

# MJSS



MONTENEGRIN JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

Volume 2, 2018. Issue 2.



CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији  
Национална библиотека Црне Горе, Цетиње  
**COBISS.CG-ID 32743952**

**ISSN 2536-5592**

## **Publisher**



**Center for Geopolitical Studies**

Publishing this issue of MJSS was supported by the  
Ministry of Science of Montenegro

Časopis *Montenegrin Journal for Social Sciences* upisan je u evidenciju  
medija, Ministarstva kulture Crne Gore pod rednim brojem 782.

**MJSS**  
MONTENEGRIN JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Volume 2, 2017. Issue 2. Podgorica December 2018.**

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**Montenegrin Journal for Social Sciences is indexed in:** CEOL-Central and Eastern European Online; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; CiteFactor; Scientific Indexing Services (SIS); ISRA-Journal impact factor; Electronic Journals Library; ROAD; General Impact Factor; OAJI - Open Academic Journals Index.

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**www.mjss.ac.me**

**Prepress and print:** Pro file – Podgorica

**Circulation:** 200 copies

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**Međunarodni uređivački odbor:** John K. Cox, North Dakota State University, Fargo, UNITED STATES; Tvrtko Jakovina, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, CROATIA; Lidia Greco, University of Bari, Bari, ITALY; Helena Binti Muhamad Varkkey, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA; Vít Hloušek, Masaryk University, Brno, CZECH REPUBLIC; Adrian Hatos, Universitatea „Babeş-Bolyai” Cluj, ROMANIA.

**Montenegrin Journal for Social Sciences indeksira se u sledećim naučnim bazama:** CEOL-Central and Eastern European Online; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; CiteFactor; Scientific Indexing Services (SIS); ISRA-Journal impact factor; Electronic Journals Library; ROAD; General Impact Factor; OAJI - Open Academic Journals Index.

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**www.mjss.ac.me**

**Priprema i štampa:** Pro file – Podgorica

**Tiraž:** 200 primjeraka

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**Review**

## THE GREAT POWERS AND REFORMS IN MACEDONIA IN 1908.

Nada TOMOVIĆ<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT**

*After the Congress of Berlin, Russia and Austro-Hungary had a major role in Balkan politics. It was in their interest to maintain the status quo in the Balkan region. After the uprising in Macedonia in 1903, these two countries made a reform program that was supposed to be carried out by Ottoman Empire. England and France were against the idea that Russia and Austro-Hungary themselves decide on the reform implementation. While European monarchs were actively involved in negotiations on Macedonia, the Young Turks movement in Ottoman Empire was formed. The Young Turks sought to modernize the social system and stabilize the international status of Turkey. One of the consequences of the Young Turk Revolution was a breakdown in the work on the reforms in Macedonia.*

**KEY WORDS:**

*Macedonia; Russia; Austro-Hungary; Ottoman Empire; Reform;*

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## **SAŽETAK**

*Nakon Berlinskog kongresa, Rusija i Austro-Ugarska preuzimaju ključnu spoljnopoličku ulogu u balkanskoj politici. Održanje takozvanog statusa-quo bio je interes i jedne i druge države. Pobuna organizovana u Makedoniji 1903. godine uticala je da ove dvije države pripreme jedan plan reformi koji je Osmansko carstvo trebalo realizovati. Tim idejama protivile su se Engleska i Francuska a dodatni problem u sprovođenju prvobitnih namjera Rusije i Austro-Ugarske nastali su nakon organizovanja Mladoturskog pokreta u Osmanskom carstvu. Članovi ovog pokreta nastojali su da modernizuju društveni sistem i stabilizuju međunarodni status Osmanskog carstva. Ovaj pokret imaće ključni uticaj na propast planiranih reformi u Makedoniji.*

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** *Makedonija; Rusija; Austro-Ugarska; Osmansko carstvo; Reforeme.*

\* \* \*

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the circumstances within the Balkans started getting out of the Great Powers' control. After the Congress of Berlin (in 1878) the major role in the Balkan policy was in the hands of Russia and Austro-Hungary, and they were the ones with the greatest interest in calming down tensions between the Ottoman Empire and Balkan peoples. By their Agreement of 1897, Russia and Austro-Hungary committed themselves to preserve the *status quo* within the Balkans.

However, the events within Balkans started getting out of control already in 1902. Particularly serious situation was in Macedonia. There was an anxiety about a mass uprising. Policy development in Macedonia gave ground to Russia and Austro-Hungary to intervene (Vojvodic, 113.). They were against shifting the *status quo*, because of the uncertainty of their interests under the newly emerged circumstances (Galkin, 197.). Both, Petersburg Court and Viennese Court could not stop the movements in Balkans. In 1903, an uprising broke out in Macedonia, against the Turkish rule. It was an independent internal movement, without any reliance on any Balkan country. In a relatively short time, Turkey managed to put down the uprising (Galkin, 197.). Facing a danger to have the Eastern Question arisen once again, Austrian and Russian diplomats developed the Programme of Reforms intended for Macedonia. Due to that, in Mürzsteg (Styria), Franz Joseph and Nicolai II met. The Mürzsteg Programme signified the Russian-Austrian Agreement of 1897 extension, specifically the preserving of the *status quo* within the Balkans.

On October 24<sup>th</sup> 1903, Russia and Austro-Hungary's envoys tabled to the British Government the Programme of Reforms designed for Macedonia. According to that Programme, Russian and Austrian civil agents should have performed both overseeing the implementation of reforms and reporting thereof to their respective Governments. The Gendarmerie establishment was entrusted to one foreign general. After calming Macedonia down, it was suggested to have the ethnic groups classified by means of administrative division. Administrative boundaries would have been changed in such manner to create districts with the highest possible ethnic homogeneity in them (Pavlovic, 248.). Besides, the Programme provided for to have the Christians more involved in governing and judicial institutions' operating and one interethnic commission engaged in investigating political crimes, and also the Chris-

tian refugees' damages compensated and their homes and schools reconstructed by the Ottoman Porte. The Mürzsteg Programme also provided for the dissolution of irregular army -bashi-bazouks (Vinogradov, 28.).

By 1906, the Ottoman Porte had fulfilled the major portion of obligations set out by the Mürzsteg Programme of Reforms. After the deadline expiration, the Great powers sent the Sultan a request for the extension of the Macedonian reform authorities' power. The Sultan was clear that the submitted request initiator had been the English chargé d'affaires based in Tsargrad (Constantinople), but he hoped for the Russian support. However, the Russian chargé d'affaires advised him that it was in the interest of Turkey to agree on the Great Powers' collective note (Pavićević, 149.).

On December 29<sup>th</sup> 1907 / November 1<sup>st</sup> 1908, the Great Powers' representatives meeting in Tsargrad concluded that the Ottoman Porte should be put on notice that the international authorities' powers must be obeyed unconditionally. Besides, it raised a question about judicial reforms implementation by the Ottoman Porte. Each of the representatives should have asked instructions from their respective governments.

The French envoy requested the Russian envoy Zinoviev to provide his opinion concerning what Russia and Austria—that had initiated the judicial reforms—were intending. He responded that the Russian project had been approved by other countries and that all the Great Powers were equally interested in the said reforms success. <sup>2</sup>

Although the leading European Powers were interested in the implementation of reforms in Macedonia, there were also disagreements among them because each one was bringing their respective interests to the fore. France was monitoring with concern what Russia and Austria's intentions were because if the application of rigorous measures against Turkey had been resorted to, the French capital losses would have been enormous given that French investments in Turkey were then estimated at half a billion francs.

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<sup>2</sup> The Great Powers were anxious about Serbia and Greece's conquering aspirations to Macedonia, which would mean a disturbance to the European Balance and, therefore, they wished to have the reforms implemented under the international overseeing.

With reference to the reforms, Germany aspired to present themselves as Turkey's protector. The German envoy based in Tsargrad, namely Baron Marshal as a former member of the judicial portfolio could not approve the idea of establishing a foreign control over the judiciary and the fact that the actual opinion would hurt the religious experience of Moslems.

The Italian official circles were of the opinion that it was necessary to wait for a while so as to get the Ottoman Porte's approval for the requirements posed by the Great Powers (Pavićević, 62.).

The Ottoman Court took the advantage of the disagreements among the Great Powers and their being absorbed in colonial matters, to prolong the judicial reforms implementation. In addition, frequent arguing and conflicts among the very Balkan peoples favoured them.

The Serbian Court with special attention monitored how the Great Powers had devised the reform implementation while expecting their extending also to the Old Serbia. The Serbian diplomatic representatives' correspondence—from London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Petersburg—with the Foreign Affairs Minister Nikola Pasic, affords the conclusion that they were very sceptic. As an example, here is what the then Serbian envoy based in Rome, namely Milovan Milovanovic's stance was. He was of the opinion that England—that was for the reforms as soon as possible, drew the attention from the Balkans to other matters such as Marocco and the Japanese-American relations. Russia was all about resolving their internal policy crisis, whereas their foreign policy gave the priority to the Far East policy. Due to the goals that they had set out to themselves, Austro-Hungary could not find true interests in forcing the Ottoman Porte to approach to reforms. On the other hand, as an ally of Germany, they could not distinguish themselves as a rival to the German's Balkans-related policy (Vojvodić -Aleksić-Pejković, 289.)

Although they had developed the Programme of Reforms for Macedonia together with Russia, the ruling circles in Vienna opposed the Russian dedication to have the reforms spread out and introduced into the western areas of the Vilayet of Kosovo, i.e. the largest region of the Old Serbia, for which they had not been envisaged, whereas primarily due to the fact that the Austrian presence in Sanjak of Novi Pazar would have been endangered then (Vojvodic, 281.).

The Russian official circles faced discords regarding the reforms in Macedonia. The far conservative powers of the Russian Empire, the Court circles and a portion of nobility advocated for the opinion that the “guardianship” of Macedonia should be extended together with Austro-Hungary, in the spirit of the Mürzsteg Agreement. According to the Russian Court circles opinion, in an event of Vienna’s opposing to the Russian dominant influence, an alliance with the Balkan countries should have been established along with the reliance on England, which should have stood for the first serious move to resist Austro-German plan for raiding the East. On the other hand, there were circles close to the Foreign Affairs Minister Izvolsky, who was dealt a severe blow because Austro-Hungary was not hiding their own interests. Those were in favour of making bonds with England because, according to their opinion, only England was advocating for improving the Christian population position in Macedonian. The European Programme of Reforms defeating would have caused Russia to suffer huge detriment because Russia had stepped forward as a traditional patron of Slavic peoples, which would have had an adverse effect on its reputation (Pavicevic, 71.).

England was heightening the Programme of Reforms according to which Macedonia should have appointed the Governor General to oversee the reforms implementation course. Besides, England also was stressing the necessity of re-rising the question about judicial reforms implementation, as soon as possible. However, Turkey did not accept the English proposal, but was ready to have civil agents and financial delegates’ term of office prolonged—which it had been hesitating to do until then. Besides, Turkey considered that the English proposal served only Bulgarian interests. The English proposal received neither Austro-Hungary nor Germany consent (Vojvodić Mihailo, Aleksić-Pejković, 608.). France also was reserved to the English proposal concerning Macedonian Governor who would have been accountable to the Great Powers, due to the opposition by Austro-Hungary and Germany, and maybe by Russia as well, while primarily by the Sultan (Vojvodić Mihailo, Aleksić-Pejković, 609.).

England was very tired of the European diplomacy’s unsuccessful moves concerning the Macedonian Question resolving; therefore, the English Minister Edward Grey developed his own plan for resolving the Macedonian Question.

The essence of the English proposal came down to the following:

1. it was allowed to have the Macedonian Governor General (a Muslim or a Christian) appointed by the Ottoman Porte, provided that it was not allowed to have him replaced without the great Power's consent;
2. civil agents, financial advisors, foreign officers and the Gendarmerie should be in addition to the Governor General;
3. the number of the reform Gendarmerie members was to be increased, along with granting the right to European officers to command and not to be nothing more than instructors as it had been the case until then;
4. judicial reforms;
5. reducing the number of Turkish troops in the reform Vilayets;
6. guaranteeing completeness by the Great Powers; (Vojvodić Mihailo, Aleksić-Peković, 639.).

Concurrently with the English proposal, the Russian Government developed their own Draft Programme of Reforms, which in essence comprised the following:

1. given that the Great Powers could not agree on a governor general appointment, his removing from office did not require a consent of all countries;
2. the French, English, German and Italian representatives to the Financial Commission were under obligation to accept the financial control by Russian and Austrian civil servants;
3. assigning to the Financial Commission a general who would carry out the Gendarmerie reorganization;
4. the Financial Commission members, civil agents and assistants to the General, who would manage the Gendarmerie reorganization, were allowed to be in Turkey service;
5. the Programme of Judicial Reforms should be implemented fully by the Ottoman Porte, whereas the court operations would be under the Financial Commission supervision;
6. for the sake of rural population security, there would be established rural-level patrols overseen by the European officers;
7. it was allowed to have the Gendarmerie officers number increased in certain areas, which depended on the Macedonia Budget funds availability.

The Russian Programme of Reforms was served to the Austro-Hungarian envoy in Petersburg, with the annotation that it was the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister's response to the English Programme of Reforms.

As it is obvious, they in Petersburg did not fully approved the English Programme of Reforms.

The Russian project essence was that it had provided for more rights and responsibilities to be delegated to the financial civil servants; their status to be superior to the Austrian and Russian controllers; and the right to have the Turkish courts controlled (AS – 21. 03. 1908.).

Germany, France and Italy accepted the Russian proposal reforms (Galkin). Serbia requested Russia to extend the reforms to the whole Vilayet of Kosovo including Sanjak of Pljevlja and Sanjak of Sjenica as well as to have the Serbian people in Turkey and other peoples to enjoy their recognized ethnic group statuses respectively (Vojvodić Mihailo, Aleksić-Pejković, 720.). Besides, it was ordered to the Serbian envoy to Tsargrad to request the Ottoman Porte to intervene with the Great powers not to have the Sanjak of Novi Pazar separated from the Vilayet of Kosovo (Vojvodić Mihailo, Aleksić-Pejković, 291.). The Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Izvolsky asserted that the Serbian request was justified, but that raising that question at that moment was not convenient because of both it was necessary to obtain the Ottoman Porte's assent first and there were the Great Powers' demands concerning the reforms, but also because thereby the Arbanasi People Question—being as it was closely related to the Serbian request—would have been raised (Vojvodić Mihailo, Aleksić-Pejković, 743.).

Since the Great Powers started working out their plans to undertake reforms, the Macedonian secret movement also started devising plans to gain both the Republic and the Constitution. In Macedonia, anarchy reached its peak and Komitadji and Chetnik rebel bands (chetas) activities were in such full swing that the Macedonian Inspector General Hamil Pasha was not capable of keeping any order; moreover, he was inciting peoples against each other, believing that it was the better way to keep the Sultan's rule (Hvostov, 644.).

The Anglo-Russian Agreement of Reval (Tallinn)<sup>3</sup> actually meant the defeating of the Austro-Russian agreement on joint control in Macedonia and abandoning the *status quo* policy within the Balkans. The Russian Minister Izvolsky did not accept the English dominance in resolving the Macedonian Question, so he publicized the Russian version of the reforms. The new Russian project corresponded to the English one proposed by Edward Grey and concerning the fundamental matter of replacing the Russian–Austrian control in Macedonia by the international one (Pavicevic, 32.).

While monitoring the Russian diplomacy intentions, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Affairs Minister Aehrenthal, by his actions undertaken thereafter, made it known that Austro-Hungary wanted to depart from the *status quo* policy. He very openly made that known to the Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand, in their meeting in March 1908. At that time, Aehrenthal openly asserted that the Vienna Cabinet would not stick to the *status quo* at any price because of the reversals of the Russian policy. Upon Prince Ferdinand warning that that could lead to making complications in the relations between Russia and Bulgaria, the Austro-Hungarian Minister promised their support.

The reversal of the relations between Russia and Austria was in favour of England. The English Government realized that their opportunities increased considerably as regards the Near East policy. That was also contributed by the Macedonian state of affairs complicating and the Young Turk Movement strengthening. Vienna considered London Cabinet actions as a kind of unhidden challenging the Austrian and German Courts. Austro-Hungary and Germany believed that the British initiative for the Macedonian reforms implementation was aimed at putting Turkey under the British patronage (Hvostov, 644-655).

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3 [In Reval (tallinn), in June 1908, the English King Edward VII and the Russian Tsar Nikolai II met. That was the very first visit of a British ruler to Russia. The major portion of negotiations concerning the reforms in Macedonia took place between the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Izvolsky and the Great Britain Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Harding. The Russian side was aspiring to have the two countries agreed on the Macedonian particular reforms-related matters such as the railroad construction for the Balkans; measures to be undertake as regards the revolution in Persia; and alike. As for the matter of general political bonding, the Russian side a very cautious stance. No general political or military agreement was entered into. Although the said meeting provoked curiosity and concerns of both the German and the Austro-Hungarian official circles, one of its practical aims was to have the agreement on the Programme of Reforms in Macedonia (A. J. Taylor: *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918*, Sarajevo, 1968, 408)]



While the European Courts were negotiating the Macedonian reforms with each other, the Ottoman Empire faced the emergence of the Young Turk Movement aspiring to modernize the system of the society. The Young Turks wished to have reforms in place to prevent any further internal crises and to stabilize Turkey's international position. With that aim, they were striving to get both Albania and Macedonia peoples support and in return promised them a broad autonomy within the reformed Turkey (Vukcevic, 50.). The Young Turk Movement transferred their activities to the European Turkey region. The largest number of the Young Turk Boards was established in Macedonia. The said Boards maintained the connections with the Balkan people liberation movements. The Movement interconnected themselves with the army, given that the country's citizenship had not been developed. In early July 1908, the majority of the Vilayet of Kosovo garrison officers were attracted to the Movement. The uprising had respectively spread throughout Macedonia, overtaken the Turkish Third Army and overwhelmed Thessaloniki where the Constitution of 1876 was proclaimed. The Macedonian rebels were joined by the Asia Minor troops. The Sultan was forced to admit the Young Turk Revolution victory (Djordjevic, 128.).

Upon the Young Turk Revolution victory in 1908, it seemed as if both the society transformation would take place and the parliamentary system's liberal ideas would be adopted. The respective Macedonian and Serbian populations were thrilled to accept the constitutionality, while believing that the Young Turks would make their promise of the Christian population autonomy improvement true (Djordjevic, 128.).

The political freedoms period in the Ottoman Empire was not long lasting one. Macedonia again faced the setting up of *Komita* rebel bands that withdrew into the forests. (Djordjevic, 129.). All of that indicated that the Balkans would become a new European crisis arena.

After the Young Turk Revolution victory, the European diplomacy was more and more confused about the Albanian policy reversal, which for sure was related to the Young Turks. According to the Skopje Civil Agency's Russian manager, namely Pe-trayev reports, the Albanian Movement was against a foreign control in Macedonia and particularly against the privileged position of Russia and Austro-Hungary in Macedonia (Pavicevic, 294.). Therefore, the Vienna Court was intending to withdraw their officers, while implying that the reforms implementation was impossible. The

Austrian officers' expulsion gave the Austrian Government an opportunity both to excuse themselves to Europe for their reforms failure and to pretend that they were the victim (Pavicevic, 311.). The Austro-Hungarian officials were of the opinion that the Sultan should both oppose to the Young Turk Movement and consider the British proposal to have the Gendarmerie and the Army to act jointly against the outlaws (Pavicevic, 315.). England, as the one most worried by the events in Turkey, soon realized the essence of the Young Turk political platform and, therefore, started investing their efforts to make a connection with them while believing that in such way they would eliminate the German influence. The most effective way of displacing the German influence was a financial support proposed after the Revolution victory to the new Turkish Cabinet (Pavicevic, 315.).

Because of the Young Turk Revolution victory, the Europe region of the Turkish Empire ceased the reform-related activities because, according to the Constitution, all the Ottoman Empire citizens had allegedly become equal and all future administrative changes should be resolved by means of legislation in the Turkish Parliament (Vukcevic, 50).

Even if the Young Turk Movement had not taken place, the Great Powers could not reach an agreement on the matter of how to have the reforms implemented. There was no sincere cooperation among them. Each of them was working out their own way to strengthen their own position within the Balkans or even within the very Turkey. The Balkan peoples' interests had always been in the shadow of their respective ones and for that reason the Programme of Reforms failed.

After the Young Turk Revolution Victory, each of them was trying to strengthen their own influence on the new Turkish Government. Russia was the initiator of removing foreign officers—who were serving police forces in Macedonia—from Macedonia. A special envoy was sent to Tsargrad, assigned to assert—in the meeting with the Young Turk Movement leaders—that Russia was supporting the new Turkish administration. In their struggling to strengthen their influence in Turkey, Russia faced strong competitors. The strongest influence belonged to England. Germany intended to renew their agreement with Turkey, on the railroad construction in Asia Minor. France approved a new loan to the Ottoman bank. Besides, England, Germany and France promised to send their advisors, for the purposes of the Turk-

ish Fleet, Army and finance reorganization. Austro-Hungary and Russia did not manage to strengthen their respective influence within Turkey. The Dual Monarchy was concerned about the position of the Provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina—that, according to the Congress of Berlin decisions, the Monarchy was allowed to conquer. There was a danger of introducing the Constitution there by the Young Turks and, thereby, of their getting the right to send their envoys to the Tsargrad Parliament; in such event, Austro-Hungary would lose them. That was what influenced Vienna to undertake measures aimed at safeguarding their interests, while acting along with the support from Petersburg. Such support would very soon be gained. Already in September 1908, the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Foreign Affairs Ministers agreed, in Buehlau near Vienna, that Russia would approve Bosnia and Herzegovina annexation by Austro-Hungary in return for the Russian war ships free transiting through Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The Russian Minister Izvolsky counted that the Austrian ally Germany would not oppose the said Agreement. France and England alliance relations with Russia were also in favour of the said diplomatic step. It was believed that Turkey would be reconciled to the Great Powers will (Ignatyev, 737.).

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