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THE KINGDOM OF SERBIA AND THE MÜRZSTEG REFORMS IN OTTOMAN MACEDONIA*

The October 1903 Mürzsteg Reforms Programme were undoubtedly one of the biggest international operations undertaken by the Great Powers in Ottoman Macedonia. It resulted from the deteriorated internal situation in Ottoman Macedonia after the Ilinden Uprising. The real goal of the Reforms programme, intended to help improve the position of the population and to calm down the rebellious province, was to establish an unofficial protectorate of the Great Powers in Ottoman Macedonia.¹ In that sense this Reforms Programme of Austria-Hungary and Russia was qualified by the

* The term Ottoman Macedonia contains two aspects: a historical one and a geographical one. In the historical context: *Ottoman* denotes the historical period of the geographical term Macedonia during the ottoman rule. (The same historical context is used for marking the other geographical terms such as: Ottoman Kosovo, Otoman Sanjak, Ottoman Albania or Ottoman Balkans). Under the geographical notion Macedonia in "Encyclopaedia Britannica" one will read: "Macedonia is bounded on the East by the lower Mesta (Nestos) river and by the western slopes of the Rhodope (Rodopi) upland. North of the Pirin massif the boundary turns west, passing south of Kystendil (Bulgaria), by the Siroka Planina, Crna Gora and Sar Planina. Thence it turns southward by the Korab and Jablanica range and lakes Ohrid and Prespa to the massif Grammos; then eastward, embracing the whole basin of the Aliakmon (Bistritsa) river and reaching the Gulf of Salonika near Mt. Olympus. Including the Khalkidhiki (Chalcidice) Peninsula, Macedonia covers an area of about 25,700 sq. mil. (67.471km²). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, V.14, William Benton, Publisher, 1967, 508. During the last period of the Ottoman rule Macedonia was part of three vilayets: Salonika (Thessaloniki), Bitola (Monastir) and Kosovo.

¹The three Western European Powers: Great Britain, France and Italy were far from even thinking of allowing a repetition of the Berlin Treaty from 1878 i.e. the case of the Austro-Hungarian "pacifying" of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the case of Ottoman Macedonia after the Uprising, these three Powers acted together only to prevent Austria-Hungary and Russia to gain exclusive influence in the Ottoman Empire.

Serbian envoy to Constantinople, Jovan Hristic, as "a condominium of the Anglo-French type like the one in Egypt."²

The Reforms Programme was adopted on 2 October 1903 in the small Staerska settlement of Mürzsteg in Austria by the Russian Tsar Nicolai II and the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph I. The main reforms programme stated the following:

"1. In order to establish control over the activities of the local Ottoman authorities for the application and implementation of the Reforms, special civil agents from Russia and Austria-Hungary should be appointed to Hilmi Pasha , and they would be obligated to accompany the Chief Inspector everywhere. Their mission would be to draw the attention of Hilmi Pasha to the needs of the Christian population, to point out the abuses by the local authorities, to transfer the motions from the Ambassadors in Constantinople, and to inform their governments about the situation in the country on a daily basis.

2. A foreign general to be tasked with the gendarmerie's reorganisation in the Three Vilayets, serving the Ottoman government and working with the other military persons appointed by the Great Powers; these persons would be appointed to certain regions where they would act as controllers, instructors and organisers. Thus, they would also be able to monitor the conduct of the Ottoman military with the local population.

3. Immediately after peace and order is established in the country, the Ottoman authorities should be asked to change the territorial division of the administrative units (vilayets) for the purpose of more adequate grouping of certain nationalities.

4. At the same time a request for reorganising the administrative and judicial institutions should be posed, which should be made accessible to the

² Михајло Миноси, "Српско-бугарски односи и македонското прашање непосредно по Илинденското востание", *Историја*, XXIII/ 1-2, (Скопје: Институт за историја при Филозофскиот факултет, Сојузот на друштвата на историчарите на СРМ, 1987), 53.

local Christians, thus contributing for the development of local self-government."³

The Mürzsteg Agreement envisaged mixed Christian-Muslim committees to be formed looking into the violations committed during the Uprising; it regulated some issues related to the Christian population that fled from the areas of the Uprising and the reconstruction of their homes; they had one year exemption from paying any kind of state taxes; since most of the acts of violence were committed by ilaves (redifs/soldiers of second order) and by the bashi-bazouks (irregular military troupes), it was necessary for the old ones to be dismissed and not to be allowed for new bashi-bazouk troupes to be created.

From the analytical point of view the entire Programme concentrated on two main points. Firstly, redefining the Ottoman security-legal and financial system to ensure safety of the population. Secondly (and more importantly), implementing the provisions of Article 3 of the Agreement to organise the rebellious province i.e. the Ottoman Macedonia into some kind of cantons of "nationalities" that would make the process of its division in the future easier. In addition there was another crucial tendency with this evolutionary reformatting approach: to pacify Ottoman Macedonia by stripping the indigenous Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation from its role of a protector of the interests of the entire Macedonian Christian population.

The Mürzsteg Reforms Programme refers to the territories of the Thessaloniki, Bitola (Monastir) and Kosovo (Skopje)⁴ vilayets, basically the entire ethno-geographic territory of Ottoman Macedonia, as well as the territories of Ottoman Kosovo, Ottoman Sanjak and some parts of the territory of the Ottoman Albania. On 23 November 1903 the Sublime Porte in principle accepted the Programme, but keeping it open for negotiation

³ Александар Христов, Јован Донеv, *Македонија во меѓународните договори 1875-1919*, (Скопје: Државен Архив на Република Македонија, 1994), Дос. 23, 149-152.

⁴ In September 1888 the centre of this vilayet from Pristina was transferred to Skopje after which this vilayet became known as the Skopje vilayet. - Драги Георгиев, "Малешевијата во административното уредување на Османлиската Империја (1877-1897)", *Малеш 100 години по Димитар Поп Георгиев Беровски, минато, сегашност и иднина*, (Берово, 2007), 41.

until all the details of its application were agreed. So called civil agents were appointed to Hilmi Pasha: the Russian representative Nikolai Demerik and the Austro-Hungarian representative Müller von Roghoj. Simultaneously, foreign officers were appointed with the mission of reforming the Ottoman gendarmerie in the Three Vilayets. The Italian General De Giorgis was appointed to command the officers.⁵

The Political Strategy of the Serbian Government regarding the Process of Reforms

The Balkan neighbours of Ottoman Macedonia, within the framework of the already overt expansionistic tendencies towards it, showed maximum interest in all the details and phases of the Müritzsteg Reforms Programme, starting from its preparations, approval and its implementation. The ruling circles of the Balkan monarchies had difficulties accepting the new situation. The Serbian envoy to Constantinople commenting on the policy of the Great Powers in one of his reports at the end of September wrote that the Balkan states could not have been satisfied. In his opinion the worst thing was the fact that the two "powers most interested in the Balkans" (referring to Austria-Hungary and Russia - M.M.) were dealing with an issue that was of interest to the Balkan states "without asking them to state their opinion and even less their interests".⁶ It was only logical for the Kingdom of Serbia to monitor with great interest the entire operation of implementing the reforms programme in Ottoman Macedonia. This is also evident from the fact that the Serbian government had had a copy of the Müritzsteg Reforms Programme with the modifications made by the Sublime Porte since the beginning of 1904. For the Serbian government the issues related to Ottoman Macedonia were of utmost importance.⁷ The statement by the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia, Andrea Nikolic also speaks of the political position of the Kingdom of Serbia regarding the process of reforms

⁵ See: Nadine Akhund, "Stabilizing a Crisis and the Müritzsteg Agreement of 1903: International Efforts to Bring Peace to Macedonia", *Hungarian Historical Review*, no. 3, (Budapest: Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities (RCH), Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), 2014), 587-608.

⁶ *Документи о спољној политици краљевине Србије 1903-1914*, књ. I, св.1, (Београд: Српска академија науке и уметности, 1991), Doc. 274, 529.

⁷ Глигор Тодоровски, *Србија и реформите во Македонија*, (Скопје: Институт за национална историја, 1987), 162.

in Ottoman Macedonia: "It is in the interest of Serbia to have the Mürzsteg Agreement implemented in order to rescue that misfortunate province from constant disturbances and to create a situation that will guarantee the Macedonians of all nationalities a life worthy for humans..." But this affirmative statement came with the conditions: "...Unless that goal is achieved, then to our great regret, certain activities of Serbia are unavoidable i.e. the actions by the Serbian chetas cannot be prevented."⁸

The opposition between the "proper" conduct by the Serbian government regarding the Reforms and the contradictory armed preparations (that were carried out within the country)⁹ were due to different stand points of the Serbian politicians concerning the solution of the "Macedonian question", along with the Serbian's aspirations for Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak. The report by the Austrian envoy Ludvig von Flotov in Belgrade, dated 18 January 1904 (old style), analyses the three political currents on this issue in the Kingdom of Serbia. He pointed out:

"The first current gathers the most serious politicians, such as the above-mentioned gentleman A. Nikolic, who hopes to pacify Macedonia by implementing the Mürzsteg Agreement. They place great importance to the reforms hoping to gain enough time to consolidate the internal circumstances within the Kingdom of Serbia. And, at the same time they want to gradually reach an agreement among the Balkan states, primarily among the Slav ones, in order to participate as a factor in a possible division of the Ottoman state. However, a failure of the reform efforts and a war between the Ottoman state and Bulgaria would ruin this formula.

The second current does see a possibility to gain that territory (referring to Ottoman Macedonia - M. M.) and to merge it with their own state by means of armed uprising (referring to the operations by the Serbian chetas in Macedonia - M. M.). But, they are convinced that any Serbian government, which would be a little bit more energetic, would be able to prevent any kind of uprising of Serbian chetas.

⁸ *Австриски документи за реформската акција на европските големи сили во Македонија 1903-1909*, trans. Edith: Ѓорѓи Стојчевски, (Скопје: Државен Архив на Република Македонија, 2002), Doc. 16, 99.

⁹ According to Ottoman communications, chetas of 130 people were formed. Two chetas were formed in Vranje, a third one in Belgrade and the fourth in Cuprija.

The third current believes that Russia betrayed the Kingdom of Serbia to Austria-Hungary. Hence, everything depends on the will of this powerful neighbour. Even, Nikola Pasic, in a conversation with one acquaintance says: 'All the Great Powers want enlargement. Austria-Hungary can achieve that only via Thessaloniki and that is why Serbia cannot have a future under the Austro-Hungarian occupation. This fear of the first current's politicians could be good for the Serbian government, because under certain circumstances it will help Serbia keep its neutrality.'¹⁰

These observations by the Austrian envoy proved to be true, because the Kingdom of Serbia during the entire time of reforms implementation was playing up to both the Ottoman state and the Great Powers. In that context Stojan Novakovic's opinion was similar to this declaratively moderate Serbian policy and politics of waiting. At the time he was the Serbian envoy to Russia. His position was that it was dangerous at that time to use nationalism on the Balkan Peninsula and to bring forward the unresolved political issues, and that the best thing for the Kingdom of Serbia was to follow to politics of the Great Powers. The experience showed that bringing up the "Serbian question" in 1878 brought the Austrians to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was why it was necessary to be cautious when provoking the Ottoman State and the Great Powers in the Macedonian knot in order to avoid causing something much more harmful to the Serbian national interests in the Balkans.¹¹ This was also supported by the conclusion of the Austrian envoy to Belgrade, Constantin Dumba, presented in the report from 6 November 1903 (old style): "It is a fact that the proposed reforms and the efforts of the two powers aimed at maintaining the status quo in the Balkan Peninsula suites Serbia politically."¹² The report of the Austrian envoy to Belgrade, Ludvig von Flotov sent to Minister Agenor von Goluchowski in Vienna on 18 January 1904 (old style) contains the official position of the Kingdom of Serbia in regard to the Macedonian issue. "Now, after Serbia has accepted the reforms and has left the Macedonian issue to be solved by the Ottoman state it will maintain reserved and honest attitude."¹³

¹⁰ *Австриски документи за реформската акција...*, Doc. 25, 108.

¹¹ *Документи о спољној политици краљевине ...*, Doc. 370, 695.

¹² *Австриски документи за реформската акција...*, Doc. 5, 67.

¹³ *Ibidem*, Doc.25, 107.

The Kingdom of Serbia did not oppose the reforms in general- only up to a certain level: they should not have helped Ottoman Macedonia get any kind of autonomy.¹⁴ The international control of the reforms implementation was also something that worried the Kingdom of Serbia. The implementation of the reforms (if the government in Constantinople considered them necessary for maintaining the territorial integrity of the state) could have lead towards achieving real autonomy of Ottoman Macedonia. It was believed that the introduction of control in the reforms implementation, regardless of the form, meant satisfying the rebelling Macedonian population. Hence, from the very beginning of the reforms in Ottoman Macedonia, the Kingdom of Serbia considered them very dangerous, since their full implementation could have completely paralysed its propaganda activities in the country.

The Serbian diplomatic envoy to Constantinople, Gjorgje Simic showed incredibly big interest in every meeting of the envoys of the Great Powers in Constantinople involved in this operation. On 11 January 1904 (old style) a meeting between Count Heinrich von Caliche and G. Simic was held. At this meeting the Serbian envoy wanted to personally find out about the character of the work of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian civil agents - the two assistants of Hilmi Pasha. Count H. von Caliche, in accordance with the first item on the reforms' agenda explained to him the duties of the agents: "they are to report about the situation in the Three Vilayets, to receive and to look into complaints by the population against the actions of the Ottoman authorities and to submit proposals to the Chief Inspector on how to deal with the crimes and to introduce the necessary reforms"¹⁵. The reports that were sent by the Serbian envoy G. Simic from Constantinople to the Serbian government were very thorough. Since all the relevant data were collected, a general position was adopted by the Serbian government on the way their supporters in the Ottoman Empire should act. Soon all the diplomatic representative of the Kingdom of Serbia abroad, in Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Macedonia were informed about the basic directions of action. The Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia, Andra Nikolic sent a circular letter to the Serbian consul in Skopje, Mihailo Ristic on 12 January

¹⁴ Тодоровски, *Србија и реформите*, 162.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 165.

1904 (old style) stating: "You, Mister Consul-General, should make efforts for the local Slav population to see you as a representative of their interests and protector in times of troubles. Regardless of the success of these activities, for us it is important not to lose but to gain the sympathy of the local population (he refers to the Macedonian population-M.M.) to become more inclined towards us, during these difficult times. It is especially important at all times to be actively involved in the problems of the local population, thus becoming the interpreter of their needs and a protector of their interests before those implementing the reforms. Special attention should be paid to the work and the movement of the agents that the Austrians use for the realisation of their plans."¹⁶

From this circular letter one could establish two things in regard to the Serbian policy towards Ottoman Macedonia. Firstly, the Kingdom of Serbia was trying to ensure further presence and to strengthen its propaganda activities in Ottoman Macedonia. For that purpose there was a constant pressure on the Great Powers to accept the Serbian national interests in Ottoman Macedonia. And secondly, it was trying to do everything possible to avoid any unilateral action by Austria-Hungary that could result in occupation of Ottoman Macedonia.

The third item in the Mürzsteg Reforms Programme obligated the involved parties to divide the Three Vilayets (Thessaloniki, Bitola/Monastir and Kosovo/Skopje) into new administrative districts. This reform measure was the most discussed issue among the Great Powers showing their opposing economic and political interest in regard to this part of the Ottoman state. In that sense the interest of the Kingdom of Serbia was not smaller, it was even greater since it was the territory on which certain number of Serbs lived i.e. Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak, which were parts of the Kosovo (Skopje) vilayet. The Kingdom of Serbia was very much interested in the extension of the reforms to these areas as well. Apart from that interest, the Kingdom of Serbia showed also interest (certainly for different reasons) in the division of the territory of Ottoman Macedonia into administrative districts. In this measure all the Balkan states, including the Kingdom of Serbia, saw an opportunity for "'nationalities' grouping" in

¹⁶ *Документи о спољној политици краљевине...*, Дос. 482, 880.

Ottoman Macedonia that could have helped them with the final division of interest spheres of influence or with the projected permanent division of Ottoman Macedonia.¹⁷ This third item of the reform programme resulted from a completely wrong historical assessment by the Great Powers. It came from the equation of the millet with the nation. The Ottoman millet-system had no social features of a formed nation, it only denoted belonging to a certain religion or religious community. In this case the so-called "Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks" as a matter of fact were only Orthodox Macedonian Christians. Setting off from this paradigm the Great Powers deprived the Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation of its right to authenticity and sovereignty. Consequently instead of pacifying the situation in the country this crucial issue caused additional deterioration of the situation in Macedonia after the Ilinden Uprising. The new administrative organisation should have "regrouped the nationalities" due to which there was significant mobilisation of the neighbouring Balkan propaganda in Ottoman Macedonia. Hence, many villages that used to belong to one church community (Exarchate, Greek-Patriarchate and the Serbian branch of the Patriarchate) were by force transferred to others in order to ensure more church members of their own in the administrative councils within the Ottoman local authorities. This third item in the Reforms stimulated the Serbian political leaders to invest lots of efforts and funds in the armed propaganda, as a more efficient form of acting in Ottoman Macedonia that would also result in the creation of the Serbian Chetnik Organisation in the summer of 1903.

In January 1904 the Russian military envoy to Constantinople, General Kalinin informed the Serbian military envoy to Constantinople, Lt. Colonel Leshjanin that the Committee (composed of the military envoys of the Great Powers), among others had a task to look into the issue of the division of the Three Vilayets into gendarmerie sectors. Because of this there was a need of forming a new sanjak in Old Serbia¹⁸ that should have

¹⁷ Радослав Попов, *Австро-Унгарија и реформите в Европска Турција 1903-1908*, (София: Българска академија на науките, 1974), 74 -75.

¹⁸ Among the Serbian politicians throughout the entire 19th and early 20th centuries there was a fluid definition of the notion about the territory of the so called "Old Serbia". This term and its territorial division depended on the military-political circumstances in which the Serbian state was in regard to the Ottoman Empire. During the Great Eastern Crisis (1878—1881) the term "Old Serbia" referred to the Kosovo area and the territory of Sandjak (Rashka) including sometimes the northern part of the Macedonian region. During the

included Prizren, Pec, Novi Pazar, Plevlje and other places on that territory.¹⁹ As the reason for the creation of this new sanjak they stated that the vast majority of Albanians and so-called Serbs-Muslims were the main population in this region. In that sanjak, which was very important for the Kingdom of Serbia, the reforms were not to be implemented, but to have it under direct governance by the Ottoman state. As the basis for this opinion the above mentioned Committee used some Austrian military map, drawn in Vienna, which provided the numbers of certain "nationalities" in the villages and the cities. According to these statistics an unfavourable ratio between the Serbian Christian population and the Albanian together with the so-called Serbian-Muslim population on the territories of Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak could be noticed.²⁰ Consequently and quite naturally the interest of Austria-Hungary came up fore in these territories; its hostile attitude towards the Serbian state; and the opposing interests of Austria-Hungary towards Italy came to play.²¹

The Serbian government did not consider this proposal as realistic and according to them it should not have allowed "terror over the minority" because this would have not served the honour of the Great Powers which, allegedly, took on the obligation of introducing "peace and order" in the

Serbian-Ottoman wars (1876, 1877/78), the term "Old Serbia" was expanded almost on the entire territory of the Macedonian region. At the beginning of the 20th century, its territorial definition included also the northern part of the Albanian region. However, one can notice that throughout the given historical time the term "Old Serbia", which territorial scope kept changing especially towards the south, had one territorial constant: the Kosovo area and Sanjak region.

¹⁹ Михајло Војводић, *Србија и балканско питање (1875-1914)*, (Нови Сад: Матица Српска, 2000), 293-294; Попов, *Австро-Унгарија и реформите*, 73-74.

²⁰ *Документи о спољној политици краљевине...*, Дос. 523, 961.

²¹ See more: Глигор Тодоровски, *Реформите на големите европски сили во Македонија (1829-1909)*, в. II, (Скопје: Новинско издавачка организација „Студентски Збор“ 1984), 127; Попов, *Австро-Унгарија и реформите*, 82-90. Especially evident were the opposing interests of Austria-Hungary and Italy who wanted to secure spheres of influence in the regions of the Three Vilayets, which were of great importance to them. The clash of their interests was most obvious on the Albanian issue, where the two powers were trying to create their own protectorates (in parts of the territory) in Ottoman Albania (that also encompassed parts of the Bitola vilayet) and even on the territories where mixed population lived, Serbs and Albanians like in Ottoman Kosovo (within the Kosovo/Skopje vilayet). That was the reason for the significant interest of Italy in the reforms in the Three Vilayets, fearing future intervention by Austria-Hungary on the Balkan Peninsula, especially Ottoman Albania. - Тодоровски, *Србија и реформите*, 166.

European section of the Ottoman Empire. In regard to this issue the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia (i.e. its Political Department) sent a comprehensive letter to G. Simic, PP No. 443, from 3 February 1904 (old style). It elaborated in details the position of the Ministry that is of the Serbian Government on that issue. G. Simic was also told to insist on having other publications and published statistics used that dealt with the issue of the population numbers in Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak and not only the Vienna military map.²²

Setting off from their own political and economic interests in their efforts to implement the reforms in the Three Vilayets of their primary state interests, H. von Caliche posed officially before the military committee in Constantinople the request to exclude the Plevjan, Novi Pazar, Pec, Prizren and Pristina sanjaks from the Kosovo (Skopje) vilayet i.e. from the Mürzsteg Reforms Programme²³. He was using all the arguments available to prove that Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak did not need reforms,²⁴ pointing out that there was a change in the ethnic composition of the population to the detriment of the Serbs. G. Simic informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia with a telegram on 3 February 1904 (old style) that the territories of the Kosovo (Skopje) vilayet that the Kingdom of Serbia claimed, and which were within their sphere of interest would be part of the Austro-Hungarian sector. Those areas were: Kacanik (Ottoman Kosovo); Kumanovo, Kratovo, Kriva Palanka, Skopje (Ottoman Macedonia). On the other hand, all the territories west of Kacanik were excluded from the reforms implementation.²⁵ Therefore, Serbian diplomatic representatives were involved very actively in convincing the representatives of the Great Powers in the need for Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak to be incorporated in the process of reforms. The main political position of the Serbian state was as follows: "If Austria-Hungary fortifies itself in Old

²² *Документи о спољној политици краљевине...*, Дос. 525, 962-963.

²³ *Дипломатическая переписка, Реформы 1903-1905*, (С. Петербург, 1906), 65-66.

²⁴ Ј. М. Јовановић, *Борба за народно уједињење 1903-1908. Српски народ у XIX веку*, (Београд: Издавачко и Књижарско Предузеће Геца Кон А. Д., without year) 33-35; М. Б. "Стара Србија и реформе", *Српски књижевни гласник*, б. 17, (Београд, without year), 360-366, 444-452, 533-537, 612-620; Сретен Мартиновић, "Русија, Мирциштегски реформни план и албански национален покрет", *Обележје*, XV/4, (Приштина, 1985), 56.

²⁵ *Документи о спољној политици краљевине...*, Дос. 527, 967.

Serbia (it refers to the Ottoman Kosovo, Ottoman Sanjak and a part of Ottoman Macedonia - M.M.) it will mean the end not only of the Serbian unification, but also of the Slavs in the Balkan Peninsula. Today from a political point of view there is no region more important than Old Serbia. Because of that all those who see the spread of Pan-Germanism in the Balkans and through it in Asia Minor as a threat to their own interests are called to oppose the strengthening of the Austrian influence."²⁶

Specifically on this issue, the Kingdom of Serbia has undertaken a broad diplomatic action in the capitals of the Great Powers involved in the reforms of the Three Vilayets. Milovan Milovanovic responded from Rome and Miroslav Spalajkovic from Petersburg, reporting about their demarches to the governments regarding the division of the vilayets into gendarmerie sectors, and especially in regard to the exclusion of big part of Old Serbia from the process of reforms. Nonetheless, the problem with the division of the vilayets into sectors still remained unresolved, which showed the complexity of this task. This helped the Kingdom of Serbia to continue acting on a diplomatic level for a different kind of division into gendarmerie sectors in Ottoman Macedonia and on incorporating Ottoman Kosovo and ottoman Sanjak in the reform process. Nevertheless, after the numerous discussions between the Great Powers and the Sublime Porte, the Skopje Sanjak i.e.(sector) was allocated to the Austro-Hungarian officers; Drama (sector) to the English; Thessaloniki (sector)to the Russians; Bitola (sector) to the Italians; and Seres(sector) to the French. These divisions meant the end of a very important phase in the preparations for the Mürzsteg Reforms Programme in Ottoman Macedonia. The reform process excluded: the several sanjaks of the Kosovo (Skopje) vilayet, where previously according to the Berlin Treaty revision, Austria-Hungary had a right to keep its military garrisons (Sjenica, Novi Pazar, Plevlje); the three sanjaks with mixed Albanian and Serbian population (Pec, Prizren and Pristina); and in the Bitola Vilayet the sanjaks: Serfidz, Elbasan, Debar and most of Korca.²⁷ Thus regardless of the efforts of the Kingdom of Serbia not to have such a division of the Kosovo (Skopje) vilayet into sectors, it failed. The main

²⁶ Ibidem, Doc. 525, 964.

²⁷ Тодоровски, *Реформите на големите европски сили*, 157; Попов, *Австро-Унгарија и реформите*, 82.

argument of the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy for excluding these areas from the reforms programme, apart from the altered ethnic composition of the population (Serbians v.s. Albanians), was also the claim that the population in these areas did not participate in the "Christian Uprising" (referring to the Ilinden Uprising – M.M.). Because of that, there was no need to incorporate these regions in the reforms process.²⁸ Consequently, Austria-Hungary showed that it dominated the process of reforms in the European part of the Ottoman state. This political engagement of the Austro-Hungarian state shows that item three from the reforms programme that referred to some kind of "grouping of the nationalities" as a matter of fact was its invention and intervention, because the areas with dominating Albanian population were excluded from the reforms in an attempt to round up and demarcate the future autonomous Albanian territory. This operation of the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy clearly shows the concept of territorial and ethnic space that was very important for the establishment of a separate political entity i.e. a state.²⁹ Naturally this exercise of the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy was not due to some special political altruism towards the Albanian population, but because of its economic and political interests in the Balkan Peninsula. In this context we also have the statement given by the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Goluhovski in October 1903. It states: "Certain better grouping of the national groups with the help of adequate modification of the sanjaks' borders for us would be highly desirable. This would also create an opportunity for certain purely Albanian areas that at the moment belong to the Skopje and Bitola vilayets to be separated from them and based on the population composition to be merged with the Skadar and Ionian vilayets populated with Albanians."³⁰ Based on the above stated historical facts and analyses one can easily conclude that with this exercise Austria-Hungary started its project of creating the Albanian state.³¹ Russia was busy with the Far East problems and regardless of all its desires to lead

²⁸ *Австриски документи за реформската...*, Doc. 36, 143-146.

²⁹ See: George W. White, *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe*, (published in the United States of America: Rowan&Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2000).

³⁰ *Австриски документи за реформската*, Dok. 3, 62.

³¹ It managed to carry out this project a little bit later at the 1912 London Peace Conference that sanctioned the end of the First Balkan War. Hence, with the mentorship by the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy the Albanian state was formed in 1912, but without the territory of Ottoman Kosovo.

an active Balkan policy and to help the Kingdom of Serbia, it nevertheless failed. It was less and less active in regard to the Balkan issues which also suited Austria-Hungary.³² By getting the Skopje sector as part of the reforms of the Ottoman gendarmerie, Austria-Hungary basically came physically closer to Serbia at its Southern borders. Thus the Kingdom of Serbia gradually became surrounded by Austria-Hungary from the North, West and now from the South. On the other hand all the illegal channels of the Serbian Chetnik Organisation that was more and more active in Ottoman Macedonia (especially after the 1903 Ilinden Uprising) passed through the Skopje Sector i.e. Skopje Sanjak. The presence of Austro-Hungarian officers on that territory meant bigger problems.

The Kingdom of Serbia failed to achieve its fundamental goals in the preparatory phase and at the beginning of the implementation of the Mürzsteg Reforms Programme in the Three Vilayets. Consequently, the Serbian diplomatic representatives in the Ottoman Empire were instructed by their Ministry of Foreign Affairs to monitor the impact of the reforms programme on the Serbian interests. Among the Serbian authorities there was fear that as a consequence from the successful application of the Mürzsteg Programme in Ottoman Macedonia, the three Macedonian vilayets together (or separately any of them) could gain autonomy. Such an outcome would have been in direct conflict with the foreign policy and the strategic determination of the Serbian politics towards Ottoman Macedonia. The opinion of N. Pasic on this topic is very interesting. He wrote:

"Now we need to work on the Kosovo vilayet that includes the Novi Pazar sanjak, to give it a Serbian character and not to allow for the name Old Serbia to be forbidden. The name Macedonia could be given to the Bitola and Thessaloniki vilayets together. The Bulgarians are trying and working on having all three vilayets called Macedonia and thus to push out the use of the name Old Serbia or to limit it to the insignificant part of the Kosovo vilayet. The thing that suits us the most is for all Three Vilayets to remain separate and each of them to bear the current name. In the Kosovo vilayets, the Serbian language along with the Turkish language would be official, in the Bitola and Thessaloniki vilayets there would be a number of languages

³² Попов, *Австро-Унгарија и реформите*, 95.

(Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek). The Kosovo vilayet should be seen as a compensation for Serbia, since Bulgaria got Eastern Rumelia, and Crete was intended for Greece. If we agree with autonomous Macedonia it should not take the entire Old Serbia and it should not be so big that it could pose a threat to Serbia, especially if it becomes close to Bulgaria. Regardless of the way the equality of the nationalities (*narodnostite*) in Macedonia is regulated and ensured, the real relations and the big number of Macedonians who were educated in Bulgaria and who are close to the Bulgarian spirit will always give to Macedonia a character more similar to Bulgaria than to Serbia."³³

Based on this one could conclude that the Kingdom of Serbia did not perceive the question of Macedonia as a dispute about which ethnic groups were living on this territory (the ethonym Macedonians is used – M.M.), but as an issue of territorial separation between the Old Serbia and Ottoman Macedonia. Therefore, they were placing their "national and historical rights" i.e. the borders of Old Serbia much lower to the South (the entire Skopje Sanjak). The Old Serbia for them was a territory they called a "historical" Serbian area, referring to their own medieval history. Probably in that sense Milovan Milovanovic, the Serbian representative in Rome, wrote a rather long letter to Nikola Pasic informing him about the opinion of the Great Powers on the creation of two autonomous areas in the European part of the Ottoman Empire, one from the Kosovo vilayet populated with Serbs, which was to fall within the interest sphere of the Kingdom of Serbia and another one of Ottoman Macedonia with Serbian-Bulgarian-Greek character. They were surveying the opinions of the foreign representatives on this issue, but there were still no results.³⁴ This was a very interesting idea that spread among the diplomatic community and the Serbian diplomacy wanted to check its feasibility. However, based on the measures undertaken by the Great Powers in the area of introducing reforms in the Three Vilayets, according to G. Simic this entire operation until then was mainly within the framework of the Mürzsteg Programme and Agreement. Hence, it did not envisage any autonomy in Ottoman Macedonia, only improvement of the situation within this Ottoman province, by maintaining the political *status*

³³ *Документи о спољној политици краљевине...*, књ. I, св. 2, (Београд: Српска академија науке и уметности, 1998), Doc. 75, 188-189.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, Doc. 83, 198-199.

quo in the Ottoman Empire. All the measures that were undertaken in that regard until then – the appointing of a chief Ottoman inspector for the vilayets where the reforms were implemented, the appointing of Austrian and Russian civil agents, the appointing of the chief gendarmerie commander and his aides etc., were within the framework of the Mürzsteg Programme for implementing the reforms. There was no mentioning of any kind of autonomy of the Three Vilayets: Thessaloniki, Kosovo (Skopje) and Bitola (Monastir) vilayet, nor there would have been one according to G. Simic. There would not have been any changes in this regard, until it was proven that the planned reforms, which implementation had already started, were insufficient to be able to say that peace and order were established in Ottoman Macedonia.³⁵

Conclusion

The Serbian diplomacy during this historical period could not utilise successfully the Mürzsteg Reforms in the Three Vilayets in its favor because Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak were excluded from the reforms project, and Ottoman Macedonia was left within its ethno-geographic borders as a complete territorial entity. Hence, the Serbian diplomacy was faced with a new diplomatic battle in order to achieve its geo-strategic pretensions, even though it faced a big political bastion: the Austro-Hungarian state. In the attempt to find new ways of achieving its political agenda, the Serbian government in 1904 concluded an agreement with the Bulgarian state for division of the spheres of interest in Ottoman Macedonia.

³⁵ Тодоровски, *Србија и реформите*, 186.

Makedonka MITROVA

THE KINGDOM OF SERBIA AND THE MÜRZSTEG REFORMS IN OTTOMAN MACEDONIA*

-SUMMARY-

The Mürzsteg Reforms Programme refers strictly to the territories of the Thessaloniki, Bitola and Kosovo (Skopje) vilayets i.e. the Three Vilayets, which basically incorporated in the entire ethnic-geographic territory of Ottoman Macedonia, but also the territories of Ottoman Kosovo, Ottoman Sanjak and some parts of territory of Ottoman Albania. The Balkan neighbouring countries of Ottoman Macedonia showed maximum interest in all the details and phases of the Mürzsteg Reforms Programme in Ottoman Macedonia, starting from the preparations, the approval and the beginning of its implementation. It was only logical for the Kingdom of Serbia to monitor with great interest the entire operation of implementing the reforms programme in the Three Vilayets. This is also evident from the fact that the Serbian government had a copy of the Mürzsteg Reforms Programme with the modifications made by the Sublime Porte, as early as the beginning of 1904. For the Serbian Government the issues related to Ottoman Macedonia, Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak were in their focus as crucial geo-

* The term Ottoman Macedonia contains two aspects: a historical one and a geographical one. In the historical context: *Ottoman* denotes the historical period of the geographical term Macedonia during the ottoman rule. (The same historical context is used for marking the other geographical terms such as: Ottoman Kosovo, Ottoman Sanjak, Ottoman Albania or Ottoman Balkans). Under the geographical notion Macedonia in "Encyclopaedia Britannica" one will read: "Macedonia is bounded on the East by the lower Mesta (Nestos) river and by the western slopes of the Rhodope (Rodopi) upland. North of the Pirin massif the boundary turns west, passing south of Kystendil (Bulgaria), by the Siroka Planina, Crna Gora and Sar Planina. Thence it turns southward by the Korab and Jablanica range and lakes Ohrid and Prespa to the massif Grammos; then eastward, embracing the whole basin of the Aliakmon (Bistritsa) river and reaching the Gulf of Salonika near Mt. Olympus. Including the Khalkidhiki (Chalcidice) Peninsula, Macedonia covers an area of about 25,700 sq. mil. (67.471km²). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, V.14, William Benton, Publisher, 1967, 508. During the last period of the Ottoman rule Macedonia was part of three vilayets: Salonica (Thessaloniki), Bitola (Monastir) and Kosovo.

political affairs. During the implementation of the Mürzsteg reforms in the Three Vilayets, especially with the implementation of its most important parts, the reforms in the gendarmerie and the finances, regardless of the significant efforts by its diplomacy, the Kingdom of Serbia failed to expand these reforms to the Kosovo vilayet (Ottoman Kosovo and Ottoman Sanjak), where there was also a Serbian population among others. Those parts, mostly due to the opposition by Austria-Hungary and the insufficient advocacy by Russia were excluded from the reforms programme. However, Ottoman Macedonia was left within its ethno-geographic borders as a complete territorial entity. That was a huge disappointment for the Kingdom of Serbia and for the Serbian diplomacy in general.