

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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AN OVERVIEW OF RELATIONS BETWEEN SERBIA AND BULGARIA IN 1914-1915

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Abstract

When the Second Balkan War broke out in 1913, the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Bulgaria broke off diplomatic relations. Owing to the conflicting military and political interests, the former allies and partners became blatant enemies. The subject matter of this paper are some issues of the Serbian-Bulgarian relations after the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, and especially after reestablishing diplomatic relations in January 1914, up to the autumn of 1915.

Special attention was paid to the attempts of the political leadership in Sofia to destabilize the security situation in the newly liberated parts of Serbia through negative propaganda, as well as the standpoint of the Kingdom of Bulgaria towards the Austro-German aggression on Serbia during the second half of 1914.

The paper also discusses the standpoint of official Sofia towards the Balkan policy of the Central Powers at the beginning of World War I, up to Bulgaria's accession to the block in September 1915.

Keywords: The Kingdom of Bulgaria; the Kingdom of Serbia; propaganda; newly liberated regions; war.

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ВЗГЛЯД НА СЕРБСКО-БОЛГАРСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ 1914-1915 ГОДОВ

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Аннотация

С началом Второй балканской войны в 1913 году произошел разрыв дипломатических отношений между Королевством Сербии и Королевством Болгарии. Бывшие союзники и партнеры вследствие противоположных военных и политических интересов стали открытыми врагами. Предметом интереса настоящего исследования являются отдельные вопросы сербско-болгарских отношений после Балканских войн 1912-1913 гг., и особенно после возобновления дипломатических контактов в январе 1914 г., вплоть до осени 1915 года. Особое внимание уделяется попыткам правительства Софии путем пропаганды дестабилизировать спокойную обстановку в новоосвобожденных краях Сербии. Авторы анализируют отношение Королевства Болгарии к австро-германской агрессии против Сербии в течение второй половины 1914 года. Рассматривается также официальная позиция Софии по отношению к балканской политике Тройственного союза в начале Первой мировой войны вплоть до болгарского присоединения к этому блоку в сентябре 1915 года.

Ключевые слова: Королевство Болгария; Королевство Сербия; пропаганда; новоосвобожденные края; война.

Significant victories of the Serbian Army at Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep and Bregalnica enabled Serbia to return the territories of Old Serbia and Macedonia under its state and legal jurisdiction after several centuries of slavery. Apart from its territorial expansion, success in the Balkan Wars contributed to the strengthening of the international reputation of Serbia, solidifying its role of the Balkan Piedmont which it had among the Slavic population under Austro-Hungarian occupation, and improving its position among the Balkan states. On the other hand, Bulgaria, which fought against Turkey alongside Serbia in the First Balkan War, emerged defeated from the Second Balkan War [4, p. 346]. It was left injured and deprived of its centuries-old aspiration to establish supremacy over Macedonia and Thrace, thus ending its “national unification”. The Bucharest Peace Agreement disabled further military actions towards the aforementioned territories, and Bulgaria’s conquest was reduced to the area of Pirin Macedonia and a smaller part of Thrace¹. The Bulgarian diplomacy had little space for maneuvers in 1913. All that remained was to keep a watchful eye on the political developments in Europe and wait for the right moment for revenge and rematch.

The diplomatic relations between Serbia and Bulgaria were broken off at the beginning of the Second Balkan War and were resumed in January 1914 with the reopening of the Serbian Legation in Sofia². The same month witnessed the first visit of the Serbian chargé d’affaires to the President of the Bulgarian Government. Serbia’s tendency was to normalize the relations with its neighbor while the government circles in Bulgaria still felt indignation and reservation. This kind of attitude of the Bulgarian government was enticed by a growing influence of the Dual Monarchy in Sofia³. Apart from diplomacy, the cooling relations between the two states in 1914 could be seen in other fields as well. The ruling political circles in Sofia did not try to conceal their open hatred towards Serbia. The Sofia press was at the forefront of efforts to promote intolerance, especially the editions titled *Dnevnik*, *Utro* and *Vecherna Poshta*. Resenting the defeat and losses

they suffered in the war, they showered the public with fabricated events, machinations and intrigues in order to create a negative image of the Serbs in Europe and cause unrest in Old Serbia and Macedonia. The pages of the cited Bulgarian newspapers were often full of news about the “atrocities of the Serbian soldiers and government”. In May 1914, they published a piece of news regarding the massacre of recruits from the newly liberated regions of the Kingdom of Serbia. The Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed of this by its representative in Bulgaria, Čolak-Antić. His telegram to Belgrade stated that the Bulgarian press was spreading the news that whole companies of recruits from Macedonia were slaughtered in Ristovac⁴, Niš, and Kragujevac, which was followed by pretentious commentaries of these events. This kind of reporting was designed to jeopardize the reputation of the Serbian Army and compromise it. Right after the aforementioned newspaper accusations were published, the official Serbian institutions denied these claims by pointing out that no military units were stationed in Ristovac, while there had been no insurrections in Kragujevac and Niš⁵. The Belgrade press fiercely responded to the allegations of the Bulgarian newspapers. The introductory text of *Politika*, a Belgrade newspaper, revealed the hidden agenda of the Bulgarian newspapers which had been writing about the “decimation of Macedonian recruits in a garrison near Ristovac”⁶, without having sufficient information on the fact that no garrison existed in the aforementioned place.

Apart from political and press intrigues, there were direct acts aimed at endangering the security situation in the border areas. The Bulgarians made maximum efforts to cause riots and compromise the Serbian government structures in the newly liberated regions. The goal of creating new conflicts in the border areas was based on the expectations of the authorities in Sofia that the deterioration of the general state would lead to a foreign intervention in

¹ *Balkanski ugovorni odnosi 1876–1996 [The Contractual Relations in the Balkans 1876–1996]*, I, 1876–1918, editor: M. Stojković, Belgrade 1998, doc. No. 87, p. 179.

² *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 1, January 1/14 – April 30/May 13, 1914, editors: V. Dedijer, Ž. Anić, Belgrade, 1980, doc. No. 32, p. 151.

³ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 1, January 1/14 – April 30/May 13, 1914, doc. No. 41, p. 159.

⁴ Ristovac is a town in what is today the Pčinja District. After the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the demarcation line between Serbia and Turkey passed near Ristovac, and the place itself contained a border watchtower. After Old Serbia and Macedonia had been liberated, this place lost its strategic significance and it no longer contained larger military units.

⁵ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 1, January 1/14 – April 30/May 13, 1914, doc. No. 636, p. 793.

⁶ *Politika*, May 31, 1914, ed. 3727, 1.

Vardar Macedonia⁷ and the reopening the Macedonian issue [see: 19; 18].

Sofia's policy of hostility towards the Serbian people was not directed only towards Serbia. These political principles were directed towards Cetinje, the capital of another Serbian state. Bulgaria could not forgive Montenegro's fighting on Serbia's side in the Second Balkan War. This is why there was a cooling of diplomatic relations between Sofia and Cetinje, which led to the Bulgarian Government deciding to close its legation in Montenegro. The decision also meant that upon closing the diplomatic mission of their country, the Bulgarian people in this country would manage their affairs over the Austro-Hungarian Legation. As a commentary of this issue, the daily newspaper *Politika* published an article titled *The Bulgarians and Cetinje*, which stated the following: "The role of the former Bulgarian legation in Cetinje was and still is a matter of general knowledge. It was the main office of intrigues against Serbia and the place where the final brotherly coating was given to all the machinations and fabrications which were to create an abyss of hatred and distrust between Belgrade and Cetinje. Today, when such intriguing agitation became impossible, the Bulgarians, being practical people, saw it fit to liquidate this legation"⁸.

The political circumstances in Bulgaria did not unfold in favor of the Entente Powers. Large war failures, which cost Bulgaria 55 000 people and caused devastation to its national economy with damages exceeding two billion levs, caused an atmosphere of distrust towards the government of Stoyan Danev. In July 1913, Danev's government was deposed, which was followed by the forming of a coalition government of liberal parties. This was the moment when Vasil Radoslavov, the Bulgarian liberal, entered the political stage again [15, p. 291]. His election for the head of government caused the Bulgarian foreign policy to change its pro-Russian course and gain clear pro-Germanic characteristics⁹. The new orientation of the Bulgarian foreign policy could quite certainly be seen as Sofia's desire to revise the borders set by the Treaty of Bucharest. Since Serbia maintained friendly relations with the

Entente Powers, the expectations of the Bulgarian political leadership were that cooperating with Austria-Hungary and Germany would lead to the accomplishment of Bulgaria's expansionist goals [3, p. 15]. This was also backed by an open hostility of Vienna towards Belgrade and Cetinje [11, p. 187].

Even before the Assassination in Sarajevo, which served the Dual Monarchy as a pretext for war with Serbia, Bulgarian representatives negotiated joining the Central Powers. The Austro-Hungarian delegate in Sofia, Count Tarnowski, incessantly reported to Vienna that the Bulgarian Government insisted on creating ties between Bulgaria and the Monarchy. These requests by Sofia in late 1913 were not only a policy of its new government but also a policy of the Bulgarian state and its sovereign, who personally advocated creating strong relations with Vienna, thus implementing a vindictive plan towards Serbia [23, p. 80]. Since Austria-Hungary had Romania on its side, and Germany counted on the support of Greece, they were not able to completely fulfill the plans of the Bulgarians, but kept everything in the phase of negotiations with frequent delays. The goal of the Germanic policy was to form a new block in the Balkans that would contain, apart from Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Greece, which would completely eliminate Russian influence in the peninsula. In order to achieve the mentioned goal, Vienna and Berlin held Bulgaria on standby and waited for a suitable time to activate it [3, p. 19].

On St. Vitus Day, June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated in Sarajevo [2, p. 172; 6, p. 685]. The assassination was performed by a Serb, Gavrilo Princip, a member of the political-revolutionary organization Young Bosnia [10, p. 17]. This event served as a pretext to the authorities in Vienna to declare war on Serbia, who was accused of initiating secret affairs directed against Austria-Hungary. It was stated that the ultimate goal of these affairs was the destruction of the state system of the Habsburg Monarchy [12, p. 5]. To be more precise, the reason for the declaration of war was Austria-Hungary's tendency to destroy Serbia and establish complete Germanic dominance in the Balkans.

The Bulgarian government wished for a war between the Dual Monarchy and Serbia. After St. Vitus Day in 1914, almost every Bulgarian newspaper wrote about the alleged direct involvement of official Belgrade in the assassination, without having any proof that was the case. The editorial of the 136th edition of the newspaper *Narodni Prava*, which was considered to be a body of the Government of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, demanded from all other states "to at long last

⁷ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 1, January 1/14 – April 30/May 13, 1914, doc. No. 641, pp. 796–797.

⁸ *Politika*, April 23, 1914, ed. 3691, 2.

⁹ *Vreme bezumlja: dokumenti o bugarskim zločinima u vranjskom kraju 1915-1918 [A Time of Insanity: The Documents on the Bulgarian Crimes in the Region of Vranje 1915–1918]*, ed.: A. Trajković, Belgrade, 1981, 11.

extinguish the hearth that is the source of sparks of eternal fires and that gives birth to ideas of incredible hideous offenses, such as the one that led to the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Archduchess Hohenberg¹⁰. It is obvious that these were open accusations against Serbia and a call for a confrontation with it.

The Austro-Hungarian ultimatum and the declaration of hostility towards Serbia¹¹ woke the revanchist spirit within the Bulgarian political leadership. The majority of Bulgarian print media justified the “cruelty with which the Dual Monarchy made its decisive move¹² towards Serbia. King Ferdinand assessed that the ideal conditions were met to avenge the Bregalnica defeat and to realize the Great Bulgarian territorial aspirations towards the territory of Macedonia and parts of southeastern Serbia [3, p. 23]. He substantiated his beliefs by matching Bulgarian goals with the plans of Berlin and Vienna, which meant that after the Germanic soldiers would claim their victory against the Serbs, larger parts of southeastern Serbia should be handed to Sofia [11, pp. 313-315].

During the second half of 1914, negotiations between Vienna, Berlin and Sofia were going towards a positive conclusion. Bulgaria did not give up on its maximalist goals of territorial expansion at the expense of Greece, Turkey, and Serbia, but was aware of the consequences that this policy brought in 1913. Therefore, during negotiations, Bulgaria expressed its readiness for military action exclusively against Serbia. This is why it deemed necessary to ensure its rear towards Romania and Turkey, for which it expected assistance by the Central Powers. The demands that Radoslavov, the President of the Bulgarian Government, placed before the representatives of the Tripartite Pact meant that the Central Powers would guarantee the integrity of Bulgarian territory from all attacks by any state, and to enable Bulgaria’s territorial expansion towards the areas that Bulgaria has historic and ethnic rights to. These demands included the territory of Serbia that

Bulgaria had aspirations to during the period of the Russia-Turkey War [3, p. 23-24]. However, Bulgaria’s demands caused confusion and concerns of Romania and Greece, which had no interest in redrawing the borders determined by the peace agreement in 1913¹³.

Because Sofia and Bucharest had undefined relations characterized by mistrust, up to the end of July Vienna demanded that Bulgaria not openly join the Central Powers, although Germany and Austria-Hungary counted on its support in the final conflict. However, as soon as Turkey joined the Central Powers, Berlin insisted on concluding an agreement with Bulgaria. On August 9, 1914, following extensive diplomatic preparation, the German and Austro-Hungarian delegates in Sofia and Prime Minister Radoslavov agreed upon the texts of agreements between Austria and Bulgaria, and Germany and Bulgaria. They implied active military participation of Bulgaria against Serbia because Berlin considered that Bulgaria had to make some kind of contribution in order to earn the territorial expansion granted to it by the pact with the Central Powers. The contract clearly stated that Germany would support the territorial expansion of Bulgaria by annexing “the provinces to which it has historic and ethnic rights, and which are under the rule of those Balkan states that are not allies to the German Reich”. Despite the fact that the text of the pact was accepted by the Bulgarian Government on August 10, King Ferdinand did not agree with it. He demanded that Germany and Austria-Hungary guarantee Bulgaria’s territorial expansion towards the areas that were included in the Mürzsteg Reform in 1903¹⁴, and the annexation of areas which Greece received in the wars led in 1912/1913 if Greece joined the war on the side of the Entente. The third demand of Ferdinand was that the agreements needed to clearly specify which Balkan states were allies of the Central Powers. After these demands, the negotiations for signing a pact with Bulgaria were delayed for a certain period of time [3, pp. 31–35].

The postponement of negotiations was additionally encouraged by Serbian success in the front line. After the Serbian forces won in the Battle

¹⁰ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 2, May 1/14 – July 22/August 4, 1914, editors: V. Dedijer, Ž. Anić, Belgrade, 1980, doc. No. 310, pp. 441-442.

¹¹ *Srpsko–austrijski i evropski rat. Diplomatski i drugi dokumenti [Serbian-Austrian and European war: Diplomatic and Other Documents]*. Serbian diplomatic correspondence, Niš, 1914, doc. No. 32, pp. 35–40.

¹² *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 2, May 1/14 – July 22/August 4, 1914, doc. No. 640, pp. 713-714.

¹³ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 2, May 1/14 – July 22/August 4, 1914, doc. No. 678, p. 732.

¹⁴ The Mürzsteg Reform was planned within the agreement between Russia and Austria-Hungary in Mürzsteg on February 2, 1903 after the Ilinden Uprising was crushed, and it included the Kosovo, Bitola and Thessaloniki vilayets. See: [1, p. 326].

of Cer¹⁵ and the Serbian Army performed a successful counter-offensive on the Kolubara River, when every last Austro-Hungarian soldier was banished from the territory of Serbia, the Bulgarian public faced a slight feeling of disenchantment. Pro-Germanic political circles in Sofia rejoiced and celebrated when Belgrade fell but were completely stunned by the news of the success of the Serbian Army. The best proof of this are the texts of Bulgarian newspapers which were analyzed in the articles of the daily newspaper *Politika*, whose text titled “In Sofia”, published on December 22, 1914, spoke about the shock and disenchantment of the Sofia press after Serbian war exploits against Austria-Hungary. “The victory of Serbia, which was already buried in Sofia, startled even the most chauvinist spirits and, all of a sudden, despite all the self-delusion, sparked an atmosphere of respect towards the neighbour that was underestimated and challenged for so long”, stated an article in the *Politika* and emphasized that “Serbia could honorably say that it had not wronged Bulgaria, either as a neighbor, or as a member of the Slavic community, and that it had remained on top of things during the hardest challenges and temptations. Armed raids, the incessant negative newspaper campaign, and fantastic fabrications on the chaos within the old and new boundaries of Serbia – all of this could not disrupt our tactful behavior towards Sofia”¹⁶. As we can see, the readiness of the Bulgarian Government and the Court to lead Bulgaria into war against Serbia, expecting its fast collapse, diminished after Austro-Hungarian defeats in August and December 1914. King Ferdinand and Radoslavov did not abandon their policy towards Serbia, but they waited for a suitable moment. Having realized the awkward position of the Central Powers in the Balkans after the military failures, they constantly increased their demands against Vienna and Berlin [3, p. 61].

Bulgaria brilliantly played the role of a neutral neighbor to Serbia throughout 1914, which did not even slightly disrupt the activity of its Komitadji troops. Armed raids of Bulgarian Komitadji troops in the territory of Macedonia were carried out continuously since the autumn of 1913. During 1914 and the conflicts with the Monarchy, the number of Bulgarian troops that endangered the border areas in southeast Serbia grew continuously. Because of this, Čolak-Antić, a representative of the Kingdom of Serbia in Sofia, wrote to the Serbian Government in

Niš¹⁷ that the Bulgarian champions “Genadiyev and General Boyadzhiev were secretly encouraging the Macedonians to immediately transfer some troops into Macedonia and provoke an uprising there”¹⁸. His report states that many Bulgarian officers got a leave of absence and went towards the border between Serbia and Bulgaria in order to prepare the troops¹⁹.

During 1915, the Komitadji actions grew in volume because the troops formed and equipped in Bulgaria contained a number of Turkish volunteers and Austro-Hungarian officers. In early April 1915, there was a fierce assault of the Bulgarian Komitadji on the Serbian troops stationed on the border not far from Strumica and Valandovo [16, p. 107]. After strenuous combat, the Serbian forces managed to repel the attack. Based on surveys and examined documents found on the dead Komitadji, it was concluded that their troops were well organized, armed and trained in Bulgaria²⁰. Upon the intrusion of Bulgarian units to the territory of Serbia at Strumica, the authorities in Belgrade sent a note to the forces it was allied to in which it sought their protection and intervention. Despite all of the evidence, the Bulgarian telegraph agency and all newspapers from Sofia claimed that none of the Bulgarian officers and soldiers crossed the border, but that the aforementioned incident was caused by local Turkish companies that fought “against Serbian physical and administrative violence” in Macedonia [20, p. 74]. Similar attacks and the violations of the border between Serbia and Bulgaria happened incessantly. Apart from the armed and sabotage actions, members of the Bulgarian organization performed an energetic propaganda campaign among the populace of south and southeastern Macedonia. The state of war that Serbia was in was also a contributing factor. An especially important issue was mobilizing conscripts from the newly liberated regions, and the members of the Bulgarian organization made use of this fact. Motivated by the Bulgarian propaganda, a part of the male populace from the Štip and Bitola regions left the territory of Serbia in order not to be conscripted, and fled into Bulgaria, which was neutral at that time. Certain Serbian officials suggested that the population of

¹⁵ The Historical Archives of Zaječar, *The Varia Collection 1789–1990*, box No.: 1, doc. No. 24.

¹⁶ *Politika*, December 22, 1914, ed. 3891, 1.

¹⁷ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 2, May 1/14 – July 22/August 4, 1914, doc. No. 580, p. 679.

¹⁸ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. VII, nb. 2, May 1/14 – July 22/August 4, 1914, doc. No. 678, p. 732.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Politika*, April 12, 1915, ed. 3997, 1.

southern and southeastern Macedonia should not be treated in the same way regarding military duty as the population of Old Serbia because the contrary could lead to large-scale incidents [5, pp. 262-263]. While Bulgaria and Turkey systematically infiltrated their people and created networks of armed groups for actions against the Serbian authorities, fear and uncertainty once again became dominant throughout the territory of Macedonia [6, p. 721].

Parallel to the Bulgarian-backed terrorist actions and propaganda campaign in newly liberated areas, Sofia was very active in terms of diplomacy. During 1915, the negotiations on Bulgaria's joining the Central Powers were continued, which was paralleled by persistent attempts from the Entente Powers to win the favor of the Bulgarian political leadership and get Bulgaria to join their side [17, pp. 165-166]. The Bulgarian policy in 1915 was defined by open trade aiming at grabbing as much territory from other countries and creating the largest state in the southeast of Europe [9, p. 8].

Great Britain and Russia tried to strengthen their influence in the Balkans by all means and secure Sofia's military and political support by granting its wishes. Therefore, London was ready to grant Bulgaria the territory of Macedonia up to the line determined by the agreement between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1912²¹, while Saint Petersburg played the card of a still vivid memory of Russia's role as Bulgaria's liberator, and the belief of the masses that the fate of Bulgaria lay in the hands of Saint Petersburg. The diplomatic actions of the Entente gained the support of the Bulgarian opposition, and it resulted in the Bulgarian Government contemplating the possibility of both retaining neutrality and still gaining the whole of Macedonia [3, pp. 62-63]. However, the news of Entente's offers alarmed Vienna and Berlin. Aware that the creation of a new Balkan block against them would be more dangerous than any allied success on the eastern or western front, they approached the continuing negotiations with Sofia with greater flexibility. All available political means were used to successfully conclude the negotiations, which even included bribing Bulgarian politicians. The situation was additionally complicated by Italy joining the Entente. Under such

circumstances, the Central Powers intensified negotiations with Bulgaria, which were ended on September 6, 1915 by signing an alliance agreement and a secret convention [14, p. 29]. This agreement granted Bulgaria territorial expansion at the expense of Serbia. According to Article 1 of the secret convention, it received 51, 425 square kilometers and 2, 648, 168 inhabitants with the following Serbian administrative units [3, pp. 169-170].

The Entente sent a ceremonial note to Sofia on September 1, 1915, but to no avail [22, p. 142]. Bulgaria had made its decision. By accepting the stated territorial grants given by the Central Powers, all the obstacles for a coordinated action of their and Bulgarian armed forces against Serbia were removed, which heralded a beginning of a new offensive. According to clearly stated obligations from the agreement and the secret convention signed with Germany (September 6, 1915), Bulgarian forces first needed to be mobilized, and then concentrated on the western border towards Serbia. They were tasked with commencing an attack on Serbia towards Zaječar, Niš, and further south towards Old Serbia after Austro-Hungarian and German units had started their attack on the Sava and the Danube. Supreme command over all the troops which participated in the assault on Serbia was given to the German Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen [13; 12, p. 208].

Table
Area and population of the territories of Serbia rejected in favor of Bulgaria

Administrative district name	Size in km ²	Number of inhabitants
1. Požarevac	4,157	262,603
2. Krajina	2,909	113,128
3. Half of the Morava Administrative District	1,450	103,270
4. Timok	3,196	150,965
5. Niš	2,558	201,762
6. Pirot	2,419	114,115
7. Vranje	4,342	257,087
8. Kumanovo	3,500	166,939
9. Štip	3,500	200,000
10. Kavadarci	3,500	97,763
11. Bitola	4,000	345,759
12. Debar	3,500	82,476
13. Tetovo	3,500	157,248
14. Skopje	3,500	153,293
15. Third of the Priština Administrative District	1,200	80,000
16. Toplica	2,839	112,610
17. Half of the Kruševac Administrative District	1,355	85,150
Total:	around 51,425	around 2,648,168

²¹ Archive of Serbia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Political department, 1912, F – Annex, D – Correspondence with Bulgaria, The Contract of Friendship and Alliance between the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Bulgaria, February 29/March 13, 1912, in: *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914 [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903–1914]*, vol. V, nb. 1, January 1/14 – July 14/27, 1912, editor: M. Vojvodić, Belgrade, 1984, doc. No. 168, pp. 375–378.

Preparations for war were performed on all sides. Even though the northern and western front were very significant to Serbia, it paid a lot of attention to its border with Bulgaria. After mobilization was announced in Bulgaria, Serbia was aware of a real danger from a possible attack from the east. This is why the Serbian High Command grouped the troops in the New Region, and on September 30 it started forming the Timok Army and the Vlasina Unit. In order to secure the border between Serbia and Bulgaria, on September 30, the High Command issued an order to the Timok Army that stated: "We are on the brink of war with the Bulgarians. Bulgaria is in a state of mobilization, which was completed on September 28 as far as infantry is concerned while the other segments will be completed on September 30. The concentration of forces is likely to start then. The Timok Army's task is to secure the border front from St. Nicholas to the mouth of the Timok River, where it empties into the Danube. According to the strict order of our government, the troop commanders should abstain from anything that could give the Bulgarians a motive to present us as instigators of war to our allies"²².

The enemy offensive started on October 6, 1915, with the bombing of Belgrade. The Bulgarian troops were then still on standby. It was only on October 14 that they started an attack from the east, and practically attacked the Serbian northern defenses from the rear. The force of the Bulgarian attack from the rear did not affect the Serbian Second Army. Under the command of General Stepa Stepanović, the Serbian forces managed to repel the first Bulgarian attacks. However, the troops in the north were not sufficient to stop an enemy superior in numbers. A gradual retreat from the northern front line also influenced the units of the Serbian Second Army [12, p. 210]. This situation forced the High Command of the Serbian Army to ask the Russian Tzar for help via its military envoy in Saint Petersburg. This request stated that "the Serbian Army, significantly weaker than the Austro-German and Bulgarian forces, will not be able to resist and stop their onslaught, despite its readiness to halt the enemy at every turn with utmost persistence"²³. This is why Russia was asked to take action that would exert any form of pressure on Bulgaria in order to halt the offensive of its army

against Serbia²⁴. Despite the Serbian appeals for assistance, there were no changes in the front towards Bulgaria. The Vlasina Unit commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Milovan Plazina offered efficient resistance to the Bulgarian forces; however, the stretch from Vlasina to Kriva Palanka was defended by conscripts of the rear guard, mainly from the newly liberated regions, who were not particularly skilled in warfare. This is how the Bulgarians managed to cut the railway line between Niš and Thessaloniki near Vranje on October 16, which entailed the interruption of the railway connection with the allied forces in Greece [7, pp. 34–36].

The Bulgarian Second Army fiercely advanced on the Macedonian front. The forces of the first call-up of the Bregalnica Division, incomparably weaker than the Second Bulgarian Army, were defeated and forced to retreat. As early as October 19, the Bulgarians managed to reach the Vardar River, they entered Kumanovo on October 20, seized Skopje on October 22, and took control of the strategically important Kačanik Gorge on October 26. Because of poor results, General Petar Bojović replaced General Damjan Popović as the commander of the "New Region" troops but was unable to do anything that would change the situation in the field due to difficult conditions across all battlegrounds. The Second Serbian Army was also unable to strike back at the enemy, but on November 9, when the front at the Pusta River began to crumble under the onslaught of the Bulgarians, it managed to consolidate its lines and suppress the enemy towards Leskovac. A fact that contributed to this success was the arrival of Stepa Stepanović, the division commander and future army commander, and King Peter to the first combat lines, a rare occasion in the history of warfare [12, p. 210].

The successful military campaign of the Bulgarian forces in the very south of Serbia was very significant to the Central Powers, cutting away Serbia from the Aegean Sea. Serbia was then in a difficult and nearly hopeless situation. Under the increasing onslaught of enemy forces, the Serbian Army and refugees flocked to the territory of Kosovo and Metohija [8, pp. 20-21]. The retreat of the Serbian Army opened the path for Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria to occupy Serbia. It was not long before Vienna and Sofia managed to establish complete control over Serbia and start forming an occupational government system. Finally, the conquered territory was divided between the Dual Monarchy and Bulgaria. Since January 1, 1916, the Austro-Hungarian part was administratively known as the

²² *Veliki rat Srbije 1914–1918 [The Great War of Serbia 1914–1918]*, editors: M. Vojvodić, D. Živojinović, Belgrade 1970, doc. No. 100, p. 191.

²³ *Veliki rat Srbije 1914 – 1918 [The Great War of Serbia 1914–1918]*, doc. No. 101, pp. 192–193.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

General Governorate of Serbia, while Bulgaria practically annexed eastern and southern Serbia. It divided its spoils of war into two military administrative areas – the Morava Area or “Pomoraviyata” and the Macedonian Area. The center of the Morava Administrative Area, which encompassed the entire eastern and southern half of the territories that belonged to Serbia up to 1912, was in Niš while the center of the Macedonian Administrative Area was in Skopje. Six new counties of the Bulgarian occupation administration were the Niš, Vranje, Pirot, Zaječar, Čuprija, and Požarevac counties. The counties were divided into municipalities and the municipalities were divided into districts. The supreme government in the counties was held by the Bulgarian Army. Upon its arrival, Serbian laws were suspended in these counties, and all the institutions were in the hands of Bulgarian clerks [21, p. 57].

The occupied parts of Serbia were not considered conquered areas. The Bulgarians treated them as liberated areas or Bulgarian “western” provinces. Apart from that, Sofia was convinced that Serbia as a state was wiped out forever from history in 1915 and that the “liberated” areas contained no Serbs at all. This is why the Bulgarian high Command considered that everything that reminded people of Serbia and the Serbs in the occupied areas should be eradicated by force and a firm government. A pure Bulgarian character needed to be imposed in the Morava Administrative Area, and turn it into the Morava region of Bulgaria. In order to achieve this, the authorities banned the use of the Serbian language and led a policy of aggressive assimilation [21, p. 57].

The relations between Serbia and Bulgaria after the Second Balkan War could not be friendly anymore. Despite the efforts of official Belgrade to establish proper relations with Sofia after diplomatic missions were reestablished, the defeat in the Second Balkan War and the loss of territories according to the decisions of the Bucharest Peace Conference disabled the political leadership of the Kingdom of Bulgaria to accept that with honesty. Official Sofia only simulated neutrality in 1914, while at the same time it prepared for a clash with Serbia. Even during the first months of the Great War, while Bulgaria was emphasizing its military neutrality, its newspapers criticized the defensive policy of the Kingdom of Serbia and publicized a great number of false claims regarding the quality of Serbian administration in the newly liberated regions and the way the central authorities treated Serbian citizens of Old Serbia and Macedonia. Parallel to propaganda activities, the

Komitadji gangs organized by active Bulgarian officers endangered the border between Serbia and Bulgaria in the southern regions of the Kingdom of Serbia by incessant provocations. This seemingly fair relationship between Belgrade and Sofia will be definitely ruined by Bulgaria’s accession to the Central Powers and its entering the war against Serbia. The fall of 1915 brought with it the retreat of the Serbian Army towards Kosovo and Metohija and Albania and heralded the beginning of great tribulations of the Serbian civilian population under Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian occupation administration.

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