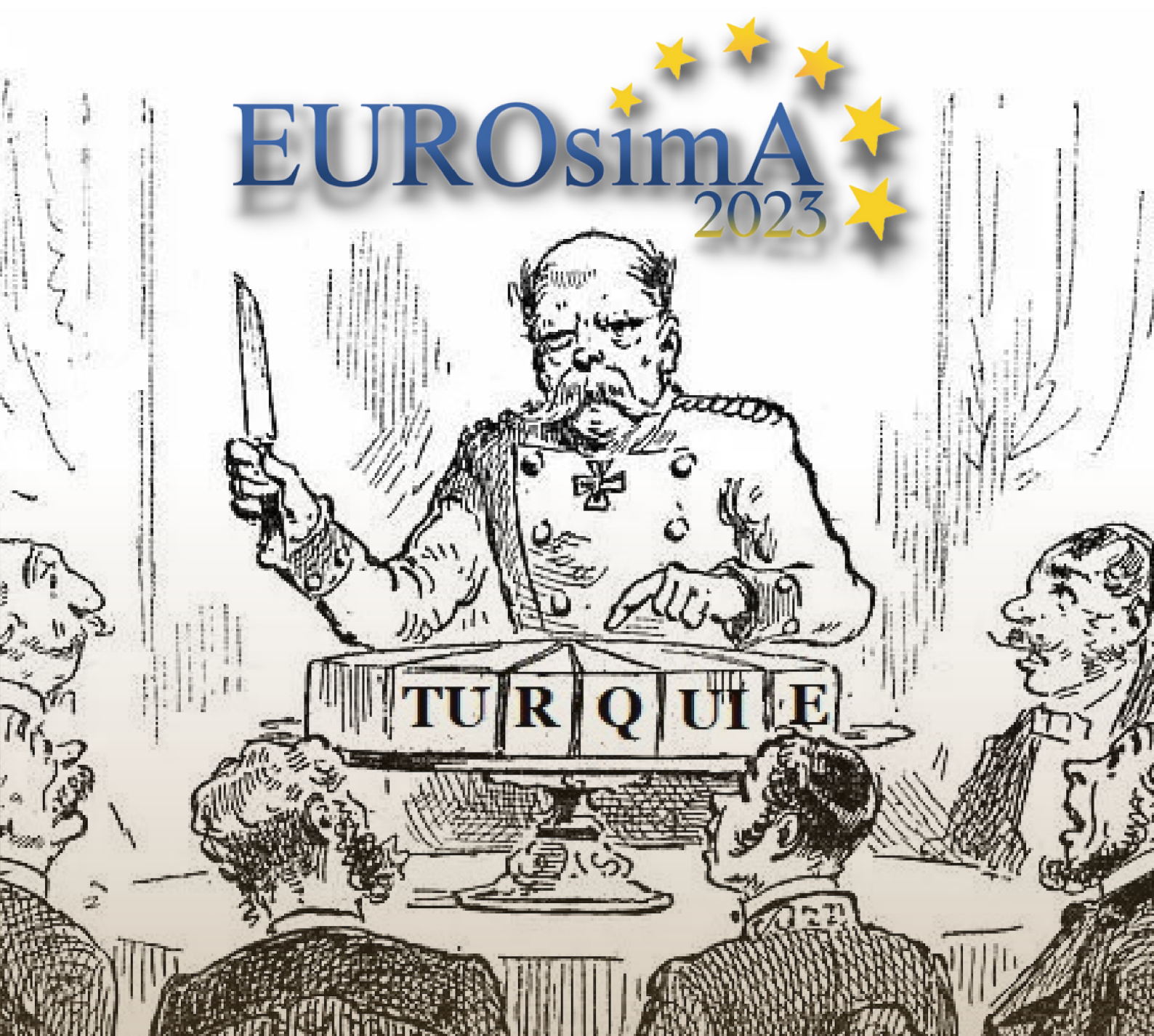


EUROsimA
2023



Historical Committee

Study Guide

Congress of Berlin, 1878

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Brief Historical Overview of the Ottoman Decline
2. Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878
 - a. Causes of the War
 - b. War Chronology
 - c. The Treaty of San Stefano and the European Balance of Power
3. The Agenda of the Committee
 - a. Balkan Independence Movements
 - i. Albania
 - ii. Bulgaria
 - iii. Romania
 - b. The Issue of Minority Rights in Ottoman Territories
4. References

1. Brief Historical Overview of the Ottoman Decline

At the beginning of the 18th century, it was clear that the Ottoman Empire had left its golden age in the past. The Empire, which forced the Holy Roman Emperor to accept its superiority in 1533, was fading as it began to be continually defeated on the battlefields (Jorga 2009, 350-351). It could be argued that the reasons for this decline were the diffusion of power throughout the 18th century and the inability to compete with the administrative and technological developments in Europe, which translated to military defeats. This chapter provides a brief explanation of this decline and the reasons behind it.

After the failed siege of Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman Empire suffered heavy defeats against the forces of the Holy League made up of the Holy Roman Empire, Venice, Russia, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In 1691, in the Battle of Slankamen, the Ottoman Grand Vizier was killed, and in the Battle of Zenta of 1697, the Imperial Army's treasury suffered significant losses. Even some cities which were distant from the Austrian-Turkish border like Skopje were invaded by the forces of the Holy League (Jorga 2009, 212). After a series of unsuccessful campaigns between 1683 and 1697, the Empire finally accepted that it was decisively defeated by the Holy League and had to accept the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), which ripped nearly all of Hungary off the Empire and left Morea and Dalmatia to Venice. Next year, with the Treaty of Istanbul, the Empire had to cede Azak to Russia, the newly emergent European power of the north. Less than two decades later, the Empire suffered another loss with the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718.

The Treaty of Passarowitz brought about the start of the Tulip Era, which marked a turning point in the Empire's perspective and understanding of Europe. Since its emergence in history, the Ottoman Empire's view of Europe was based on the idea that as the representative of the Muslim world, it was superior to the Christian world (Lewis 2008, 49-50). Based on this viewpoint, the Empire saw itself as the power to civilize European "infidels". After two major defeats against European armies in the wars of 1683-1699 and 1715-1718, the Empire questioned its stance against European powers, as they had repeatedly achieved major successes against the Imperial Army. Therefore, with the Tulip Era, the Ottoman understanding of the relations between itself and Europe was questioned. This question was answered by the fact that the Empire had lost its superiority to Europe.

The Tulip Era, however, was not the first time the Empire utilized European experts and methods. For example, according to historian Gabor Agoston (2020, pp. 37-38), the Empire successfully adopted Hungarian battle tactics and European weapon and gunpowder production methods, and European captains were serving under the Imperial Navy (Gürkan 2022, 47). The shift that took place in the Tulip Era was the acceptance of European superiority by the Empire and following changes in diplomacy such as the utilization of advisors from European armies for modernization of the army, like Baron de Tott, who formed the rapid artillery units (Gezer & Yeşil 2018, 143-144).

Another aspect of the Ottoman decline in this period was the fact that European monarchs consolidated power in their own hands throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, whereas in the Empire, power became increasingly diffused and decentralized, and more actors became part of the decision-making process such as households of pashas or merchants of Istanbul, who mostly represented their will through the Janissaries (Quataert 2005, 45). Therefore, Ottoman historian Quataert (2005, 46) defines the 18th century as the “golden age of popular politics” for the Empire due to this plurality of actors.

In the meanwhile, the Empire continued to suffer harsh defeats against European powers, despite minor efforts to modernize the army. The first major reform attempt came in 1793 with the establishment of the New Order Army (*Nizam-ı Cedid Ordusu*) by Sultan Selim III. This army was an alternative to the Janissaries with modern equipment and fighting methods. Although it was this new army which defeated Napoleon in 1799, the political elite of Istanbul was displeased with this alternative to their place in the state and they thusly revolted against Selim III in 1807 and replaced him with Mustafa IV, who would later be replaced by Mahmud II with the Alemdar Mustafa revolt, which was triggered thanks to the encouragement of pro-reform bureaucrats of Selim III that had escaped İstanbul after his dethronement in 1807 (Uzunçarşılı 2010, 82-84).

Mahmud II's era holds significance with two events in Ottoman history: The Auspicious Incident during which the Janissaries were abolished, and the Muhammad Ali Pasha revolt. The Auspicious Incident demonstrates that in the centre, the Empire began to consolidate power in Sultan's hands again, however, the Muhammad Ali Pasha incident demonstrates that the Empire, in the periphery¹, was losing power to local political actors.

¹ Periphery: All regions distant from the centre.

The Auspicious Incident commenced as a regular Janissary revolt, which had become something customary for the Ottoman capital Istanbul in the 17th and 18th centuries. However, in this incident, unlike previous Janissary revolts, the Sultan was able to bring the ulema, which had mostly sided with the Janissaries up until that point, and the people of the capital to his side, leaving the Janissaries alone against other political actors. Three days after the beginning of the revolt, the Janissaries' home was bombed by artillery units and a firman was declared, announcing the abolition of Janissaries (Ahmet Cevdet Paşa 2008, 411-417). Later, in the era of Sultan Abdülmecid, Mahmud II's reform efforts continued with the declaration of Tanzimat Edict, which introduced supremacy of law and equal citizenship to the Empire and was followed by many reforms in various fields, especially administration.

On the other hand, in 1824, Muhammad Ali Pasha, who was the powerful wali of Egypt that had exploited the power vacuum after the French invasion of Egypt in the late 18th century was called to suppress the ongoing Greek revolt, which had started in 1821. During his reign as wali in Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha successfully removed the traditional powerholders of Egypt, the Mamluks, and established his absolute authority over the region with his new modern army (Fahmy, 2010, 81-83). Muhammad Ali accepted the duty of suppressing the Greek revolt assigned to him by the centre with the condition of him becoming the wali of Crete and Cyprus. However, with the achievement of Greek independence in 1829 and after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29, the Sultan was displeased with Muhammad Ali and so did not give him the provinces he demanded, which led to the wali's revolt. Armies of the centre could not stop him, and the Empire was forced to ask for help from Russia.

Asking for help from a great power against other powers had become a recurring trend of Ottoman diplomacy, especially after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. This was known in Turkish historiography as *denge politikası*. Later, in the 19th century, when one power acted against the Empire, it sought other great powers' help, exploiting the rivalries and conflicts of interests among great powers to maintain its own territorial integrity and sovereignty. The reason behind this policy was the fact that the Empire had no power to stop great powers on her own and therefore needed the help of others. The best example of this approach was the Crimean War of 1853-1856, in which the Empire formed an alliance with France, Britain and Sardinia-Piedmont against Russia.

However, foreign help was not always for the sake of assisting the Ottoman Empire and such help came with some conditionality. For example, in 1833, when Mahmud II requested help

from Russians, he had to accept that Russians may use the Bosphorus Straits as they wished and that the Straits would be closed to the enemies of Russia. In 1856, in exchange for the help of its Allies in the Crimean War, the Empire had to declare the Islahat Edict, which provided privileges for non-Muslim subjects of the Empire and threatened the unity of the Ottoman realm.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that power diffusion in domestic politics, and failure to achieve military successes in foreign policy brought about the decline of the Ottoman Empire. In the 19th century, the inability of the Empire reached such an extent that it had to seek help from another state against its own wali. Although there were efforts to reform the structure of the army and the administration, these efforts have not borne fruit yet. In 1878, the Ottoman Empire stands on yet another precipice as the conservative Sultan Abdulhamid II sabotages attempts at reform while trying to manage a balanced foreign policy.

1. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878

Unfortunately for the Ottoman Empire, *denge politikası* was no longer as useful as before in the late 19th century. Particularly with a strengthened Russia in the north, Istanbul's position in international relations seem weaker then before as traditional allies, specifically the United Kingdom, do not seem intent on maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Truly, the weakening of the Ottomans is at hand, as they will go to war with Russia over territories in the Balkans.

a. Causes of the War

Throughout history, it can easily be observed that Russia was trying to reach warm waters. It is no surprise that, guided by this desire, there were many campaigns towards the region (Green 1993, 80). Towards the end of 19th century with the invention of the concept of geopolitics (Green 1993, 81), which links foreign policy to geography, this desire only grew larger. Now there was the need to stand their geopolitical ground for the Russian side (Green 1993, 81-82). Naturally, Russians started acting by their Pan-Slavism ideology, basically the idea of bringing all Slavic nations under the same political organization, which was successful in the Balkans, for their own benefit (Drury 2012, 3).

The main push that led to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 was the possibility of Russia losing Slavic influence over central Europe, after attempts to promote the Tsar as the absolute leader

of all Slavic people backfired. Therefore, the revolt against the Ottoman rule in Herzegovina started due to a combination of reasons, ranging from foreign influence to domestic problems (Ković 2010, 55) including the implementation of higher taxes. This revolt was used by the Three Emperors League, consisting of Russia, Austria, and Germany, to push for reforms in the Ottoman Empire (Sander 2017, 313). During the revolt, Russian military men were quick to join the battle on the side of the Serbians, which had sided with the Bosnians. Russia was also involved in the unsuccessful siege of the combined forces of Serbia and Montenegro in 1876, during which an uprising by the Bulgarian Christians occurred. According to Drury (2012, 3), this revolt was brutally suppressed by the Ottoman Empire, and this did not sit well with the Russians or the global stage in general. In fact, in response to the news about the Bulgarians, the London Protocol was issued in March of 1877 and was signed by Russia and the United Kingdom. The document called upon the demobilization of the Ottoman army together with reforms in exchange for British neutrality in any potential conflict between the Turks and the Russian Empire. Russia had already begun the mobilization of its army, along with political campaigns to “protect” Christian provinces under the Ottoman rule (Drury 2012, 3).

Due to the uncertain nature of and the constant lashes of violence around the region agitated by the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire was forced to entertain a conference by the Russian Tsar in Constantinople, with the aim of reaching a peaceful solution for the region. Some initial demands were to separate Bulgaria to eastern and western provinces, and Bosnia-Herzegovina to be united with autonomy for all three. These were rejected by the Turkish side. This led Russia to start gathering allies in case the war broke out (Stavrianos 2000, 403, 405).

b. War Chronology

Initially, the Russians planned to strike through Romania while leaving behind some troops in order to cover the flanks, aiming to achieve a swift victory in order to prevent foreign powers from intervening. In the meanwhile, the Turkish side, having defeated the Russians several times before, was initially more relaxed, heavily underestimating the Russian effort. This led to the initial deployment of Russian troops through Romania being a success, passing the Danube River and capturing Shipka Pass. After which there was an attempt to capture Nikopolis, which was unsuccessful as there was an active Turkish force there. This attempt was not all in vain however, as the Russian troops gained intelligence of Turkish troops located in Plevne, Bulgaria, which was relatively close to the Russian line of communication to the Balkan passes and hence needed immediate action. As a result, the Russians assaulted the region and

unsurprisingly, they were met with heavy fire from the Turkish troops, which had the time to entrench as a result this assault was a failure. The Russians did not stop however and after some reinforcements, the second assault on Plevne began. The Turks, having an advantage already, had prepared even more and as a result, the Russian troops faced severe casualties and were left with no option but to stop the assault and wait for reinforcements in order to keep their gains.

During the battle in Plevne, Turkish army had organized a large army to strike Shipka Pass, which was previously captured by Russia. This ambush, however, was met with a catastrophic failure as the already prepared Russian troops combined with the Bulgarian Legion, in the words of Drury (2012, 8), “mowed” down the Turkish troops. As the battle in Shipka was happening, the Russian army was already in preparation to attack Plevne for the third time. Having been embarrassed twice before from the failed attempts, this time they tried changing tactics, they ordered guns, even used some of their men as bait. All for nothing, since for the third time, they were bested.

As the logical next step, Russia besieged the region. This was no easy task as the Turkish troops had no intention of being cut off from their supplies. However, although not easily, the Turkish side fell to the lack of supplies and the state of siege, surrendering Plevne to the Russians. This back and forth had been going on for a while and the winter was rapidly approaching. The Russians were planning to break through the Araba Konak Pass to capture Sofia while simultaneously attacking Rustchuk. They were successful in pushing through the unfavourable weather conditions and reaching Sofia, now, the new route was to push towards Philipopolis to cut off the supplies of the Turkish troops around Trojan Pass. The Russian army then marched towards Adrianople, which meant that the Russians were free to march towards Constantinople. This threat caused the Royal Navy to come to aid, as they did not want to leave Constantinople to the Russians: Russia’s fear of a foreign intervention had become a reality (Drury 2012, 4-14). Regardless, the Russians had achieved an astounding victory and the British intervention forced them to enter bilateral negotiations with the Ottoman Empire to come up with a peace settlement.

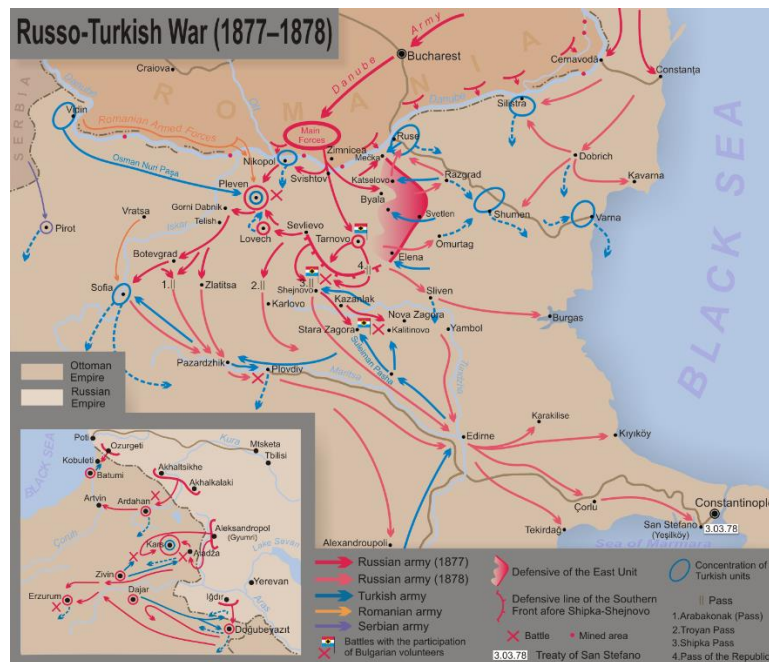


Figure 1: A map showing military movement in the Russo-Turkish war (Kandi, “Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878),” Wikimedia Commons, accessed March 5, 2023, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russo-Turkish_War_\(1877%E2%80%931878\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russo-Turkish_War_(1877%E2%80%931878).png)).

c. The Treaty of San Stefano and the European Balance of Power

The Treaty of San Stefano was the settlement reached at the end of this effort. The terms of the treaty were heavily skewed towards achieving Russian interests in the region as the war itself was a clear victory for the Russian Empire: the war marked the second time within the century that the Russians stood at the doorstep of Constantinople. However, it must not be overlooked that the diplomats of the Russian Empire were aware of the fact that trying to resolve the war with such a peace treaty would warrant attention from the Western powers, and they themselves acknowledged that it was only a “preliminary” treaty (Jelavich 1979, 171). The treaty proposed numerous revisions of the Balkan-Ottoman borders as well as some territorial changes in the Caucasus.

One of the clauses of the treaty explicitly stated that a highly autonomous tributary principality of Bulgaria would be established with the right to have its own military and its own government (Spiratos 2022). This Bulgarian autonomous region would have borders defined by “the majority of the Bulgarian population, and which cannot, under any circumstances, be less than those described by the Constantinople Conference. ...” (Jelavich 1979, 173). Once the discussions were finalised, however, some adjustments would be made to that outlook, and except for the southern portion, Dobruja would be ceded to Romania, the province of Nish

would be ceded to Serbia, the North Macedonian border was altered in several places but remained similar in size, and most importantly, several advances of territory towards Thessaloniki (excluding the city itself as well as the region around it) and Thrace were made (Sumner 1962, 319).

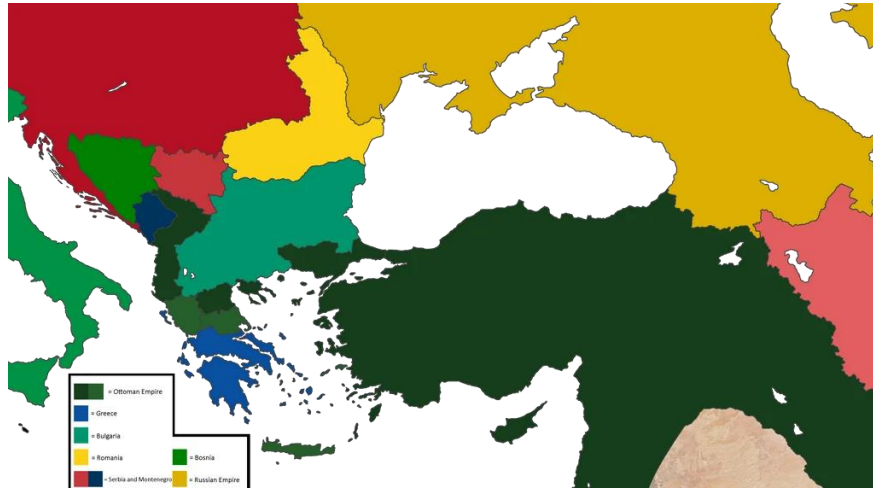


Figure 2: Map of Proposed Borders in the Treaty of San Stefano (Stanthefax, “Map of the San Stefano treaty, aka how Russia wanted to split ottoman balkans after the russo-turkish war of 1877-78.” map, Reddit, 19 March 2021, <https://i.redd.it/2luftf27wxn61.png>).

While from the Bulgarian perspective, it seemed as though the Russian Empire had their interests in consideration with this action, Ivo Indzhev (2022), a Bulgarian journalist who specialises in relations between Bulgaria and Russia, argues that the treaty was drafted with the expectation of a revision and that the Russians expected the Bulgarian borders within this revision to be marginal when compared to the one drafted in San Stefano. The same acknowledgement was made in the diaries of Count Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatyev (1986), the Russian Ambassador to Constantinople, stating that while the Bulgarian borders drafted within the Constantinople Conference would be significantly larger, it would have the Bulgarians grateful to the international community rather than the Empire herself as those borders would have been approved by all powers involved, making the Bulgarians less like to stay exclusively in the Russian sphere of influence, making it harder to increase control over the Balkans and reach the straits. This ploy would ensure that whatever the result, the Bulgarians would remain aligned with the Russian Empire.

The treaty also demanded the recognition of the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro by the Sublime Porte as well as granting autonomy to the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Spiratos 2022). There were several territorial changes that also concerned these

nations as Montenegro would nearly double in size, Serbia would attain the province of Nish and Romania would be ceded Dobruja except for the southern region. Lastly, the Georgian and Armenian regions in the Caucasus would be ceded to Russia and the straits would be declared open to all neutral ships at all times (Spiratos 2022).

This treaty proposal was seen as so aggressive that even the Serbians objected to its implementation since it would limit any possible further advancement into Ottoman territory as it had now become Bulgarian (Jelavich 1979, 187). It breached several restrictions imposed on Russia in the Treaty of Paris of 1856. Also, it betrayed secret agreements made with Austria-Hungary, which limited territorial acquisitions of the Russians to Dobruja in exchange for Austria-Hungary taking Bosnia and Herzegovina, and had even earned a reaction from, by that time, the long-time ally of the Russians, Germany (Jelavich 1979, 173). The British had also been promised that the issue of Bosphorus Straits and Constantinople were questions that concerned the entirety of Europe and would not be singlehandedly dealt with by Russia (Jelavich 1979, 174).

The Treaty of San Stefano can therefore be seen as a clear Russian attempt to breach the European focus of the century, balance of powers. Ever since the Napoleonic wars, powers within the continent had numerous arrangements, agreements, and alliances to preserve at the very least the short-term status quo as no nation would so certainly eclipse others as to become a unilateral threat. However, this never meant that these European states would abandon their agendas, but more so meant that they had to achieve them by guaranteeing mutual benefit noteworthy enough to satisfy both sides or through exchanges of favours. What Russia had done in promulgating the treaty of San Stefano was considerably a denunciation of this outlook and the terms of this document, therefore, had no real possibility of being implemented and Russia would now have to defend against a redesign of these proposals.

3. The Agenda of the Committee

The outcomes of the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war and the San Stefano Treaty had naturally alarmed the British as it threatened to upset the balance of power in favor of the Russian Empire. Similarly, Otto von Bismarck, the famous Chancellor of Germany, was interested in stabilizing the Balkans as one of the members of the League of Three Emperors. A practitioner of *realpolitik*, Bismarck wanted to keep peace in the region, to tide over the disruption of the balance of power caused by Russia, and to make Germany one of the leaders in the conduct of diplomacy in Europe.

It was with the suspicion of the British, the motivation of the Russians to keep their gains, and Bismarck's shrewd politics that Congress of Berlin was inaugurated in June 1878. While there were many agenda items in the committee, ranging from Balkan nationality movements to Russian claims in the Ottoman Empire's eastern territories, the committee will only focus on 4 main topics: **nationalist movements in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, and the issue of minority rights in Ottoman territories.**

a. Balkan Independence Movements

i. The Albanian Issue

In the late 19th century, the Albanian people was divided into two regions, with Northern Albania being more tribal and Southern Albania being more urban. Also, Albanians were divided into three millets in the Imperial system, 70% were Muslims, 20% Greek Orthodox and 10% Latin Catholic (Gawrych 2006, 7) and for example, an Orthodox Albanian would speak Greek instead of Albanian (Hanioglu 2008, 36).

The event brought the Albanian issue into the agenda of great powers was the Treaty of San Stefano, which divided Albanian lands to enlarge Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria. Albanians responded to this by establishing the Central Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Albanian Nationality in Istanbul. The Sublime Porte, rather than preventing, encouraged Albanian struggle to prevent annexation of their lands to other Balkan states (Skendi 1967, 36). In June 1878, Albanian representatives gathered in Prizren with the call of Abdul Frasheri, an Ottoman bureaucrat as well as an Albanian nationalist. In this meeting, Albanian committees which were established to prevent annexations were united under one central committee. In the conference, the Albanians also decided to launch an armed resistance to any partition (Gawrych 2006, 46).

The Albanian movement was not an independence movement at the expense of the Empire, rather, it was aiming to prevent partition of Albanian inhabited lands between Balkan states and to ensure the Sultan's rule over Albanian people. They sent a memorandum to Otto von Bismarck and other European great powers stating that the expansion in the Balkans should be based on ethnicity of people, and they would resist any plan in which Albanians do not remain under the Sultan's rule. However, the religious identity of this Albanian movement led the great powers to not welcome their demands: even von Bismarck claimed that there is no Albanian nationality (Gawrych 2006, 46-48).

ii. The Bulgarian Issue

Unlike Greek and Serbian independence movements, the Bulgarian independence movement emerged in the second half of the 19th century, with Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi Rakowski introducing the idea of forcing Ottomans out of the country and establishing an independent Bulgaria. Later, in 1869, the first Bulgarian independence committee, Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC) was established in Romania by Bulgarian emigrants. In 1873, a Bulgarian revolutionary named Vasil Levski, who established connections with Bulgarians under the rule of the Empire to revolt for independence, was captured by Imperial forces and hanged in Sofia (Heraclides & Dialla 2015, 150).

Although the Bulgarian political elite had a dispute on the issue of independence in 1870s, ordinary people were not concerned with the issue. The great powers, on the other hand, were not eager to see an independent Bulgaria in the Balkans, believing that it would merely be an extension of Russia into the Balkans, therefore, unlike their stance in Serbian and Greek revolts, advocated the preservation of status quo in the region (Neuburger 2004, 34). In 1876, BRCC felt that the ongoing Bosnian revolt would be a chance for independence and launched the April Revolution, however, the revolution was not able to spread to whole country and remained a revolt in some mountain towns and ended with a disaster for Bulgarians (Heraclides & Dialla 2015, 150).

On the other hand, some Bulgarians, especially clergy, demanded a model like the Austria-Hungary. To strengthen the ties between the Imperial throne and Bulgarian people, they sent a petition to the Sultan demanding him to establish an autonomous Bulgaria with a constitution within the Empire by claiming himself as the Tsar of Bulgarians, alongside with his title of the Ottoman Sultan (Hanioglu, 2008, 75).

In conclusion, it could be said that the issue of Bulgarian independence was not an issue promoted and celebrated as much as those of Greek and Serbians. Even the Bulgarians were not completely in favour of independence, as could be seen in the clergy's petition to the Sultan. Moreover, great powers except Russia did not want an independent Bulgaria in the region, which arguably was the reason behind the disaster in 1876. It was the Russian decisive victory against the Empire in 1878 which put the issue into the agenda of the Treaty of San Stefano and later on, the Congress of Berlin.

iii. The Romanian Issue

It could be stated that the idea of a Romanian nationalism did not occur until late 19th century. Indeed, in Ottoman historiography, there is no such word as “Romania” even though these lands were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Instead, two provinces known as Wallachia and Moldavia are the two components which make up Romania according to nationalists. These two provinces share a common culture and language, which made them a primary target for unification. As the Ottoman Empire was being swept by the wave of nationalism, these two provinces indeed were in 1859, which paved the way for the cultivation of a nationalist movement.

Much like other nationalist movements against the Ottoman Empire, such as that of the Serbs and the Greeks, this emergence of a Romanian nationalism was readily exploited by rivals of the Sublime Porte. Throughout the 18th century, the Russian Empire continually provoked the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia to revolt against Istanbul which contributed to the outbreak of war in at least two separate occasions (Yüksel 2019, 606). In 1774, with the decisive Ottoman defeat in Küçük Kaynarca, the Russians were finally successful in granting autonomy to the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia (Yüksel 2019, 607). This paved the way for the formation of the United Principalities of Romania in 1859.

Up until the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, the United Principalities of Romania enjoyed this autonomy and the patronage of Russia. As the war ended in Russian victory, the Tsar wasted little time in trying to expand his influence in the Balkans. With the Treaty of San Stefano (Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire 1878), it was decreed that Romania would get full independence and that the Ottomans would be forced to recognize it. However, the exact territories of Romania remained the same as under Ottoman rule, although Romanian nationalists view the territory of Dobruja as a legitimate claim. In this way, they are in conflict with Bulgarian nationalists.

Since the Treaty of San Stefano was abrogated with the intervention of the British and Otto von Bismarck, the issue of Romania is unclear though the consensus seems to be in favour of granting independence to the United Principalities. Regardless, the expansion (or, the contraction) of Romanian territories remains an issue for the Congress of Berlin to address. The current *domnitor* (English: leader) of Romania, Carol, remains intent on gaining total

independence from the Ottomans and receiving territorial gains from the Russian victory against the Sublime Porte.



Figure 3: A portrait of Carol (George Basaraba, “Carol I, King of Romania, Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen.” portrait, Wikimedia Commons, 20 April 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carol_I,_King_of_Romania,_Prince_of_Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen.jpg).

b. The Issue of Minority Rights in Ottoman Territories

Albeit a consideration of lesser importance when it comes to Balkan power politics, it can be stated that the Congress of Berlin presents a unique opportunity for the discussion of rights for minorities living under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The minorities in question are defined as being non-Muslim: this definition encompasses mostly Christians and, to a lesser extent, Jews.

The discussions at hand hail from a concession that the Russian Empire received as a result of its victory in the Russo-Turkish war of 1768-1774, which culminated in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. In that document, the Russians were granted the right to “protect” Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire (Beydilli n.d.). While a very vague stipulation, this

concession nevertheless laid the ground rule for future interventions into Ottoman internal affairs on the grounds of the protection of a minority.

These discussions should not detract from the fact that the Ottoman Empire had/has a relatively successful record when it came/comes to minority rights. Up until the Tanzimat Edict in 1839 and the Islahat Edict in 1856, **the millet system** granted non-Muslims a very large degree of autonomy as minorities could set up their own schools and even courts. The Islahat Edict, which was implemented under pressure from the Ottoman Empire's allies of the Crimean War, practically abolished the millet system, which paradoxically led to a worsening of minority rights. This was because, although the Edict granted legal equality between peoples of all faiths, animosity festered among the public as legal equality did not translate into practical equality (Davison 1963, 63-64). Consequently, the experiment to create a common Ottoman national identity has failed thus far.

This was to the advantage of those states which sought to disrupt the Sublime Porte's territorial integrity, such as Russia. In addition to Russia, Bismarck has a personal ambition to protect the Jewish minority in the Balkans (Jewish Virtual Library n.d.). Irrespective of these, the legal statuses of minorities remain undefined, and no provisions are at hand that would force the Ottoman Empire to alter its treatment of its minorities. In conclusion, the members of the Congress of Berlin will have to bear these considerations in mind when going forth with its deliberations.

4. References

- Agoston, Gabor. 2020. *Osmanlı'da Ateşli Silahlar Ve Askeri Devrim Tartışmaları*. İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
- Ahmet Cevdet Paşa. 2008. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*. İstanbul: İlgi Kültür Sanat.
- Beydilli, Kemal. n.d. "KÜÇÜK KAYNARCA ANTLAŞMASI." TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi. Accessed March 10, 2023. <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/kucuk-kaynarca-antlasmasi>.
- Davison, Roderic. 1963. *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Drury, Ian, 2012, *Men-at-Arms: The Russo-Turkish War 1877*, London: Osprey.
- Fahmy, Khaled. 2010. *Paşanın Adamları: Kavalalı Mehmed Ali Paşa, Ordu Ve Modern Mısır*. İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Gawrych, George Walter. 2006. *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Gezer, Ömer, and Fatih Yeşil. 2018. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sürat Topçuluğu I: Top Döküm Teknolojisi, Bürokratik Yapı Ve Konuşlanma." *Osmanlı Araştırmaları Dergisi* 52, no. 52: 135–80.
- Green, William C. 1993. "The Historic Russian Drive for a Warm Water Port: Anatomy of a Geopolitical Myth." *Naval War College Review* 46, no. 2: 80–102.
- Gürkan, Emrah Safa. 2022. *Sultanın Korsanları: Osmanlı Akdenizi'nde Gaza, Yağma Ve Esaret 1500-1700*. İstanbul: Kronik Yayınları.
- Hanioglu, M. Şükrü. 2008. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Heraclides, Alexis, and Ada Dialla. 2015. "The Bulgarian Atrocities: a Bird's Eye View of Intervention with Emphasis on Britain, 1875–78." Essay. In *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent*, 148–68. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Ignatyev, Nikolay P. 1986. Diaries 1875-1878 (Записки 1875-1878). Sofia, BG. Fatherland Front.
- Indzhev, Ivo. 2018. The San Stefano Deceit. Sofia, BG: Siela.
- Jelavich, Barbara. 1979. "Negotiating the Treaty of San Stefano." Southeastern Europe 6 no. 1 (January): 171–93. <https://www.doi.org/10.1163/187633379x00184>.
- Jewish Virtual Library. 2008. "Congress of Berlin (June 13 – July 13 1878)." Accessed March 10, 2023. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/berlin-congress-of>.
- Jorga, Nicolae. 2009. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi. Vol. II. V vols. İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları.
- Jorga, Nicolae. 2009. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi. Vol. IV. V vols. İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi.
- Ković, Miloš, 2010, "The beginning of the 1875 Serbian uprising in Herzegovina the British perspective" *Balkanica* 2010, no 41: 55-71, <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC1041055K>
- Lewis, Bernard. 2008. Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu. Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınevi.
- Quataert, Donald. 2005. The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Neuburger, Mary. 2004. "The Bulgarian Figure in the Ottoman Carpet: Untangling Nation from Empire." Essay. In *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria*, 18–54. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. 1878. The Preliminary Treaty of Peace, signed at San Stefano. *The European Concert in the Eastern Question* 335-48.
- Sander, Oral. 2017. *Siyasi Tarih, İlkçağlardan 1918'e*. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları.
- Skendi, Stavro. 1967. *Albanian National Awakening*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Spiratos, Miltos. 2022. “The Treaty of San Stefano, a Peace Treaty That Could Not Be Implemented.” Arcadia. <https://www.byarcadia.org/post/the-treaty-of-san-stefano-a-peace-treaty-that-could-not-be-implemented>.

Stravionos, Leften S., 2000, *The Balkans Since 1453*, New York: NYU Press

Sumner, Benedict H. 1962. *Russia and the Balkans 1870 - 1880*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.

Uzunçarşılı, İsmail Hakkı. 2010. Meşhur Rumeli Ayanlarından Tirsinikli İsmail, Yılık Oğlu Süleyman Ağalar ve Alemdar Mustafa Paşa. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.

Yüksel, Sinan. 2019. “Küçük Kaynarca’dan Yaş Antlaşmasına Kadar Eflak-Boğdan Üzerinde Osmanlı-Rus Nüfuz Mücadelesi.” *Belleten* 83: 605-32. <https://doi.org/10.37879/belleten.2019.605>.

