples, then, taking into consideration their nationalist rise, it could lose

a significant part its influence in an extremely important region for itself (Kosik, 2003, pp. 415–416; Sokolovskaya, pp. 461–462; *Istoriya diplomatii*, pp. 737–738).

As a result of tense negotiations, the Serbian-Bulgarian Alliance Treaty was signed on March 13, 1912, (Serb – Bulgarian Alliance, 1912), the Greek-Bulgarian Alliance was signed on May 29, 1912, (Greek – Bulgarian Alliance, 1912), and the Serbian-Montenegrin Alliance was signed on October 6, 1912 (Serbian – Montenegrin Alliance, 1912). Thus, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro were directly or indirectly united by alliance obligations.

Although Russia was one of the initiators of the unification of the Balkan states, from the very beginning the activities of the above-mentioned intergovernmental organization raised concern in St. Petersburg, in particular, the fact that the Bulgarian King Ferdinand did not hide his hopes for a triumphal entry into Constantinople at the head of a victorious army. Hence, there was a threat that the control of the Straits would pass from the weakened Ottoman Empire to a vigorous Bulgaria with the German dynasty on the throne (Anderson, 1965, p. 291). In his reports to Paris the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, M. Bompard, emphasized the following: “Since Russia is forced to abandon the capture of Constantinople for the time being, it should be concerned that this city, taking into account its importance for controlling the Straits, does not fall into the hands, instead of a weak, impoverished and disarmed Turkey, to a strong state. Therefore, it was worried about the increasing influence of both the Bulgarians and the Austrians” in this region (Bompard – Poincaré, 1912, p. 191).

According to the British historians K. Phillipson and N. Buxton, Russia made significant diplomatic miscalculations by contributing to the formation of the Balkan League in order to use its influence to strengthen its own positions on the issue of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles or, even taking advantage of favourable circumstances, with the help of this alliance to resolve it in its favour finally. In fact, the Balkan League, with its victorious war against the Ottoman Empire, would, on the contrary, have created a significant problem to St. Petersburg, since the rapid advance of the Bulgarian army to Constantinople and the Straits, quite realistically, could cause the transfer of control over these strategic water communications from the weakened Porte, which had to balance between the Great Powers, to Bulgaria, which was gradually getting closer to Germany and Austria-Hungary (Phillipson, Buxton, pp. 192–193).

Russia believed that the instructions would be enough for the Bulgarian army, in the event of a successful offensive in the direction of Constantinople, to stop in front of Adrianople and not move further towards the Straits and the Ottoman capital (Bobroff, 2000, p. 82). The Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Sazonov was convinced that, in the last resort, Sofia’s harsh ultimatum would stop the Bulgarian march to the Bosphorus (Bobroff, 2000, p. 83).

At the same time, Petersburg, like the majority of European cabinets, did not exclude the victory of the Ottoman Porte in the war with the Balkan states and the significant strengthening of the Ottoman Empire as a result (Hauser, 1929, pp. 225–226; Bobroff, 2000, p. 82). It would also be contrary to the traditional strategy of the tsarist government regarding the Bosphorus and Dardanelles issue. Petersburg, together with its own efforts to curb the militancy of the Balkan League, also turned to its Entente allies for this purpose. As A. Nicolson wrote, London responded to its partner, who was interested in avoiding unpredictable cataclysms in this region, but it did not have effective levers to settle the situation and, therefore, advised the tsarist government to cooperate with Austria-Hungary primarily. According to A. Nicolson, the real motive behind this policy of the British cabinet, was the fear that while London would spend its resources to support St. Petersburg on the above-mentioned issues, at that time Russia

would intensify its expansion in the Middle and Far East, and thus, would cause damage to the British interests. In addition, the Foreign Office was not too keen on spoiling its relations with the Balkan states in order to ensure the Russian needs, forcing them to act contrary to their own expectations (Honchar, 2004, p. 100; Nicolson – Buchanan, 1912, pp. 44–45).

On October 9, 1912, Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire, and on October 17 – Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece (Iskenderov, 2003, pp. 482–483; *Istoriya diplomatii*, 1963, pp. 743–744). Hence, the First Balkan War began. The tsarist government along with the beginning of the hostilities was concerned about the possibility of a raid by the Greek fleet to the Dardanelles. On October 3 (16), 1912, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S. Sazonov, while receiving the Greek chargé d'affaires in St. Petersburg, emphasized the following: “The interests of our grain exports require the free passage of ships through the Straits. The example of Italy clearly showed the difficulties of naval operations in the Straits. Any attempt by Greece in this direction is still doomed to failure” (Sazonov – Demidov, 1912, pp. 476).

On October 20, 1912, the Greek naval forces invaded the islands of Imbros, Samothrace, Lemnos and Tenedos, which are located near the entrance to the Dardanelles. Taking it into consideration, Russia demanded assurances from Greece regarding the non-expansion of military operations to the Straits, as well as the subsequent release of the above-mentioned islands (Dontas, 1987, p. 26). On October 20, 1912, the Russian Foreign Ministry instructed the ambassador in Athens, E. Demidov, to analyze the probability of the threat of conducting military operations in the Black Sea Straits by Greece (Hauser, 1929, p. 234). The Greek Prime Minister E. Venizelos, in a conversation with the tsarist diplomat, according to the testimony of the Russian ambassador in London O. Benkendorf, “refused to give any guarantee regarding the Straits and expressed confidence that, if necessary, the Greek fleet would pass where the Italian fleet would not was able to succeed in” (Grey – Buchanan, 1912, p. 44).

A more important threat to Constantinople and the Straits than the Greek fleet was the rapid offensive of the Bulgarian army on the Ottoman capital after the victory over the Turkish troops on October 29 – 30, 1912. (Hauser, 1929, p. 234). As E. Gray wrote to J. Buchanan, the ambassador in St. Petersburg, on November 1, 1912, “the capture of Constantinople by the Bulgarians can become an accomplished fact any day” (Grey – Buchanan, 1912, p. 72).

According to the observations of the German ambassador in St. Petersburg, F. Pourtales, the tsarist government was concerned about Bulgaria’s success not only because, as S. Sazonov claimed, “it was more profitable for him that nothing should change regarding Constantinople and the Straits” (Pourtales – Bethmann Hollweg, 1912, pp. 395–396). As the German diplomat wrote, the possibility of “King Ferdinand’s triumphant entry into the Turkish capital” caused envy in St. Petersburg, because there was fear that Bulgaria would be able to do what “the Russians were forced to refuse 34 years ago” (Pourtales – Bethmann Hollweg, 1912, pp. 395–396). Russia considered any attempts in this regard, according to the British historian A. Macfie, as a *casus belli* and, accordingly, was ready in such case even for military intervention (Macfie, 1993, pp. 38–39).

As early as on October 20, 1912, the Russian Naval Department decided that it was expedient, “taking into account the threat of anarchy and the danger to the Christian population of Constantinople, ... to use the smallest opportunity to send at least the minimum number of troops to capture the European shore of the Bosphorus... The final occupation of the upper Bosphorus would half solve (for Russia – *authors*) the painful issue of the Strait” (Hauser, 1929, p. 211). On the night of October 25 – 26, Admiral I. Hryhorovych, the

Minister of the Navy, “after the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, approved by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers”, asked Nicholas II to allow him to enter into direct communication with the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, M. Girs, “to direct, (at a convenient moment – *authors*), an unlimited number of warships or even the entire squadron (Black Sea – *authors*), if necessary” (Hauser, 1929, p. 212). Nicholas II replied that “from the very beginning it was necessary to resort to such measures, to which (he – *authors*) agrees” (Bovykin, 1961, p. 124).

On November 8, 1912, the Russian ambassador in the Ottoman capital, M. Hirs, received from his government the authority to call the Black Sea fleet to the Bosphorus, which, in the event of the final defeat of the Ottoman army, was supposed to ensure Russian interests in the Straits (Istoriya diplomatii, 1963, pp. 744–745).

However, neither the Russian army, which was in the process of rearmament, nor, even more so, the navy, which had not yet fully recovered after the defeat in the war with Japan, were ready for a large-scale armed conflict (Kutsyk, 2022, pp. 65–66). Taking into account Petersburg’s threats, expressed on November 4, 1912, to London and Paris to send their fleet to the Straits were more like, as the French researcher M. Hauser said, “a light blackmail in order to induce two allies to support its policy more actively” regarding Bosphorus and Dardanelles (Hauser, 1929, p. 234).

Russia wanted to leave the Straits under the control of the weakened Ottoman Empire for a certain time in order to, having accumulated resources, eventually change their regime in its favour (Dascovici, 1915, p. 268). For Russia’s allies – France and Great Britain, such hopes of the tsarist government were a convenient means to emphasize their sympathy for these Russian aspirations, to keep it in the orbit of their influence, to strengthen Petersburg’s dependence on London and Paris, and to seek new preferences from it in other important issues of world politics.

Another diplomatic paradox was that while Russian diplomacy was actually taking a pro-Ottoman position, worrying that the Bulgarian army would not occupy Constantinople and the Straits, hence, undermining its authority among the Balkan peoples, the pro-Bulgarian sentiments were increasingly spreading in Germany and Austria-Hungary. In particular, the German and Austro-Hungarian pro-government press were filled with articles expressing admiration for the successes of the Bulgarian army and emphasizing that the Ottoman capital was the only place where Tsar Ferdinand could make peace with the Sultan (Phillipson & Buxton, p. 193).

Germany, which was trying to draw Bulgaria into its sphere of influence, emphasized that the capture of Constantinople by the Bulgarians would be beneficial for Russia. Of course, such actions of the Berlin cabinet aggravated its relations with Petersburg and increased the need for the Russian diplomacy to appeal to its allies in the Entente in order to restrain Sofia’s ambitions and, as it seemed to Russia, the intrigues of the Triple Alliance (Phillipson & Buxton, p. 193).

The British government realized that in order to maintain friendly relations with Russia, it was necessary to show Russia support for the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. In addition, the continuation of this Bulgarian offensive worried the London cabinet, since it could, as at least they claimed in St. Petersburg, lead to Russia conducting an amphibious operation on the Bosphorus or at least sending the Russian Black Sea Fleet to Constantinople (Lowther – Grey, 1912, p. 94). Secretary of State E. Gray was convinced that “the change in possession of Constantinople is a great European issue” which was not the time to raise it. At the same

time, the British government, despite repeated requests from St. Petersburg, was limited in its ability to exert pressure on Sofia, which would cause the cessation of the Bulgarian troops advance to the Straits, since “public opinion (of Great Britain – *authors*) opposed any attempt to deprive the Balkan states fruits of their victories” (Lowther – Grey, 1912, p. 94). The British government understood the Russian strategy for the Straits fully and did not want to go to extra mile in order to support those plans, which were contrary to its own interests. In particular, the British ambassador in Paris, Lord F. Bertie, wrote on October 25 (November 7) 1912 that “the Russians cannot expect that the majority of the Great Powers will contribute to the fact that Constantinople remains in the hands of the Turks only to wait until Russia, using auspicious moment, captures it itself” (Kostrikova, 1999, p. 287).

However, as it turned out, reaching the consensus between Russia and Austria-Hungary in Balkan politics was already an extremely difficult task. Moreover, the tsarist government’s support of Serbia’s aspirations to gain access to the Adriatic Sea during the Balkan wars almost caused a pan-European armed conflict, since Vienna, having secured the support of its Berlin ally, opposed these demands categorically (Grey – Paget, 1912, p. 108).

Hence, in particular, on November 6, 1912, the Serbian Chargé d’affaires in London emphasized in his conversation with E. Gray that for his country “a port at the Adriatic coast is a matter of economic independence, and therefore – life and death” (Grey – Buchanan, 1912, p. 110). Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, the Serbian troops, ignoring Vienna’s warnings, captured a number of ports on the Albanian coast of the Adriatic Sea during November of 1912 (Iskenderov, 2003, p. 440). On the other hand, the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs A. Kiderlen, in a conversation with the British Ambassador to Germany V. Goschen, noted as early as November 7, 1912, that Berlin “will be forced to support Austria... and if Serbia and its friends receive Russia’s support, then Germany will be together with its ally. It cannot be otherwise!” (Goschen – Grey, 1912, p. 149).

A. Kiderlen shared his thoughts quite fair and correct in a letter to the German ambassador in Rome, G. von Jagow, he mentioted the following “the Russian government’s support of Serbian claims to a port in the Adriatic Sea should not only demonstrate Russia’s traditional role as a defender of the Balkan states”. According to the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the tsarist government planned that by taking control of the Straits with Constantinople eventually and helping Serbia gain a port on the Adriatic, it would have “two valuable bases for its naval power in the Mediterranean” (Kiderlen – Jagow, 1912, p. 362). According to the testimony of A. Kiderlen, Petersburg aimed at reaching the above-mentioned goal, tried to use allied relations with Paris in order to encourage Italy to take a positive attitude to Serbian demands, and thus, provoke a “split in the Triple Alliance” (Kiderlen – Jagow, 1912, p. 362).

Taking into consideration the fact that Russia was convinced that Austria-Hungary, followed by Germany, would not refrain from military intervention if necessary, Russia decided to concede as realized its unpreparedness for the war, despite the support of warlike France. In January of 1913, Serbia, on the advice of St. Petersburg, declared its agreement to withdraw troops from the Adriatic coast and agreed to the creation of the Albanian state on its shores (Tupolev, 2003, pp. 286–287; Iskenderov, 2003, pp. 438–442; Istorija diplomatii, 1963, pp. 746–748, 750–751).

Taking into account that “the friendly but serious advice that Mr. Sazonov gave to Sofia so that the Bulgarians would not storm Çatalca” turned out to be useless, the Russian diplomacy, whose capabilities were also weakened by the confrontation with Vienna, continued to appeal

to London and Paris “to do something in this sense in Sofia”. Although E. Grey was firmly convinced that it was “already too late” to curb the offensive fervor of the Bulgarian army (Grey – Buchanan, 1912, p. 95).

The increasing pressure of the Bulgarian army on Constantinople intensified the cooperation within the Russo-French alliance in order to encourage the warring parties to end the armed struggle with the help of joint mediation efforts, with the involvement of other Great Powers. France, as well as its Russian partner, was interested in at least maintaining the status quo in relation to Constantinople and the Straits, albeit with somewhat different motives. According to the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, M. Bompard, Paris “having significant economic, industrial, financial interests” in the Middle East, was primarily concerned with preserving the operational capacity and solvency of the Porte (Bompard – Poincaré, 1912, p. 192) if possible, as R. Poincaré noted, also “territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire” (Poincaré – Luis, 1912, p. 41). As the Russian ambassador to France, O. Izwolsky, reported to St. Petersburg, “although the Paris cabinet expressed readiness to support Russia in a friendly manner in the Balkan crisis, but when it came to financial issues, I predict that all our efforts and means are ineffective compared to the arguments that are at Ottoman and other interested banks” (Iswolsky – Sasonow, 1913, p. 163).

R. Poincaré also tried to influence Sofia in order to stop the Bulgarian army in front of Constantinople and the Straits and even suggested the head of British diplomacy E. Gray resorting to “collective intervention of the Great Powers in order to stop the hostilities” (Grey – Buchanan, 1912, p. 95). However, at that time his proposals did not find support in London, which, although it did not object to it, considered these actions too late (Grey – Buchanan, 1912, p. 95).

It should be emphasized that during the Balkan wars, the aggravation of the Straits issues as a result of the Bulgarian offensive, as well as the threat of the capture of the Bosphorus by Russia, clearly revealed the hidden contradictions between Paris and St. Petersburg. After all, when there was a real threat of the tsarist government taking control of the Straits, as it was during the Middle East crisis of the 1990s, Paris opposed it strongly and unequivocally, making impossible to take such actions by Russia.

We can agree with the opinion of a modern American researcher R. Bobroff, that at that time it was the closest Russian ally – France, that at the above-mentioned critical moments was the biggest hindrance to these Russian ambitions. R. Bobroff explained such actions taken by Paris the following way: Paris was concerned about the possibility of the powerful Russian influence penetration into the Mediterranean and, as a result, disruption of the balance of power in this region, which would cause geopolitical instability there and endanger significant French investments in Syria and the Levant (Bobroff, 2000, p. 81).

A notable conflict of the Russian and French interests regarding the Straits issue was caused by Russia’s support for a proposal by the Bulgarian diplomacy that the Ottoman Empire should pay Bulgaria financial compensation for not continuing the offensive on Constantinople. The tsarist government, considering the above-mentioned option acceptable for securing the Straits from being captured by the Bulgarian army, tried to persuade the European states to support it. On the other hand, Paris opposed it strongly, as it worried that such additional payments would cause the Porte to go bankrupt and unable to repay the huge French loans, which accounted for 45% of the Ottoman Empire’s debts (Bobroff, 2000, p. 92).

Taking into account the above-mentioned facts, it can be considered a significant exaggeration of the statement of the French historian N. Dascovici that the offensive of the Bulgarian army on the defensive line near Constantinople was stopped not so much by the

resistance of the Ottoman troops and numerous epidemics, but by the Russian-British diplomacy (Dascovici, 1915, p. 267). Similar mistakes were made by the English researchers K. Phillipson and N. Buxton, who published their collective monograph on the Straits issues in 1917. In the collective monograph, in particular, there was covered the period of the Balkan wars, the authors focused too much attention on the anti-Russian policy of Germany and Austria-Hungary on the Bosphorus issue and the Dardanelles (Phillipson & Buxton, 1917, pp. 192–195).

As the German State Secretary for Foreign Affairs A. Kiderlen wrote, European capitals realized that “Bulgaria, with its relatively modest population of 4 million, was not interested in keeping a large city with several million inhabitants on its periphery” (Aufzeichnung Kiderlen, 1912, pp. 38–39). Therefore, the Great Powers understood that even if the Bulgarian army entered the Ottoman capital, it would be there temporarily until the fate of this city and the problem of the Straits were resolved.

The London Cabinet lacked sufficient motivation to press Sofia to stop the movement of the Bulgarian army to Constantinople, and, at the same time, was concerned about the possibility of worsening relations with Petersburg, as well as the threat of the Russian amphibious operation on the Bosphorus. Therefore, at the beginning of November of 1912, the Foreign Office prepared proposals for the Great Powers, according to which, in the event of the fall of the Ottoman capital, “the narrow strip that includes the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles should become a neutral territory” (Paget – Grey, 1912, p. 82). The British Prime Minister H. Asquith first heralded those proposals in a private, confidential conversation with the Russian ambassador in London, Count O. Benkendorf. The proposals were officially addressed to the St. Petersburg cabinet after that (Grey – Paget, 1912, p. 109). In general, Bulgaria supported such ideas of the Foreign Office (Goshen – Grey, 1912, p. 187).

The above-mentioned project did not suit Russia, which since the time of the eastern crisis of the 90s of the XIXth century considered the strengthening of international control in the Ottoman Empire unacceptable. Russia predicted that it would be beneficial primarily to European states, which, using their financial and economic advantage, would supersede the Russian influence from these areas gradually. “Internationalization” and “neutralization” of the Strait was disadvantageous for St. Petersburg also because it facilitated the passage of foreign warships to the Black Sea (Macfie, 1993, p. 40) and contradicted the old axiom of the Russian diplomacy – to resist attempts to establish any foreign control over the entrance to the Black Sea (Dranov, 1948, p. 150). In addition, the tsarist government had a rather strong temptation, taking advantage of favourable circumstances, in particular the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, to achieve a change in the regime of the Straits to its own advantage later or even to subjugate them completely (Macfie, 1993, p. 38).

French Foreign Minister R. Poincaré also considered the “internationalization” of Constantinople and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles unrealistic (Grey – Paget, 1912, p. 109). Fierce resistance of the Ottoman army at the Çatalca positions, which were the last frontier before Constantinople and the Straits, as well as the exhaustion of the Bulgarian troops, eventually led to the signing of an armistice between the warring parties on December 3, 1912. On December 17, 1912, a peace conference began in London. It was attended by representatives of the Balkan states and the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, a meeting of ambassadors of six Great Powers – Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy – was held in the British capital (Honchar, 2004, p. 747).

European countries were generally interested in maintaining the status quo regarding Constantinople and the Black Sea Straits (Macfie, 1993, p. 38). The closest allies of Russia

in the Entente – Great Britain and France, as evidenced by E. Gray's conversation with the French ambassador in London P. Cambon on December 11, 1912, believed that it was unacceptable for them that the Straits issue should be directly raised at the above-mentioned conferences (Grey – Bertie, 1912, p. 278). Although the Bosphorus and Dardanelles issue influenced the consideration of other important issues during these negotiations significantly.

At the London Conference of the Great Powers, a heated discussion took place regarding the future of four islands in the Aegean Sea, which were captured by Greece in October of 1912, and which were located near the Dardanelles. According to the testimony of Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Germany A. Zimmerman, the states of the Triple Alliance were mainly inclined to return these islands to the Ottoman Empire and grant them autonomous status. On the contrary, Great Britain and France insisted that they remain in the possession of Greece (Zimmerman – Lucius, 1913, p. 157).

Hence, a rather dangerous divergence for the Entente in one of the fundamental issues of international politics was observed. Actually Petersburg followed the position consonant with Vienna and Rome, which, fearing “a complete disturbance of the balance in the Mediterranean” in favour of Greece, which was mainly under the influence of London and Paris (Zimmerman – Tschirchky, 1913, pp. 124–125), strongly demanded that Athens would return the islands captured by it to the Ottoman Porte (Lichnowsky – Auswärtige Amt, 1913, p. 148). The above-mentioned circumstances, taking into account Germany's willingness to compromise with Great Britain, led to the eventual agreement of the Great Powers to join those islands to Greece.

Nationalist-minded Young Turk activists, hoping for the support of Germany, refused further concessions at the peace conferences held in London. On February 3, 1913, the hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and the countries of the Balkan League resumed. After the Bulgarian army captured the cities of Adrianople and Ioannina in March of 1913, it again attacked the Çatalca defensive line, which was the last obstacle on the way to Constantinople, as it was only 45 km away from it (Bovykin, 1961, p. 124). Once again Russia was worried about the fate of the Ottoman capital and the Black Sea Straits. As a result, on March 28, 1913, the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, M. Hirs, was given the proxy again: if necessary, to call the Black Sea Fleet to the Bosphorus (Istoriya diplomatii, 1963, p. 752). In mid-April of 1913, the adviser to the German Foreign Ministry, von Treutler, reported to the leadership of this department that “Russia's arbitrary regulation of the Dardanelles issue will threaten the existence of the Triple Entente” (Treutler – Auswärtige Amt, 1913, p. 678). At the same time, Russia again turned to its Entente allies with a request to influence Sofia in order to stop the offensive of the Bulgarian army.

On March 29, 1913, Paris and London learned about the threat of the Russian military action in the Straits (Bülow – Saleske, 1913, p. 580). However, unlike the tsarist government, France and Great Britain believed that the Bulgarian armed forces, in which the cholera epidemic was spreading, were unable to break through the Turkish fortifications. Hence, the Paris and London cabinets did not consider it necessary to comply with the Russian request regarding pressure on Sofia, and thus, risk their influence in this country (Lichnowsky – Auswärtige Amt, 1913, pp. 669–670).

At the same time, in order to avoid the threat of Russia's individual action on the Bosphorus, at the end of March of 1913 France proposed to return to the idea of collective actions of the Great Powers in the Straits. As the Russian ambassador in Paris, O. Iswolski, reported to St. Petersburg, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, S. Pichon, claimed that if the

tsarist government agreed, he would “immediately make a proposal to all cabinets to send a combined squadron of six states to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles” (Iswołski – Sasonow, 1913, pp. 120–121). However, the above-mentioned proposals of the Paris cabinet were accepted in St. Petersburg no longer as its declared desire to help the ally in securing its interests in the Straits, but as an attempt to prevent Russia, at an inconvenient moment for its Western partners, to raise again the Bosphorus and Dardanelles issues (Lichnowsky – Auswärtige Amt, 1913, pp. 669–670).

According to the negotiations between S. Poklovsky-Kozell, assistant to the Russian ambassador in London, and E. Grey at the beginning of April of 1913, the tsarist government considered “the French initiatives to hold a joint naval demonstration” as an extremely forced measure that should have a local character. On April 7, 1913, E. Grey wrote to the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, J. Buchanan, that he had the impression that in the event that “if any powers pre-occupy Constantinople in order to prevent its capture by the Bulgarians, the Russian public opinion will be categorically against this, as it believes that the only state that has the right to do so is Russia. Hence, according to E. Grey, the Russian public believed that it would be best for the Russian government to resolve the Strait issue alone, without the participation of other states in this process” (Grey – Buchanan, 1913, pp. 660–661).

The London Peace Treaty of May of 30, 1913 between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro put an end to the First Balkan War. According to it, the Ottoman Empire lost almost all its European possessions, which were distributed among the victorious states. However, Bulgaria had to withdraw its troops from all the points it reached on the coast of the Sea of Marmara (Phillipson, Buxton, 1917, p. 193). According to the French historian N. Dascovici, the above-mentioned decision was made primarily under the influence of the British diplomacy, which, in turn, had to reckon with the wishes of St. Petersburg (Dascovici, 1915, p. 267). Although both Serbia and Russia, which supported it, did not achieve their goal of the Serbs entering the Mediterranean Sea, which would obviously lead to the Russians obtaining a naval base there.

The Conclusions. On the eve of serious escalation in the Balkans, Russia hoped to use its influence over the southern Slavs in its own imperial interests, and, therefore, contributed to the formation of the Balkan League. Even during the Bosnian crisis of 1908 – 1909, the tsarist diplomacy considered increasing its expansion in the Black Sea-Mediterranean region, the ultimate goal of which was to subjugate the strategically located Black Sea straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, and transform Russia, in fact, into a powerful imperial player in the Mediterranean region. Such rampant ambitions became one of the important causes of World War I, because other empires had their own expansionist plans in this region. First of all, this concerned Austria-Hungary, which sought to at least preserve its Balkan possessions, and, in general, to change its position on this peninsula, which was significant for European stability. Even more ambitious were the plans of the German Empire, which rapidly spread its influence in Asia Minor, the Middle East and advanced, so far mainly by economic means, in the direction of the Persian Gulf. The rapidly degrading Omani Empire attempted to maintain the status quo by holding off the advance of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, who formed an allied league to oppose Ottoman imperialism and gain independence.

Britain and France, as Russia’s allies within the Entente, emphasized that they understood Russian concern about the advance of Bulgaria by land or Greece by sea towards the Ottoman capital and the Straits. However, London and Paris were aware of the fact that

the Russian tsarism wanted to capture this “main prize” in the “Eastern issue” itself, which would fundamentally upset the balance of power in an important region. Petersburg, which positioned itself as the main defender of the interests of the Balkan Christians, turned out to be an opponent of the Bulgarians and Greeks when they threatened its imperial interests.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to all members of the editorial board for the given advice during the preparation of the article for publishing.

Funding. The authors did not receive any financial assistance for research, writing and publication of the article

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*The article was received September 20, 2021.
Article recommended for publishing 30/08/2022.*