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Great Britain and the Consular Initiative of the Great Powers in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1875

Abstract: This paper examines on the basis of the British archival records the attitude of Great Britain towards the consular initiative of the Great Powers in August and September 1875. It was the first joint undertaking of the European powers in the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878). In the British view, it was the ambitions of the League of the Three Emperors in the Balkans and Austria-Hungary in Bosnia-Herzegovina that underpinned the initiative. Although the consuls had limited authority, Britain accepted the initiative with reluctance and mistrust – and only after the Ottoman Empire had given its consent. When the League of the Three Emperors proposed more extensive powers for the consuls in order to prevent the failure of their mission, both the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain declined this proposal. This meant that the Consular Mission could accomplish nothing.

Keywords: Great Britain, Great Eastern Crisis, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbs, Austria-Hungary, Consular Mission

Great Britain's policy in the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878 has been discussed in several monographs.¹ This Great Power played the key role in that momentous crisis. However, the British attitude towards the Serbian question, which was central to the uprising in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wars of 1876–78, has not been explored. Serbian historiography has not produced a comprehensive and thorough account of the events that constituted the Great Eastern Crisis either.² Therefore, this paper, which aims to continue earlier re-

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¹ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question. A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1971); R. Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875–1878* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); M. Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

² Nevertheless, there are some important works: M. Ekmečić, *Ustanak u Bosni 1875–1878* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ and Balkanološki inštitut SANU, 1996); V. Čubrilović, *Bosanski ustanak 1875–1878* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ and Balkanološki inštitut SANU, 1996); M. Stojanović, *The Great Powers and the Balkans 1875–1878* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni-

search on Britain's policy towards the Serbian question at the time, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina,³ may be seen both as a study on British foreign policy and as a contribution to Serbian national history and to our knowledge, still not complete, of the Great Eastern Crisis.

There is no study of the consular initiative. It lasted from 19 August to 28 September 1875 and marked the first attempt of the European Powers to take a joint stance in the Great Eastern Crisis. A similar commission composed of consuls appointed by the Great Powers had been formed in 1861, during an earlier uprising in Herzegovina, but it had failed because of the lack of Ottoman support. The main goal of the consular mission in 1875 was to prevent the insurgency from spreading to neighbouring countries and turning into an international crisis. It also ended in failure, but it showed, as will be seen, that London was right in suspecting that the members of the Three Emperors' League intended to take initiative and try to exploit the events in the Balkans to their own benefit.⁴

The intentions of the signatories of the Three Emperors' League had raised doubts ever since it came into being in 1873. Formally, it was a reconstruction of the alliance between Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany, the three strongholds of European conservatism and the guardians of the order established at the Congress of Berlin in 1814–1815. In the spirit of the Holy Alliance, these three empires declared that they would protect the peace of Europe against all revolutionary attempts after the bloodshed of the Paris Commune.

versity Press, 1939). See also the publicist but thorough monograph by V. M. Gutčić, *Opšta i diplomatska istorija ustanka u Hercegovini i Bosni iz 1875–1878*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 2016).

³ For a synthesis on the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, see D. T. Bataković, *The Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina: History and Politics* (Paris: Dialogue, 1996); see also several articles by M. Ković: "Vojvoda Argajl i Istočno pitanje", *Tema: Akademik Dragoljub Živojinović, Mitološki zbornik* 19 (2008), 129–145; "Velika Britanija i Bosna i Hercegovina u Istočnoj krizi (1875–1878)", *Zbornik za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine* 6 (Belgrade: SANU, 2009), 159–173; "The Beginning of the 1875 Serbian Uprising in Herzegovina: The British Perspective", *Balcanica* XLI (2010), 55–71; "Misija Roberta Lojd-Lindzija u Srbiji 1876", *Istorijski časopis* LX (2011), 377–391; "Britanci i Hadži-Lojina revolucija: Konzul Edvard Frimen o pobuni i okupaciji Sarajeva 1878", *Mešovita gradja/Miscelanea, n.s. XXXII* (2011), 381–414; "Dve imperije: Britanci i Osmanlije (1774–1923)", in *Turska: regionalna sila?* eds. M. Djurković and A. Raković (Belgrade: Institut za evropske studije, 2013), 191–204; and "Disraeli's Orientalism Reconsidered", *Serbian Political Thought* 7–13 (2016), 5–14.

⁴ On the 1875 consular mission see D. Harris, *A Diplomatic History of the Balkan Crisis of 1875–1878: The First Year* (Stanford, London and Oxford: Stanford University Press and Oxford University Press, 1936), 88–98; Čubrilović, *Bosanski ustanak*, 87–92; Stojanović, *The Great Powers and the Balkans*, 22–25; Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875–1878*, 23; Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, 21; Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, 90. On the 1861 consular mission see D. Berić, *Ustanak u Hercegovini 1852–1862* (Bileća and Gacko: SPKD Prosvjeta, 2007), 700–770.

The three emperors committed themselves to opposing not just socialists, but also nationalists. They agreed specifically to prevent the realisation of “Greater Serbian” plans and any disturbance of the Balkan *status quo*.⁵

The Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1874–1880) was in control of British foreign policy. He was convinced that the Three Emperors’ League had been formed in order for its members to exploit the decline of France and Britain’s isolation for the purpose of dividing the remaining Ottoman lands. The League had emerged immediately after the defeat of France in the war against Prussia and the North German Confederation. The two western Powers, Britain and France, had for centuries guaranteed the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. On the other hand, the three conservative Powers had been traditional enemies of the Turks. The Romanovs and Habsburgs had waged war against the Ottomans for centuries and expanded their domains at their expense. Furthermore, Russia seized the opportunity offered by the Franco-Prussian War to announce the return of her fleet to the Black Sea, which annulled the most important stipulation of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856.⁶

The Serb uprising in Herzegovina only strengthened Disraeli’s concerns. Both he and the Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby (Edward Henry Stanley, earl of Derby), were convinced that Austria-Hungary had stirred the rebellion. The same was believed in Paris. Indeed, the uprising was preceded by the secret meeting of the Viennese Crown Council in January 1875 which decided that Austria-Hungary would occupy Bosnia-Herzegovina if there was a danger that these provinces might be absorbed by Serbia and Montenegro. The military governor of Austrian Dalmatia, General Gavriilo Rodić (Gabriel von Rodich), undertook a series of measures designed to collect information and strengthen the position of the Dual Monarchy in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In April and May, Emperor Francis Joseph visited Dalmatia and heard the complaints made by Herzegovinian Roman Catholics. He then met in Kotor with the Russian protégé, the Montenegrin Prince Nicholas Petrović, who requested support from the Three Emperors’ League for Montenegro’s territorial expansion into Herzegovina immediately after their meeting. The Herzegovinian Catholics started the rebellion in June 1875. Eye-witnesses reported that Austro-Hungarian flags had been flown over their positions. It was only later that the uprising spread to the Orthodox Christian part of Herzegovina, while it almost died down in

⁵ V. M. Khvostov, *Istoria diplomatii II 1878–1914* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 34–41; G. H. Rupp, *A Wavering Friendship: Russia and Austria 1876–1878* (Harvard, London and Oxford: Harvard University Press and Oxford University Press, 1941), 17–23.

⁶ Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, 76–90.

the Catholic areas. The aid for the insurgents was coming from Dalmatia and Montenegro.⁷

London also suspected Serbia of being involved in Austro-Russian plans to dismember the Ottoman Empire since the time Prince Milan Obrenović had paid visit to Vienna and met Emperor Francis Joseph and Foreign Minister, Count Julius Andrassy, in early August 1875. Moreover, volunteers from Serbia were going to Herzegovina. The suspicions were confirmed by the news that Prince Milan, upon returning from Vienna, had dismissed the peaceful cabinet of Danilo Stefanović. After the election, the winning Liberal and bellicose government of Stevča Mihailović took office. During the consular mission in Herzegovina, reports constantly reached London on volunteers crossing from Serbia into Bosnia, bashi-bozouk detachments making raids from Bosnia into Serbia and troops being gathered on the border between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire.⁸

There were two other bad news that reached the Foreign Office. The rebellion spread to Bosnia on 19 August. On the same day, the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, Count Nikolai Pavlovich Ignatiev, took the initiative that the Powers signatories of the 1856 Paris Treaty send their consuls to Herzegovina in a mediating mission.

That could be the start of a definitive division of the Ottoman Empire between Russia and her allies from the Three Emperors' League. But Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov, Russian Foreign Minister, did not want the situation in the Balkans to deteriorate at that particular moment. He was in favour of the closest collaboration within the League and with other Powers with a view to bringing about a joint solution to Balkan crises. As a diplomat who had matured during the era of the Holy Alliance, he was in principle against all revolutionary turmoil, including the movements of Balkan nationalists. However, the influential Count Ignatiev had no confidence in any agreements with the western Powers which, in his view, used to combine against Russia and he was particularly distrustful of Austria-Hungary. Unlike Gorchakov, he did not want to negotiate about Austria-Hungary's entry into Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to protect Russian interests in the eastern Balkans. He argued for settling disputes in direct cooperation between Russia and Turkey, without any involvement of the western Powers. The aim was to work towards the formation

⁷ Rupp, *Wavering Friendship*, 34–45; M. Ekmečić, *Dugo kretanje između klanja i oranja: Istorija Srba u Novom veku (1492–1992)* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007), 278–279; M. Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 2 vols (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989), vol. II, 283–284; Ković, “Beginning of the 1875 Serbian Uprising”, 55–71.

⁸ Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije*, II, 255–256, 277–282; Č. Popov, “Srbija u Istočnoj krizi 1875–1878”, in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. V-1, ed. V. Stojančević, (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1981), 369–373; Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, 92–93.

of an alliance between the Balkan national states under the auspices of Russia. That alliance and Russia would dismantle Ottoman rule at a favourable moment. Russian statesmen were divided into supporters of Ignatiev's policy and supporters of the much more influential Gorchakov.⁹

The idea of taking consular initiative to deal with the rebellion was ascribed to Gorchakov's people in Russian diplomacy, namely the Consul in Dubrovnik, Alexander Petrovich Yonin, and the Ambassador in Vienna, Eugen Petrovich Novikov. Count Ignatiev was on the leave of absence at the moment when that decision was made in St. Petersburg. Emperor Alexander II, who personally favoured Ignatiev but always sided with Gorchakov, yielded to the demand of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Andrassy, to have negotiations held in Vienna. Shortly before the initiative, in August 1875, a special "consultative conference", a "centre for agreement" among the Powers of the Three Emperors' League was established in Vienna. It was there that the instructions for the consular mission would be formulated in cooperation between Andrassy, pro-Austrian Novikov and the German Ambassador, General Hans Lothar von Schweintz.¹⁰

Ignatiev claimed that Austria-Hungary was involved in the outbreak of the Herzegovinian rebellion. He was bitter because Gorchakov was drawing European Powers, especially those inimical to Russia, into resolving the crisis and because Andrassy was now in charge of the situation. Ignatiev also believed that the rebellion had broken out too early. Austria-Hungary alone could benefit from it and it was thus necessary to make peace between the insurgents and the Turks. But Ignatiev had to follow Gorchakov's instructions. Ignatiev instructed Consul Ivan Stepanovich Yastrebov, who was sent from Shkodra to Herzegovina, to follow what had been agreed in Vienna, to examine together with other consuls what was the real situation and to encourage the insurgents to negotiate with the Sultan's envoy in Herzegovina, Server Pasha.¹¹

At the same time, Ignatiev's main efforts were directed towards preventing Andrassy's initiatives, suspecting them to be designed to lead to the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary. In order to diminish the influence of the Viennese "consulting mission" in the second half of August, Ignatiev summoned in his residence a conference of the Ambassadors of the Great Powers, signatories of the Paris Treaty, to consider together the consular reports and agree on further steps to be taken. Among the decisions reached at that conference, outlined by Ignatiev, it was agreed that all Powers, that is to

⁹ V. M. Khevroлина, *Nikolai Pavlovich Ignatiev: Rosiskii diplomat* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2009), 114–119, 136–151, 186–190, 219–221, 226–266.

¹⁰ Harris, *Diplomatic History*, 72–83.

¹¹ N. P. Ignatiev to I. S. Yastrebov, Pera, 14 August 1875, in *Rossia i vosstanie v Bosnii i Gertsegovine 1875–1878: Dokumenti* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008), 55–57.

say their representatives in the consular mission, make their communications through Yastrebov, who was the only one with codes and special couriers to be in contact with Constantinople. But the idea of a conference in Constantinople failed because of the opposition of Gorchakov and his chief associate in the Foreign Ministry, Baron Alexander Henrikovich Jomini. Ignatiev bitterly noted that another attempt on his part to keep in check Vienna's ambitions in Bosnia-Herzegovina had failed.¹² As British records will show, he would not give up easily.

The British Ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Henry Elliot, reported to Lord Derby on 20 August 1875 on the initiative originating from Vienna which was supposed to be presented to the Sultan on behalf of the Three Emperors' League. In Elliot's view, the purpose of the consular mission was to let the insurgents know that they should give up the rebellion, that they could expect no external support, and to direct them to negotiate with the Sultan's special envoy. The French Ambassador in Constantinople said that his country was prepared to join the initiative. The Grand Vizier was also willing to accept the idea, but he asked of Britain to be part of it. He stressed that the Ottoman government had "perfect confidence" in the British Consul in Sarajevo, William Richard Holmes, who had already been in Mostar.¹³

Disraeli was rather suspicious, but he was left with little choice after the Turkish consent. He told Derby that he "does not like it, but see it is inevitable".¹⁴ Replying to Elliot's dispatch, Derby accepted the participation of Britain in the consular mission, but only "with great reluctance" and because the Sublime Porte had requested it. He underlined that the British government "would have thought it better that the Porte should have dealt with the insurgents, without foreign intervention of any kind".¹⁵ Disraeli, Derby and Elliot made it clear that, in their view, the best solution for the crisis in Herzegovina was a rapid suppression of the rebellion by the Ottomans.¹⁶

Elliot observed that the Porte's success in suppressing the insurrection would depend on the willingness of Austria-Hungary to prevent volunteers, money and munitions crossing from Dalmatia into Herzegovina. An advantage of the consular mission was, in his view, that the Habsburg Monarchy com-

¹² N. P. Ignatiev, *Zapiski (1875–1878)* (Sofia: Otechestveni front, 1986), 78–90; Khevtrolina, *Nikolai Pavlovich Ignatiev*, 262–265.

¹³ The National Archives (TNA), Foreign Office (FO), 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 20 August 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 460), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 20 August 1875.

¹⁴ 24 August 1875, *The Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93). Between September 1869 and March 1878*, ed. J. Vincent (London: UCL, 1994), 239.

¹⁵ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 258), Derby to Elliot, London, 24 August 1875.

¹⁶ Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, 87–90; Harris, *Diplomatic History*, 87–88.

mitted itself to non-interference and cooperation with the other Powers.¹⁷ In a telegram of 27 August, he relayed to Derby the joint instructions for the consuls which stipulated, along with the necessity that the insurgents lay down their arms, negotiate with the Sultan's envoy and abandon any hope in the support of the Great Powers, that the consuls were forbidden to advocate any other measures beyond what the insurgents might agree on with the Porte's representative.¹⁸ Derby was also informed about the instructions which Server Pasha had received just before he had left for Mostar.¹⁹

Elliot forwarded to Derby on 26 August the instructions he had sent to Consul Holmes, a member of the mission. Those were, as had been agreed, in compliance with the instructions of the other Ambassadors in Constantinople. Moreover, Elliot was familiar with the instructions Ignatiev had given to Yastrebov. Holmes was ordered to hear the complaints made by the insurgents so as to be able to report on the real situation, to be reserved and not to give them any reason to believe that they could receive support. It should be made clear to them that there was no prospect whatsoever of receiving assistance from the Great Powers. Holmes had to direct them to negotiating with the Sultan's envoy. The consuls were not expected even to be present during those negotiations. Holmes was supposed to conduct himself in such a manner as to make it clear that he was a representative of a Power friendly to the Ottoman Empire. In particular, he had to avoid anything that might look to the Turks as a joint undertaking of the consuls and to make sure he was working on his own. Holmes was also informed about the pressure which the Great Powers exerted on Serbia and Montenegro to stop them from aiding the insurgents in Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁰

Holmes was the first member of the consular mission to arrive in Mostar on 20 August together with Dervish Pasha, Governor-General of Bosnia unpopular among the local Christians. Even without Elliot's instructions, Holmes' reports brimmed with sympathy for the Turks and hostility to the insurgents. On 22 August he reported that Dervish Pasha cried while he was describing how the insurgents "spitted and roasted two children before their parents, whom they afterwards murdered".²¹ He was dead set against the Christians' demand and the subsequent decision of the Porte to replace Dervish Pasha. He depicted, based on the news he received from the Turks, how the rebels burned Nevesinje

¹⁷ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 25 August 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 474), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 25 August 1875.

¹⁸ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 27 August 1875.

¹⁹ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39, Musurus Pasha to Derby, London, 11 September 1875, Inclosure 1 and 2.

²⁰ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 479), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 26 August 1875, Inclosure 1 and 2.

²¹ TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 22 August 1875.

to the ground and killed all the women and children they laid their hands on in the town.²²

Elliot also claimed, based on Server Pasha's reports from Mostar, that the insurgents "pillaged and destroyed upwards to seventy villages".²³ Commenting on the letters which John Russell, earl of Russell, favourable to the rebels, published in the *Times* and the reports on Turkish atrocities in Herzegovina of the *Times* correspondent, William James Stillman,²⁴ Elliot professed that such writing served only to encourage the rebellion and further aggravate the situation. He argued, contrary to the *Times*, that the rebels were but bandits and that the whole movement was characterized by pillaging and killing of Muslim civilians.²⁵ As it would turn out, this was the beginning of a split in British public opinion in which Elliot would be labelled a soulless executor of the Benjamin Disraeli government's immoral policy in the East.

On 23 September, there were news about the end of the mission and the return of the consuls to Mostar. They reported that the rebels refused to negotiate with the Turks except in the presence of the representatives of Great Powers and demanded an armistice prior to the negotiations.²⁶ That was, however, outside the scope of the consuls' authorisation.

Holmes also reported that the insurgents wanted a ceasefire and a guarantee from the European Powers. Having returned to Mostar on 22 September together with his Russian and French colleagues, he informed Elliot about the failure of the consular mission. He reiterated his conviction that "Serbian agitation" caused the rebellion and that the insurgents would be content to remain under the rule of the Sultan with some improvement in their material situation. The Austro-Hungarian, German and Italian consuls arrived in Mostar the next day.²⁷

Holmes submitted to Elliot a detailed report on the consular mission on 28 September and forwarded it to Derby two days later. The consuls moved

²² TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 30 August 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 2 September 1875.

²³ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 535), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 8 September 1875.

²⁴ See W. J. Stillman, *Herzegovina and the Late Uprising: The Causes of the Latter and the Remedies* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1877); R. Subić, *Stilman i Balkanski ustanci (1866–1878)* (Belgrade: Phoenix Press, 2016), 77–103.

²⁵ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 543), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 10 September 1875.

²⁶ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Buchanan to Derby, Vienna, 25 September 1875.

²⁷ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 6), Holmes to Derby, Mostar, 24 September 1875, Inclosures 1, 2; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 26 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 594), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 26 September 1875.

through Herzegovina in two groups. The British, Russian and French consuls headed to Nevesinje and Gacko, whereas their Austro-Hungarian, German and Italian colleagues went to Trebinje and Zupce.²⁸ From 12 to 22 September, Holmes' group spent their time in Nevesinje and then among the Herzegovinian rebels in Biograd and Trusina. They did not meet with the principal leaders; they were told these were busy fighting the Turks. Still, they managed to gain a clear insight into their demands. After all the failed reforms and agreements, the insurgents did not believe any guarantees coming from Server Pasha and other Turks. They requested the presence and guarantees of the Great Powers in the course of negotiations. The consuls could not promise that, but Holmes nevertheless concluded in his report that under the existing critical conditions the mediation of the Great Powers was a better possibility than the increasingly likely Austro-Hungarian occupation. At the advice of the rebels, the consuls headed to Bileća instead of Gacko, but they were surprised to run into Turkish troops near Stoce marching to attack the insurgents gathered in Trusina for their talks with the consuls. Once they had realised that their lives were in danger, since the Turks attacked the rebels only a few hours after their departure, and that the confidence of rebels in them would be destroyed by the Turkish offensive, the consuls cancelled the visit to Bileća and decided to wait for the return of their colleagues in Mostar.²⁹

A few days later, Holmes was given a detailed memorandum in Italian on the position and demands of the insurgents titled "To the Representatives of European Powers in Bosnia-Herzegovina" and dated 17 September 1875. This "pamphlet", as Holmes called it, was translated into English and forwarded to his superiors in London on 1 October. It was a lengthy and thorough account of all taxes imposed by the state and *sipahis*, and of the available evidence about judicial abuses and the absence of even the basic protection of life, honour and prop-

²⁸ The French Consul in Mostar, Dozon, travelled with Holmes and Yastrebov. The mission which headed to Trebinje in order to meet with Trivko Vukalović, Luka Petković and Mića Ljubibratić in Zupce consisted of the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Shkodra, Von Wassitsch, the German Consul in Dubrovnik, Von Lichtemberg, the Italian Consul in Bosnia and a member of the Danube Commission, Durando. See Harris, *Diplomatic History*, 90.

²⁹ TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 28 September 1875; also see TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 23 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 24 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 26 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 27 September 1875. Elliot also had to report to Derby that the Russian and French Consuls had informed their Ambassadors in Constantinople how the Turks had used the occasion of the meeting between the Consuls and the insurgents to attack the latter. See TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 24 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 607), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875; Harris, *Diplomatic History*, 93.

erty in Herzegovina. In conclusion, it was suggested that Bosnia-Herzegovina be established as an autonomous state with a Christian ruler, or “to put a strong body of troops from some neighbouring State into the principal cities of the Province”, along with the appointment of representatives of European Powers to judicial institutions.³⁰

Holmes had to admit that he could not dispute the content of this document, although he pointed out that it was biased in favour of the insurgents. On the basis of that document and his own observations, he compiled a list of the most necessary tax, judicial and administrative reforms.³¹ Holmes would later report to Derby and Elliot that the author of the memorandum was “a very respectable man, the Catholic Bishop of Mostar”.³²

However, Yastrebov and Ignatiev did not share Holmes’s pessimism. Yastrebov’s report was written with much sympathy for the rebels. He described how they cried while telling him about Turkish atrocities. He enumerated the same complaints as the abovementioned memorandum which clearly had been handed to him as well. His report, however, also contained the complaints by the insurgents about the avarice of the Greek bishops and their hostility to the Herzegovinian Serbs.³³

In conversations with Elliot, Ignatiev criticised the instructions for the consuls coming from Vienna and pointed out Andrásy’s ambitions. For those reasons, he stressed that he preferred the idea of cooperation between all the Powers, signatories of the Paris Treaty of 1856, to the action of the Three Emperors’ League. He assured the British Ambassador that the autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was known to have been championed by Gorchakov, was impossible of achievement. He suggested that the consuls be authorised to discuss matters with Server Pasha and then make a plan of reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He also assured Elliot that all the Ambassadors in Constantinople backed this idea. It was necessary, he claimed, to bring the uprising to an end, secure peace and introduce moderate reforms, which could be applied to other parts of the Ottoman Empire as well. Elliot was satisfied with what he had heard from Ignatiev. However, he rejected the proposal, stating that Turkey and Britain had accepted the idea of the consular mission only with the clear and limited mandate. From a conversation with the French Ambassador in Constantinople, De Bourgoing, Elliot understood that he was prepared to send instructions for expanding the scope of the consular mission. Moreover, Ignatiev handed an official note to Elliot, in which he proposed that the consuls exchange opinions

³⁰ TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 1 October 1875.

³¹ TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 5 October 1875.

³² TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 13 October 1875.

³³ I. S. Yastrebov – N. P. Ignatiev, Mostar, 15 sentiabria 1875, *Rossia i vosstanie v Bosnii i Gertsegovine*, 117–120.

with Server Pasha and then send to the Ambassadors in Constantinople “si c’est possible, un project de solution pratique et acceptable pour tout le monde”. This document also claimed that the Ambassadors of Austria-Hungary, France and Italy were in agreement with such a step. Ignatiev again warned Elliot in a letter of Vienna’s ambitions, suggesting that it would be much better to settle the crisis in Constantinople in cooperation with the Porte.³⁴ However, Elliot remained cautious and persistent, and instructed Holmes again not to participate in the joint actions of the consuls. He asked to be informed about the course of the mission and the discussions with Server Pasha and fellow consuls.³⁵

Andrássy expressed his moderate optimism in a conversation with the British Ambassador in Vienna, Andrew Buchanan, on 23 September. He waited for an official report on the consular mission before considering further measures for calming down the rebellion.³⁶ Four days later, Andrássy still had no detailed information. He then received a telegram from the consul in the presence of Buchanan in which a suggestion was made that negotiations between the insurgents and Turks be held in Dubrovnik with representatives of the Great Powers present. Andrássy considered it too big a concession to be asked of the Turks and expressed hope that the proposal could be modified. He also pointed out to Buchanan his dissatisfaction because of the articles published in the *Times*, which argued for the autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina.³⁷

Odo Russell, Ambassador in Berlin, noted the full unanimity of the members of the Three Emperors’ League in advocating what he described as “improvement of the *status quo*” in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He observed a general favourableness of German public opinion to the insurgents.³⁸ As expected, the news about favourable attitude of Russian public opinion towards the insurgents was coming from St. Petersburg.³⁹ Reports from Constantinople, Vienna, Berlin and St. Petersburg only contributed to London’s fear of the League’s

³⁴ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 565. Very confidential), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 17 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 596.), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 26 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 597.), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 26 September 1875, Inclosures 1, 2, 3, 4.

³⁵ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 26 September 1875.

³⁶ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 303. Confidential), Buchanan to Derby, Vienna, 23 September 1875.

³⁷ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Buchanan to Derby, Vienna, 27 September 1875.

³⁸ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 397. Confidential), Russell to Derby, Berlin, 24 September 1875.

³⁹ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 307. Very confidential), Doria to Derby, St Petersburg, 12 October 1875.

plans. Elliot appreciated that Ignatiev was trying to take over initiative from the hands of Andrásy, but that could not do away with his suspicions.

The League's Ambassadors in Constantinople met on 26 September to discuss the reports of the consuls. The mission could be regarded as a failure, since the consuls reported that the insurgents refused to negotiate without guarantees from the European Powers. The Ambassadors thus broadened the scope of the consular instructions. They were told to have a discussion with Server Pasha after their conversations with the rebels and then to propose measures which would satisfy both sides. The French Ambassador gave his assent later.⁴⁰ On the same day, Ignatiev tried, as has been seen, to win over Elliot for that idea.

On the next day, however, the consuls, including Holmes, accepted the proposal made by the Austro-Hungarian member of the mission, Conrad von Wassitsch, to the effect that following an armistice a conference be organised between the insurgents and Turks in Dubrovnik in which the consuls would also take part.⁴¹ Judging by Andrásy's reaction of the same day, he either feigned surprise in front of Buchanan or was not familiar with the idea of a conference in Dubrovnik.

The Porte, however, firmly refused the broadening of the consular mission. The Grand Vizier, Mahmud Nedim Pasha, informed Elliot as early as 28 September that he had not accepted the proposal for a conference in Dubrovnik between the consuls, Server Pasha and the insurgents. Elliot welcomed such decision, but he suggested to the Grand Vizier to have Server Pasha receive the consuls individually instead of having a conference in order to avoid an incident. After that, Mahmud Nedim Pasha reminded Server Pasha that he was only authorised to listen to the consuls' individual opinions and not to negotiate with them collectively.⁴²

Elliot then found out that it was the German Ambassador in Constantinople, Baron Carl von Werther, who had suggested the failed proposal to the Grand Vizier. Mahmud Nedim Pasha had replied to him that the consular mission had been ended after they had listened to the rebels, relayed to them the views of their governments and received from them a negative answer. But Ignatiev assured Elliot that his German colleague had made no proposal to the Porte and only passed on the view of the consuls.⁴³

⁴⁰ Harris, *Diplomatic History*, 94.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 94–95.

⁴² TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875, 2.50 p.m.; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 604), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875.

⁴³ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic. Confidential), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875, 3.00 p.m.; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 610. Confidential), Derby to

Holmes confirmed, however, that there had been such an agreement. His telegram made it clear that he had agreed to the proposed measures:

My colleagues of Austria, France, Germany and Russia have received instructions to suggest a practical project acceptable to all for the pacification of the country. We agree that the only means would be a recognized constitution: Armistice: Reunion of the Commission with Server Pasha at Ragusa [Dubrovnik], where his Excellency and the insurgents, with the co-operation, of the European Delegates, could easily discuss the details with the Pasha. This must be arranged at Constantinople, and I shall take no steps in this matter, without your Excellency's instructions.⁴⁴

This development was, in fact, a consequence of Ignatiev's initiatives with a view to preventing Austria-Hungary's rule over Bosnia-Herzegovina. But a conference in Dubrovnik was not his idea. After the Turks' rejection and the British resistance, Ignatiev backed down temporarily. He informed Elliot that he had instructed Yastrebov not to exceed the initial mandate of his mission. The French Ambassador in Constantinople did the same.⁴⁵ Elliot then reminded Holmes again of his instructions.⁴⁶ Derby sent a special telegram to approve of Elliot's message.⁴⁷

Ignatiev now claimed that the initiative for expanding the consuls' authorisation had originated with Andrassy and that he had even proposed that a conference in Dubrovnik be held between the consuls and the rebel leaders, without Turkish representatives. The Russian Ambassador continued, however, to persuade Elliot that the Great Powers ambassadors in Constantinople rather than in Vienna should deal with the solution of the crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴⁸

In a long report to Derby written on 28 September, Elliot assessed that at the moment there were two, almost equally bad, possibilities for resolving the crisis. The first one was an intervention on the part of the Three Emperors'

Elliot, London, 28 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 611. Confidential), Derby to Elliot, London, 29 September 1875.

⁴⁴ TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 27 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 600), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875.

⁴⁵ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875, 10.00 p.m.; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 604), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875, 11.00 p.m.

⁴⁷ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39, (Telegraphic), Derby to Elliot, London, 1 October 1875, 2.25 p.m.

⁴⁸ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 606. Confidential), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, London, 28 September 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Confidential. Telegraphic), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 8 October 1875.

League, without other Great Powers, to the benefit of Austria-Hungary, which the British diplomat considered the main threat in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The second possibility was an international conference, which could bring about the harmful involvement of Powers in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, but that would perhaps allow Britain to rein in the ambitions of the League and Austria-Hungary. Elliot did not trust Ignatiev, but he concluded that the latter really aimed at keeping Andrásy in check.⁴⁹

The British Ambassador was thus basically in agreement with Holmes's opinion that European mediation would be necessary after all. More importantly, Elliot was correct in his assessment of Ignatiev's intentions. The Russian Ambassador's initiatives were welcome insofar as they could deepen a rift between St. Petersburg and Vienna and halt Austria-Hungary's thrust in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nevertheless, Britain regarded any broadening of the consular mission as an impingement on the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

The consular mission finally collapsed on 28 September. The last blow was dealt by the Ottomans and British. The Ottoman Foreign Minister, Safvet Pasha, stated to the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Constantinople, Count Ferenc Zichy, that the Porte considered the consular mission over.⁵⁰

The consuls stayed for another several months in Mostar but without any impact on the events. Holmes reported on Server Pasha's declarations of reform to which no one paid any attention.⁵¹ At the same time, he justified his participation in expanding the consular mandate by the danger of Austria-Hungary's expansion into Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia's preparedness to exploit that to realise her interests in other parts of the Balkans. He repeated that it was necessary to cease conflicts and, given the unwillingness of the Turks to undertake reforms, that that was possible only with the mediation of the European Powers.⁵²

Ignatiev turned to his old idea of separate negotiations between Russia and Turkey with a view to persuading the Porte to carry out the necessary reforms. However, the subsequent Sultan's irades and fermans had no effect on the situation in the rebellious provinces.⁵³

Military tension in relations between Turkey and Serbia also subsided. On 4 October, Prince Milan dismissed the bellicose, Liberal, Serbian government under the pressure of the Great Powers. That was welcomed with relief

⁴⁹ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 608), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 28 September 1875.

⁵⁰ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 631), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 4 October 1875.

⁵¹ TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 11 October 1875.

⁵² TNA, FO, 1875, 195, vol. 1061, Holmes to Elliot, Mostar, 13 October 1875.

⁵³ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39, Musurus Pasha to Derby, London, 5 October 1875, Inclosure 1; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 621), Elliot to Derby, Therapia, 2 October 1875.

in Britain's capital.⁵⁴ Satisfied because of the change of government in Serbia, Disraeli wrote to Queen Victoria that "Herz: business seems virtually settled".⁵⁵ The real complications in the Balkans, however, had just started.

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The consular mission of August-September 1875 was the first joint undertaking of European Powers in the Great Eastern Crisis. Behind this initiative the British statesmen saw the intention of the Three Emperors' League (Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany) to dismember the Ottoman Empire. Since the initial news of the uprising in Herzegovina had been received, London regarded the ambitions of Austria-Hungary as the main threat to Turkey.

Indeed, Russia showed willingness to follow Austria-Hungary's initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina on this occasion as well. The idea of the consular mission was a Russian one, but the instructions for the consuls were written in Vienna. Their limited mandate deprived the consuls from any substantial influence on the developments in the rebellious areas. Their failure to win over the insurgents for negotiations with the Sultan's envoy, Server Pasha, without the mediation of European Powers marked the collapse of the mission. It was sealed with the sudden Turkish attack on the insurgents who assembled to negotiate with the consuls. The failed attempt in late September 1875 to have the consuls' authorisation extended and to allow them to compose a plan of reforms resulted from Count Ignatiev's attempt to transfer decision-making with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina from Vienna to Constantinople. He wanted in that way to prevent the sliding of Bosnia-Herzegovina into the hands of Austria-Hungary, contrary to the intentions he sensed in Count Gorchakov's entourage.

The British Ambassador in Constantinople, Elliot, appreciated Ignatiev's intention to oppose Austria-Hungary in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, despite all his mistrust, supported him to that end. Nevertheless, Britain regarded the broadening of the scope of the consular mission advocated by the Three Emperors' League as an encroachment on the rights and the very existence of the Ottoman Empire. The refusal of the Porte to accept that idea and the support Britain extended to it marked the definitive end of the consular mission.

⁵⁴ TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (Telegraphic), White to Derby, Belgrade, 6 October 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 62), White to Derby, Belgrade, 8 October 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 63), White to Derby, Belgrade, 8 October 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 66), White to Derby, Belgrade, 9 October 1875; TNA, FO, 1875, 424, vol. 39 (No. 659), Elliot to Derby, Belgrade, 12 October 1875.

⁵⁵ Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, 92.

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