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## Austro-Russian Agreement of Raichstadt and the Eastern Crisis

DEFRIM GASHI

General Director of Education  
Inspectorate in Education, Republic of Kosovo

After the Crimean War<sup>1</sup> the Balkan area had been relatively calm. The Great Powers had settled in Central Europe and Italy, not the Middle East. Important for the future of the Balkan affairs particularly important was the victory of Prussia over Austria in 1866, (in the battle of Königgrätz,) the revival of Hungarian nationalism in 1867 from Ausgleich (compensation)<sup>2</sup> and the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.<sup>3</sup>

Henceforth the monarchy, referred to as Austria-Hungary, was divided into two administrative parts, united under the authority of the Emperor with a joint Minister of War, Foreign Affairs and Finance, linked to these two government offices. The other event, the Franco-Prussian war and the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership, led to the creation of a significant government, whose policies had a major impact on future Balkan affairs.

Russia was not satisfied with the decisions of the Paris Treaty<sup>4</sup> (1856). "The defeat France suffered by Prussia (1871)

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<sup>1</sup> The Crimean War was fought between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. In this war, Britain and France fought on the side of the Ottoman Empire against Russia. It is so called because it is related to the attack on the Crimean peninsula in southern Russian coast of the Black Sea.

<sup>2</sup> Glenny, Misha; *Historia e Ballkanit 1804-1999*, Toena, Tirana, 2007, p.135. ISBN978-99943-1-231-3

<sup>3</sup> Kissinger, Henry; *Diplomacia*, Leart, Tirana, 1999, p.103. ISBN 99927 634 0X

<sup>4</sup> The Paris congress, which assembled in March 1856, was led by the Great Britain, which had won the war and was able to dictate terms. Among the most important

gave the opportunity to Tsarist Russia to reject articles of the Paris Treaty (1856), which prevented it from arming in the Black Sea against the Ottoman Empire".<sup>5</sup>

After the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871) France lost its fame, and the Eastern crisis re-emerged. In the early '70s of the 19th century the results of the Franco-Prussian conflict had brought about changes in the political and military balance in Europe, afflicting the 1856 Paris Treaty almost definitely. On the other hand, the Russian Empire would no longer back away from the Franco-British alliance, which is why in 1871 it began to mobilize its navy troops in the Black Sea. Russia had also begun to implement its policy of encouraging and organizing people, especially the Christians under Ottoman rule, for destabilizing activities and even uprising.

It should be noted that meanwhile, on March 13, 1871 in London a new agreement was drafted between Great Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, the Ottoman Empire and defeated France, which reviewed parts of the Paris agreement from March 30, 1856. Thus paragraph 2 of the new agreement lifted the cruise ban of warships in Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, allowing the passage of all warships of friendly and allied countries, except for the cases when the High Gate considered it was necessary to preserve essential parts of the Paris agreement (1856).

Prior to 1870 states had not entered into direct conflict over the division of the Balkan territories, as an Ottoman buffer zone was still in existence, covering the Bulgarian lands, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Eastern crisis of the 1870s found the Albanians surrounded by an indifference of the international arena. None of the Great Powers was expressed publicly about their national rights.

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decisions were those that would strip Russia of its ambitions to decide the fate of the Ottoman Empire and the life of the East. Russia lost its benefits against the Ottoman Empire that it had had since the peace of Kucuk Kaynarca of 1774. Taken from Buxhovi, Jusuf; Kosova, Perandoria Osmane, "F. Konica", Prishtina, 2015, p. 127

<sup>5</sup> Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, Historia e Popullit Shqiptar II, Toena, Tirana, 2002, p. 132

During this decade, the chances increased for the Ottoman order to be expelled from at least some of the regions, most of which were difficult to divide along solid national lines.

Russia's ambassador in Istanbul, Ignatiev, deepened the crisis of 1870s, inspired by a revolt of Christian peasants of Bosnia-Herzegovina, (...) In the last quarter of 19th century, the Slavic issues in the Balkans began to emerge: the Bosnia and Herzegovina issue, Serbia issue, the question of Montenegro and the issue of Bulgaria,<sup>6</sup> all due to the deep involvement neighboring Serbia and Montenegro in this event, which made the existing problems between the Great Powers and the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans resurface. "Furthermore, a new opposition force had now come into play, the Democratic Liberal Ottoman movement represented by the Young Ottomans organization, aiming to overthrow the theocratic feudal despotism of the sultans."<sup>7</sup>

East issue is the pivotal axis of the diplomatic war and all the most powerful alliances of the Great Powers at the time. The Eastern issue of the 19th century is the continuation of the two thousand years' war raged between Rome and Greece. Now it was the Germans replacing the Romans, and Slavs replacing the Greeks (the Byzantines).<sup>8</sup> Earlier the alliance of the Three Emperors<sup>9</sup> was formed (1873, Germany-Russia-Austria-Hungary), the aim of each was to stop the spread of the Republican, Revolutionary ideology in Europe. In its 19th century last quarter's edition, more than ever before, it presents as its main content the national issue in the Balkans, the liberation of the nations in the peninsula from Ottoman rule.

The war of oppressed peoples was undoubtedly the main exploding factor to push the Ottoman Empire downhill. But there were also external factors. Among them were those who

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<sup>6</sup> Rizaj, Skender; Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit 1877-1885, Drita, Prizren, 1998, p.42

<sup>7</sup> Historia e Popullit shqiptar II, Toena , Tiranë, 2002, f. 132

<sup>8</sup> Rizaj, Skender; Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit 1877-1885, Drita, Prizren, 1998, p.42

<sup>9</sup> Culaj, Lush; Në udhëkryqet e Historis Shqipëtare, Prishtina, 2009, p. 37

encouraged and stimulated, but also those that constrained it in the process of assimilating the Balkan nations. There were three Powers that engaged more in the Eastern Crisis: Russia, Austria-Hungary and England. Others either had no power for more involvement (France, that had just emerged from the defeat by Prussia, and Italy, which had just completed its unification), or wanted to stay aside to come between the disputed parties as a third party (Germany).<sup>10</sup>

In the alignment of forces within the diplomatic front an important role is played by the new Balkan states that join the diplomacy game, and their aim is twofold. On the one hand, they are the most stable element of the anti-Ottoman war to overthrow the Empire and to that purpose they surely meet an undoubtable progressive and libertarian function. On the other hand, dynastic interests and chauvinistic trends prevail in their midst, thus spreading the seed of hostility in the Balkans. Lusts for invasion of the neighboring countries' chauvinist circles with their tendency to "unfold" to the detriment of the Albanian lands, to which they referred as being "no man's", become a negative and constant factor that accompanies the Albanian question in every step during its confrontation with the European diplomacy.<sup>11</sup>

According to Gazmend Rizaj, the so-called Great Eastern Crisis, which began in summer 1875, with the outbreak of peasant rebellions, first in Herzegovina and then Bosnia, was in fact a scenario of Russian agents under direct instructions of Russia's Ambassador in Istanbul, also chairman of the pan-Slavic community, Nikola Ignatiev.<sup>12</sup>

Russia sought to encourage Christians in Balkan area, through peoples' uprisings, not only against the High Gate, but also against Austria, which after the defeat in the Austro-

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<sup>10</sup> Puto, Arben; *Çështja Shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare të Periudhës së imperializmit, vëll. I*, Tirana, 1984, p.11-12.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>12</sup> Rizaj, Gazmend; *Shqipëria e Sipërme 1800-1913*, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtina, 2011, p.113. ISBN-978-9951-596-43-5

Prussian War in 1866, had oriented its entire state policy towards the Balkans. It was the active involvement of pan-Slavism in Balkan issues, and Russia's interest for the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina that pushed Franz Joseph I and the Austria-Hungarian Government to anticipate such a pan-Slavic scenario, engaging in full potential to have this Ottoman province join the Austria-Hungarian realm.<sup>13</sup>

Based on data provided by J. Buxhovi, Serbia on June 30, 1876 and the next day, on July 1, Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire.<sup>14</sup>

With Serbia and Montenegro entering the fight against the Ottoman Empire, the political situation in Eastern Europe got very complicated. Greece and Romania joined the dualist coalition against the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, this was a diplomatic success of Prince Milan, who established a coalition between four Balkan monarchies, Serbia, Greece, Romania and Montenegro.<sup>15</sup> As might be expected, the Russian Empire was the first to seek to benefit. After declaring that "its quarantine period" had now ended, it came out in support of the rebel Slav populations. At the same time, Russia understood it had to consult Austria-Hungary first, and not act totally on its own, as it did not want to end up being thrown back from the Balkans like it had 20 years ago at the time of the Crimean war. So, Russia was forced to compromise with its main partner, Austria-Hungary.

Vienna on the other hand showed in this case that it would not oppose any change to the Ottoman Empire, that it was ready to reach an agreement if it received a part. The Russian Chancellor A. M. Gorchakov had set the principles of compromise in the project presented in May to his Austria-Hungarian colleague, Andrassy. In it, Russia presented the

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<sup>13</sup> Rizaj Gazmend; Shqipëria e Sipërme 1800-1913, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtina, 2011, p.114.

<sup>14</sup> Buxhovi, Jusuf; Kosova III, Perandora Osmane, Faik Konica, Prishtinë 2015, p.130

<sup>15</sup> Frasheri, Kristo; Lidhja Shqiptare, 1878-1881, ASHSH, Tiranë, 2012, p. 130

granting of administrative autonomy to Slavic provinces still under Ottoman rule as a minimum requirement.

Professor G. Rizaj further notes that the two highest state dignitaries of Austria-Hungary and Russia (Andrassy and Gorchakov) through the two sovereigns, Francis Joseph and Alexander II, on 8 July 1876 signed the so-called Raichstadt agreement formalized in the Budapest Convention of January 15, 1877.<sup>16</sup>

In the Raichstadt Conference<sup>17</sup> the parties agreed to have a common approach to solving the Eastern Crisis. This is due to the continuous unrest in the Ottoman Empire and the narrow interests of both Powers of the Conference for the Balkan region. They also discussed the potential Russian-Ottoman<sup>18</sup> war (that exploded later in 1877-1878) and the scenarios on the international and regional impacts it could bring.

The diplomatic negotiations in the Raichstadt Conference were private and informal. This was due to the inability to change the principles set out in the Vienna Treaty of 1815 on multilateral agreement and consensual spirit at the level of the Great Powers, members of the of Vienna Congress. It is interesting that the results of the meetings were not written down, which is why the views of both sides on what was agreed, based on the analysis of unilateral documents, seem quite different. There was also no formal act or protocol signed between the parties. The time for talks was dictated separately by the two heads of diplomacy, Andrassy and Gorchakov, which testifies that neither party trusted the other.<sup>19</sup>

This distrust prevailed during the entire Conference, and it was the mutual skepticism that made the meeting of the most important states at the time unstable and generally

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<sup>16</sup> Rizaj, Gazmend; *Shqipëria e Sipërme 1800-1913*, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtina, 2011, p. 117. ISBN 978-9951-596-43-5

<sup>17</sup> Raichstadt, Castle in Czech Republic; Rizaj, Gazmend; *Shqipëria e Sipërme 1800-1913*, 2011, p. 117

<sup>18</sup> Muhamed A. Salabi, *Perandoria Osmane, Fjala e bukur*, Prishtina, 2009, p. 440-442.

<sup>19</sup> Ibra, Hysen; *Çështja shqiptare dhe Komuniteti Ndërkombëtarë, në: "Gjurmime albanologjike-SSHH"*, no. 28- 29, 1998- 1999, IAP, Prishtina, 2002, p. 55- 76.

unfruitful, provoking disagreements over the division of territories at the expense of helpless people.

Among the main terms, the one on expansion of Austrian annexations over the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained rather contradictory. Many researchers have later criticized the Austria-Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Andrassy for not extending the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Sandzak area. By undertaking such a step, Andrassy would extend the Austria-Hungarian zone to Thessaloniki while stopping any direct links between Serbia and Montenegro, consequently to emergence of Serbia and through it, of Russia, into the Adriatic Sea.<sup>20</sup>

Jusuf Buxhovi states among other things that the Ottoman Empire was forced, under the circumstances, by both the Russian and Austria-Hungarian Empire to implement certain reforms in favor of the Slavic population; should the other side win the war (Serbia and Montenegro), Bosnia would pass primarily to Austria-Hungary and partly to Serbia, which would take a part of Kosova (northern part), and Montenegro would take a part of Herzegovina. Bulgaria would become an autonomous state and Rumelia an autonomous vilayet.<sup>21</sup> According to Skender Rizaj, if the Ottoman State were to triumph, both states pledged to intervene to ensure the status quo for Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>22</sup> Seeing the permanent risk by the expansion or the creation of a vast great Slavic state, Germany intervened with Austria to prevent Serbia from expanding towards the Adriatic and Bulgaria would not include Macedonia, because one and the other would jeopardize the Austro-German interests towards the Aegean sea.<sup>23</sup>

According to the talks, the Balkan Christians would initially enjoy at the greatest extent the full independence from the Ottoman Empire, and the generous support of Russia, while

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<sup>20</sup> Rexha, Sabri; Raportet shqiptaro-serbe në Kosovë, IAP, Prishtina, 2011, p. 29 – 95.

<sup>21</sup> Buxhovi, Jusuf; Kosova III, Perandoria Osmane, Faik Konica, Prishtinë 2015, p. 130

<sup>22</sup> Rizaj, Skender; Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit 1878-1881, Drita, Prizren, 1998, p.46

<sup>23</sup> Buxhovi, Jusuf; Kosova III, Perandoria Osmane, Faik Konica, Prishtinë 2015, p.130

Austria-Hungary, with the consent of Germany's Bismarck, would have access to both large territories, Bessarabia (in Eastern Europe) and the Caucasus. At the same time, with the permission of Russia, Austria-Hungary could annex Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ever since the initial negotiations with Austria-Hungary in Raichstadt (1876) up to the Ambassadors Conference (1912), Russia opposed the option of creating an Albanian state in the European Ottoman Empire and worked towards dividing the Albanian lands between its Orthodox Slav clients in the Balkans.<sup>24</sup>

All this effort had a basic price; Russia was to stay away from the war with the Ottoman Empire, while politically Austria-Hungary and Russia would align ideas on how to split the Balkans, in case of a possible Russian-Ottoman war, the winner of which would be Russia. Buxhovi further notes that Austria-Hungary touched on the Albanian issue. It envisaged the creation of an autonomous Albanian state.<sup>25</sup> Then three autonomous countries would be established in the Balkans: Albania, Bulgaria, Rumelia, while Thessaly and Epirus would be given to Greece. Istanbul with its surroundings would be declared a free city.<sup>26</sup>

These inconsistencies of the Raichstadt Agreement made it necessary to continue the diplomatic attempts to attend another conference, namely the Istanbul Conference, which followed the Budapest Treaty. The latter would review to a considerable extent the Raichstadt Agreement<sup>27</sup>, in which the Great Power diplomacy for the first time discussed the Albanian question.

The isolated agreement with Austria-Hungary, the main rival in the Balkan issues, was for the circumstances of the time the best move of Petersburg. Under the existing circumstances the Russian government was faced with a

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<sup>24</sup> Rexha, Sabri; Raportet shqiptaro – serbe në Kosovë, IAP, Prishtinë, 2011, p. 29-95

<sup>25</sup> Buxhovi, Jusuf; Kosova III, Perandora Osmane, Faik Konica, Prishtinë 2015, p.130

<sup>26</sup> Rizaj, Skender; Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit 1878-1881, Drita, Prizren, 1998, p.46-47

<sup>27</sup> Rexha, Sabri; Raportet shqiptaro – serbe në Kosovë, IAP, Prishtinë, 2011, p. 29 - 95



serious diplomatic task: to help the Balkan Slavs, but also to avoid the confrontation with Austria-Hungary. Even Vienna, supported by Berlin, showed willingness in this regard. "The city of Raichstadtin Beomia became the meeting place of the highest figures of the two greatest powers: Russia and Austria-Hungary, at the Imperial Austria-Hungarian Palace".<sup>28</sup>

Vienna and Petersburg decided not to intervene militarily, neither pro nor against the Ottoman Empire. On other issues arising from the Eastern Crisis they agreed only on a few points. If the Ottoman Empire were to emerge triumphant from the war, they would not allow any change in political borders of the Balkan Peninsula. They would respect the pre-war situation, but would intervene to force the High Gate to implement certain reforms in favor of the Slavic populations. Lush Culaj notes that in Raichstadt 1876 Agreement, Austria-Hungary had hinted it would oppose the establishment of a large Slavic country on the Balkan Peninsula (Southeast Europe).<sup>29</sup>

If the two Slavic monarchies would win the war, political and territorial changes would appear in the map of the Balkans. In such a case, Vienna put a sine qua non condition that a great Slavic country in the Balkan Peninsula not be formed. This meant that Serbia would be extended to the Adriatic and Bulgaria would not include Macedonia, because both would hinder the expansion of Austria-Hungary towards the Aegean. Territorially, both sides would ensure equal benefits for themselves at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. Austria-Hungary would take most of Bosnia and Herzegovina together with the Ottoman Croatia, and Russia would regain Bessarabia in Europe and some Asian regions in the Caucasus.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bertel, Jozef; Schloos Riechstadt – Historische Skizze, Preg im Juli,1876, p.21

<sup>29</sup> Culaj, Lush; Në udhëkryqet e Historis Shqipëtare, Prishtinë, 2009, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Puto, Arben; Çështja Shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare të Periudhës së imperializmit, vëll. I, Tiranë, 1984, p.103-109

With the condition that Vienna put to not establish a great Slavic state, the possibility of northern Albania's annexation from Serbia was ruled out. Montenegro was also to be rewarded with Slavic territories. The Albanian territories would remain under the Ottoman rule, but under the Austria-Hungary sphere of influence. The Russian pan-Slavism (...) required the establishment of "Greater Bulgaria" from most of the Rumelia (Balkans) which means it asked for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>31</sup> This means that Russia sought to form two new Slavic states, Bulgaria and Rumelia, both independent principalities. Austria-Hungary adopted the Russian idea (provided that they were autonomous principalities), and also proposed the formation of a third country, the Albanian autonomous principality. Russia, sticking to its pan-Slavic platform opposed the Austria-Hungarian proposal. Despite this, in Raichstadt, the Albanian question came for the first time in the European diplomatic history as a political issue.

Raichstadt agreement was finalized with the signing of the Secret Military Convention of Budapest on 15 January 1877. According to this Convention, Russia ensured the neutrality of Austria-Hungary against the Ottoman Empire. Austria-Hungary won the right to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina, but was obliged not to expand military operations in Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria or Montenegro. In order to secure the German support against Austria, the Russians bought off Austria. In a convention signed in Budapest on January 15, 1877, later supplemented by the agreement of 18 March, Austria agreed to remain neutral in case of a Russo-Turkish war. In exchange the Austrians would be allowed to invade the Turkish province of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whenever they saw it fit. On April 24, 1877, Russia declared war on Turkey.<sup>32</sup>

Austro-Russian agreements for the division of Balkans into Austria-Hungary and Russia spheres of interest were

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<sup>31</sup> Rizaj, Skender; Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit 1878-1881, Drita, Prizren, 1998, p. 47

<sup>32</sup> Rich, Norman; Diplomacia e Fuqive të Mëdha 1814-1914, Toena, Tirana, p.223. ISBN 99943-1-1999-9

supported and encouraged by Bismarck.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, Bismarck sought to be neutral but in no way would he allow the fracturing of Russia's or Austria's status as great powers,<sup>34</sup> or the destruction of Austria-Hungary from Russia, though he showed no interest to fight against Russia for the Balkan interests of Austria-Hungary. The above agreements were primarily an attempt to solve some of the issues that could encourage the confrontation of these two empires. Subsequent events showed that rivalry and animosity between these two powers were in no way diminished.

It could not pass unnoticed that despite the reached agreement, Austria-Hungary and Russia remained the main rivals in the Balkans and this is reflected in the fact that there exist two versions for the same Raichstadt meeting (both versions will be given below), the comparison of which explains the divergences between parties. So, while Gorchakov provided that, in case of victory, Serbia would assume most of Bosnia, and Montenegro all of Herzegovina, Andrassy on the other hand implied that both provinces be involved mainly in the Habsburg Empire.

The importance of Raichstadt Agreement in our case is that under Austrian pressure, it was discussed for the first time that Albania could also obtain autonomy in principle in case of the Ottoman Empire destruction.<sup>35</sup> Although this is not reflected in the other version, which speaks the Russian opposition, it is a proof that the Albanian question began to count as an element of the situation created in the Balkans after the eventual defeat of the Ottoman Empire.

The Austria-Hungary Government apart from its efforts to contribute in the above fields was committed to the Albanian cause in the international arena to affirm it as much as

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<sup>33</sup> Rizaj Gazmend; *Shqipëria e Sipërme 1800-1913*, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtina, 2011, f.118

<sup>34</sup> Rich, Norman; *Diplomacia e Fuqive të Mëdha 1814-1914*, Toena, Tirana, p.223. ISBN 99943-1-1999-9

<sup>35</sup> Rizaj Gazmend; *Shqipëria e Sipërme 1800-1913*, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtina, 2011, p. 120

possible, so that the latter could reach its objective, an autonomous or independent Albanian state. Berch told, the Austrian Foreign Minister of the time, declared, "We only aim to create an independent Albania, the establishment of which in turn was provided through previous diplomatic work, especially in agreement with the other ally, Italy."<sup>36</sup>

Austro-Hungary, unlike other great powers, the first tried to push the idea for the establishment of an Albanian state, by conditioning the placement of this state under its protectorate,<sup>37</sup> concretizing it as a project clearly formulated in 1897, and especially through the active role it played in 1912-1913. As we noted above, the idea and Austria-Hungarian projects for an Albanian state include a period that begins in 1876, when the so-called Eastern Crisis had started, and continued until 1913.

Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph said on the independence of Albania that "fully agreeing with the allied government of Italy we told the Conference of Ambassadors our opinion on the creation of a free and independent Albanian principality and could have the support of other governments on this issue we had initiated."<sup>38</sup>

While the Russo-Ottoman war was waging (1877), Lippich, the Austria-Hungarian consul in Shkodra, was asked by his Ministry to present a memorandum on Albania. One of the main issues discussed in this memorandum was the importance of Albania on the politics orientation of the Dual Monarchy.

Considering the possibility of creating new, partially or completely sovereign Slavic states on southeastern borders of Austria-Hungary, Lippich reckoned that Albanians and their lands could serve as bulwarks against Slavic expansion. If

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<sup>36</sup> Hause Und Staats Archiv (HHStA), Politiches Archive (PA), Wien, A, Albanien, në AIH, vj.23-34-3447; taken from Elena Kocaqi Levanti; *Si e krijoi Austro Hungaria Shtetin Shqiptar*, Tirana, 2012, p. 13

<sup>37</sup> Frashëri, Kristo; *Lishja shqiptare e Prizrenit 1878-1881*, Toena, Tiranë, 1997, p.37

<sup>38</sup> Hause Und Staats Archiv (HHStA), Politiches Archive (PA), Wien, A, Albanien, taken from Elena Kocaqi, vep. e cit. p. 12

Albanians were to remain alone, he thought, they obviously would be too weak to resist the clash with the Slavs. If they were part of a greater power like Austria-Hungary, they could become valuable allies as they were not only “a strong people, utterly anti-Slavic, but also among those that own a territory extending on one side up to the borders of Serbia, and on the other up to the Bulgarian Morava.” They, he continues, “could become a valuable ally of Austria-Hungary in its clash with the Slavs protected by Russia and its aims to spread to the Western Balkans.”<sup>39</sup>

Austria-Hungarian diplomacy intensified its efforts to recognize the situation in Albania and the Albanian orientation as opponents to the Slavic expansion, and moved to attract the Albanians towards itself. Austria-Hungary needed to convince them that it could provide them with political autonomy. Earl Grenville, a colleague of Lippich in Thessaloniki, advised his Minister that the double-monarchy should do its best to attract the Albanians. "The friendship with a strong Eastern Albania ensures our plans with regards to a Turkey coming to an end, while an autonomous Albania is a strong support against the extravagant wishes of Serbia and Bulgaria."<sup>40</sup>

The conception of the problem was more significant: from narrow provincial autonomy to the all Albanian it becomes clearer from the meetings held in the second half of August 1880, the Commission of Eastern Rumelia.<sup>41</sup>

Rumelia - with this name Ottomans called the Balkan Peninsula because of the way Byzantines called themselves. The Vilayet of Rumelia in the 15 century included almost the entire Balkans and had Manastir (Bitola) as its center. In the 19 century several Vilayets were created in it with smaller or

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<sup>39</sup> AIH. HHStA, PA XII/256, Turkei 1-v."Denkschrift uber Albanian" von k. und k. Consul f. Lippich, Wien, 20 qershor 1877.

<sup>40</sup> AIH. HHStA, PA XII/263, Turkei VIII, B. V. Grenville, "Ostalalbanien's Bedeutung", Wien, 25 August 1881; quotes according to Skendi Stavro, p. 222.

<sup>41</sup> HHStA, PA, Minutes of the Committee of Eastern Rumelia with ordinal no. 22-23, from haus Hof und Staatarchiv Vienna archive. Photocopy in the History Institute archive, Tirana, mikrofilm 743.

larger territories. Before 1864 this name implied primarily Macedonia and Thrace.

In the context of all its works based on Article 23 of the Berlin Treaty for the implementation of reforms in the European Ottoman Empire, the committee discussed this in relation to the Albanian territories. The starting point was "the Shkodra Sanjak Memorandum."<sup>42</sup>

Although it tackled the problem locally, the memorandum was not a simple repetition of the old project, because the first idea of Mirdita privileges finds a wider reach across the highlands of Shkodra, including not only the Catholic population but the Muslim one too. The authors of the memorandum, however, put aside the religious criteria and especially emphasized the criteria of the Albanian national aspirations. In a special statement (to which the Russian representative, Hitrova, did not join) representatives of Germany, Austria-Hungary, France, Great Britain and Italy recommended the provisions of the Franco-Austrian project to the High Gate, and more importantly, announced that their governments would not object if the High Gate decided to unite the Albanian territories in a single vilayet.<sup>43</sup>

In a letter to Foreign Minister Goluchowski sent in February 1897 to the Austria-Hungarian Ambassador in Istanbul, expressing concern about the risk of Austria-Hungarian interests in the Ottoman dominion, he argued that it would be dangerous if Serbia and Bulgaria extended their borders to the West, towards the Adriatic. Austria-Hungary saw an even greater risk if Italy seized territories in the eastern Adriatic coast. "From this point of view – Goluchowski argued – Albania presents for us a very special significance. Austria-Hungary has a vital interest that this country does not fall

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<sup>42</sup> HHStA, PA, Minutes of the Committee of Eastern Rumelia with ordinal no. 22-23, from haus Hof und Staatarchiv Vienna archive. Photocopy in the History Institute archive, Tirana, mikrofilm 743 presenting in the Commission in mid August representatives of Austria-Hungary and France, Kosiek e Aubaret.

<sup>43</sup> HHStA, PA, Minutes of the Committee of Eastern Rumelia with ordinal no. 22-23, from haus Hof und Staatarchiv Vienna archive. Photocopy in the History Institute archive, Tirana, mikrofilm 743 Anex no.2 iof the Session 16 minutes.

under foreign influence, and, as we have no intention to occupy Albania, we are determined, in the event of the Ottoman Empire's collapse, to favor the creation of an autonomous separate Albania, with a foreign prince and under our protectorate."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> AIH. HHSTA,PA, letter of Gulochowski to Austria-Hungarian ambassador to Istanbul - in Kalise on 18.02.1897.