

From Cooperation to Confrontation: The Collapse of the Reform Concept Led by Austria-Hungary and Russia in Macedonia (1903-1908)

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As two major Great Powers in the geopolitics of the Balkans, the relationship between Austria-Hungary and Russia directly affected the stability of the political situation in Europe and the Balkans. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Austro-Russian cooperation dominated the Macedonian reforms, but with the deepening of the reforms, the structural contradictions between the two countries were fully exposed, and the original cooperative relationship went to a rupture. This drastically changed relationship became an important factor in the restructuring of relations between the Great Powers and the Balkan states before the First World War.

Keywords: Austro-Russian relations, Macedonian reforms, diplomatic game, Balkan Region

Introduction

The Austro-Russian conflict was one of the major factors contributing to the outbreak of World War I. The conflict between the two countries could be traced back to the Crimean War; the original friendly relationship between Austria-Hungary and Russia was gone forever because of Austria's betrayal. During the Austro-Prussian War, Russia watched Austria being defeated by Prussia, which deepened the discord between the two countries. After the Austro-Prussian War, Austria-Hungary was forced to shift its direction of expansion to the Balkans, while Russia, under the influence of Pan-Slavism, was also committed to expanding its influence in the Balkans, and the geopolitical collision between the two countries became more and more intense. With the rise of Germany in Central Europe, Bismarck pushed for Austro-Russian cooperation in order to isolate France, and the Three Emperors' League was the product of a temporary easing of the differences between the interests of the two countries. By the end of the 19th century, as Russia shifted its expansion to the Far East, Austria-Hungary devoted itself to domestic affairs, and the preservation of the status quo in the Balkans became a mutual consensus. The Austro-Russian Agreement of 1897, promoted by Germany, made peace possible if Austria-Hungary and Russia could maintain the balance of power in the Balkans (Seaman, 2003, p. 164). The cooperation between the two countries continued until the Macedonian reforms. How did Austro-Russian cooperation on Macedonian reforms evolve? How did Austro-Russian relations gradually move from cooperation to rupture? What were the

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consequences of the transformation of the relationship between the two countries? This paper will briefly explore these questions.

The Internationalization of Macedonian Issue and the Involvement of Austro-Russian Forces

The Macedonian issue arose in the late 19th century, mainly in the context of the Macedonian revolutionary organizations, which took the advantage of the conflicts between Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the other Balkan states that coveted Macedonian territory, and by means of national liberation movements forced the European Great Powers to intervene in the affairs of Macedonia as a means of urging the Ottoman Empire to carry out reforms and to change the environment in which Christians existed in order to further their efforts to establish a Macedonian nation-state (Gao, 2019).

At the end of the 19th century, in view of the rise of the Macedonian national liberation movement and the crises in the Near East, Austria-Hungary and Russia began to coordinate their actions to restrain the behavior of the Balkan states and the Turkish Empire. In January 1899, Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Goluchowski, when discussing the possibility of a war between the Turks and the Bulgarians with the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Muravyov, stated that if Bulgaria won, Macedonia would be occupied by it, and if the Turkish Empire won, the result could be a Europe-wide crisis, neither of which the two countries wanted. Therefore, the combination of Austro-Russian pressure on the Balkan states could help to stop the outbreak of a possible conflict among the Balkan states (GP, 12. Band, Zweite Hälfte, 1924, S. 523).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Macedonian revolutionary organizations launched a number of armed uprisings aimed at provoking the intervention of the Great Powers in regional affairs, and although the uprisings ended in failure, they succeeded in arousing the sympathy of the Great Powers for the Macedonian Christians. France stated that if there was no change in the Turkish government's policy toward the Macedonians, then what was happening today would certainly happen in the future (DDF, 2^e Série, Tome 2, 1931, pp. 586-587). The implication was that the Great Powers should consider urging the Turkish government to adopt reform measures to quell the unrest. Britain stated that if the Turkish Empire did not quickly alleviate the unfortunate fate of the Macedonian populace, it would soon be faced with a full-scale uprising, the consequences of which would be catastrophic. If the current situation did not change, Britain would demand an extension of the reforms and might consider the independence of Macedonia, at which point the Turkish Empire would lose Macedonia (DDF, 2^e Série, Tome 2, 1931, p. 670). At the same time, the Austro-Russian governments suggested that the Turkish government should take the initiative in carrying out reforms, and if it did not comply, the intervention of the Great Powers would be unquestionable.

As the situation in Macedonia continued to deteriorate, Austria-Hungary and Russia decided to intervene in Macedonian affairs in order to avoid the outbreak of a war among the Balkan states over the Macedonian region, as well as encroachment of the Balkan region, which the two countries regarded as their own sphere of influence, by other Great Powers. Goluchowski stated that the Austro-Russian governments were endeavoring to draw up a plan for improving the administration of Macedonian provinces of the Turkish Empire, and that once the plan was completed, it would be submitted to the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin, who would supervise the reforms undertaken by the Turkish government (BD, Vol. 4, 1929, p. 43). On 21 February 1903, the Austria-Hungary and Russian formally submitted "the Vienna Scheme" (BD, Vol. 5, 1928, pp. 51-53; DDF, 2^e Série, Tome 3, 1931, pp. 115-118) to the Turkish government, requesting the latter to carry out the necessary reforms, and thus the

Macedonian issue formally evolved into a European issue. On 2 October of the same year, in order to quell the regional unrest, the Austro-Russian governments proposed “the Mürzsteg Programme” (ASEE, No. 2 (1904), 1904, p. 51), which involved even more reforms. The Great Powers, in order to secure their respective favorable positions in the Balkans, launched complicated diplomatic games around the implementation of the reform programme.

The Macedonian reforms consist mainly of gendarmerie reform, fiscal reform, and judicial reform. Austria-Hungary and Russia actively led the reform process with the intention of maximizing their respective interests. However, with the deepening of the reform process, the inherent structural contradictions between the two countries became increasingly acute, and the relationship between the two countries eventually broke down irretrievably.

Working Together on the Reform of the Gendarmerie

The implementation of “the Mürzsteg Programme” began with the reorganization of the gendarmerie, as the building of a strong gendarmerie was a guarantee of security, stability, and social order in Macedonia, and a prerequisite for other reforms carried out by the Great Powers.

First of all, on the question of the procedure for the reform of the gendarmerie, Austria-Hungary and Russia did their best to oppose the British proposal. In November 1903, in order to break the Austro-Russian domination of the Macedonian reforms, Britain indicated that it would send a certain number of British officers to the Balkans as soon as possible to assist in the reorganization of the gendarmerie (ASEE, No. 2 (1904), 1904, p. 144). The proposal was positively received by France and Italy. Germany expressed that it was in favor of all measures to achieve peace in the Balkans, but Britain needed to win the prior consent of Austria-Hungary and Russia (ASEE, No. 2 (1904), 1904, pp. 151-152). In December, Austria-Hungary and Russia replied to Britain at the same time. Russia stated that it agreed with British Government’s proposal to organize immediately a gendarmerie in Macedonia, but the immediate priority was for the Turkish government to appoint a foreign general to take the charge of the organization of the gendarmerie. The Great Powers would then assign high-ranking officers to assist the general. The Russian and Austro-Hungarian ambassadors in Constantinople, with the participation of the ambassadors of the other Great Powers, would draw up a note to be circulated to the assigned officers. Moreover, the immediate assignment of foreign officers to Constantinople was premature, as it would stimulate strong resistance from the Turkish government and thus make reform difficult (ASEE, No. 2 (1904), 1904, pp. 152-153). Austria-Hungary supported the Russian proposal that the first step in the reform should be the appointment of a foreign general as head of the gendarmerie. The Austro-Hungarian government attached great importance to the participation of British officers in this work, but hoped that their arrival should be delayed until the time was ripe (ASEE, No. 2 (1904), 1904, p. 153). Austro-Russian cooperation against British approach in the early stages of the reform ensured that both countries would take the lead in reform matters.

In the second place, on the question of the zonal occupation of Macedonia, Russia, constrained as it was by the war situation in the Far East, favored the Austro-Hungarian position in the division of the occupation zones. In a conversation with Goluchowski, Russian Foreign Minister Lamsdorff stated that despite the distractions of Asian affairs, the Tsarist government would not ignore the Macedonian issue and would be happy to provide effective assistance to Austria-Hungary to ensure peace in the region. In addition, he frankly admitted that the Russo-Japanese War would change the deployment of the two countries on the Macedonian issue, so that the Turkish Empire might adopt a belligerent attitude, which would jeopardize the process of Macedonian reforms

(DDF, 2^e S érie, Tome 4, 1932, p. 399). Therefore, in order to secure the superiority of each other, Austria-Hungary and Russia should submit the plan, which had been agreed in advance, to the Great Powers for discussion, so that the other Great Powers would be aware that even if “the Mürzsteg Programme” failed, it did not mean the end of the mission of the two countries and hoped that the two countries would surrender the dominance of the Balkan affairs (DDF, 2^e S érie, Tome 4, 1932, p. 437).

In the end, on the issue of the powers and number of foreign officers, Austria-Hungary and Russia unanimously demanded that the Turkish government should increase the number of officers and extend their powers. The ambassadors of the two countries sent several joint notes to the Turkish government requesting the latter to recognize the execution power of foreign officers, i.e., foreign officers had the right to give orders to Turkish officers and to dismiss from the gendarmerie of the three Macedonian provinces those Turkish imperial officers and soldiers who were not of good physical, intellectual, or moral qualities or who had been subjected to complaints of misconduct or lack of discipline. These dismissed officers and soldiers were to be immediately transferred elsewhere. The Turkish government agreed to receive the foreign officers and non-commissioned officers required for the reorganization of the gendarmerie proposed by the Great Powers (ASEE, No. 4 (1904), 1904, pp. 65-66). At the same time, in order to force the Turkish government to accept the increase in the number of officers, Austria-Hungary and Russia sent officers to Macedonia without prior notice to the former. Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Constantinople, Calice, said that Austria-Hungary and Russia would tell the Turkish government that if it wished to enter into contracts with these new officers similar to those entered into by the previous officers, the embassy would be more than happy to accept such an arrangement, or else the new officers employed would be paid by their respective governments and wear national uniforms to assist their brother officers. “The Mürzsteg Programme” required this form of procedure (ASEE, No. 2 (1905), 1905, p. 68). Subsequently, Austria-Hungary and Russia threatened the Turkish government with coercive measures by the Great Powers and asked it to accept the demands of the Great Powers. In a note sent by the ambassadors of Austria-Hungary and Russia to the Turkish government, it was stated that in view of the disorder and confusion in the Macedonian provinces, it was imperative to employ additional officers. If the Turkish government refused to accept the plan, the Great Powers would embark on a joint action, and France and Italy had already expressed their support for such action (ASEE, No. 2 (1905), 1905, p. 79). Ultimately, the Turkish government was forced to agree to the Austro-Russian plan.

From Crafting Fiscal Reforms to Creating Animosity

The reorganization of the Macedonian gendarmerie was a prerequisite for ensuring regional stability, while the stability and perfect order of the Macedonian finances was a guarantee that the administrative and judicial systems would function properly (ASEE, No. 3 (1905), 1905, p. 4). Thus, as early as the end of December 1904, Russia had already made it clear to Britain that fiscal reform was necessary (ASEE, No. 2 (1905), 1905, p. 114). On January 17, 1905, the Austro-Russian ambassadors sent a plan of Macedonian fiscal reform to the Turkish government.

With regard to the Austro-Russian plan of fiscal reform, Germany considered that the content of the plan far exceeded the framework of “the Vienna Scheme” and “the Mürzsteg Programme”, and feared that the reform would jeopardize its interests in the Turkish Empire, therefore changed its previous attitude of staying aloof from the matter, and chose to actively participate in the reform. Germany stated that it would need a seat on the Finance Committee if international financial control were to be imposed on Macedonia (GP, 22. Band, 1927, S. 216). Britain rejected the Austro-Russian plan on the grounds that it gave two countries too much power. In addition,

Britain actively sought the support of Germany and Italy. Italy resented the fact that it had not been consulted before the Austro-Russian reform plan was put forward, and considered that the way in which the two countries wished to count on the support of the other Great Powers by means of a *fait accompli* was a unilateral action, which ran counter to the spirit of the Concert of Europe established by the Treaty of Berlin. Moreover, the countries of interest mentioned in the reform plan only referred to Austria-Hungary and Russia and did not include Italy (GP, 22. Band, 1927, S. 206). Therefore, Italy hoped that all signatories of the Treaty of Berlin would appoint representatives to monitor the Macedonian fiscal reform together with the Austro-Russian representatives (GP, 22. Band, 1927, S. 247). France took a similar position to Britain and Italy, opposing the Austro-Russian reform plan while mediating British-Russian relations as much as possible. France reminded its ally, Russia, not to lose sight of the fact that the continuation of the Macedonian situation would only favor the expansion of Austria-Hungary, not Russia (DDF, 2^e Série, Tome 6, 1935, p. 79). The Turkish Empire, supported by Germany, rejected the plan with the intention of using the differences between the Great Powers to undermine the implementation of the reform as much as possible. At the same time, it proposed to increase the percentage of tariff revenue to make the implementation of the Austro-Russian plan more difficult.

In order to enable the implementation of their fiscal reform program, Austria-Hungary and Russia agreed in principle to Turkish demand for an increase in tariff rates. But the Austro-Russian adjustment did not resonate with the other Great Powers, with Britain in particular being the most vocal in its skepticism. Britain not only wanted to increase its voice in Macedonian fiscal reform, but also sought to change the Austro-Russian domination into a co-management of the Great Powers. Britain stated that the scope of fiscal reform should be extended to the province of Adrianople, and that Britain, France, Italy, and Germany should each send a fiscal official to assist the Austro-Russian representatives. Austria-Hungary expressed its dissatisfaction with the British statement, believing that it would only anger the Turkish Empire, strengthen its resistance, and encourage the Macedonian population to rebel, which would ultimately hinder the ongoing Austro-Russian reform plan (DDF, 2^e Série, Tome 6, 1935, pp. 87-88). In contrast to the Austria-Hungary's attitude, Russia slowly began to move closer to the British point of view, thanks to French lobbying. After quelling the Anglo-Russian Dogger Bank Incident, Russia tried to get out of the Far East War, suppress the revolutionary movement at home, seek loans from Britain and France to relieve the unbearable financial pressure, and also hope to ease the relationship with Britain and try to use Britain's influence on its ally Japan to minimize the loss in the Far East and to bring the center of gravity of the country back to the Near East. Thus, Russia had a basis for cooperation with Britain on the issue of Macedonian fiscal reform. Eventually, in the face that the Austro-Russian coordination did not go well, Austria-Hungary could only be forced to re-draft a new plan with Russia that basically met the British requirements, the status quo of the Austro-Russian domination of Macedonian reforms was shattered, and the originally cooperative Austro-Russian relationship began to give birth to a rift.

Judicial Reform and the Breakdown of Relations Between the Two Countries

With the end of the Russo-Japanese War, Russia, in order to get rid of the domestic pressure caused by the loss of the Far East War, once again shifted its diplomatic focus to the Balkans, where Austria-Hungary and Russia were competing. As a result, the relationship between the two countries, which had been cooperating on Macedonian reforms, gradually broke down due to the competition for dominance in the Balkans.

Russia took the lead in proposing Macedonian judicial reform and actively pushed forward the reform process, however, Austria-Hungary, for a change, was lukewarm in its response to the Russian proposal. In

addition to the irreconcilable structural contradictions between the two countries in the Balkans, it was also at this time that the growing Austro-Serbian rivalry over Bosnia and Herzegovina weakened Macedonia's position in Austro-Hungarian foreign strategic deployment. After the coup d'état of 1903, Serbia moved towards a diplomatic course of confrontation with Austria-Hungary, seeking Russian protection, and gaining the support of its neighbors for the new government. In addition, Austria-Hungary hoped to make some concessions to the Turkish Empire on the issue of Macedonian reforms in order to gain more rights and interests in the future. Further, Germany's attitude on Macedonian reforms shaped the adjustment of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy. On the one hand, Germany hoped that Austria-Hungary would return more initiative to the Turkish government and give the latter sufficient time and not put further pressure on it (GP, 22. Band, 1927, S. 404-407). On the other hand, in view of the conclusion of the agreements between Britain, France, and Russia, Germany, which had originally intended to break up the Franco-Russian alliance and to restore the traditional friendship between Germany and Russia, realized that it had been deeply isolated. In order to change the status quo, Germany could only support Austria-Hungary's Balkan policy, and Germany's support helped Austria-Hungary to implement a more active foreign policy. Finally, the disadvantages of the Austro-Hungarian dual model of rule became increasingly apparent and became a major factor in limiting the implementation of its foreign policy, which in turn weakened its position in the Macedonian judicial reform. It can be said that the establishment of the dualism became a permanent obstacle to systematic change in the empire (Roshwald, 2001, p. 12).

In January 1907, Austria-Hungary and Russia submitted the joint draft of the judicial reform to the Turkish government, which expressed its willingness to cooperate, but had to wait for a longer period before it could be put into practice. Austria-Hungary welcomed the Turkish government's attitude as a favorable opportunity to develop the latter's autonomy. However, Russia argued that a delay in the judicial reform might provoke discontent among the Macedonian Christians majority and that the reform plan should be implemented immediately (Zaitsev, 1995, pp. 55-57). In June, Russia presented Austria-Hungary with a final plan for the reorganization of the judicial system (Akhund, 1998, pp. 305-306). The plan completely rejected Austro-Hungarian attempts to have Austria-Hungary and Russia dominate Macedonian judicial reform, and instead adopted the British view of co-management by the Great Powers. Austria-Hungary modified the Russian plan by suggesting that the Turkish government should be given full powers to choose the officials responsible for judicial reform (Zaitsev, 1995, pp. 59-61). Russia maintained its position that if Austria-Hungary did not give way on the question, it would then be referred to the ambassadors of the Great Powers in Constantinople for a joint decision (Zaitsev, 1995, pp. 61-63). In addition, Russia actively sought the support of Britain in order to put pressure on Austria-Hungary. Britain, based on the consideration of its global strategic interests, and France's mediation in the Anglo-Russian relationship, indicated that it would stand by Russia and seek to move the relationship in the direction of an Entente (GP, 22. Band, 1927, S. 419; DDF, 2^e Série, Tome 11, 1950, p. 235).

Russia's coordination with Britain, France, and Italy on the Macedonian reforms increased Austro-Hungarian concern over Russian expansion in the Balkans. In order to maximize its Balkan interests, in early 1908, Austria-Hungary put forward the plan for the Novi Pazar Railway, which, once completed, would provide significant support for its hegemony in the Balkans (May, 1938). In addition, the plan ended years of Austro-Russian cooperation in forcing the Turkish government to carry out reforms in Macedonia (Schurman, 2008, p. 7).

Conclusion

The internationalization of the Macedonian issue was an important venue for the diplomatic games of the Great Powers. Austria-Hungary and Russia chose to intervene actively because of their special geopolitical interests in the Balkans. From the reorganization of the gendarmerie to the fiscal reform to the judicial reform, the original Austro-Russian cooperation became untenable due to the deepening of the reforms and eventually broke down. The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909 further deteriorated the relations between the two countries. From 1909 onwards, on the one hand, Russia enacted a new military reform program, increased its defense expenditure, and restored its military power so that it became a decisive force in the Triple Entente, and its threat to Germany and Austria-Hungary became greater and greater (Herrmann, 1992, p. 220). On the other hand, Russia drastically adjusted its foreign relations. Russia not only strengthened its ties with Britain and France, but also actively drew Italy into its fold, and pushed the Balkan states to establish a barrier to prevent Austria-Hungary from expanding its power to other parts of the Balkans. In October 1909, Russia and Italy signed the Racconigi Agreement, in which they agreed to maintain the status quo in the Balkans, and if the status quo became unsustainable, the two countries would promote the development of the Balkan states in accordance with the principle of nationality (GP, 27. Band, Erste Hälfte, 1927, S. 164). In addition, Russia was active in coordinating the conflicts among the Balkan states and helped to establish the Balkan League. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, said excitedly after the establishment of the Balkan League: “Well, this is perfect! Five hundred thousand bayonets to guard the Balkans—this would bar the road forever to German penetration, Austrian invasion” (Taylor, 1954, p. 484). Ultimately, the growing Austro-Russian conflict became an unstable factor in the political situation in Europe, and was an important driving force in the outbreak of the First World War.

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