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Albania before the Balkan War and the 1912
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Çınar Özen*, Yelda Demirağ, Ahmet Tetik**

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Ankara University, Department of
International Relations

** Assoc. Prof. Dr., Başkent University, Department of
Political Science and International Relations

Dr., ATASE Archives Director

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The Montenegrin Policy of Expansion towards Albania before the Balkan War and the 1912 Summer Campaign

Çınar ÖZEN, Yelda DEMİRAG and Ahmet TETİK*

ABSTRACT

Montenegro launched a large-scale military attack on Northern Albania and the Sancak border region in 1912. Many writers have analyzed this military operation in the framework of the border disputes between Montenegro and Ottoman State as their borders were not clearly established by the Berlin Treaty (June 13-July 13 1878) According to this view, the fighting that took place had a limited scale and scope. Our study is based on the material at the Ottoman Ministry of War archives. The documents assert that the said fighting was widespread and violent. The main argument of this work is that this military operation of Montenegro was not of limited scope, and the result of reacting to immediate challenges, but was a war which went beyond border skirmishes. Especially the Montenegrin operation which began at the end of July was a planned, large-scale, and violent military operation. This study is based on the idea that Montenegro started this fight upon the successful conclusion of Serbian-Bulgarian negotiations and when a Balkan War became imminent at the beginning of 1912, in order to achieve gains and to anticipate Serbia.

Keywords: Montenegro, Albania, 1912 Summer Campaign.

Balkan Savaşı Öncesi Karadağ'ın Arnavutluğa Doğru Genişleme Politikası ve 1912 Yaz Seferi

ÖZET

Karadağ 1912 yazında Kuzey Arnavutluk ve Sancak sınırı boyunca büyük bir askeri harekât başlatmıştır. Pek çok kaynak bu harekâtı, 1878 Berlin Antlaşmasıyla kesinleşmemiş olan Karadağ-Osmanlı sınır ihlalleri çerçevesinde değerlendirmiştir. Bu görüşe göre söz konusu çatışmalar sınırlı bir nitelik göstermektedir. Çalışmamız Osmanlı Harbiye Nezareti Arşivleri'ndeki belgelere dayanmaktadır. Belgeler söz konusu çatışmanın çok yaygın ve şiddetli olduğunu açıkça ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmanın temel savı Karadağ'ın söz konusu askeri harekâtının, dar kapsamlı ve ani gelişen bir nitelik taşımadığı, sınır çatışmalarının ötesine geçen bir savaş niteliğinde olduğudur. Karadağ'ın özellikle Temmuz sonu başlattığı harekât, planlı, kapsamlı ve şiddetli bir askeri harekât niteliği taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma, Karadağ'ın bu savaşı, Sırbistan ve Bulgaristan arasında yürütülen görüşmelerin başarıyla sonuçlanıp 1912 başı itibarıyla Balkan Savaşı'nın kesinleşmesi üzerine, tarihsel olarak genişleme emelleri olan bölgede Sırbistan'dan önce harekete geçip, ön almak için başlatmış olduğu görüşüne dayanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karadağ, Arnavutluk, 1912 Yaz Seferi.

* Çınar Özen, Assoc. Prof. Dr., Ankara University, SBF, Department of International Relations, Ankara. E-mail: cinar.ozen@politics.ankara.edu.tr. Yelda Demirağ, Assoc. Prof. Dr., Başkent University, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Ankara. E-mail: demirag@baskent.edu.tr. Ahmet Tetik, Dr., ATASE Archives Director, Ankara. E-mail: atetik08@yahoo.com.tr.

Introduction

The use of the name Montenegro began in the 15th century when the Crnojević dynasty began to rule the Serbian principality of Zeta; over subsequent centuries Montenegro was able to maintain its independence from the Ottoman Empire. From the 16th to 19th centuries, Montenegro became a theocracy ruled by a series of bishop princes; in 1852, it was transformed into a secular principality.

In 1860, the Montenegrins proclaimed Nicholas I as the successor of knjaz (Prince) Danilo I. In 1861-1862, Nicholas engaged in an unsuccessful war against the Ottoman Empire. He was much more successful in 1875. Following the Herzegovinian Uprising, partly initiated by his clandestine activities, he yet again declared on Ottoman Empire. Serbia joined Montenegro, but it was defeated by Ottoman forces in 1876 only to try again the following year after Russia decisively routed the Ottomans. Montenegro was victorious throughout. The results were decisive; 1900 square miles were added to Montenegro's territory by the Treaty of Berlin, that the administration of the maritime and sanitary police on the coast was placed in the hands of Austria. The reign of Nikola I (1860-1918) saw the doubling of Montenegro's territory and international recognition of her independence. He also granted the country's first constitution (1905) and was elevated the rank of King (1910).¹

Durham compared three books written on the Balkans and Turkey during 1917 in a review article published in 1918, and put forward a different view on the pre-Balkan War Montenegrin policy regarding the Ottomans.² Devine's reply article to Durham published in the same journal classified Durham's views on Montenegro as slander and argued that these views were refuted.³ In the controversial article, Durham summarily stated that Montenegro was preparing to invade Ottoman lands in collaboration with Bulgaria, and before the Serbs did it, and that Montenegro started its preparations for the campaign in the summer of 1911, and forced the Ottoman State to war in the summer of 1912 using the on-going border disputes as an excuse.

Durham's views that infuriated Devine make up this article's subject. The documents in the Ottoman Ministry of War archives, in the section of the Domestic Rebellions Collection, Albanian Rebellion, which clearly set out the military activity the Montenegrins started in July 1912, are the basis for this

¹ For more information about the history of Montenegro see also; Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain : A History of Montenegro*, Ithaca, New York: Corwell University Press, 2007.

² M. Edith Durham, "The Turks and the Balkans", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 2, February 1918, p. 115-119.

³ Alex Devine, "Montenegrin History in 1912: A Reply to Miss Durham's Review in the February Journal", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 5, May 1918, p. 338-339.

work. This study claims that there were no border skirmishes during 1912, instead there was a large-scale, planned military attack by the Montenegrins against the Ottomans, and this plan was put into action at the end of July 1912. The documents show that the said military campaign was not of a spontaneously-evolving, small-scale nature, but was a well-planned, large-scale, and vigorous military act, and hence the documents support Durham's thesis.

Developing Ottoman Instability and Montenegro

The Albanian Revolution which started in 1909 and greatly accelerated in May 1912, and the internal political instability of the Ottoman State, combined with the government crises, strengthened the views that the end of Ottoman Europe was at hand.

Montenegro, while stating its unease over the fact that its borders with the Ottomans were not determined by an agreement, kept its facade of "aggrieved neighbour" for a long time due to the continuous flow of Albanian rebels to its lands. The Ottomans, on the other hand, refrained from drawing up a formal border agreement with Montenegro in order not to further provoke Albanian rebels. They also pursued a passive policy, foreseeing that a fight with Montenegro would alter the existing balance in the Balkans. Montenegro changed its policy on the issue in parallel with the strengthening of the Rebellion in 1912 and with the Serbian-Bulgarian alliance talks, and on July 1912 attacked the Ottoman border forces in a well-organized fashion and in collaboration with the rebels. This military operation began in the north-west, in Mojkovac, within the Sancak province, and continued into Gusinje in the south-east, and Selce, Tamarë, Hot and Traboin in the south. Montenegro also laid siege to the town of Tuz which was near Podgoridca.

Even though Montenegro's relations with the Albanian rebels in this border region were met with suspicion in the Ottoman State,⁴ these were not taken as Montenegrin hostility. The Ottoman State generally chose to describe the issues regarding the rebels on the Ottoman-Montenegrin border area as de facto complications arising from the conditions in a very difficult geographical region. However, in 1912, Ottoman-Montenegrin relations came to the point of near total nullity with the Montenegrin attacks. The rebels in Northern Albania and Kosovo joined forces with Montenegro during these attacks. This co-operation

⁴ Treadway quite clearly defined Montenegro's relations with Melisoriens. Treadway specified that Montenegro was a safe haven for the large body of insurgents and Podgoridca had become the unofficial capital of Albanian Catholics and King Nicholas had welcomed Mallisors with open arms. John D. Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle: Montenegro and Austria-Hungary 1908-1914*, Purdue Univ. Press, West Lafayette, India, 1998, p. 77.

led to a different way of understanding the Montenegrin attitude during the Albanian Rebellion.

The Ottoman relations with Montenegro were formed on the basis of two dynamics: The first of these relates to the Balkan balance of power which was shaped against the Ottomans, and the second is the Albanian question. The Ottoman State, while trying to establish good relations with Montenegro under the pressure of the former, failed to take the necessary steps under the pressure of the latter.

It is especially easy to observe this situation regarding the border dispute issue. Albanian nationalism directed against Montenegro, which emerged with the Treaty of Berlin, was at the heart of the Montenegrin-Ottoman border disputes. The fact that the Ottomans failed to support those Albanian communities which did not want to leave the lands left to Montenegro by the Treaty of Berlin caused great harm to the Albanian loyalty to the Ottoman State. This feeling was further aggravated by the Albanian Revolution. Nevertheless, as the Ottomans were afraid that the Albanians might be further offended should they open border talks with Montenegro, they avoided such negotiations and gave the impression of being uninterested concerning border negotiations,⁵ which meant that they ended up pursuing a policy which became more obsolete and irrelevant by the day due to the pressure of the Albanians. Treadway calls the purchase for a hefty sum of the Montenegrin Kin Nicholas' seaside villa on the Bosphorus by the Ottoman Government a fruitless attempt at bribery.⁶

The Montenegrin Policy of Expansion toward the Ottoman State and Albania

Montenegro was established as a small Balkan principality with the signing of the 1878 Berlin Treaty, which followed the last Ottoman-Russian war of the 19th century.⁷ This principality, in which in the main Orthodox Slavs lived, has

⁵ The negotiations in Cetinje involving the Ottoman border commission, headed by Ali Riza Bey, led to reconciliation on the subject of the Rzanica border territory in June 1912. The agreement signed by Montenegrins in 11 June 1912 was not certified because of the hesitations of Ottoman government about an Albanian reaction.

⁶ Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, p. 102.

⁷ The three Balkan states of Serbia, Montenegro, and Rumania were recognized as completely independent states even though they were considered as part of the Ottoman Empire by the Berlin Treaty; however, they lost part of the lands they gained by the Aia Stefanos Treaty. Rumania, which had been an ally of Russia in the last Ottoman-Russian War, had to return Besarabia to Russia as Russia had lost it in the Crimean War of 1856. Hence, Russia managed to control the mouth of the Danube River once again. In return, Rumania received the region of Dobruca in the south of the Danube which was separated from the Ottoman Empire. Bosnia-Hezegovina would be occupied and provisionally administered by Austria-Hungary. However, the sovereignty over the provinces would

gained an importance far beyond its geographical area due to its strategic location, and great ambitions beyond its scale due to this strategic importance. The ambitious nature of Nicholas Petrovic, who was first the prince then the king of Montenegro, also affected the active Montenegrin policy. King Nicholas pursued his Ottoman policy by establishing relations with the great powers of that period as well as with regional countries.

Montenegrin expansionism towards Ottoman lands covered two areas, the Sancak province in the east and Northern Albania in the south. The region of Kosovo is a continuation of the same strategic geopolitical area as Sancak. The King of Montenegro chose a policy of expansion up to Prizren—seen as sacred by Orthodox Slavs—and pursued insistent claims on the land, in competition with Serbia.

Sancak is a region critically important in terms of geopolitics in which Muslim Bosnians constituted the majority and which was left to the Ottoman State by the Berlin Treaty. This region separated the two Orthodox Slav nations of the Balkans, Serbia and Montenegro. The German Kaiser Wilhelm II was able to reach the Ottoman territories, including the East Mediterranean and Basra via Sancak. For this reason, Russia and Serbia gave great importance to Sancak, Albania and Kosovo, and saw this region as a tool to unify Serbia and Montenegro and to let the Russians reach the Adriatic Sea. Süleyman Kâni Bey sums up this situation as “He who owns the road from the north to Salonika, also owns Albania”.⁸

The second side of Montenegrin expansionism was towards the south, into Northern Albania. The Montenegrin points of interest in Northern Albania were especially the Malësia and Skoder regions and the land between the narrow Adriatic band of Montenegro and Kosovo. The Catholic Albanians who lived in that region had helped both the decay of Ottoman power in the region and the increase in Montenegrin interest in the region. Moreover, the Montenegrin interest in Northern Albania also became important for the Albanian minority population Montenegro contained.

The Berlin Treaty, while narrowing the areas left to Montenegro, had also given the Albanian-populated Podgoridca, Plav, and Gusinje and their environs

belong to the Ottomans. In the Sancak of Yenipazar, which was situated between Montenegro and Serbia, Austrian troops would be stationed. The Austrian intervention to Yenipazar was important for two reasons: Firstly, to prevent the unification of Serbia and Montenegro, and secondly to keep the road from Salonika and the Aegean Sea open. The Sancak Question gained more importance with time. For further information on the Berlin arrangements, see: W.N. Medlicott, *The Congress of Berlin and After: A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement*, London, 1938.

⁸ Süleyman Kâni İrtəm, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Makedonya Meselesi: Balkanların Kördüğümü*, Yayına Hazırlayan Osman Selim Kocaoğlu, Temel Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999, p. 127.

to Montenegro. This land division led to Albanian organized resistance, and therefore Montenegro could not in reality own and control the lands it was legally granted by the Berlin Treaty. The Albanian League owes its establishment to this resistance. Negotiations concerning the land left to Montenegro went on after the Berlin Treaty as well, and Bar and Ulcinj at the Adriatic coast were given to Montenegro while Gusinje and Berane were returned to the Ottomans. On the other hand, the talks on Montenegrin-Ottoman border went on until the Balkan Wars.⁹ This border dispute constituted another reason for the Montenegrin policy of expansion into Ottoman lands.

During the 1903 Revolution in Serbia, Montenegro's King Nicholas pursued a policy of seeking to establish a common kingdom for Orthodox Slavs, but failed in these attempts. His son-in-law Peter Karadjordjevic became the King of Serbia but a clandestine rivalry between these two kings remained. On 28 August 1910, the Skupstina, the Montenegrin parliament, accepted a resolution ensuring that the Montenegrin principality now became a kingdom. Montenegro has deep historical and cultural ties with Serbia and Russia. When Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina on 6 October 1908, these ties became stronger. On 24 November 1908, Serbia and Montenegro concluded a secret alliance agreement according to which Serbia's claims on Bosnia and Montenegro's claims on Herzegovina were respectively accepted, and they decided to act together on the Sancak province.¹⁰ Serbia generally supported Montenegro's expansionist policies regarding the Catholic population of Northern Albania, but expected in return Montenegrin support for Serbian supremacy in the Sancak and Kosovo regions.

Two years after the Serbia-Montenegro agreement, on 15 December 1910, a military co-operation agreement was concluded between Russia and Montenegro and in that context Russia started an aid program regarding Montenegro and directly contributed to the reorganization of the Montenegrin army. What Russia expected in return for its assistance was that Montenegro avoid any military agreements with a third party without Russian consent and that the kingdom avoid any attacks on the Ottoman State, as Russia feared being caught up in any controversy resulting from a Montenegrin fait accompli.¹¹

King Nicholas, who had been able to establish multidimensional relations with Italy, Britain, and even Austria-Hungary, with which Montenegro had

⁹ Richard C. Hall, *Balkan Savaşları: 1912-1913 I. Dünya Savaşı'nın Provası*, trans. M. Tanju Akad, Homer Kitabevi, Istanbul, 2003, p. 73.

¹⁰ Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, p. 31.

¹¹ Philip E. Mosely, "Review: Russian Policy in 1911-12", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, March 1940, p. 77; Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, p. 64-65.

problems,¹² offered to assist Italy by invading Albania after the Italian attack on the Ottoman State. However, the Italians declined this offer.¹³ As can be seen, Montenegro tried to incorporate the support of all the regional and great powers for its expansion plans concerning Sancak and Albania.

Montenegro and the Balkan League

In 1912 it was clear that the Albanian Rebellion which had begun in 1909 was very near success. The Albanian nationalists, who did not wish to be left beneath the rubble the crumbling Ottoman State would leave behind, began to work on creating a greater Albania which would be made up of the Yanya, Shkoder, Kosovo, and Monastir provinces and which would have full autonomy. On the other hand, Serbia and Bulgaria, which supported the Albanian Rebellion to weaken the Ottomans, were also discontented about the possibility of Albania's establishment. The Albanian Rebellion's success led these two countries to solve their problems regarding their plans to share Ottoman Europe.

During the Serbian-Bulgarian negotiations, Russia had an active standing as the protector of Slavic nations. The Italian declaration of war against the Ottomans on 29 September 1911 and the Bulgarian change of government on 22 March 1911 are factors that affected the speeding up of negotiations. In Bulgaria, the Democratic Party government of A. Malinov which gave great importance to relations with Austria-Hungary was replaced on 22 March 1911 by the Geshov-Danev Coalition Government.¹⁴ Prime Minister Ivan E. Geshov was the leader of the National Party, and the Head of the Parliament (the *Narodna Subranie*) Dr. Stoian Danev was the leader of Progressive Liberal Party.

On 11 October 1911, the Bulgarian PM Geshov stopped by at Belgrade on his way from Vienna to Sofia, and had a meeting with the Serbian PM Milovan Milovanovic for three hours in a carriage especially added to the train for the occasion.¹⁵ Both politicians were unhappy about Austria-Hungary's plans to establish an independent Albania and thought it was necessary to make good use of the situation created by the Italian–Ottoman War. In these talks, bargains on the sharing of Ottoman Europe were struck. It was concluded that north of the Shar Mountains should be given to Serbia, and most of Thrace and Macedonia,

¹² With the reconciliation in February 1912 between Montenegro and Austria-Hungary, Austrian law experts paid a visit to Montenegro and contributed the judicial reforms in the Kingdom of Montenegro. In the same period, a project for a road started from Austria's Risano Docks to Montenegro's city of Niksic. Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan rivalries and Russia foreign policy 1908-1914*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1981, p. 57.

¹³ Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, p. 90.

¹⁴ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.37.

and west of the Struma River should go to Bulgaria. However, they failed to solve the situation concerning the critical corridor north of the Vardar Plain which started at the town of Struga, south of the Shar Mountains, next to the Lake Okhrida, and which continued on to the Bulgarian border. The leaders left the meeting agreeing to meet again to discuss this last point.

Russia became part of the Serbia–Bulgaria talks through its Ambassador to Belgrade, Hartwig, and during the negotiation process, both Serbia's and Bulgaria's expansion areas were determined, as well as the gray areas which were to be handled by future talks.

Serbia and Bulgaria agreed, with active Russian mediation, to conclude a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance and a secret division plan annexed to this agreement. Serbia ratified these agreements on 11 March 1912 and Bulgaria on 13 March 1912. These two states also signed a military convention seen as an integral part of this agreement on 29 April 1912.¹⁶ According to these agreements, north of the Shar Mountains and Kosovo were left to Serbia while the west of River Struma was left to Bulgaria. A truly critical land mass situated in the middle of the lands shared between Serbia and Bulgaria, the area which goes from the south of the Shar Mountains to the Aegean Sea, and which is between Okhrida and the Rodop Mountains, that is, the area including the towns of Struga, Okhrida, Skopje, and Kumanova, was defined as contested zone. As the agreements aimed at preventing the establishment of an independent Albania, Greece would consequently have room for expansion as well.¹⁷

While Montenegro followed the Serbian-Bulgarian negotiations in an indirect manner, it also anticipated the time when the Ottoman State would become part of the process. The Montenegrin-Ottoman border dispute and the Albanian Rebellion gave Montenegro the excuse it waited for. Durham states that right after King Nicholas returned from his visit to Russia's capital St. Petersburg in February 1912, Prince Danilo visited Sofia, and people began to say that war was unavoidable in Montenegro.¹⁸ Treadway underlines the importance of the visit made by King Nicholas of Montenegro to Vienna in relation to the process. On 17 February 1912, Austria-Hungary's Foreign Secretary Aehrenthal died and was replaced by Berchold, appointed by Emperor Franz-Joseph. In May 1912, the Montenegrin and Bulgarian kings expressed their wish to visit Vienna to meet the new foreign secretary.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁷ For the secret attached document, see "Annexe Secrète au Traité d'Amitié et d'Alliance entre le Royaume de Bulgarie et le Royaume de Serbie", Charles Leboucq, *Un An de Cauchemar Balkanique*, Maison E. Figuière, Paris, 1914, p. 219-223.

¹⁸ Edith Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, George Allan, London, 1920, p. 226.

¹⁹ Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, 101-102.

Thaden emphasized the role played by the said visit, that took place between 8 and 12 June 1912, during the secret meetings between Bulgaria and Montenegro.²⁰ King Nicholas has met Bulgarians in Vienna, where he was invited by Franz Joseph, without Austrian knowledge. The details of these talks were mentioned by Rossos in detail. In the first week of June 1912, the number two of Bulgarian government and the leader of the Liberal Party, the smaller coalition partner in Bulgaria's government, arrived at Vienna and met the Bulgarian King Ferdinand and Bulgarian PM Geshov who carried on their official visits. Bulgarian diplomats Teodorov and Rizov came to Vienna for this meeting from Paris and Rome, respectively. Playing a key role in the secret meetings Bulgaria was conducting against the Ottomans, this group met clandestinely in Vienna. According to the decisions made during the talks, Danev and Rizov met the Montenegrin General Martinovic in Vienna. General Martinovic, a close aide to King Nicholas who was accompanying the king in Vienna, was appointed Prime Minister and Foreign Minister right after these meetings by the king.²¹ In these talks, Montenegro expressed its wish to attack the Ottomans and its expectations of financial, military, and political support from Bulgaria. Montenegro wanted to attack "without a formal declaration of war and immediately". The Bulgarians accepted the Montenegrin proposal in principle and a verbal agreement was reached. In the wake of this verbal agreement, King Nicholas began to exert pressure on Bulgaria regarding the promised aid via their ambassador to Cetinje Kolushev. Kolushev travelled to Sofia on 20 August and met with PM Geshov who told Kolushev that Bulgaria would comply with the verbal agreement it concluded with Montenegro; that Bulgaria would enter the war within thirty days of its outbreak; and that Bulgaria would help Montenegro with a sum of 35,000 levas per day for three months. The Bulgarians also added that they would bring up the matter into their discussions with Serbia and Greece as soon as possible.²²

According to Thaden, the Bulgarians accepted the Montenegrin offer to attack the Ottomans without declaring war, but also asked for time to conclude their secret negotiations with Serbia and Greece.²³ Thaden also states that through Popatov, the Russian military attaché to Cetinje, King Nicholas tried to make Russia a part of the conflict, making use of the Albanian question and talks

²⁰ Edward C. Thaden, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912*, The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1965, p. 103.

²¹ King Nicholas would appoint General Mitar Martinovic who pursued secret negotiations on behalf of Montenegro as Prime Minister instead of Tomanovic upon his return from Vienna and would also employ him as foreign minister. Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, p. 101.

²² Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, p. 57-59.

²³ Thaden, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance*, p. 103.

between Russia and Montenegro that had been going on since June 1911.²⁴ These views signify that Montenegro had every reason to use the border disputes with the Ottomans, along with the Albanian Rebellion, to provoke a war with the Ottomans.

Montenegro's Summer of 1912 Campaign

The Ottoman sources began to inform the Shkodra Governor's Office from July 1912 onwards that the Montenegrins were preparing for attack. Therefore, it was in mid-July that Ottomans knew about a possible campaign. Both the Cetinje Embassy and the local military information indicated that Montenegro was preparing to invade Ottoman lands. Accordingly, the Ottoman Foreign Ministry warned the Shkoder Governorship, based on the information from the Cetinje Military Attaché. Foreign Minister Asım Bey informed the Shkoder Independent Legion HQ on 9 July 1912 that Montenegro was preparing for war. Asım Bey states that Montenegrin military preparations were very serious and, as is clear from information given in a coded telegram by the Cetinje Military Attaché, says that Montenegro had stopped livestock and grain exports to the Ottoman State, that the people had been forbidden to leave the battalion catchment areas they belonged to, but that nevertheless the troops had not yet been conscripted.²⁵

In the wake of this warning, the first news of an armed clash on the Montenegro border arrived from near Podgoridca. This first clash, which took place on 17 July 1912, is different in nature from a planned Montenegrin attack. It took place as Ottoman and Montenegrin border patrols came face to face and branched out when the Albanians and Montenegrins, who were hostile to each other, became involved. Rossos states that the Montenegrin-Ottoman hostility turned into armed conflict on 17 July and continued throughout August. According to Rossos, this first clash near Podgoridca continued for six hours.²⁶

The Ottoman sources support Rossos' information. However, this border clash on 17 July is very different in nature and scope from the Montenegrin attack which began at the end of July. This border clash found its place in Ottoman documentation with a memo sent to the Shkoder Independent Legion HQ by the Ministry of War. The Minister of War, Nazım Pasha, sent a memo to the commander of the Independent Legion, Colonel Hasan Rıza Bey, and to the Governor of Shkoder on 23 July 1912 (10 July 1328) and asked for information on a clash rumored to have taken place with the Montenegrins. In this memo, Nazım Pasha states that there was news in the papers for a few days that there was fighting with Montenegrins on the banks of the Tarhana River and that

²⁴ Ibid., p. 32-33.

²⁵ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.001

²⁶ Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans*, p. 54.

according to the news the clash had taken place on Montenegrin soil, with nine Montenegrin casualties whose bodies had been dismembered. Nazım Pasha asked Hasan Rıza Bey to explain what happened.²⁷ Five days later, on 28 July 1912 (15 July 1328), Colonel Hasan Rıza Bey sent a coded telegram including a report on the issue. In his report, Hasan Rıza admitted that a clash had taken place on the morning of 17 July (4 July 1328) to the south-west of Tayran. Hasan Rıza Bey reported that the border patrol of the Mirlas border post had run into two armed Montenegrins 400 meters inside Ottoman soil and a clash had taken place after a halt signal. The report states that the clash widened with the inclusion of Montenegrin villagers on the enemy side, and Albanian Muslims and Christians on the Ottoman side. Hasan Rıza Bey says that two squadrons and one heavy machinegun team were sent to the area and a Montenegrin squadron located in Podgoridca was also involved in the clash, which ended within five hours. In the clash, the station corporal of the border squadron, three soldiers, and two Albanian peasants were killed and six people were wounded. Hasan Rıza also informed the ministry that the Albanian villagers also decapitated two Montenegrins, as was customary in the area. He also states that he has authorized the captain of the border patrol and a clerk from the Podgoridca consulate, a commission was established with the inclusion of Montenegrin clerks, and the conclusion would soon be reached.²⁸

This event that took place on the morning of 17 July is a border clash. The Ottoman and Montenegrin patrols that met alongside the border were involved in skirmishes with the involvement of Albanian and Montenegrin locals; however, it shows very clearly the Montenegrin-Ottoman tension by July 1912. Moreover, this clash raised Ottoman border troops' fears concerning a probable attack from Montenegro. In a memo it sent to the Tuzi Parish Administration on 22 July 1912 (9 July 1328), the Shkoder–Goridje Border Squadron HQ reported on the increasing military preparations along the border, also citing the clash on 17 July. The squadron commander, after stating the outrage and concern Montenegro felt due to the latest clash (*müşademe-i ahire*), informed the administration that Montenegro was preparing to invade Ottoman land for revenge (*ahz-ı sâr*) and hence might begin an operation to this end. He pointed to the danger the increased activity created for Selce and asked that the Selce Border Patrol should be informed of the situation and should be vigilant, with increased patrols, and that they should be informed of any event.²⁹

The expected Montenegrin attack came at the end of July. It is understood that the Montenegrin attack was planned into two directions. The attacks first took place in the Selce and Tamara regions which border the River Cijevna and

²⁷ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 220.177.173.036.

²⁸ ATASE, Arşivi O.D.I. Kol., 218.168.170.001.13.

²⁹ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 220.177.173.033.

which constitute the fairly mountainous area of Malisië. The attack then widened from there to Gusinje and Plav in the north-east and to Traboin in the south-west. This area is the Malisië region. The Montenegrin attack spread with the inclusion of the related Albanian clans to the shores of the rivers Cijevna and Lim. This attack also considerably weakened the connection of the town of Tuzi, which is situated in the Podgoridca Plane near the city of Podgoridca, with Shkoder.

The second area of attack for Montenegro was the Yenipazar-Sancak area. The Montenegrin attack reached from north to south in this area. It began at Mojkovac and went into Kolashin. It is clear that the Ottoman border troops failed to maintain their positions against this attack. All these regions had fallen to the Montenegrin invasion by August 1912.

The first report concerning a planned attack by Montenegro is dated 28 July 1912 (15 July 1328). In his very urgent (*gayet müsta'celdir*) message to the Ministry of War, the regional officer of Tuzi, Colonel (*Miralay*) Hâlid Bey, states that Montenegrins and Selce Maliserians attacked to the Selce Border Squadron. In his report, Hâlid Bey tells the ministry that the Tamara and Uzne Stations fell after a day and a night's resistance each. The report admits a battalion led by Lieutenant (*Mülâzım*) Ramazan Ağa turned in their guns and ammunition and left Selce to reach Tuzi at 2 a.m., and the soldiers in Selce centre resisted till 8 p.m. until they surrendered in the end. Hâlid Bey narrates that it was not possible to send help to the squadron near Gosinje from Tuzi due to a lack of communication, for the conditions were inappropriate, and hence, at the end of a twenty-four hour struggle, control of the area was completely lost. The report asserts the Montenegrins and Melisorians acted together (*muavenet-i fi'iliye*) and therefore the attack was of extreme importance. In the same report, Hâlid Bey says that five Melisorians were killed and five were captured when they attacked the logistic (*mekâri*) platoon on duty between Hoti and Bukovic.³⁰

The commander of the Seventh Army Corps situated in Skopje, Brigadier General (*Mirliva*) Kadri Pasha, also sent a coded telegram on the night of 30 July (17/18 July 1328) to the Ministry of War informing it of the situation. In his report, Kadri Pasha explains that the Montenegrins and Melisorians attacked the stations of the Selce Border Squadron and the Selce Fort fell. According to the report, Montenegrins and Melisorians attacked the Selce Fort with an estimated force of 1,500 on Sunday morning,³¹ laid siege to the fort, and asked for the battalion to surrender with all its equipment. Upon the command of fire by Selce Border Squadron Commander Osman Bey the clashes began and continued for

³⁰ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.07.

³¹ 28 July 1912, or 15 July 1328 according to the Rumi calendar, is a Sunday. Therefore, the report of Kadri Pasha supports the report of the Tuzi Parish Administrator.

twenty-four hours, and the squadron surrendered as it ran out of ammunition. The guns and bayonets of the 75 soldiers present were taken, four were wounded, and control of the area was lost. The report says the squadron was taken to Gosinje with its commanders. Kadri Pasha's report states that information from Ipek District Administration claimed attacks were reported on Velipole Fort on Wednesday and on Gosinje on Thursday and this information was shared with the Gosinje Provincial Administration. Kadri Pasha informs his superiors that three squadrons from the First Battalion in Dakovica and one battalion from Ipek had been sent to Gosinje upon this information.³²

The Governor of Kosovo Mazhar Pasha also reports the same attack in his urgent telegram sent to the Shkoder Province on the night of 30 July 1912 (17/18 July 1328). In this telegram to warn the Province of Shkoder, Mazhar Pasha states that he informed the Ipek District Administration and Army HQ that the Kura Melisorians who lived near Gosinje had attacked and occupied Selce in co-operation with the Montenegrins and had taken the soldiers' guns and belongings.³³

The information on the Montenegrin attack on Selce reached the Cetinje Embassy, too, and Ambassador Rüstem Bey asks for further information on the subject in his telegram dated 2 August 1912 to the Shkoder Governor's Office. Rüstem Bey notes in this telegram that he was informed by a telegram dated 1 August 1912 that the Selce Stations had been captured by Montenegrins and Melisorians, and asks whether this was information based on documents (*istidlâatı mevsuka*) or a regional rumour (*şâiyat-ı mahalliye*).³⁴ The Ambassador to Cetinje, Rüstem Bey, did not know about Montenegro's attack on the Ottoman State and was really doubtful about the truthfulness of this news. This situation was a sign of the general mistrust between the Ministry of War and the Foreign Ministry.

Montenegro invaded Selce on 28 July with the assistance of Kura Melisorian tribes of the region. The information that this attack expanded towards Gosinje is given by the Ipek District Administration. On the other hand, the correspondence about the occupation shows the disorderliness of communication among the centers of Shkodre, Tuzi, Skopje, and Cetinje. Nevertheless, the reports of the Deputy Commander of the Seventh Army Corps, Brigadier General Kadri Pasha, and of the District Administrator of Tuzi, Colonel Hâlid Hâlid, express the heart of the matter and corroborate each other. While Hâlid Bey states that the soldiers came to Tuzi alongside their commanders, Kadri Pasha gives the information that they reached Gosinje. Under these

³² ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.168.170.002.02.

³³ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.006.

³⁴ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.12.

circumstances, it can be assumed that part of the Selce Border Squadron reached Tuzi and another part of it reached Gosinje. From their reports to the Ministry of War, it is also to be understood that there was no orderly communication between Tuzi, which was attached to the Shkoder Governor's Office, and the Seventh Army Corps located in Skopje.

In the wake of this attack, on 1 August 1912 (19 July 1328), the Tuzi Parish Administrator sent a report to Governor of Shkoder Hasan Rıza, informing him that the Melisorians were preparing for a general uprising, yet, this time, the rebels were not to withdraw to Montenegro but instead to the Shalme, Shush and Kelmenti regions so that they could merge with the Kosovo Melisorian Albanians. The Tuzi Parish Administrator also reports that Melisorians were preparing to attack the Rapsha, Traboin, and Gruda stations. He argues that this time it was Austrians who provoked Melisorians to rise up, and when the Melisorians withdrew to the inner territories, Montenegro would begin its attack, and would then invade the lands the Melisorians had left when they withdrew. The administrator who thought there was an Austrian-Montenegrin alliance behind this plan claims Austria would intervene using the Montenegrin invasion as an excuse.³⁵ He makes a very important analysis by combining local intelligence sources right before the great Montenegrin attack. However there was no Montenegro-Austria alliance. Austria had border problems with Montenegro and was very ill at ease vis-à-vis the possibility of Montenegro's becoming neighbors with Serbia if it went into the Sancak Province. To prevent such a development, Austria was fortifying its southern border and repeatedly warning Montenegro. The Parish Administrator's conclusion, that Austrian propaganda in the region and Montenegrin plans of occupation was interrelated, is probably related to this. However, the Parish Administrator of Tuzi identified the relationship between the Melisorians and Montenegro.

Right after the fall of Selce on 30 July, the Montenegrin Army started a wider and far more successful attack. This operation was realized on 3 August 1912. The Montenegrin Army simultaneously moved from Mojkovac to Kolashin in the north, attacked to the east of Andrijevića, and became involved in skirmishes in the Velipole region to the east of Selce. There was fighting on Mount Decić atop Tuzi and in the mountainous area beyond it.

The highest-ranking military and administrative officer in the region, the Deputy Inspector of Second Army and Commander of the Kosovar General Forces (*Kuvâ-yı Umumiye*) Marshall (*Müşir*) Zeki Pasha, reported the Montenegrin attack to Istanbul with a coded telegram classified as "Urgent". In his telegram sent from Skopje on the night of 3 August 1912 (21/22 July 1328), Zeki Pasha enunciates to the Ministry of War that the Montenegrins began an

³⁵ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.09.

attack toward Gosinje throughout the border region, there was fighting in the mountainous regions of Mokra, Biyelaşiçe, and Çakur, and in Velipole and its environs to the east of Selce, some border stations were on fire, and some had fallen to the Montenegrins. Zeki Pasha informs the ministry that three squadrons were sent to Gosinje and one squadron was sent to Tregovishte from the Second Division in Yakova, and the reservists and local people were conscripted in Tergovishte. Zeki Pasha writes that the command of the border forces was given to Hasan Izzet Bey, the commander of the First Division in Yakova, and that the whole battalion in Mitrovice belonging to the Seventh Army Corps was fully conscripted. Finally, Zeki Pasha argued that the Albanian problem should be solved urgently in the face of the Montenegrin violation (*tecâvüzâtına*).³⁶

In another telegram dated 3 August 1912 (21 July 1328) Zeki Pasha reports to the General Staff (*Erkan-ı Harbiye*) that, due to the consecutive Montenegrin attacks, *all our forts* and telegraph stations fell in the Moykovac region, and communications with the region were down.³⁷

Major Muhtar Bey, the Austrian Border Commissar and Commander of Pljevlja, in his 5 August (23 July 1328) and urgent (*Gayet müsta'cel ve te'biri mücib-i cezâdır*) document, reports that, according to the telegrams he had been receiving for the last two days, Montenegrins were vigorously attacking the Moykovac region, they had occupied the area by opening artillery fire, and were on their way to Kolashin. Major Muhtar Bey writes, especially emphasizing the use of artillery fire, "I can't make out whether it is a border skirmish or a declaration of war (*ilan-ı harp*)". He declares that more than half the troops in the Pljevlja and Sjenica regions had already been sent to Albania that he sent half his remaining troops to Kolashin for help and was left with only two squadrons in Pljevlja. Muhtar Bey warns that the Austrians were making fortifications in the region, with high-ranking Austrian officers frequenting the border regions, and it was possible that the Austrians who were disturbed by the Albania Problem might directly interfere to the region using the excuse of the Montenegrin violation into the Sancak Province.³⁸ His remark is important as it shows the Austrian unease regarding the Montenegrin operations in Sancak.

On 3 August, the Melisorians attacked the Hoti region to the west of the Tamara region of Selce, which is an important point of passage between Shkoder and Tuzi. The battalion commander Selahaddin Bey writes that they were attacked by over 600 people, they had been involved in heavy fighting for over

³⁶ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I.K., 218.168.170.002.03.

³⁷ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.168.170.002.04.

³⁸ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.168.170.002.05.

25 hours, their ammunition was decreasing and his battalion would perish unless help should arrive before night.³⁹

After the fall of Selce and Tamara, the land connection between Tuzi and Shkoder was greatly weakened. By 4 August, it could be seen that the Montenegrin attack focused on Tuzi. The Podgoridca Consulate wrote on 16 August (3 August 1328) that the Montenegrins were about to attack from Zeta, that Tuzi was in danger, that it was necessary to send urgently two battalions and a battery of sequential mountain cannon to Tuzi.⁴⁰

The Commander of Tuzi, Colonel Hâlid, sent a telegram on the night of 3 August (22/23 July 1328) to the Shkoder Division HQ, and stated that the real problem was not the Melisorians but the Montenegrins, the attacks had been going on against the Ottoman forces in the hills of Zanve an Planitse since the previous night, and cannons were fired from the Decic Mountain situated right behind Tuzi. Halid Bey also wrote that fighting continued around Traboin, Helim, and Samabur. Moreover, he informed the division that most of those killed in the Pikala region had turned out to be Montenegrin. Colonel Hâlid Bey also argued that it was extremely urgent that a battalion of soldiers should immediately be dispatched to the Tuzi region.⁴¹

While the Montenegrin operation continued all along the Ottoman border, the Deputy Commander of the Seventh Army Corps, Brigadier General Kadri Pasha, reported the military mobilization plans of the Serbian Government, and the conscription of all the soldiers who had been dismissed, and the call for the first and second class army reservists for medical examination.⁴² The Seventh Army Corps was monitoring Serbian war preparations as well as the Montenegrin attacks.

In the wake of these developments, the Ambassador to Cetinje, Rüstem Bey, attempted to intervene with the Cetinje Government and this showed, according to Treadway, the end of the “policy of appeasement”, and on 6 August he communicated that, unless they formally apologized, there would be dire consequences for Montenegro. However, Rüstem Bey failed to find the support of the Ottoman Government in his attempt. The Ottoman Government, who saw the Montenegrin attacks as the sign of a much wider war, did not leave its defensive and vigilant policy and consequently, on 8 August 1912, the Ambassador to Cetinje Rüstem Bey sent his letter of resignation to Istanbul.⁴³

³⁹ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.021a.

⁴⁰ ATASE Arşivi, O.D.I. Kol., 218.180.166.41.

⁴¹ ATASE, BIK, 218.180.166.028.

⁴² ATASE, BIK, 218.168.170.002.08.

⁴³ Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, 1998, p. 102-103.

Conclusion

In 1912, the Albanian uprisings growing stronger by the day on the one hand, and the domestic instability caused by these insurgencies and other reasons on the other, pointed to the fact that the end was near for the Ottoman Empire. In this environment, Montenegro, which had refrained from overtly supporting the Albanian rebels so far, began to work in tandem with the Albanian rebels in order to realize its policy of expansion concerning Sancak in the east and Northern Albania in the south.

After the border skirmish experienced on 17 July, Montenegro started a major military campaign at the end of the same month. This operation, despite claims to the contrary, went beyond the Montenegrin-Ottoman border problems which had not been solved by the Berlin Treaty of 1878, and was very well-planned and executed. The most important cause of this Montenegrin attack was the conclusion of a Serbian-Bulgarian "Friendship and Co-operation Treaty" under Russian moderation and the secret treaty between Serbia and Bulgaria about the division of Ottoman lands. Montenegro, which wanted to be part of the process of redistribution of Ottoman territories, and which wanted to expand at the expense of the Ottomans before the Serbians did, started negotiations with Russia and Bulgaria on this subject. It initiated the attacks after receiving promises of help from Bulgaria in the financial, military, and political areas.

The claims that the Montenegrins had plans to invade the Ottoman State in co-operation with the Bulgarians and before the Serbians, and about the scope of the attacks, were first made by Edith Durham in 1918. Durham's views are clearly attested by Ottoman Ministry of War archive documents in the Albanian Rebellion section of Domestic Insurgencies Division. The telegrams from the Cetinje Military Attaché's Office to the Foreign Ministry, and again the documents sent to the Shkoder Battalion Headquarters from the Ministry, the documents from the Shkoder-Gorice Border Battalion HQ to the Tuzi Parish Authority, and the urgent coded telegrams from Tuzi Parish to the Foreign Ministry, justify the statement that the Montenegrin attacks were planned and comprehensive.

Furthermore, the Montenegrin attacks are important as they also reveal the policy differences between the Ottoman Government and its Ambassador to Cetinje. The Ottoman Government, even if it believed Montenegro was provoking a far greater war, decided to let go of their ambassador to Cetinje who wanted to threaten Montenegro, in order to maintain a policy of caution.

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