

Russia, Britain and the Establishment of the Province of Eastern Rumelia

Nadezhda Vasileva Vasileva¹

Abstract

The Treaty of San Stefano signed immediately after Ottoman-Russian war 1877-1878 creating "Great Bulgaria" and thus endangered the "Balance of Power" in Europe disturbed by the Great Eastern Crisis 1875-1878 arose in the Balkan Peninsula. The Treaty was considered as one-sided attempt to solve the Eastern Question by Britain and Austro-Hungary. So they insisted a revision of the Treaty. Thus the Great Power met in Berlin with the aim to be re-established the order in the Balkans providing each of the Great Powers with proportioned influence in the region.

At the Congress of Berlin the large Bulgarian state was divided into three parts and thus was created the province of Eastern Rumelia remaining the authority of the Sultan. The establishment of autonomous province was decided during a bilateral negotiations between Britain and Russian at the time of the diplomatic preparation of the Congress. The growing rivalry between the two Great Powers regarding the Ottoman Empire's territories in the second half of the 19 century required compromises and Eastern Rumelia was one of them.

The aim of this paper is to examine the struggle between Russia and Britain during the organization of the province of Eastern Rumelia at the Balkans. The research focus on the British and Russian policy executed during the time of elaboration of Organic Law and organization of the administrative institutions of the province. The article has an aim to present the British and Russian notions about the functions which Eastern Rumelia had to fulfil in the future Balkan policy of these two Great Powers in their rivalry for dominance of the Balkans.

Keywords: Eastern Rumelia, Russia, Britain, Balkans

Rusya, İngiltere ve Doğu Rumeli Vilayetinin Kuruluşu

Özet

1877 – 1878 Osmanlı Rus savaşından sonra imzalanan Ayestefanos Antlaşması neticesinde ortaya çıkan "Büyük Bulgaristan" ideali Büyük Doğu Krizi sürecinde sarsılan Avrupa güç dengesinde daha derin krizler ortaya çıkardı. İngiltere ve Avusturya-Macaristan bu antlaşmanın Rusya'yı doğu sorununu çözmede tek taraflı olarak avantaj elde ettiğini kabul ettiler. Bunun sonucunda antlaşmanın tekrardan yeni şartlar altında tashih edilmesini istediler. Böylelikle büyük güçler Balkanların yeniden dizayn edilmesi ve kendi nüfus alanlarının korunması için Berlin'de bir araya geldiler.

¹ PhD student, University of Sakarya, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History, nadejda_v.vasileva@abv.bg. (ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6370-728X)
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Berlin Kongresi'nde varılan antlaşma sonucunda büyük Bulgar devleti üç bölgeye ayrıldı. Böylece Osmanlı İmparatorluğuna bağlı olarak Şarki Rumeli Vilayeti kuruldu. Berlin Kongresi öncesi yürütülen diplomatic temaslarda İngiltere ve Rusya ikili müzakereler gerçekleştirmişti. 19'yy ikinci yarısında büyük güçlerin Osmanlı toprakları üzerindeki çıkar çatışmaları ve yaşanan gelişmeler bir uzlaşma sonucunda Şarki Rumeli Vilayeti'ni ortaya çıkardı.

Bu çalışmanın amacı Şarki Rumeli Vilayeti'nin Balkanlardaki örgütlenmesi sırasında Rusya ve İngiltere arasındaki siyasi çekişmeleri incelemektedir. Çalışma, vilayetin nizamnamesinin hazırlanması ve idari kurumların yapılanması sırasında İngiltere ve Rusya arasındaki çekişmeleri odaklanmaktadır. Bu makale Berlin Antlaşması sonrası Balkan politikasında Şarki Rumeli Vilayeti'nin nasıl bir konumu olacağı konusunda Rusya ve İngiltere'nin temel yaklaşımlarını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şarki Rumeli Vilayeti, Rusya, İngiltere, Balkanlar

Introduction

The province of Eastern Rumelia emerged after the division of lands of the Bulgarian state created by the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 into three parts. From the territories north of the Balkan range was created the Principality of Bulgaria, from the south part was created the Eastern Rumelian province with autonomous status and the province Macedonia, which was left under the Ottoman rule. Indeed this division was set up as a compromise between Russia and Britain which at that time were struggling for dominance over the Balkan Peninsula. All of the Great Powers unanimously agreed that the Treaty of San Stefano had to revise but as the Treaty impacted mostly the interest of the British policy in the Balkans before the Congress of Berlin to be convened Russian and Britain had to reach an agreement on the main controversial points regarding the future organization of the Balkan Peninsula.

At the beginning of May 1878 the Russian Government made the first step and stated its readiness for the negotiations with the British authorities. The Russian Ambassador in Britain Count Shuvalov was sent to London with special instructions to approach the British objective points concerning the Treaty of San Stefano. British Foreign Minister Lord Salisbury stipulated that the British Cabinet made objections to the size of Bulgaria and he insisted that the territory of the new state should be divided into two parts – the northern part to be organized as Principality with Bulgarian Government and the southern obtaining the territory situated in the south of the Balkan mountain, had to be organized as a self-governing province, under the ruling of the Ottoman Empire, like the British colonies. But main condition for the

establishing of this province Salisbury stipulated that its southern boundaries should not include the coast of the Aegean Sea.² During the negotiation Salisbury urged on the Russian Ambassador the necessity of establishing of Ottoman garrisons in the province as a measure for preservation of the Sultan's rights and protecting the frontiers of the province. In the conversation between two statesmen, the Russian Ambassador explained that "the Czar would not hear of Turkish troops being retained in any of the emancipated Provinces."³ Thus this important issue remained open for further debate and in the agreement was written that the Russian Emperor accentuated the importance of withdrawing the Ottoman army from South Bulgaria, because he was concerned about the safety of the Bulgarian population, if Ottoman garrisons had been left there.⁴

The Russian Government and Alexander II himself agreed upon a division of Bulgaria but for the Emperor and the government was important in these territories to be established a governing regime which had to give guarantees to the population there and to preserve Russian interest concurrently.⁵ After several difficult days of negotiations, Shuvalov reached an agreement with Salisbury and after Alexander II gave his approval, it was signed on the May 31, 1878.⁶ Due to the stipulations of the Shuvalov-Salisbury agreement, the emergence of the new autonomous province in the Balkans was actually endorsed before its official recognition by the Treaty of Berlin.

Latter the provisions of Treaty of Berlin only determined the details regarding the future organization and the name of the province. At the meeting held on the June 22, the British delegates presented a project for the organization of Bulgaria's southern part and also proposed that the province should take the name Eastern Rumelia.⁷ The province was named for the first time in this treaty. Until that moment it was mentioned in the official documents as "Province south of the Balkans", "South Bulgaria", "the territory south of the Balkan", "unsatisfied Bulgaria". During the session

² Konstantin Kosev, *Bismark, Iztochnia vapors i Bulgarskoto osvobojdene 1856-1878g.*, Sofia 2003, p. 446-450

³ Lady Cecil Gwendolen, *Life of Robert Salisbury*, Vol. II, London, 1921, p. 258

⁴ *Sbornik dogovor Rossii s drumu gosudarstwami 1856-1917*, Moskva, 1952 p.176-179

⁵ Richard G. Weeks, *Peter Shuvalov and the Congress of Berlin: A Reinterpretation*, The Journal of Modern History 51/1 (1979), p.1056

⁶ F.O. 93/81/47, Memorandum, p.1-16, p.18, p.74

⁷ Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relating to the Treaty of Berlin, with the Protocols of the Congress" House of Commons, Protocol No. 4 – Sitting of June 22, 1878, Turkey No. 39(1878) p. 46-47

Russian representatives objected to the name Eastern Rumelia. Shuvalov explained that if they excluded the word “Bulgaria”, they would deprive the population of a name that belonged to the people. The reason that British diplomacy abstained from the using of the word “Bulgaria” was that it would have been considered as “watchword or rallying point” for the dangerous aspirations of the population inhabited the province.⁸

According to the stipulations of the Treaty, the province had to be organized on the following model: the province remained under the direct political and military authority of the Sultan, under conditions of administrative autonomy; for a Governor General had to be appointed a Christian one; the Governor General of Eastern Rumelia had to be nominated by the Sublime Porte, with the assent of all of the Great Powers, for a term of five years; The Sultan had the right to maintain troops in the province with the purpose for defence of the land and sea frontiers; internal order had to be maintained by a native Gendarmerie assisted by a local Militia.⁹

According to Anna Mirkova: “Eastern Rumelia could be regarded as a “quasi-sovereign” state, since the sultan remained the suzerain, but the province paid an annual tribute, had only a gendarmerie, and could not conduct foreign policy.”¹⁰ Eastern Rumelia was a project largely an artificial one of the British Government to preserve the interests of British Government and to move Russia away from the Straits and to undermine its influence in the Balkans.¹¹ The southern boundary of the province was situated 100 km north from the coast of Aegean Sea along the Rhodope Mountains which also deprived Russia from sea outlet. The establishment of the province of Eastern Rumelia allowed Britain to succeed in preserving as much as possible the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and interrupted the further penetration of the Russian Empire south of the Balkan territories.

The Elaboration of the Organic Law

⁸ Parliamentary Papers, “Correspondence Relating to the Treaty of Berlin, with the Protocols of the Congress” House of Commons, Protocol No. 4 – Sitting of June 22, 1878, Turkey No. 39(1878) p. 48

⁹ *Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878*, The American Journal of International Law 2/ 4 (1908), p. 401-424

¹⁰ Anna M. Mirkova, “Population Politics” at the End of Empire: Migration and Sovereignty in Ottoman Eastern Rumelia, 1877–1886, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55/ 4 (2013), p. 959

¹¹ Gerald David Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question. Missolonghi to Gallipoli*, London 1971, p.147

At the meeting held on the 26th of June, it was agreed that, immediately after peace conclusion, one European Commission would be instituted for the elaboration of Organic Law and completion of the administrative organization of Eastern Rumelia.¹²

Thereby the rivalry between Russian and Britain during the time of the Congress of Berlin crossed over the organization of the province. The establishment of the new born province confronted the Russian and British interests regarding their Balkan policy as organization of administration of the Eastern Rumelia would determine the further development of the Province which actually had only two paths in front of itself – first one to remain under Ottoman's authority or to unite with the Principality of Bulgaria¹³. The first one would satisfy the British policy and second one would accomplish the Russian mission in the Balkans for creation of powerful Slav state under the patronage of the Russian Empire.

According to the Treaty, a Commission constituted from the representatives of the Great Powers had to be organised to elaborate an Organic Law, to define the rights of the Governor General and the administrative, judicial and financial government of the province, as well as the regulations and functions of the militia. The European Commission met on September 18, 1879 in Istanbul¹⁴.

As was mentioned above Eastern Rumelia was left under the authority of the Porte according to the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin, but the extent of its subordination depended on the character of the regime that would be established in the country. So, after the Congress of Berlin, the activity of the European Commission was very important for the province. The result of this activity, namely the Organic Law, would determine the future development of the province of Eastern Rumelia¹⁵. Therefore, the character of the authority which had to be established was depending on the character of the Organic Law which had to be prepared.

The British Foreign Policy required ceasing of the Russian advancements in the region in the immediate proximity of the Ottoman capital. For this reason

¹² Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relating to the Treaty of Berlin, with the Protocols of the Congress" House of Commons, Protocol No.7 – Sitting of June 26, 1878, Turkey No. 39(1878), p. 94

¹³ Mitko, Palangurski, *Nova Istorija na Bulgaria I. Knyazhestvoto*, Sofia, 2013, p. 98

¹⁴ Elena Statelova, *Iztochna Rumelia (1879-1885): Ikonomika, politika, Kultura*. Sofia, 1983, p. 13

¹⁵ Statelova, *Ibid*, p.14

British authorities desired the province to be organized in such way which had to secure the absolute power of the Sultan in the province. During the diplomatic preparations British Government gained as its allies Austro-Hungary, which interest regarding the Balkans and Ottoman Empire also desired “the firm establishment of the political and military authority of the Sultan side by free Constitutional rights for the people”¹⁶. The other assistance British Government was able to obtain from the French Government.¹⁷

But after the meetings of the European Commission began its labour British authorities found out that Russian authorities had already been established an administrative system and organized the province on the particular model. The Russian authorities tried to preserve the existing administration established by the Ottoman Government under the *Law of the Vilayets*. But in the local administrative institutions were employed exclusively Bulgarian subjects excluding the other two ethnic groups Greeks and Muslims from the representation in the governing system.¹⁸ With this model of organization was given the advantage of the Bulgarian population to take the control over the administration of Eastern Rumelia.

Thus when the European Commission convened to elaborate the Organic Law and organize the administration of Eastern Rumelia, Russia already had possessed a significant degree of influence in these lands which during the work of the Commission it had to struggle to preserve.

Russia desired to be elaborated such an Organic Law, which to allow to be preserved the existing order and administrative system set up by the Provisional Russian authorities which was confining the Sultan’s power. For this purpose the Russian authorities preferred in the province to be implemented the liberal principles of governance based on the broad representation of the population at the governing authorities. These views regarding the model of the Organic Law were entirely contrary to those of

¹⁶ Parliamentary Papers” Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia”, House of Commons, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquise of Salisbury, Foreign Office, Vienna, August 27, 1878, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 10

¹⁷ F.O. 78/3036, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff, 6 March 1879, Philippopolis, No 98, p. 89-97, PRO.

¹⁸ Parliamentary Papers” Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia”, House of Commons, Lord Donoughmore to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Philippopolis, September 22, 1879, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 24

Britain. So when the first proposal for Organic Law based on the *Law of the Vilayets* presented by the Ottoman authorities was rejected by the Russian Commissioners. The project stipulated the preservation of the old administrative system, the appointment of the Government apparatus by the Porte and subordinating the militia and gendarmerie to the Ottoman authority. The project restricted the autonomous rights given to the province with the provisions of Treaty of Berlin¹⁹.

As the situation in the province occurred different from what the British authorities expected British diplomacy was forced to deprive from its initial view that the province had to be entirely subordinated to the Sultan authority and realized that British interest would be better secure if the Russian influence could be suppress by giving to the population of Eastern Rumelia considerable rights of self-government.²⁰

In the beginning of November the European Commission unanimously adopted the program for elaboration of Organic Law proposed by the Austro-Hungarian Commissioner Kalay²¹. According to the program, if the Commission successfully accomplished its work in the province of Eastern Rumelia, the rights and freedom of population would be secured, a modern finance administration would be implemented, modern educational system would be created, powerful executive authority under effective control and civil administration would be created which had to work for prosperous of the province²². Salisbury expressed his positive attitude to the project: "The scheme appears to afford a very clear and comprehensive sketch of the framework of such constitution as the Commission is desired to prepare, and of the principles by which they should be guided in the task."²³

Russian authorities also accepted the proposal without significant opposition.²⁴ The project corresponded with their desires for introduction of

¹⁹ Stelova, *Ibid*, p. 24; Maria Manolova, *Rusia i konstititsionnoto ustroistvo na Iztochna Rumelia*, Sofia 1975, p. 76-78

²⁰ *Maritsa*, 13 October, 1878; 17 October, 1878

²¹ Parliamentary Papers" Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia", House of Commons, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, November 3, 1878, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 111

²² Manolova, *Ibid*, p. 83

²³ F.O. 901/9, Foreign Office, 21 November 1878, PRO.

²⁴ Parliamentary Papers" Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia", House of Commons, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, November 5, 1879, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 109

Government authority based on modern and liberal principles which gave the population the right of broad attendance in the ruling process of the province. But this was actually the beginning of the long struggle took by the Russian authorities for the each article of the Organic Law.²⁵ Russian Commissioner Tzeretelew avowed that the details of the Organic Law might be lead to long discussions.²⁶ Russian Commissioners stated their willingness to cooperate but it did not mean that they were ready to make concessions with their policy for preserving autonomous rights in Eastern Rumelia.

The chapters of the Organic Law were distributed between the Commissioners of other Great Powers, the Russians saddle to prepare only the chapters for the organization of the Militia and Gendarmerie. This course of the Russian authorities gave them the advantage carefully to examine every chapter and to object the controversial, according to them, provisions. Thus most of the time the Russian Commissioner criticized and opposed the projects as also very energetic exercised the right of veto. They did not hesitate to pronounce a veto even against the united decision of the representatives of all of the six Powers. This attitude of the Russian Commissioners left the impression that they tried to retard the work of the European Commission²⁷. As long as the work of the Commission continue the Russian authorities would took occasion to prolong the occupation in the province.

For Britain the purpose for the elaboration of an Organic Law which would allow the population of the province to have significant self-government authority had to influence the people instead of wishing to unite themselves with Bulgaria, they could enjoy to the superior liberty developed in the Eastern Rumelia.²⁸

During the discussion upon the first chapter, the Russian and British opinions clashed on some important points. The project was prepared by the British delegate Wolff. Firstly despite the Governor General, Governor General's Secretary the high clerks, officers and Judges had to be appointed

²⁵ Parliamentary Papers" Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia", Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, November 7, 1879, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 118-119

²⁶ Parliamentary Papers" Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia", House of Commons, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquise of Salisbury, Philippopolis, December 1, 1878, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 207

²⁷ F.O. 78/3035, 5 November 1879, Philippopolis, p. 109, PRO.

²⁸ F.O. 901/11, 4 February 1879, Vienna, PRO.

by the Sultan²⁹. Russians considered this provision as a restriction of the administrative autonomy of the province. The compromise was achieved with the following correction – the director of the departments, Judges of the High Court and the local Governors had to be appointed from the Governor General with the approval of the Sultan. The Governor General received also the right to appoint officers until rank of Captain. The designated right of the Sultan to approve the laws accepted from the Provincial Assembly also arose discussion as this put all legislative power in the dependence of the Porte. So it was decided to be given a right to the Sultan to approve the laws with the condition that if in two months the Sultan did not reject a particular law, it would be considered as accepted³⁰.

Chapter V dedicated to the Provincial Assembly probably gave the rise of the most significant discussions between British and Russian delegates. The consultations prolonged 39 days and even threatened to interrupt the labours of the Commission as both British and Russian authorities showed relentlessness. The project again was elaborated by the British Commissioner and gave comprehensive rights to the Governor General with, at the expense of restricting the population right to take part in the governance of the province. Many restrictions were put for the suffrage – property and educational qualification. If it had been established on that model the Provincial Assembly would be completely in the dependence on the Governor General and its function as a controlling organ would have been abolished. Likewise, the attendance of the Bulgarian population also was limited³¹. The Provincial Assembly was consisted by: 1. Members by right; 2. Elected members; 3. Members appointed by the Governor General. Russian delegates did not agreed upon the number of the members which had to be nominated by the Governor General as they were half of the number of the elected members. The problem originated from the fact that the number of the members by right (10) and nominated members (18) together (28) went beyond the number of the elected members (36).³² The construction of the Provincial Assembly on this scheme according to the Russian delegates threatened to deprive the population from the prerogatives to take part in the rule of its country and to subject the province to Governor General's will and respectively Sultan's.

²⁹ Manolova, *Ibid*, p.87

³⁰ Statelova, *Ibid*, p. 26-27, Manolova, *Ibid*, p.92-108

³¹ Manolova, *Ibid*, p. 171-174; Statelova, *Ibid*, p. 30-31

³² Maria Manolova, *Ibid*, p. 111-112

Finally a compromise solution was found and Russian Commissioners accepted the Governor General to have the right to appoint members in the Assembly but only ten. In the exchange Britain authorities agreed the Permanent Committee to be consisted from 10 members but the election ballot could not present more than 6 names, which had to secure the place for the minorities in the Provincial Assembly, which British authorities strongly desired as a counterbalance of the Bulgarians.³³

The struggle over the composition of the Provincial Assembly revealed from what importance was the alignment of the forces in it between the different nationalities for the establishment of such Government which had to maintain the interest of the particular power, in this case Russia on one side or the Ottoman Empire and behind it Britain on the other side. The opportunity of the population to take a more active role in the governance of the province gave more liberal character to the regime and an opportunity for self-development which Russia desired. On the other side the dimension of the Governor General's power secured the opportunity for influence of the Porte in the province. Russia and Britain clashed on the point how much had to be dosed the Sultan's power in Eastern Rumelia because this had to determinant which of them would be able to establish control over the province.

The Struggle for the Rights of the Ethnic Groups

The fight for the dominance over the province of Eastern Rumelian between the two Great Powers concerned not only the administrative organization but also regarded the races inhabited the province. The preponderance of one nationality over the other had to secure the possibility of Britain and Russia to direct the internal affairs on the province in such way which had to provide the execution of their policy in the region. Russian supported Bulgarian population as a part of the program of the Pan-Slavism ideology. Britain traditionally sustained the Greek population against the dominant Slav population in the Balkans.³⁴

From the entering of lands south of Danube River, Russian authorities pursued a policy which aimed to diminish the number of Muslim population. Provisional Russian Authorities executed measures for deportation of the Muslim inhabitants from the region. In the sense of this policy line on October 1878 Governor of Eastern Rumelia General Stolypin made a proposal instead of the Muslim refugees to be allowed to return to their homes in the province

³³ Manio, Stoyanov, *Izrobotvane na Organicheskiya Ustav na Iztochna Rumelia*, Sofia 1955 p. 78-79

³⁴ Maria Manolova, *Ibid*, p. 27

to be carried out “exchange of properties between Muslims from Eastern Rumelia and Christian refuges from Turkish Provinces”³⁵. Together with the deportation of the Muslim population the Russian authorities pursued also a line of internment of Bulgarian population. In the end of February, it was organized a movement by Russian authorities using the occasion of departure of the Russian army which exited the Bulgarian population from the province of Adrianople to emigrate into Eastern Rumelia³⁶. All these actions had an aim to depopulate Eastern Rumelia from the local Muslim population and replaced it with Christian one, respectively from Bulgarian origin and to be secured the dominance of Bulgarian population.

British authorities on their part desired Eastern Rumelia to have a character of a multiethnic province. This was frankly expressed in the conversation between Russian Emperor and British Ambassador Dufferin.³⁷ British delegates in the European Commission tried to obtain some important rights for the other ethnic groups in the province. For example Wolff struggle for the official language to be recognized also the Greek and the Ottoman languages as Russians insisted only the Bulgarian to be nominated for official one.³⁸

The question regarding the appointment of the chief clergy staff in the province was also a controversial issue. The British considerations arose from that in the situation of schism between the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate if the Bulgarian church independently nominated the bishops it would be able in short time to secure the predominance of the Bulgarian population over the Greek and thus the province could take the character of purely Bulgarian province. So in the instruction sent by British Foreign Office to Wolff this proposal was firmly opposed with the following claim: “The policy of Britain is to sustain the Greeks against the Slavs: and we could not support any proposal in an opposite sense.”³⁹ British authorities also manage to prevent as much as possible the repatriation of the Muslim population with the joined endeavours of the European Commission.⁴⁰

³⁵ F.O. 901/1 to Salisbury, 29 October 1878, Philippopolis, PRO; Parliamentary Papers” Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia”, House of Commons, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, October 29, 1879, Turkey No 9 (1879), p. 96

³⁶ F.O. 78/3041, Wolff to Salisbury, February 26, 1879 Philippopolis, p.153, PRO;

³⁷ F.O. 901/11, 8 February 1879, Foreign Office, PRO.

³⁸ F.O. 78/3035, 12 February 1879, Philippopolis, p. 149-150, PRO.

³⁹ F.O. 901/11, 25 February 1879, Foreign Office, PRO; F.O. 78/3033, To Sir. Drummond Wolff, 25 February 1879, p. 164-169, PRO.

⁴⁰ F.O. 78/3036, 13 March 1879, Philippopolis, p. 171, PRO.

These actions of the Great Powers with Britain in the head regarding the establishment of Eastern Rumelia actually were struggles for securing of “the heterogeneous character of local society so as to balance their respective roles in the Ottoman lands, and this became entwined with maintaining a balance among the main ethno-religious groups in the Province: Bulgarian Christians, Turkish Muslims, and Greek Christians”.⁴¹ Whereas Russia made endeavours to ensure artificially a homogeneous character of the local population.

Balkan Garrisons

One of the issues from primary importance concerning the future of the Eastern Rumelia was the article of the Treaty of Berlin which stipulated the right of the Sultan to summon troops in the province and to garrison them on the border with the Principality of Bulgaria. This provision threatened the Russian interests which required in the province to be preserved strong Russian influence which was in immediate proximity of the Ottoman Capital and the Straits and would provided Russia with powerful tool for constant menace of the Sultan’s possessions. So the entire actions of the Russian authorities regarding the organization of Eastern Rumelia from the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, during the work of European Commission to the time of evacuation of the Russian troops were leaded by the perception the execution of this provision to be avoided. The Russian authority apprehended that once entering in the province of the Ottoman troops would be able to impose strong Ottoman authority, which respectively would diminish the Russian influence there. Thus the advantage gained by them in the struggle for the Straits against Britain would be lost.

The settlement of the military forces of the Sultan in the province was from great importance for the Britain policy too as one of the most significant anxieties of the British diplomacy regarding the Eastern Rumelia was the preserving of order in the province after the evacuation of Russian troops and implementation of strong Ottoman authority in the province. They feared that could be occurred disorders in the province that would force the Russian authorities to insist the prolongation of the occupation period⁴².

Therefore the British authorities tried to found out another measure instead of the Balkan garrisons which were able to preserve and control the tranquillity in the province. One of the possible remedy was one mixed

⁴¹ Mirkova *Ibid*, p. 978

⁴² F.O. 195/1215, Sir Henry Elliot to the Marquise of Salisbury, 3 January 1879, Vienna, PRO.

occupation. The idea occurred as a counter act against the dominance Russia managed to establish in the province, strong opposition of the Bulgarian population against the returning of Ottoman troops and probable embarrassment that could arise after the departure of the Russian army.⁴³

However the Russian objection endorsed by the Bulgarian antagonism made the British authorities to seek again an alternative plan for introduction of a control in the province. In the telegram of H. Drummond Wolff to the Foreign Office, he supposed in accordance of the right of the Sultan to garrison and fortify the Balkans the following:

*while maintaining her right to garrison and fortify the whole of the frontiers, should limit the exercise of it in the Province itself to the sea frontier at Bourgas; that she should keep a considerable force at Adrianople and about 5000 men at Djuma, Mustapha Pasha and in the Rhodope; and that the garrisons bordering on the frontier should in the first place be accompanied by British officers and those of any other of the signatory Powers that thought fit to send them*⁴⁴

This way of disposition of the military forces was evaluated as one of the great strategic strength giving to the Porte complete control over the sea entrance of the province and concentrating the military force in one location from where it could be immediately attack and sized the Balkan line.

Russian authorities denied making concessions on the issue regarding the preservation of the Eastern Rumelia from military occupation by Sultan's army. So the Russian Emperor only ostensibly accepted the British proposal which offers Ottoman troops to occupy Bourgas and Ichtiman instead of the Balkan range and Russian government only had used this proposal objecting it many times to protect the negotiation on the issue.⁴⁵ And in April 1879, when the issue entered into the last phase British Ambassador in St. Petersburg was instructed to ascertain the following arrangements from the Russian Government⁴⁶:

1. *The Turkish troops only to enter the Province with the sanction of a majority of the Commission.*

⁴³ F.O. 195/1214, Lord Lyons to the Marquis of Salisbury, 29 December 1878, Paris, No 1082, PRO.

⁴⁴ F.O. 78/3036, from Sir H.D. Drummond Wolff, 9 March 1879, Philippopolis, p. 140-3, PRO.

⁴⁵ F.O. 65/1042, Lord Dufferin to Marquis of Salisbury, March 28, 1879, St. Petersburg; Lord Dufferin to Marquis of Salisbury, 31 March 31 1879, St. Petersburg, PRO.

⁴⁶ F.O. 65/1044, Dufferin to Salisbury, 14/29, April 1879, British Embassy, PRO; Medicott, W. N., and Richard G. Weeks, Documents on Russian Foreign Policy, 1878-1880: Section II: January-February 1879," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 64/2 (1986), p. 431

2. *The immediate occupation of Ichtiman and Bourgas*
3. *The non-occupation of the Balkans for a year*

This scheme Prince Gorchakoff accepted with certain modifications viz:

1. *The non-occupation of Ichtiman*
2. *The non-occupation of Bourgas until the departure of the Russian army from the Province.*
3. *The non-entry of the Turkish troops into the Province, under any circumstances, until after the Russian evacuation.*
4. *The non-occupation of the Balkans until after conclusion of the delimitation.*

The Russian authorities were intransigent and rejected all proposals made by the British authority the article regarding the Balkan garrisons to be executed even by some modifications. Thus they managed to defend to the last their position for not allowing and entering of any Ottoman troops under any circumstances in the province and London was forced to yield on this issue realizing the real danger of the situation in the province. In the end the question was solved by agreement between Russian and the Porte.⁴⁷ An article was added in the Organic Law giving the right of the Governor General in case of threatens of the internal order of the province to summon the Ottoman troops.

Nomination of Governor General

The question for Governor General appeared as the main hindrance to accomplish the organization of the Eastern Rumelia. The figure of the Governor would determine the prevailing power of the influence in the province respectively of the Britain or Russia. British authorities would exercise its ascendancy over the province indirectly through the Ottoman authorities which had to be secured by a suitable nomination for a Governor General of Eastern Rumelia. For this purpose they preferred the appointment of an Ottoman subject obedient to the Sultan. The first nominated candidate was Rustem Pasha, the present Governor General of Lebanon. The proposal was made in January, 1879 by the Porte before the Commission to conclude with the elaboration of the Organic Law. The Russian authorities rejected the nomination of the Rustem Pasha reasoning its objection with arguments that he was "a persona grata" and failed in the administration of the province of Lebanon. Prince Gorchakov also made a remark that it was premature to be

⁴⁷ F.O. 78/3041, H.D. Wolff to Salisbury, 2 May 1879, Constantinople, p. 355, PRO.

nominate Governor General before the Commission to elaborate the chapter which defines the power with which he would be invested⁴⁸.

Together with the measures carried out by the Russian authorities to refute the Ottoman nomination they took the initiative and proposed as a Governor General to be appointed a foreigner who had to win Bulgarian population's confidence as an Ottoman functionary could only daunted remaining them the previous authority under they lived.⁴⁹

The idea for a nomination of foreign governor who probably would not be obedient to the Sultan and could become a powerful tool in hands of the European Powers was unfavourable for British authorities. As Salisbury shared in a dispatch to Wolff the principal reason for insisting on nomination of Ottoman rather than a European Governor was "the fact that in such an appointment lays the only security against a repetition of the maneuvers which resulted in the union of the two Danubian Principalities under Prince Couza"⁵⁰. The figure of the Government General was the key factor in that situation because the British authorities desired to prevent the execution of one union between the province and the Principality of Bulgaria.

But a nomination of foreigner was a complicated issue and Russian Government was aware about this because no one of Great Powers would accept a candidate originated from nationality of one of its rivals. So the Russian proposed to be appointed a neutral candidate from Swiss or Belgian origin.⁵¹

The strong objection about the Catholic religion of Rustem Pasha which also was underlined as an obstacle by Russians made the British authorities to suppose that "a member of the Greek faith would be preferred by Russia to a Catholic probably with the necessary addition of his being a Bulgarian"⁵². This was approved when Alexander II conveyed the idea that "His Majesty would himself would have prepared a member of the Orthodox church

⁴⁸ F.O. 195/1215, Lord Loftus to the Marquis of Salisbury, 14 January 1879, St. Petersburg, PRO.

⁴⁹ Parliamentary Papers " Correspondence Respecting the Proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Roumelia", House of Commons, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquise of Salisbury, Philippopolis, December 1, 1878, Turkey No 9 (1979), p.236 -7

⁵⁰ F.O. 901/11, Foreign Office, 17 February 1879, PRO.

⁵¹ F.O. 78/3041, 5 February 1879, Philippopolis, p. 79-80, PRO.

⁵² F.O. 195/1214, from Augustin Loftus, 4 January 1879, St. Petersburg, PRO.

though he did not insist upon qualification.”⁵³ This cross-reference to the figure of the Governor General with Orthodox origin opened the way for the nomination of the Aleko Pasha as he was the only qualified candidate who could be a satisfy nomination for all of the Great Powers. Aleko Pasha was not only from Bulgarian origin but also served a long time to the Ottoman Government which satisfied Britain.

Early in 1878 Russian Ambassador Orlov in the French capital communicated in very secret manner with Aleko Pasha and asked him if he would accept the position of a Governor General of Eastern Rumelia. After 48 hours which he asked for to think over, he accepted the position. Later the nomination of Aleko Pasha was negotiated on March 25, 1879 between Prince Gorchakov and Dufferin and he was appointed on April 14, 1879 by the Sultan.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The British and Russian policy in the Balkan Peninsula followed particular political lines from the outbreak of the Eastern crisis 1875-1877 when the regional Balance of Power in the Ottoman Empire's Balkan possessions was broken by the insurrections of the local population and successive Russian victory in the war with the Ottoman Empire 1877-1878. The decisions of the Congress of Berlin aimed to restore the order at the Balkans impacted by the struggle for dominance over the Ottoman's lands in the late 19th century between the European Powers.

British interests in the Balkans pursued a course to keep Russian Empire far away from the Mediterranean coast, Ottoman capital and the Straits. For this purpose British diplomacy established the province of Eastern Rumelia as a barrier against the Russian further advancements in these directions. On the other hand Russian authorities after the war had already managed to achieve significant advantages as dominant power in Balkans which were determined to preserve through the settlement of the province as Russian satellite. As a measure against the British policy, Russian authorities struggled to prevent the entering of the Ottoman troops and the restoration of the Ottoman authority in Eastern Rumelia. The Russian authorities considered that this could be achieved by introduction of a self-government authority and acquiring of some degree of rights by the Bulgarian population to be able to

⁵³ F.O. 901/1211, Lord Dufferin to Marquis of Salisbury, 12 March 1879, St. Petersburg, PRO.

⁵⁴ Hristo Glushkov, *Frenskata diplomatsia i izborat na gubernator na Iztochna Rumelia (1878-1879)*, Bulgarian Historical Review, 1-2 (2006), p.163-179

take the governance of the province and thus to secure the Russian influence in the province.

This Russian political course followed in the province threatened the policy of British government on the one hand to subordinate the province to the Sultan's rule and on the other the new order in Balkans established by the Treaty of Berlin. If the existing system of governance in Eastern Rumelia set up by Russian Provisional Administration was preserved, the province would facilitate the future unification of the divided Bulgarian lands and thus would menace the integrity of Ottoman Empire, which was strongly undesired by the British authorities.

Therefore the British diplomacy struggle to reduce the Russian influence in Eastern Rumelia. But after realizing that this could not be achieved with subordination of the province to the Porte, it decided to achieve this aim by giving to the Bulgarian population large rights of self-government to undergo the Russian power in the province and at the same time to give a chance to the population to set free from the Russian's tutelage.

The struggle for the administrative organization of Eastern Rumelia was an example the rivalry of Britain and Russia for securing of geopolitical interest and providing a regional Balance of Power. The compromise of the political demands of the two Great Powers was carried out through the method of introduction of modern institution and liberal principles of governance. Another aspect of the political model named 'Eastern Rumelia' was the establishment of a balance among the local ethno-religious groups of Bulgarians, Greeks and Muslims. As a result from the struggle between the Britain and Russia the province of Eastern Rumelia was granted with an Organic Law, implementing most of the liberal principals, widely detailed and designated strictly the governance authorities. Four years later British authorities confessed that this liberal system was unsuited for a such young nation and the worse think was that the Organic Law was made a prisoner of the interests of the all the Great powers as it could not be changed without their content.⁵⁵ Seven years later the events in the autumn of 1885 proved the artificial character of the province of Eastern Rumelia when the act of union between the Eastern Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria was executed.

⁵⁵ KMF 04, inf. No 215/1, l. 21-41, 7 April, 1884, Philippopolis

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