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SERBIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND THE 'BOSNIAN QUESTION' IN THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF THE TREATY OF BERLIN**

Abstract

Despite aspirations for expansion into Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1844 and Ilija Garašanin's Načertanije, Serbia was too weak to actively pursue its foreign policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). However, the insurrections of the Christian (both Orthodox and Catholic) population against the Ottoman Empire turned BiH not only into the nexus of South Slavic imaginings of nationhood but also into an ideal site for the development of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878), followed by Balkan rebellions, such as the Serbian Wars of Independence (1876–1877 and 1877–1878), and the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). This paper aims to offer a general analysis of Serbia's sovereignty within the kaleidoscope of the Treaty of Berlin (1878), while also providing insights into the geopolitical impact of the "Bosnian Question" on Serbian state- and nation-building processes. Namely, due to its pivotal geostrategic importance, Serbia and the region of BiH have always had to maintain the ability to strategically navigate their nationalist interests in the context of divergent geopolitical aspirations. By relying on historical analysis backed up by a qualitative methodology encompassing narrative and descriptive approaches, and by an analytical framework that includes comparative and case studies related to operationalization of sovereignty in Serbia and (BiH), this research analyses geopolitical interests of historical Great Powers toward the Balkan region, framing the Congress of Berlin not just as a historical precedent but as a paradigmatic moment that articulated a durable paradigm of conditional sovereignty, underscoring the structural continuities between nineteenth-century Balkan arrangements and the evolving architectures of modern international governance.

Keywords: Serbia, Balkan uprisings, Eastern Crisis (1875–1878), Great European Powers, Congress of Berlin, sovereignty, Bosnian question, geopolitics

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1885) was marked by intense diplomatic and political upheavals tied to Europe's attempt to resolve the so-called "Eastern Question," which stemmed from the Ottoman Empire's decline and the uprisings across the Balkans.[1] As the Empire lost control over its territories in Southeastern Europe and the Middle East, the Balkan region gained heightened strategic significance for the Great Powers. The Serbian uprising in Herzegovina in July 1875, followed by revolts in Bosnia, the Bulgarian insurrections of April– May 1876, and the war waged by the autonomous principalities of Serbia and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire in June– July 1876, transformed the Eastern Question into a central issue of European politics. The Serbian uprising of July 1875 spread into parts of the Novi Bazar Sanjak, beginning in Priboj under the leadership of clerics such as Pop Žarko and Prokopije Bujišić. Rebels attacked Ottoman posts, burned inns, mosques, and villages, and briefly captured Priboj, devastating the area between Višegrad, Nova Varoš, and Sjenica. In response, Ottoman reinforcements were dispatched from central regions, with troops moving through Novi Bazar, Sjenica, and Nova Varoš toward Bosnia, and even Egyptian units temporarily deployed. Meanwhile, Užice became a hub of Serbian propaganda and volunteer recruitment, supplying arms and men to insurgents across the border. By mid-1876, around 2,000 volunteers had gathered, reviving historic Serbian banners in preparation for war (Bandžović 2019, 212–214).

Confronted with continued unrest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the economic difficulties facing Egypt and the Ottoman Empire,[2] both the British public and policymakers were compelled to reassess Britain's commitment to preserving Ottoman territorial integrity, as well as the broader inter-European dynamics that threatened to undermine Britain's imperial interests.[3]

[1] The Eastern Crisis intensified as Ottoman efforts at administrative centralization clashed with Christian minorities' drive for autonomy and independence, turning the conflict between rulers and subjects increasingly violent (Yapp 1987, 59).

[2] Foreign support for the Ottoman Empire began in the Crimean War (1854–1856), when Britain and France allied with it against Russia, and grew over the next two decades until the Empire's bankruptcy in 1876. The Imperial Ottoman Bank, established in London in 1856, depended on British creditors, while economic crises in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt (1875–1876) destabilized the Great Powers, especially France and Britain as key financiers. Despite reform efforts by the Sublime Porte, the Empire continued to face deep economic and political decline.

[3] At the start of the Eastern Crisis, the Great Powers aimed to uphold the 1856 tripartite alliance of Britain, France, and Austria to protect Ottoman integrity. However, Germany's

Moreover, reports of the so-called "blood horrors," referring to atrocities carried out by Muslim paramilitary groups against Bulgarian Christians, had an unprecedented impact on Western powers, reshaping their Orientalist perceptions and straining the Ottoman Empire's ties with the Balkans. Throughout the Eastern Crisis, both Britain and other European elites, including Russia, developed strong anti-Ottoman sentiment. In fact, the Bulgarian Crisis of 1876–1878 acted as a catalyst, reinforcing long-standing cultural prejudices that portrayed the Turks as barbaric and oppressive, and the Ottoman Empire itself as the "Ottoman peril" (Said 1978, 59–60).[4] In addition, Victorian British elites influenced the transformation of Britain's Eastern policy through the rivalry between Conservatives and Liberals. The traditional Palmerstonian approach had favored the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russian expansion in the Balkans, the Black Sea, and potentially toward India. As a defender of Ottoman territorial integrity, this policy – endorsed by the Conservative government under Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (later the First Earl of Beaconsfield, 1804–1881) – sought to preserve the European balance of power while advancing British interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet Disraeli's support for the Ottomans was driven more by pragmatic aims and realpolitik than by ideology, with his strategy focused squarely on securing England's standing within the framework of great power politics.[5]

Nonetheless, the turning point in this dynamic was driven not only by the democratization of the British Parliament during the 1860s and the rise of political liberalism, but also by the growing influence of the press in shaping public opinion and alternative approaches to foreign policy. The British government faced mounting criticism and internal divisions over its efforts to uphold Ottoman territorial integrity. Guided by his "Catholic Christianity, Liberalism, European outlook, and democratic sympathies" (Shannon 1963, 89), yet simultaneously advancing an imperialist agenda,

Prussian-led unification and Bismarck's realpolitik unsettled the Near Eastern balance established after the Crimean War, enabling Russia at the London Conference of 1871 to restore its naval power and militarize the Black Sea.

[4] Even before the Eastern Crisis, Europeans portrayed the Ottoman Empire and Turks as uncivilized – associating them with Islam, laziness, polygamy, feudalism, and backwardness – while constructing their own image as liberal, progressive, and the embodiment of civilization (Rodogno 2012).

[5] In 1876, Disraeli's Cabinet, pressured by public outrage over Bulgarian atrocities and domestic shifts, aimed to safeguard Britain's strategic interests and control of the Turkish Straits without overtly backing the Ottomans. Germany's unification after the Franco-Prussian War disrupted the European balance of power, weakening France's role, though this dynamic was later altered by the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894 (Ghosh 2025).

William Gladstone – former Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Party – argued that Britain had a responsibility to defend Christians and the "profound interests of humanity." He insisted that Britain, together with "civilized Europe," bore the duty of eradicating Turkish power in Bulgaria (Gladstone 1876, 13, 19, 37–38).[6] Thus, as a result of their sympathy for the oppressed Ottoman Christians, the British middle class grew more hostile toward the Ottomans, viewing Islam as a rigid and regressive faith resistant to progress and civilization. In this context, they portrayed the Turks, along with local Muslims from Bosnia, Herzegovina, and other Slavic regions, as uncultured and barbaric (Todorova 2009, 97).[7] Furthermore, although Russian foreign policy had remained largely measured and pragmatic after its defeat in the Crimean War, Britain's political elite continued to view the Russian Empire as a major imperial threat. Reinforced by widespread Russophobia, Russia was portrayed as the principal external force behind the Balkan uprisings (Schumacher 2012).

Considering that the Crimean War (1853–1856) had split the Concert of Europe into rival blocs, the Great Powers – signatories of the Treaty of Paris – held a shared conviction that any changes to borders or the creation of new independent states required collective agreement. Yet the era of imperialism fostered highly self-serving and aggressive power politics (Čalić 2020, 286). At the same time, the rise of nationalism among the Slavic peoples of the Balkans after the Crimean War could not be ignored. By the onset of the Balkan Wars, all four Balkan Christian states – Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria (with Montenegro still closely tied to a Serbian proto-national identity) – had become deeply infused with mass nationalist sentiment (Marković 2013, 245).[8] As the largest Slavic group in the Balkans and a semi-independent nation,[9] the Serbs – engaged with the

[6] The British Parliament closely followed the rise of anti-Turkish sentiment, which repeatedly demanded an end to Ottoman rule over Christian territories – first during the Greek War of Independence, and later in the Lebanon crisis of 1860, the Serbian events of 1862, and the Cretan uprising of 1866.

[7] The term civilized delineated not only the British from the Ottoman, but also the European from the non-European.

[8] Between 1831 and 1872, the Orthodox Church's ethnicization was pivotal in shaping Balkan national movements. It fostered ethno-religious proto-national identities among Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Macedonian Slavs, which gradually developed into full national identities during the 19th century (Marković 2013).

[9] The First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813), seen as the Serbian Revolution, fostered a new national ideology shaped by Enlightenment-influenced Serbian Josephinists among Hungarian Serbs, laying the foundation for modern Serbian identity (Stoianovich 1994, 172, 174). Serbia achieved de facto autonomy in 1815, and by 1830 this autonomy was formally recognized by Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and European Powers. Under Prince Miloš

labor movement in Central and Western Europe and influenced by modern socialist ideas – viewed their national aspirations as a powerful means of uniting the South Slav territories (McClellan 1966).[10] Nevertheless, the surge of nationalism in the Balkans inherently encompassed ethnic diversity and fostered conflicting national aspirations, which proved difficult for the Great Powers to manage or contain. The Congress of Berlin (1878) exemplified the Great Powers' attempt to manage the Balkan Question through negotiated equilibrium rather than regional consolidation. Ethnic complexities and unresolved national aspirations ensured that territorial settlements remained provisional and contested (Ekmečić 1981, 94). The guiding principle was the prevention of a Balkan hegemon, achieved by redrawing boundaries and curbing Russian ambitions toward the Bosporus, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. The resulting distribution of territories – Austria-Hungary's acquisition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Britain's control of Cyprus and eventual penetration into Egypt, and France's expansion into Tunisia – illustrates a form of "balkanization from above," a showcase of diplomacy as a calculated craft.

In this context, the Prussian triumph over France in 1870–1871 paved the way for Germany's long-awaited unification into a single nation-state, dramatically reshaping the European balance of power. With France's influence diminished, Germany assumed its role as a leading power and the new focal point of European diplomacy. Although Austria introduced a revised policy toward Germany in 1871, the Hungarian foreign minister, Count Julius Andrassy, was reluctant to reassert Austria's involvement in German affairs. Concerned about the ambitions of Russia, Austria's eastern neighbor, Andrassy focused instead on blocking any attempt to establish a large Slavic state south of Austria (Bridge 1972, 50).[11] Hence, up until the Berlin Congress of 1878, Islam was not actually recognized as a European religion and peace treaties did not allow for Muslim religious or

Obrenović, the Hatt-i Şerif secured an autonomous Serbian Church, with ethnic Serbs appointed as metropolitans and bishops from 1831 onward (Marković 2013, 201, 231).

[10] In the mid-1870s, Serbia sought territorial expansion and formal recognition of its independence by petitioning the Ottoman High Porte for authority over Bosnia, using the uprisings there as leverage. Austria-Hungary initially supported the move, but the involvement of Britain, Austria-Hungary, and Russia shifted the issue to the Constantinople Ambassadors' Conference (December 1876–January 1877) (Pandevska 2022, 79–80).

[11] After 1871, Slavic agitation made the Balkans a potential expansion zone and threat to Austria-Hungary's borders. Prince Milan Obrenović, pressured by liberal and nationalist circles to fight the Ottomans, initially resisted under Prime Minister Kaljević's weak "First Action Ministry." He later shifted toward the liberals, forming the "Second Action Ministry" with Stevča Mihailović as Prime Minister and Jovan Ristić as Foreign Minister (Bartulović and Ranđelović 2012, 72; Stoianovich 1959, 261).

national minorities to exist within European states. What Ekmečić calls the "iron law" of forcing Muslims to migrate from conquered territories remained in effect until Austro-Hungarian interests reshaped the situation in 1878. Consequently, Muslim demands for protection and self-determination were met with skepticism in Berlin. However, by then, the Ottoman Empire had ceased to be a major European power, though it was granted "one more generation of life" – about thirty to forty years. Even so, military defeats severely undermined the modernization project begun in the mid-19th century. Ultimately, the Berlin Congress forced the empire to surrender three-fifths of its territory and one-fifth of its population – around 5.5 million people, half of them Muslims. This marked another step in the long decline of Ottoman power, following earlier treaties such as Sremski Karlovci (1699) and Küçük Kaynarca (1774) (Bandžović 2019, 231).

Within this framework, as the Herzegovinian crisis broke out in July 1875, the Great European Powers initially sought to uphold a stance of non-intervention, working together in peacekeeping efforts and assuming the Ottomans would eventually suppress the unrest. Yet, despite these attempts to contain the turmoil, the Balkan crisis escalated in 1875–1876. Crucially, by 1876 the Serbian government concluded that war was the only means to preserve its regime, making the conflict with the Ottomans not just a struggle for national liberation but also a tool to safeguard the prevailing political and social order (McClellan 1966, 68).[12] Moreover, Imperial Russia recognized the clear divisions among its Western rivals and their failure to form a united anti-Russian alliance.[13] In this context, as Pan-Slavism[14] increasingly aligned with Russia's objective of restoring its Black Sea fleet,[15] the new Tsar, Alexander II, pursued a policy that allowed Russia

[12] Due to Slavic agitation, the Balkans became a possible area of expansion after 1871, or a destabilizing region that could eventually lead to a change in Austria-Hungary's borders.
13 In 1844, Tsar Nicholas proposed to Britain a plan for partitioning Turkey, anticipating the Ottoman Empire's collapse (Потемкин 1941, 424). Though criticized as "pro-Turkish," Disraeli's priority was maintaining the 1815 balance of power and peace between Russia and the Ottomans, countering Russia's Balkan ambitions and, after the Crimean War, preventing further Great Power intervention in the Ottoman East where Britain and France could not compete.

[14] Pan-Slavism emerged between 1830–1840 as the first modern pan-nationalist idea, aiming to transcend divided national identities and create a broader, more sustainable Slavic unity. While Russia later became its main defender, the earliest significant form developed as *Austro-Slavism* (1846–1918), reflecting the struggles of Slavic peoples under Habsburg rule for greater autonomy and emancipation (Suslov, Čejka, and Đorđević 2023, vii).

[15] The Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774) ended with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which expanded Russian influence by granting access to the Black Sea, Crimea, navigation rights through the Straits, and authority to protect Orthodox Christians – laying the foundation

to choose its allies independently.

Given the poorly coordinated military campaigns by Serbia and Montenegro in support of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian insurgents during the summer of 1876,[16] Russia launched its war against the Ottomans in 1877–1878. Consequently, with the Ottoman Empire weakened by internal uprisings and the acknowledged legitimacy of foreign intervention in its domestic affairs, Austria-Hungary and Russia came to recognize the necessity of defining their respective spheres of influence and territorial ambitions within the Ottoman Balkans.[17] The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 unfolded across two main fronts: the Balkans in the west and the mountainous regions of northeastern Anatolia in the east. In the western theater, Osman Nuri Paşa successfully repelled the Russian siege of Plevna (Pleven) in northern Bulgaria, yet by November 1877 the Russians captured Kars, and the following year advanced to Edirne. Further Russian penetration into European Turkey was halted through the intervention of the Great Powers – most notably Britain – which pushed for a truce. The conflict concluded in March 1878 with the Treaty of San Stefano, signed in Yeşilköy, a suburb of Istanbul. Had its provisions been fully enacted, the treaty would have created a "Greater Bulgaria" within the Ottoman Empire as a tributary principality, temporarily under Russian occupation, with expanded territory reaching the Aegean Sea (Hale 2023, 47–48).

The Congress of Berlin in 1878 reshaped the Balkans, accelerating the erosion of Ottoman authority and formally recognizing the independence of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro. This process of "balkanization," driven by the Great Powers in an effort to maintain balance, produced frag-

of the "Eastern Question." Britain later opposed these claims during the Crimean War and the Treaty of Paris, seeking to restrict Russian naval power and access to Constantinople. However, the Treaty of London (1871) allowed Russia to rebuild its Black Sea fleet, though Britain maintained that treaties could not be changed unilaterally (Anderson 1966; Marriott 1940; Taylor 1954).

[16] The Herzegovina uprising, launched near Nevesinje on 9 July 1875, quickly grew into full-scale war with support from Montenegrin forces, foreign volunteers, and later Russian troops under General Chernyaev, appointed by Serbia (Ekmečić 1996; Stojanovic 1939). By 1876 it expanded into a Serbo-Ottoman war, but Serbia's defeat led the Constantinople Peace Conference to restore the status quo. Though Serbia's National Assembly absolved its government, covert Ottoman– British cooperation created a diplomatic stalemate, leaving the Balkans' future unresolved (Pandevska 2022, 80).

[17] In 1877, Russia secured Austria-Hungary's neutrality through the secret Budapest Convention, limiting its own expansion in the Balkans and blocking a unified Slavic state, while recognizing Austria-Hungary's right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina. Likewise, the London Protocol, though rejected by the Sultan, reflected Russia's readiness to cooperate with the Great Powers and avoid unilateral military action (Pandevska 2022, 80).

mented states and left unresolved territorial disputes, which in turn fueled nationalist tensions and set the stage for the Balkan Wars. Namely, Western political culture, framed by notions of European civilizational superiority, constructed the Balkans as a liminal frontier where the "Imaginary Turk" embodied the "European Other." In this discourse, the region was imagined as a fragment of Asia within Europe – an exotic, unstable zone separating the supposedly superior European civilization from the "mystical Orient." Thus, in the eyes of Great Powers, "Balkanism became synonymous with disorder, violence, and misfortune, while Balkan ferocity was the expected natural outcome of a warrior ethos deeply rooted in the psyche of the local population" (Todorova 2009, 15, 207; Lazarević-Radak 2013, 58–59).

After 1878, "Ottoman Europe" was reduced to a fragile corridor from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, increasingly exposed to conquest. Between 1870 and 1890, mass killings and expulsions of Muslims, alongside waves of *muhajirs* from Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, reshaped the empire's demographic profile. Successive migrations, particularly during the Balkan Wars, devastated Bosniak communities – many resettling in Sandžak only to be displaced again during the Balkan Wars. By the early twentieth century, the Balkans were marked by rapid de-Ottomanization and successive Muslim migrations, which reveal how the turbulent Balkan events and Bosniak displacement formed part of a broader exodus shaped by great-power rivalries and global geopolitical context, processes of deosmanization, and balkanization, with many Balkan Muslims having earlier migrated into Ottoman lands and fought in its military, and the Empire's eventual collapse, which culminated in the Ottoman defeat after the Greco-Ottoman War (1919–1922), and the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 (Bandžović 2020, 2022).

The article examines the Berlin Congress as a turning point in diplomatic practice, showing how sovereignty was externally curated and hierarchically distributed. By connecting nineteenth-century diplomacy to modern governance, this research contributes to both historical scholarship and international relations theory, demonstrating that the Berlin Congress of 1878 institutionalized a hierarchy of conditional sovereignties, rather than establishing sovereign equality among Balkan states.

HISTORICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BALKAN CRISIS

Given that the Serbs had lacked full sovereignty for nearly four centuries, their collective aspiration for independence was relatively obscure in Europe at the dawn of the 19th century. Specifically, in periods of peace, the Serbs succeeded in gaining substantial autonomy, which was formalized

through interstate agreements between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (Šuljagić 2025, 9).[18] Beginning with the Herzegovinian revolt in 1875 and concluding with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, the three-year Balkan Crisis unfolded through the diplomatic maneuvers of the Great Powers seeking to extend their influence, alongside the nationalist movements within the Balkans that manifested in uprisings against Ottoman domination. Despite unfavorable international conditions, Serbo-Bosnian relations developed according to their own internal dynamics. Following uprisings against Ottoman rule in 1831–1832[19] and 1850–1852,[20] Bosnia – though marked by its distinctive resistance to Ottoman centralization – remained part of the empire, gradually moving toward Austro-Hungarian control after the Berlin Congress. In 1875, heavy taxation, feudal exploitation, and religious oppression of Orthodox and Catholic Christians sparked a peasant revolt in Herzegovina that soon spread into Bosnia. At various points, Bosnian insurgents advocated for unification with Serbia, while rebels in Herzegovina looked toward Montenegro.[21] Once Serbia and Montenegro declared war

[18] The First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813), led by Karađorđe Petrović, secured Belgrade and gave Serbia nearly a decade of de facto independence, but collapsed after Russia withdrew support through the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, leaving the rebels vulnerable to renewed Ottoman invasions (Narochnitskii 1982). The Second Uprising (1815), under Miloš Obrenović, succeeded through diplomacy: by 1817 he was recognized as hereditary Prince of Serbia, granting the region broad self-governing rights while remaining under Ottoman suzerainty (Melichárek 2012).

[19] In 1830, Serbia gained autonomy as a principality, reviving the provisions of Article 8 of the Bucharest Treaty (1812) that had guaranteed self-rule. Though limited in scope, this autonomy – secured after the uprisings – provided the framework for sustained efforts in building and consolidating Serbian national identity (Novaković 2004, 258).

[20] Bosnia experienced two major uprisings against Ottoman rule: the Great Bosnian Uprising (1831–1832) under Husein Gradaščević, the "Dragon from Bosnia," and revolts in 1850–1852. Both stemmed from Sultan Mahmud II's centralizing reforms, which nobles resisted after Serbia's autonomy and the loss of Bosnian lands in 1829. In 1831, Bosnian leaders declared autonomy, opposed military reforms, and backed Gradaščević as Vizier, winning battles before defeat. Renewed reforms later provoked further revolts, briefly separating Herzegovina from Bosnia. Ultimately, Ottoman forces crushed resistance, dismantled the kapetan system, and tightened control, paving the way for the peasant revolts of 1875 (Melichárek 2014, 1).

[21] Some members of the Main Committee for Aid to the Uprising in Zagreb sought to assert political control over the Bosnian uprising, viewing Bosnia as part of Croatian territory (Slipičević 1952, 127). The Croats of Starčević pursued the revival of a Greater Croatia, thereby positioning themselves as open adversaries of the Serbian cause (Biankini 1925, 12–13). In Zagreb, young Croatian academics reinforced this stance by publishing a statement in the press that denied the existence of Serbs or a Serbian uprising in Bosnia, instead portraying Bosnia as a "jewel in the crown of Croatian King Zvonimir" (Pelagić 1880, 85).

on the Ottoman Empire, unification with Serbia was proclaimed in four Bosnian regions where most of the rebel forces were concentrated (Bataković 1996, 118).[22] Therefore, the Herzegovinian uprising demonstrated that the insurgents possessed a clear political awareness, recognizing their struggle as not merely against local injustices but as part of a broader fight for national liberation and integration within a Serbian-Montenegrin framework. Historically, the relationship between the two state entities was generally supportive[23] and can be divided into distinct phases. The first of these was the preparatory stage of the national program, marked by Serbia's non-intervention due to its political weakness, which limited its ability to pursue foreign policy objectives in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[24] Nevertheless, during this period, various national programs already identified Bosnia and Herzegovina as belonging to the Serbian ethnic sphere.[25]

In this regard, the most influential program defining Serbia's long-term national and foreign policy in the 19th century was *Načertanije* (The Draft), written in 1844 by Ilija Garašanin, then serving as Serbia's interior minister (Garašanin, Bataković, and Josić Višnjić 1991, 15). Within *Načertanije*, the section titled "Policy of Serbia in regards to Bosnia, Montenegro and Northern Albania" placed particular emphasis on Bosnia. Ow-

[22] The insurgents proclaimed Bosnia and Herzegovina's unification with Serbia and Montenegro, declaring their resolve to end Ottoman rule and join their Serbian kin. This was met with widespread celebration, as they pledged loyalty to Prince Milan of Serbia and invited Prince Nikola of Montenegro to take sovereignty over Herzegovina. (Ekmečić 1996, 231).

[23] In 1459, Bosnian King Stjepan Tomaš sought to unite Serbian lands with Bosnia by marrying his son, Štefan Tomašević, into the Serbian throne to resist the Ottomans. The plan failed, and Štefan's brief rule ended with the fall of medieval Serbia in 1459 and Bosnia in 1463 (Zirojević 2009, 12).

[24] The 1875 Herzegovina uprising, lacking strong backing from Belgrade, leaned on Russian support and fostered ties with Serbs in Vojvodina, Slavonia, and other Yugoslav groups. Herzegovina's strategic role made it a battleground between Serbia and Montenegro: Prince Milan sought its annexation with Bosnia to Serbia, while Prince Nikola aimed to curb Serbian influence and expand Montenegro between the Lim and Neretva Rivers, bolstering his position against the Obrenović dynasty (Jaroslav 1875, 1–2; Vuković 1925, 84, 170).

[25] Between 1790 and 1794, Serbian national consciousness spread among intellectuals in Hungary and Austria and merchants from Adriatic centers, inspired by Enlightenment ideas. This climate shaped the First Serbian Uprising. Count Tekelija advanced the cause with an 1805 map of Serbian lands and an 1804 proposal to Napoleon for an Illyrian Kingdom. Metropolitan Stevan Stratimirović later drafted a program for Serbian liberation and unification under a Slavonian-Serbian Grand Duchy, while in 1868 Svetozar Marković expanded the vision to include Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro (Melichárek 2014, 6).

ing to its strategic geography, rugged terrain, and strong military traditions, Garašanin viewed these areas as essential to Serbia's territorial expansion, insisting that consolidating Serbian influence there should be a key priority of Serbian politics within the Ottoman Empire. He set forth seven guiding principles, the most important of which was the assurance of full religious freedom – intended to satisfy Christians and potentially attract Muslims as well. Equally central was Serbia's envisioned role as the protector of the Slavic peoples of the Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the Principality of Serbia acting as their diplomatic representative. As Bosnia's nation-building process progressed in the early 19th century, Garašanin also highlighted the importance of cooperation with Croats – particularly the Franciscans – who could support the idea of uniting Bosnia with Serbia.[26] He also emphasized the need to publish prayer books, hymnals, liturgical texts for Orthodox Christians, anthologies in both Latin and Cyrillic, as well as a concise history of Bosnia that included Bosnians who had converted to Islam (30, 33–35).

By 1875, the preparatory stage of the uprising shifted as ties between Serbia and its compatriots in Bosnia and Herzegovina strengthened, with many openly expressing their wish for unification with Serbia (Ekmečić 1989, 256–257; Bataković 1996, 118). The decline of Ottoman authority in Herzegovina coincided with Russia's broader objective of expanding its influence in the Balkans and ultimately gaining access to the Mediterranean. Framing the rebellion within its Pan-Slavic mission, Russia emerged as a key supporter of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian revolts, working in concert with Montenegro.[27] On the other hand, while the Dual Monarchy proclaimed official neutrality, it exploited this stance to prohibit the delivery of humanitarian aid to the rebels and block the export of weapons. In reality, this declared neutrality was chiefly aimed at preventing Montenegro and Serbia from supporting the insurgents, thereby limiting Russian

[26] Nevertheless, while Serbian radicals strived to revive the Serbian medieval empire of Dušan the Mighty, the Croats of Starčević intended to resurrect Greater Croatia (Biankini 1925, 12–3).

[27] The Bosnian uprising was driven by both internal and external factors. Domestically, Serbian nationalist agitation combined with the 1858 Ottoman land reform under Omar Pasha Latas, which weakened Muslim nobility and converted state timars into private estates, fueling resentment among Christian serfs and intensifying peasant hardship through heavy taxation and tithe exploitation. Externally, Montenegro, Serbia, Austria-Hungary, and Russia were involved more as participants than direct instigators. Austria-Hungary exerted particular influence, both through the local Catholic community and its cooperation with Montenegro's Prince Nikola I Petrović (Ekmečić 2007, 269–278, 278–279; Čubrilović 1996, 19–28, 45–52, 52–57; Ković 2010, 55–57).

involvement.[28] The uprising claimed roughly 150,000 lives, and by the end of 1875, more than 200,000 civilians had fled to Austria-Hungary, with another 70.000 seeking refuge in Montenegro and Serbia (Pavlowitch 2002, 64; Ekmečić 2007, 280).

Facing near bankruptcy, the Principality of Serbia was forced to dismiss many of its officers, particularly foreign ones, and its army suffered defeat. The brief conflict exposed the weaknesses of relying on short military training for peasant soldiers and highlighted Serbia's overall military ineffectiveness, underscored by the Ottoman advance that captured Aleksinac and threatened Belgrade.[29] At Prince Milan's request, Russia intervened as mediator, with General Mikhail Chernyaev taking over as commander of the Serbian forces (Gallenga 1877, 187–92; Popov 2008, 197). Ultimately, a ceasefire was declared on 28 February 1877, preventing the collapse of the Principality of Serbia (Mandić 1910, 14–15).[30] In December 1877, Serbia reentered the conflict following Russia's initial strategy in Ottoman Bulgaria but soon shifted to independent campaigns in South Serbia, capturing Niš, Leskovac, Vranje, and nearby towns, and advancing into northern Ottoman Macedonia before the Edirne armistice (Popov 1985, 65). At the same time, Montenegrin forces operated along the borders of Ottoman Herzegovina and Albania, taking Nikšić, Bar, Ulcinj, Grmožur, Vranjina, and Lesendro between September 1877 and January 1878. These joint Slavic successes significantly altered the Balkan political landscape, intensifying friction between Russia and the Western powers (Pandevska 2022, 82). Moreover, Pan-Slavist-s celebrated Alexander II as the "Tsar of all Slavs" while fiercely criticizing Europe (Stojanovic 1939, 154).[31]

[28] Foreign volunteers who fought alongside Serbia grew resentful due to severe shortages of food, clothing, footwear, and military equipment, compounded by the ethnocentric attitudes of some Serbian leaders toward non-Serb volunteers, especially those from Austria-Hungary (Luković 1977, 224).

[29] Austria's occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878 marked the collapse of Garašanin's *Načertanije* vision of uniting all Serbian-inhabited Ottoman lands into a single Serbian state. This outcome, shaped in Vienna to secure control of the Balkans and facilitate expansion toward the Near East, signaled the beginning of Austria-Hungary's *Drang nach Osten* policy, aimed at dominating Slavic territories in the region (Bataković 1996, 118).

[30] Petar Karađorđević, fighting under the pseudonym Petar Mrkonjić and defying the Serbian assembly's prohibition, took part in the Bosnian Uprising as a "simple volunteer." Although his role was limited and he withdrew in January 1876, Serbian journalism and historiography elevated his participation into a powerful symbol of national memory. As a result, the Bosnian Uprising of 1875–1878 came to be popularly remembered as "Petar Mrkonjić's uprising" (Gutić 1980, 10).

[31] During the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), Romania, led by Prince Carol I, allied with Russia and seized the opportunity to declare its formal independence from the Ottoman

After advancing to Constantinople, Russia attempted to impose peace terms, but British intervention prevented its entry into the city.[32] Reluctant to cede territory to Serbia, the Ottoman Empire was compelled to sign the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano on February 19, 1878.[33] Actually, the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) marked Russia's bid to reshape the Balkans after its victory in the Russo-Turkish War (Raspopović 2003, 198). It recognized Romania (Art. V), Serbia (Art. III), and Montenegro (Art. II) as independent, promised Serbia and Montenegro territorial expansion to create contiguous borders, and granted Bosnia and Herzegovina autonomy under Russian and Austro-Hungarian supervision. Its most disruptive clause, however, was the creation of a vast Bulgarian principality envisioned as a Russian satellite,[34] stretching from the Danube to the Aegean and including much of Macedonia (Anderson 1966, 203). This "Greater Bulgaria" threatened the regional balance of power and provoked sharp criticism in Serbia, where leaders saw it as undermining national interests and challenging their own South Slavic project, leading to strained relations with Russia even before the Congress of Berlin.

In fact, the Treaty of San Stefano created a new framework in which Austria focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Britain on Bulgaria, laying the groundwork for a coordinated great-power policy in the Balkans (Gauld

Empire (Lyde and Mockler-Ferryman 1905, 151).

[32] The peace settlement endangered key British and Austrian interests. A large Bulgaria under Russian dominance, with access to the Aegean, threatened Mediterranean trade routes and Britain's vital passage to India via the Straits and the Suez Canal. Russian control of the Black Sea also jeopardized alternative routes toward the Persian Gulf and India. Britain further feared that Russian influence over the Ottoman Empire would erode the Sultan's independence, leaving him vulnerable to constant pressure. As a result, Britain firmly opposed any arrangement granting Russia authority over the straits.

[33] The Treaty of San Stefano, authored by General Count Nicholas Ignatiev, reflected Russia's Pan-Slavist agenda by seeking to liberate Slavic peoples and secure influence over the Straits while curbing Austria's role in the Balkans (Stojanovic 1939, 233). Britain strongly opposed Russian control of the straits, and in February 1878 even sent its fleet through the Dardanelles toward Istanbul, risking direct confrontation. To prevent war, German Chancellor Bismarck mediated at the Congress of Berlin. The settlement dismantled the "Greater Bulgaria" envisioned at San Stefano: western Bulgaria was placed under nominal Ottoman rule, Eastern Rumelia remained under Ottoman administration with a Christian governor, and Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro gained independence. Russia secured territory in northern Romania along with Batumi, Kars, and Ardahan, while Britain obtained Cyprus through a separate agreement (Hale 2023, 47; Varnava 2009).

[34] Shuvalov described the Treaty of San Stefano as "the most foolish act we could have undertaken," further dismissing Ignatiev's vision of Bulgaria as absurd (Clayton 1971, 142–144).

1926, 109).[35] However, a major flaw in this perception was the absence of clearly defined, homogeneous entities like Bulgaria or Bosnia; portraying the Balkans as a purely Christian land under Islamic rule ignored its diverse realities and ultimately fueled conflicts and human rights abuses through aggressive nation-building.[36] Namely, the agreement deprived Turkey of most of its European possessions, and formally recognized the independence of Montenegro, Serbia, and Romania. Serbia secured Niš and extended its influence toward Novi Bazar and the Sanjak, while Pirot and Vranje were assigned to Bulgaria. Montenegro expanded into Herzegovina and gained the port of Bar, with guarantees protecting the property rights of local Muslims. Although Article 14 dealt with Bosnia and Herzegovina, it failed to establish a lasting resolution (Ranđelović 2015, 125).[37]

Russian military campaigns broke Ottoman authority in Bulgaria, yet the Western powers insisted on reinstating it, even in territories already occupied by Russia. Consequently, Count Nikolay Ignatyev's so-called "Russian Machiavelli's San Stefano Bulgaria" plan functioned largely as a tactical maneuver to gain bargaining power at the forthcoming congress, since its terms conflicted with Russia's earlier agreements with Austria-Hungary and Britain and were inevitably subject to revision.[38] Prior to the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano, Bismarck convened a congress of the Great Powers to address the Eastern Crisis, presenting himself as a neutral mediator

[35] On 21 April, Andrassy urged the British government to back Austria's occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, while Lord Salisbury's reply on 4 May emphasized that joint Anglo-Austrian action on Bulgaria would be more effective than separate efforts. Salisbury even declared willingness to treat a "Balkan line" agreement as a *casus belli*, provided it was reached first, and in return pledged support for Andrassy's proposal of a European – rather than Russian – administration (Gauld 1926, 110).

[36] Following the Russian intervention and the war, populations were forcibly expelled from newly independent Bulgaria and Bosnia into Ottoman territory, a process that intensified divisions among ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups and deepened regional alienation.

[37] The redrawing of Balkan borders after the Congress of Berlin did not secure lasting peace, as unrest, uprisings, and the brief Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885 quickly followed. These events reflected the continuation of earlier European political, military, and diplomatic struggles rather than a resolution. Thus, the years from 1878 to the mid-1880s represent the next phase of the Great Eastern Crisis, defined by Balkan resistance to the settlement imposed at Berlin (Pandevska 2022, 82).

[38] Russia envisioned a vast Bulgarian principality from the Black Sea to the Albanian mountains, including Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbian towns, and the Aegean coast. Conceived as a Russian-dominated stronghold and gateway to Constantinople, it secured Russian supremacy while weakening Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian influence. Yet by privileging Bulgaria over Serbia and excluding other powers, the plan reflected Russian ambitions and proved unacceptable to the wider European community (Ranđelović 2015, 125).

– a "fair proxy" – aiming to guide negotiations rather than pursue personal interests. However, this claim masked his retreat from openly supporting Russia, effectively placing the final decisions in the hands of the European Concert of Powers. Their priorities overshadowed the aspirations and fates of the small Balkan states, whose populations ultimately suffered the consequences of these geopolitical compromises.[39] Thus, without German involvement, Russia accepted a limited victory, and only three days after the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano, Count Andrassy officially suggested convening a congress to settle the peace terms between Russia and the Ottoman Empire – a proposal supported by the other Great Powers. Escalating the situation carried the danger of sparking a new war, with Britain and Austria-Hungary potentially mobilizing against Russia. Consequently, diplomatic records indicate that prominent Russian leaders – including Grand Princes Nikolay and Mikhail, War Minister Milutin, Finance Minister Reitern, and Chancellor Gorchakov – determined that extending the conflict was detrimental to Russia's interests and should be avoided (Hvostov and Minz 1949, 49).

Before the congress convened, a wave of diplomatic exchanges sought to shape outcomes in advance. In a letter to Gorchakov dated 18 February 1878, Count Ignatyev restated his opposition to a direct border between Serbia and Montenegro, instead suggesting that Turkey maintain a corridor extending toward Sarajevo. He underscored Mitrovica's strategic value as both a railway hub and a pivotal point for Bosnia. Attached to the letter was the program of the recently established Prizren League, which represented Albanian leaders. The League proclaimed loyalty to the Ottoman Empire while expressing hostility toward Montenegro, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Its declaration vowed unending resistance to foreign rule, framing participation as a sacred Islamic obligation and condemning betrayal with collective reproach and curses (Ranđelović 2015, 127).

Another instance is a telegram dispatched from Saint Petersburg to the Russian mission in Vienna in mid-April 1878. In this message, Russia explained its stance during and after the war, affirming to the Austro-Hungarian government that it upheld its pre-war commitments and did not object to Austria-Hungary's occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[40] The

[39] Bismarck sought to maintain European balance while actually protecting Germany's interests, mainly by preventing an anti-German alliance. The Three Emperors' League of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia initially appeared cooperative but proved ineffective during the Balkan crises. The Herzegovinian revolt (1875) and the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) exposed deep rifts between Austria-Hungary and Russia, with Germany carefully managing its alliances while avoiding direct involvement (Kosmach 2025).

[40] As mentioned earlier, Russia and Austria had secretly aligned their Balkan strategies, be-

telegram further recognized the option of splitting Bulgaria into two sections, with the southeastern area placed under tighter Ottoman administration, and proposed that the borders established at San Stefano be adjusted in line with ethnic considerations.

Austria-Hungary, in turn, submitted a Memorandum to Britain defending its intention to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina.[41] Attached to it was an Appendix that provided a geopolitical assessment with long-term cautions. It argued that the creation of a large Slavic state in southern Europe would destabilize the region, pointing to Dalmatia's weakness as a narrow coastal strip lacking a secure hinterland. The Appendix further maintained that Bosnia and Herzegovina were unsuitable for autonomy due to fragile geography and economy, pronounced ethnic and religious divisions, and cultural contrasts – Herzegovinians depicted as impoverished, warlike highlanders, and Bosnians as more agrarian and peace-oriented. Religious plurality, with Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, and Catholics living together yet frequently in conflict, was identified as the greatest barrier. The document concluded that any attempt at self-rule would be short-lived and ultimately result in union with neighboring Slavic states. It also warned that Serbia posed a direct danger to Austria-Hungary and Central Europe, since a union of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Serbia or Montenegro – or the creation of a new Slavic state – would threaten the monarchy's borders and stability. This, in turn, would compel Austria-Hungary either to annex the entire Slavic bloc or confront unrest among its own Serbo-Croatian population. On the economic front, Austria-Hungary opposed Montenegro gaining access to the Adriatic, fearing smuggling, and dismissed Serbia's claims to Kosovo and Metohija as unrealistic. These demands had already been rejected by Turkey at San Stefano, with Russia backing its position – an outcome that aligned with Austria-Hungary's strategic interests (Ranđelović 2015, 126–127).

From this standpoint, intense diplomatic efforts – both overt and covert – made revisions to the Treaty of San Stefano unavoidable. The broad framework of the new arrangement had already been established, needing only official endorsement and minor tactical modifications. This outlook was solidified by the secret British-Russian memorandum of 18 May 1878, which was later communicated to Germany. In it, Lord Salisbury, Britain's

ginning with the Reichstadt Agreement in July 1876 and later reinforced by the Budapest Treaties signed in January and March 1877.

[41] From February 1877 onward, Herzegovina was organized as a Sanjak within the Bosnian vilayet. Following extended disagreements, Austria and Russia came to an accord to regard Bosnia and Herzegovina as a unified entity (Rupp 1925, 508–512).

newly appointed Foreign Secretary, and Count Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador in London, reached a confidential accord that essentially set the boundaries of the Berlin settlement (Seton-Watson 1972, 432).

This agreement demonstrated Britain's resolve to limit Russia's gains from the Treaty of San Stefano, while Russia accepted compromise to avoid a direct clash with the other Great Powers. In effect, the Salisbury– Shuvalov accord served as the diplomatic foundation for the Berlin Congress: it set boundaries on Russian influence in the Balkans, confirmed Austria-Hungary's right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, and assured Britain that Russia's access to the Mediterranean would be restricted. As a result, "the Berlin Congress was less a venue for genuine debate than a formal endorsement of arrangements already settled behind closed doors" (Jelavich 1983). Ultimately, the Great Powers agreed to convene the Congress only on the condition that it deal exclusively with issues stemming from the Treaty of San Stefano and the Russo-Turkish War, leaving aside questions concerning Egypt, Syria, and the Far East (Stojanovic 1939, 236).

During the 1878 crisis, the Ottoman Empire was ultimately preserved due to Russia's diplomatic isolation, as none of the other European powers accepted the Treaty of San Stefano. Britain continued to resist any arrangement granting Russia control over the straits, and in February 1878 its fleet sailed through the Dardanelles toward Istanbul, heightening the risk of direct conflict with Russia. To avert another European war, both sides agreed to mediation by German Chancellor Bismarck, which resulted in the Berlin Congress. On 13 July 1878, a peace treaty was concluded. Its main outcome was the dismantling of "Greater Bulgaria": the western portion received autonomy under nominal Ottoman authority, while the southeastern area, Eastern Rumelia, remained under Ottoman rule but was governed by a Christian official. Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro achieved independence; Russia gained territory in northern Romania as well as Batumi, Kars, and Ardahan in the east; and Britain, through a separate agreement, secured Cyprus (Anderson 1966, 69–73, 178–217, 226).

THE IMPACT OF THE TREATY OF BERLIN: SERBIA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STRATEGIC LOSSES

The Congress of Berlin, which convened on 13 June 1878, was hailed as one of the most significant political assemblies of the modern age, frequently likened to the Congresses of Vienna and Paris (Langer 1956, 150). Its purpose was to uphold European stability through the Concert of Powers, operating within a pre-set framework for peace, with delegates responsible only for refining details and formalizing agreements. Acting

as an "honest broker" (Kosmach 2021, 48) Chancellor Otto von Bismarck gathered the leading states – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Britain, Russia, France, Italy, and the Ottoman Empire – to renegotiate the Balkan settlement. The Congress thus emerged out of necessity, serving not as a platform for Balkan self-determination but as an arena for imperial negotiation.

From the outset, it was clear that the Great Powers would dominate the Congress, leaving the smaller Balkan states to exert influence only through informal channels. Although Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania were present, their role in shaping decisions was negligible. The aspirations of these states were subordinated to the strategic agendas of the Great Powers, who, as Mark Mazower notes, determined the Balkans' destiny not in Belgrade or Sofia but in Berlin, treating the region as a geopolitical chessboard (Mazower 2000). Bismarck's dismissive attitude toward Balkan nationalism – captured in his famous remark that the area was "not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier" – mirrored the dominant view of the Balkans as peripheral yet dangerously unstable (Wallace 1922, 289; Kössler 1981, 102).

In this context, Serbia's exclusion from sending an official delegate – while Greece and Romania were granted that privilege – underscored the unequal treatment of Balkan states at the Congress. A clear anti-Slavic bias, promoted chiefly by Britain and Austria-Hungary, permeated the negotiations and set their overall tone. Guided skillfully by Gyula Andrássy, Austro-Hungarian diplomacy pursued Bosnia not through outright conquest but by presenting itself as Europe's appointed authority, ostensibly temporary and framed as a civilizing mission. Consequently, with Vienna intent on curbing Serbia's access to the north and west, and Russia showing little concern for its interests in the east, Jovan Ristić, Serbia's plenipotentiary, was left to depend on informal diplomatic channels along the Vienna– Berlin– Belgrade axis to make Serbia's position heard (Popov 2008, 162–163).

On 12 June 1878, Jovan Ristić submitted a Memorandum to the Congress of Berlin, serving as Serbia's sole official voice in the absence of direct representation. Reinforced through further memoranda and diplomatic contacts, it traced Serbia's trajectory from medieval decline to Ottoman vassalage and pressed two central demands: recognition of independence and territorial expansion on ethnic-historical grounds. Ristić argued that recent wars had severed ties with the Ottoman Empire, that San Stefano had already acknowledged sovereignty, and that Ottoman atrocities and tribute payments made renewed vassalage impossible. His conclusion was clear – Serbia's future lay in full independence, not subordination to the Porte (Ranđelović 2003, 248).

Therefore, at the Berlin Congress (1878), Serbia pressed for territorial expansion on ethnic and historical grounds, insisting that lands occupied by its army should not be returned to Ottoman rule. However, while its independence was acknowledged, the Great Powers curtailed its ambitions: Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia were established, Serbian claims in Old and Southern Serbia were restricted, and Austria-Hungary was granted oversight in the Sanjak of Novi Bazar.[42] Vienna's interpretation held that allowing Austria-Hungary into the northern Sanjak of Novi Bazar would prevent "the supremacy of the Slavic race" and ensure balance among ethnic groups.[43] This arrangement gave Austria-Hungary military presence in the corridor separating Serbia and Montenegro, effectively blocking their potential unification and reinforcing its strategic influence in the Balkans (Anderson 1966, 214–219).

Border disputes with Bulgaria, backed by Russia, complicated matters further, though local populations in contested districts expressed loyalty to Serbia. Ultimately, Serbia secured Pirot, land up to Caribrod, and part of Trn, while Bulgaria received Caribrod and Trn as compensation, with Ihtiman left under Ottoman control. The settlement reflected pragmatic Great Power bargaining rather than principle, yet Serbia emerged with recognized independence and partial fulfillment of its territorial demands (Ranđelović 2015, 130).

In summary, the Treaty of Berlin regulated Serbia's status in Articles 34–42, granting formal recognition of independence, equality of citizens, religious freedom, and defining new borders, while also confirming Serbia's prior international agreements and imposing obligations such as railway construction and the assumption of Ottoman debt for newly acquired territories – an issue strongly opposed by Jovan Ristić. Montenegro's independence was similarly recognized (Article 26), with financial responsibilities for ceded lands (Article 33). Bosnia and Herzegovina were

[42] The term *Sanjak of Novi Bazar* is frequently misapplied in scholarship and popular writing. Detached from the Vilayet of Bosnia in 1872 and briefly part of the Vilayet of Novi Bazar, it was incorporated into the Vilayet of Kosovo in 1877. After 1880, its western districts formed the Sanjak of Pljevlja, the remainder became the Sanjak of Sjenica, and only the kaza of Novi Bazar was attached to the Sanjak of Priština. By the early twentieth century, *Novi Bazar* no longer existed as a distinct Ottoman unit, though the name persisted; between the Congress of Berlin (1878) and the Balkan Wars (1912) its territory was divided among several sanjaks, making continued use of the term for the whole area administratively illegitimate (Svirčević 2013, 288–289).

[43] Austria-Hungary received an international mandate to occupy two provinces plagued by persistent unrest under Ottoman rule, with the British and other European powers viewing this mission not as temporary but as a permanent settlement to restore peace and order (Schmitt 1930, 312).

assigned to Austro-Hungarian occupation and administration (Article 25), with military garrisons in the Sanjak of Novi Bazar to be arranged later. Navigation on the Danube was addressed in Articles 46–57, largely continuing earlier provisions, with Austria-Hungary overseeing works in the Đerdap Gorge[44] (Article 57). Finally, Article 63 confirmed the continued validity of the Treaties of Paris (1856) and London (1871) except where amended (133).

Jovan Ristić, in his parliamentary address, underscored that Serbia's military victories had relied on Russian arms, while its political achievements were secured through Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, foreshadowing Serbia's future political orientation. He argued that independence, more than territorial expansion, was Serbia's greatest accomplishment, likening it to individual freedom and invoking Ranke's view of independence as the foundation of statehood. Ristić criticized the financial burdens imposed by the Treaty of Berlin, particularly the obligation to assume Ottoman debt for conquered territories, and warned against British and Turkish proposals to capitalize tributes, which would have been ruinous but were ultimately rejected. Supported by Russian, French, and even Count Andrássy's references to San Stefano, Ristić concluded that despite the painful financial obligations, the settlement was tolerable and inevitable, securing Serbia's independence and modest territorial gains (Ranđelović 2003, 254).

Consequently, after BiH was incorporated into the Habsburg Monarchy following the Congress of Berlin, Serbia could no longer influence Bosnian affairs and redirected its policy toward Old Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, and northern Albania (Petrovich 1976, 411–414).[45] Furthermore, with the signing of the secret Austro-Serbian Convention on 28 June 1881, Serbia effectively became a protectorate, abandoning the principles of Garašanin's *Načertanije* (1844) and reorienting its policy toward Austria,

[44] Article XXV of the Berlin Congress allowed Austria-Hungary to station a garrison and secure military and commercial routes in part of the former Bosnian vilayet, ensuring control of communications and the new political order. Foreign Minister Count Andrássy adopted this measure both to appease Turkey and to avoid direct governance of a volatile region, while using the garrison as a safeguard against a Serbia-Montenegro union. Anticipating future complications, he also obtained Russia's assurance that it would not oppose Austria-Hungary should it eventually decide to annex the Sanjak of Novi Bazar along with Bosnia and Herzegovina (Seton-Watson 1930, 313–314).

[45] Following the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Bosnia and Herzegovina mounted fierce resistance to Austro-Hungarian occupation, led mainly by Bosnian Muslims under Hadži Lojo, with sporadic Serbian support. Austria-Hungary was forced to deploy up to 268,000 troops to crush uprisings, especially in Bosanska Krajina, suffering over 5,000 casualties in the process. The campaign devastated the local population, costing Bosnia and Herzegovina around 150,000 lives, predominantly Serbs and Muslims. (Bataković 1996, 119).

thereby aligning itself with the Triple Alliance (Pribram 1920, 51–63).[46] Bosnia-Herzegovina was effectively treated as a colony within Austria-Hungary, and Vienna viewed the suppression of the Serbian national movement for unification with Bosnia as essential for securing dominance in the Balkans and advancing further toward the Near East. Austria's occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina marked the launch of its *Drang nach Osten* policy, and the true underlying cause of the conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia that eventually led to World War I was the occupation and subsequent annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Schmitt 1930, 108).

The Treaty of Berlin marked Serbia's formal recognition as an independent and sovereign state, ending centuries of Ottoman suzerainty and representing a major diplomatic triumph. Yet this independence was limited by Austria-Hungary's dominance in the northern Balkans, as Serbia was compelled to construct railway links to the Habsburg network, sign a trade convention favorable to Vienna, and align politically with Austrian interests (Samardžić 2010).[47]

Hence, the Treaty reconfigured rather than resolved Balkan tensions, leaving Serbia independent but constrained by Austria-Hungary's dominance and setting the two states on a path of antagonism.[48] This hostility surfaced in the Pig War (1906–1908), when Austria-Hungary blocked Serbian livestock exports, prompting Serbia to diversify trade and strengthen ties with France.[49] Moreover, these obligations were not merely

46 Frustrated by Russia's pro-Bulgarian stance and tempted by promises of expansion into the Vardar valley, Prince Milan Obrenović concluded the Secret Convention in Vienna. The treaty bound Serbia to seek Austria-Hungary's consent before making agreements with other states and to refrain from any agitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, effectively subordinating Serbian foreign policy to Austrian oversight (Samardžić 2005, 30–34, 40–42).

47 From the beginning, Austria-Hungary viewed its occupation of the Balkan provinces not as temporary but as a precursor to annexation, underscoring its strategic ambition to consolidate control and expand regional influence (Seton-Watson 1930, 586–587). This intent was formalized in 1881, when Austria-Hungary conditioned its participation in the Three Emperors' League on recognition of its right to annex the territories whenever it deemed opportune (Pribram 1920, 43).

48 Austria-Hungary's rule in Bosnia-Herzegovina was marked by exploitation rather than genuine modernization: infrastructure such as roads and railways served mainly to extract raw materials, while social progress stagnated, with the agrarian question unresolved and school enrollment remaining very low (just 14.33 percent by 1908). Governance was undermined by poorly trained officials, often from lower military ranks, who lacked local language skills and behaved arrogantly, fueling resentment and widening the divide between the occupying authorities and the population (Bataković 1996, 135).

49 Guided by St. Petersburg, Serbia commissioned cannons from the French firm Schneider-Creusot, rejecting Austrian and German suppliers. Vienna retaliated with the five-year

economic; they symbolized Serbia's incorporation into Austria-Hungary's sphere of influence.[50] Consequently, railroads and factories played a limited role compared to the pervasive presence of military garrisons, fortresses, and gendarmerie posts, which underscored the dominance of military authority over genuine economic progress (Bataković 1996, 120). Politically, Belgrade was expected to align with Austrian policy, curtailing its freedom of maneuver in foreign affairs.[51] Hence, Austria-Hungary's ambitions in the Balkans consistently conflicted with Serbia's, blocking its westward expansion and denying it access to the Adriatic Sea. Moreover, in an effort to prevent Serbia's alliance with Russia, Austria-Hungary granted Milan Obrenović the royal title, and concluded the "Secret Convention" which allowed Serbia to expand southward at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, except in the Sanjak of Novi Bazar, which remained under Austrian influence. In return, Serbia pledged not to support political or religious uprisings in Bosnia, Herzegovina, or the Sanjak against Austria-Hungary (Petrovich 1976, 414). In that sense, Serbia's independence was "genuine in form but constrained in substance, shadowed by the influence of a powerful neighbor" (Banac 1984). Accordingly, from Serbia's perspective, the Bosnian settlement of 1878 was disastrous, stripping what was seen as part of its medieval heartland and fueling outrage that weakened the Obrenović dynasty while empowering the nationalist Karađorđević opposition.[52] In other words, independence was both a victory and a frustration: Serbia had achieved formal sovereignty but remained hemmed in by the geopolitical

customs conflict (1906–1911), known as the "Pig War." By redirecting exports through the port of Salonika, Serbia resisted the blockade, and within a few years Austria-Hungary controlled only 41 percent of Serbian trade (Đorđević 1962).

[50] With independence, Serbian progressives viewed rapid modernization as vital, making railway construction both an economic necessity and a fulfillment of Berlin Congress obligations. The railway, seen as a "Berlin child," symbolized the price of independence while serving as the cornerstone of Serbia's domestic modernization and state-building (Samardžić 2010, 140).

[51] Bosnian Serbs found support primarily among opposition parties (Radicals and Liberals) and clerical circles in Belgrade. The Austrophile orientation of Milan Obrenović, continued under King Aleksandar (1889–1903), was unpopular among Serbs, who traditionally leaned toward Russia. Radicals and some Progressists condemned Milan's refusal to protect Herzegovinian and Bosnian Serbs as a betrayal of national interests. Under Aleksandar, Austro-Hungarian envoys repeatedly pressured Serbia to suppress the Belgrade press, objecting even to references to "national aspirations," "Slavic solidarity," "repressed brethren," or "Serbdom." As a result, Serbia remained absent from Bosnian politics for the next three decades (Bataković 1996, 120).

[52] As a leader of the 1804 First Serbian Uprising, Karadjordje Petrović is remembered as the founding father of modern Serbia for making a decisive break from Ottoman rule (Stojančević 2004, 272).

realities of Great Power politics. Thus, from 1889 onward, the administration sought to shape provincial identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina by introducing a distinct red-and-yellow flag and coat of arms (Bataković 1996, 125).

Article 25 of the treaty granted Austria-Hungary the right to occupy and administer the provinces while leaving nominal sovereignty to the Ottoman Sultan (Schmitt 1930, 313).[53] This compromise served several Great Power interests: it blocked Serbian and Montenegrin expansion into Bosnia, rewarded Austria-Hungary for its neutrality during the Russo-Turkish War, and aimed to stabilize a region recently shaken by anti-Ottoman revolts. For Austria-Hungary, occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina offered strategic depth against Russia but created governance problems due to the provinces' ethnic diversity.[54] Namely, the 1881 decree introducing general recruitment in Bosnia and Herzegovina ignited the Serb uprising in Herzegovina the following year. The rebellion, which also drew in numerous local Muslims and received backing from Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire, spread beyond the Neretva River into central and eastern Bosnia along the Drina. In contrast to the Muslims, who opposed the new rulers together with the Serbs, hope rose among the Croats of Croatia-Slavonia that the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was only the beginning of its union with the Monarchy by including it in Croatia-Slavonia. Austria made no effort to ease religious tensions and, exploiting the link between faith and national identity, actually sought to divide the Serbian population in Bosnia into three separate nationalities (Bataković 1996, 122–123, 130).[55]

[53] Although the convention proclaimed the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as "provisional" and recognized Ottoman sovereignty, its promises soon collapsed: Ottoman currency was excluded, the provinces absorbed into the Austro-Hungarian customs union, administration reshaped to match the Monarchy, capitulations abolished, and military service enforced – effectively turning the region into a Habsburg possession (Schmitt 1930, 313).

[54] In Bosnia and Herzegovina, demographic shifts were pronounced in the late 19th century. By 1879, Orthodox Serbs constituted a relative majority, accounting for 51.25% of the population, while Muslims comprised 32.83% and Roman Catholics 14.25%. Roman Catholics were systematically settled in the province, with around 230,000 newcomers – mainly Croats, but also Czechs and Poles – arriving between 1879 and 1914. At the same time, Serbs migrated to Serbia, while Bosnian Muslims relocated to nearby provinces such as Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania, or to distant Ottoman regions like Anatolia. Earlier, the Ottoman census of 1871 had recorded Muslims as the relative majority, a result of mass emigration from Serbia to Bosnia following 1867 (Bataković 1996, 121).

[55] Along the Drina River, Roman Catholics were settled in Serb-inhabited towns to disrupt Serbian ethnic continuity on the Bosnian border with Serbia. In 1881, Jesuits were introduced to Bosnia to reinforce Roman Catholic influence, regarded as more militant in their

However, broadly speaking, the settlement fused the Bosnian and Serbian Questions, embedding the liberation of Bosnian Serbs into Serbian nationalism and foreign policy.[56] Austria-Hungary's policy of forcibly imposing a new Bosnian identity failed to achieve its aims and instead provoked resistance and counter-reactions. Facing the threat of Roman Catholic proselytism, Bosnian Serbs cooperated with the autonomist Muslim movement. In 1902, they founded the cultural society Prosvjeta in Sarajevo, which, together with Zora from Mostar, became a cornerstone of the future struggle for national rights. Over time, Bosnian Serbs grew more organized and fostered stronger solidarity, and Bosnia, rather than serving as a barrier to Serbia, became a conduit for the expansion of Serbdom (Bataković 1996, 131–132).

At the same time, Serbia embraced the "Piedmont of the South Slavs" identity, positioning itself as the nucleus of South Slav unification.[57] The settlement's failure to liberate millions of Serbs under Habsburg rule made irredentism inevitable, ensuring Serbia's focus on undermining Austrian authority. The turning point certainly came with the Bosnian Annexation Crisis of 1908 when Austria-Hungary formally incorporated Bosnia and Herzegovina into the empire, violating the spirit of the Berlin Treaty. In 1909, under Russian pressure, Serbia was forced to accept Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Belgrade government signed a declaration affirming that the new situation did not infringe on Serbia's rights, thereby abandoning hopes of territorial compensation, an Adriatic railway link, or a corridor through eastern Bosnia (149–150).[58]

proselytism than the local Franciscans. As part of a broader repression of Serbian national identity, officials – mostly from Croatia – suppressed the Cyrillic alphabet and imposed the Croatian Latin script in Bosnia (Bataković 1996, 126–127).

[56] From 1896 onward, Bosnian Serbs – backed by Serbs in Croatia, Dalmatia, Vojvodina, and the Belgrade government – advanced their struggle for educational and religious autonomy. They submitted three memorandums to Emperor Franz Joseph (1896, 1897, 1901), demanding communal self-governance, civil rights, press freedom, freedom of assembly, and constitutional protections (Bataković 1996, 127).

[57] The 1903 coup restored the Karađorđević dynasty in Serbia and ushered in a new foreign policy direction. Between 1903 and 1914, Serbia revived Garašanin's Načertanije program, adapting it to contemporary international circumstances by pursuing national unification through an independent foreign policy. Serbia aligned itself with Western democracies, France and Great Britain, but relied on Russia as its principal ally, viewing it as the traditional protector of Slavic and Orthodox interests against growing German influence in the Balkans (Bataković 1996, 137).

[58] The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was a consequence of Austria-Hungary's domestic and foreign-policy needs. The beginning of political cooperation between Serbs and Croats in Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia (the Croato-Serbian Coalition), the Ser-

By the early twentieth century, the Balkans had become Europe's most volatile frontier. Austria-Hungary struggled to govern Bosnia, a province marked by ethnic diversity and nationalist agitation. Serbia, emboldened by its victories in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, sought to expand its influence and liberate South Slavs under Habsburg rule. The collision course set at Berlin seemed unavoidable as "the Bosnian settlement fused the Serbian and South Slav questions into a single explosive issue, ensuring that the Balkans would remain Europe's most dangerous frontier" (Mazower 2000). The crisis reached its climax in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne, was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb nationalist affiliated with the Black Hand. The assassination was the spark that ignited the First World War, but its roots lay in the unresolved tensions of 1878.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Before the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Serbia had achieved autonomy under Ottoman suzerainty, maintaining its own institutions while still paying tribute and hosting Ottoman troops. The modern Serbian state was forged through the First and Second Uprisings, which secured autonomy in 1830 and entrenched anti-Ottoman sentiment in national identity (Novaković 2004, 112). Independence was formally recognized in 1878 and Serbia became a kingdom in 1882, but its ambition to unite all Serbs was blocked by Austro-Hungarian control of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nationalist discourse, first articulated in *Načertanije* (1844), envisioned either an inclusive South Slav state or an ethnically defined Greater Serbia, shaping foreign policy toward expansion south into "Old Serbia" (Kosovo and Niš) and west into Bosnia (Manetović 2006, 138, 140). The "Bosnian Question" thus emerged as a central regional issue, as Serbian nationalists claimed Bosnia – home to Orthodox Serbs, Croats, and Muslims – as part of their historic homeland, a claim contested by others. Nonetheless, the long-term consequences of Berlin demonstrated that hierarchical sovereignty was not a sustainable model. Though it offered temporary stability in the Balkans,

bian national movement for religious and educational autonomy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, along with the analogous movement of Bosnian Muslims, gave rise to fears that the further development of the movement for Serbian unification might make the idea of Serbia as the Piedmont appealing to the South Slavic peoples of the Monarchy. The logic of Vienna's policy in 1908 was: "With the weakening of Turkey and its expulsion into Asia, the process of state rearrangement has begun again on our southeastern frontiers. As we had to respond to that fact, thirty years ago it was solved by occupation, and this time by annexation. These two acts meant the destruction of the dream of a Greater Serbian state between the Danube, Sava, and the Adriatic" (Bataković 1996, 140).

it entrenched great-power rivalry and denied genuine autonomy to emerging states, ultimately fostering instability. Its collapse in 1914 illustrates the core argument: fragmented and conditional sovereignty produces disorder rather than lasting order. By analyzing Balkan sovereignty after the Berlin Congress, and situating Serbia and Bosnia within a hierarchy of conditional sovereignties, this article examines how the Berlin Congress institutionalized sovereignty as conditional, relational and negotiated, reshaping the meaning of statehood from an absolute Westphalian principle into a fragmented, externally supervised status. In this sense, the article contributes to both historical scholarship and international relations theory by reframing the concept of sovereignty and offering a historically grounded framework for understanding supervised statehood today, with implications for scholars of Balkan history, international law, and policymakers engaged in peacebuilding and state recognition.

For Austria-Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina served as a strategic buffer against Russian and Serbian ambitions, consistent with its *Drang nach Osten* expansion. Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish War produced the Treaty of San Stefano, which redrew Ottoman territories "in the exclusive interest of Russia" (The National Archives 1878b, ZLIB 15/16, 4), creating a "Greater Bulgaria" under Russian influence that destabilized the Balkans and alarmed Britain, France, and Austria-Hungary. Britain's ambassador Austen Henry Layard warned that the treaty sought to establish a vast Slav state under Russian control, threatening the European balance of power (The National Archives 1878a, FO 881/3541). However, rather than fostering Orthodox unity, the settlement alienated Serbia, which felt marginalized by Russia and left geopolitically isolated. Austria-Hungary exploited this, positioning itself as the main check on Serbian expansion and Russian influence. The Congress of Berlin, under Bismarck's mediation, revised Russia's gains to restore equilibrium, subordinating Balkan aspirations to Great Power interests. While some independence and territorial gains were recognized, Serbia's ambitions remained unfulfilled, leaving it embittered and estranged from Russia. Specifically, the Treaty of Berlin (1878) curtailed Ottoman influence by reorganizing Bulgaria as an autonomous principality (Art. I), granting Eastern Rumelia limited autonomy (Art. XIII), and recognizing the independence of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro (Arts. XLIII, XXXIV, XXVI), collectively stripping the Empire of much of its Balkan territory (The National Archives 1880).

For Serbia, independence confirmed what had long existed in practice, but territorial ambitions were only partly realized: it gained Pirot, Caribrod, and part of the Trn district, while Bulgaria received compensa-

tory lands. These compromises reflected Great Power interests in balancing imperial rivalries rather than adhering to ethnic or historical claims. Thus, the settlement was both a triumph and a setback for Serbia – securing statehood and international recognition but leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian administration with nominal Ottoman sovereignty. Although this arrangement was intended to stabilize the region, it deepened tensions, particularly with Serbia, which viewed Bosnia as part of its national aspirations. This tension, coupled with rising popular nationalism and peasant political mobilization, ensured that Serbia's leaders remained determined to prepare for future Balkan upheavals.[59] As Mazower notes, 1878 marked the peak of Great Power control in the Balkans, but its unraveling culminated in 1914 when the Sarajevo assassination transformed a Balkan dispute into a global war (Mazower 2001, 103, 111). Thus, by institutionalizing hierarchy, conditionality, and external supervision, Berlin created a durable model that continues to shape both Balkan politics and global governance. In this framework, sovereignty is not absolute but relational, negotiated, and perpetually contested. In this sense, the Berlin settlement anticipates modern forms of "monitored autonomy," where stability is prioritized over full independence.

Ultimately, the Berlin Congress of 1878 did more than resolve the Eastern Question; it established a lasting model of conditional sovereignty. By granting recognition while restricting autonomy, it set a precedent for externally supervised statehood – later echoed in Bosnia after Dayton, Kosovo under international administration, and other cases of international oversight. This continuity highlights the central claim of this research: the hierarchy of sovereignties created in 1878 redefined sovereignty itself, showing it to be a negotiated status contingent on external supervision and compliance with international norms.

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[59] Nationalism in the Balkans did not emerge naturally but developed through a deliberate process of fostering and shaping an intelligentsia within different ethnic groups, who in turn constructed distinct identities for themselves (Mazower 2000, 80).

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СУВЕРЕНОСТ СРБИЈЕ И „БОСАНСКО ПИТАЊЕ" У КАЛЕИДОСКОПУ БЕРЛИНСКОГ СПОРАЗУМА**

Сажетак

Источно питање се као проблем опстанка Османског царства у Европи одразило истовремено на односе балканских народа и представника „Концерта Европе". Стога, историју Балкана XVIII и XIX века немогуће је адекватно разумети без сагледавања ширег европског контекста, односно свеукупног геополитичког поретка, као и разумевања интереса тадашњих велесила. Заправо, разумевање Балкана као једног од кључних попришта сукоба великих сила, круцијално је за схватање борбе за независност српске државе као неодвојиве фазе у процесу финализовања Источног питања оличеног у одлукама Берлинског Конгреса (1875–1878). Наиме, са слабљењем отоманског Балкана отворио се простор геополитичког вакума у оквиру кога су се истовремено сукобљавали стратешки циљеви велесила и претензије малих балканских народа вођених превасходно жељом за успостављањем самосталног спољнополитичког позиционирања и борбом за независност. У том смислу, у овом истраживању ослонили смо се на дескриптивни и историјски метод како би кроз наративни и компаративни приступ са фокусом на дипломатску и политичку историју интердисциплинарно и холистички сагледали утицај актуелних модела деосманизације и балканизације на процес стицања међународног правног суверенитета Србије и разумели маневарски простор конфронтирања историјских европских сила и међународних околности које су условиле спољнополитичко деловање Србије у датом периоду. Циљ истраживања је да укаже на значај који су велика Источна криза (1875–1878), Руско-османски рат, као и одлуке Берлинског конгреса 1878. године, имали у друштвено-политичком мапирању Балкана и међународном позиционирању Србије као суверене државе. Структурално, рад се састоји из три дела. У првом, уводном делу акценат је стављен на разумевање односа процеса дезинтеграције Османског царства и надметања европских сила у новонасталој подели интересних сфера. Објашњено је како је ослабљено Османско царство постало зависно од дипломатије великих сила, а модерни свет кројен у складу са одредбама Бечког конгреса 1815.

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године који је империјалистичке амбиције Европе решавао ратом, а националне противречности учинио централним предметом европске политике. Други део рада посвећен је разумевању историјског и геополитичког контекста Балканске кризе и догађаја који су довели до Берлинског конгреса. Укратко, кроз призму кључних дипломатских и политичких активности које су обележиле период 1875–1878, Балканска криза сагледана је као кулминација вишедеценијског Источног питања у којем су се сударали интереси Русије, Британије и Аустроугарске. У том смислу, устанак балканских народа био је катализатор, али су коначне одлуке донете на Берлинском конгресу, где су „мале нације" биле само пиони великих светских играча. Завршни део рада посвећен је анализи Берлинског конгреса са аспекта стицања међународно признате независности Србије, односно интерпретирана су постигнућа, као и стратешки губици и ограничења која је овај споразум донео Србији. Истакнуто је да је Берлински споразум, као историјски преломна тачка за Србију и Босну, Србији донео међународно признање независности и територијално проширење Србије ка југу, али је истовремено ограничио њене националне аспирације према Косову, Санџаку и Македонији, док је Аустроугарској поверена окупација Босне и Херцеговине, чиме су српске тежње ка западним крајевима биле блокиране. На тај начин, Берлински конгрес је за Србију представљао историјски успех у смислу стицања независности и територијалног проширења, али и стратешки пораз јер су кључне српске аспирације према Босни и „Старој Србији" остале ван њеног домашаја. Тиме је Србија, иако оснажена као суверена држава, ушла у орбиту аустроугарског утицаја, а Босна је постала поље империјалне контроле Беча, што је дугорочно обликовало политичку динамику Балкана, претварајући босанско питање у кључну тачку сукоба која је покренула низ догађаја, кулминирајући Балканским ратовима и Првим светским ратом. У овом калеидоскопу интереса, Русија је настојала да подржи панславизам и јачање словенских држава, док је Аустроугарска ширила свој утицај и сузбијала словенске аспирације. Србија која се нашла у средишту тог сукоба морала је да балансира између идеје словенске солидарности и реалполитике наметнуте од Беча и Лондона, чиме је постала геополитичка клацкалица региона. Другим речима, иако је Србија добила међународно признање независности, њен утицај у региону остао је ограничен интересима великих сила. Наиме, анексија Босне и Херцеговине од стране Аустроугарске показала је да Балкан није у позицији да самостално обликује своју судбину, већ да је део ширег европског калеидоскопа у којем се преламају панславистичке и германистичке амбиције. За Србију, то је заправо значило да је њен пут ка пуној националној афирмацији тек започет, док је Босна остала симбол неиспуњених тежњи и стални извор политичких тензија и потенцијалних конфликата. Ретроспективно, пут од Берлинског конгреса до Сарајевског атентата оголио је крхкост европских савеза у XIX веку и недовољну политичку моћ велесила да дипломатским путем реше дубља геополитичке про-

блеме. Наиме, иако је намера Конгреса била да обезбеди европску стабилност подређивањем балканских тежњи интересима империја, нерешено босанско питање из 1878. године постало је искра која је 1914. запалила фитиљ којим је локални спор попримио размере светског рата. Берлински конгрес из 1878. године трансформисао је суверенитет из апсолутног вестфалског принципа у фрагментисану и условну категорију. Србија је добила формално признање независности, али под сталним спољним надзором и геополитичким компромисима, док су Босна и Херцеговина представљале пример „празног суверенитета" – номинално под османском влашћу, а фактички управљане од стране Аустроугарске. Ова асиметрија институционализовала је хијерархију суверенитета, где је признање зависило од усклађености са спољним нормама и интересима великих сила. На тај начин, у раду се истиче како је Берлински конгрес заправо успоставио трајни модел надгледаног суверенитета, који је антиципирао модерне аранжмане попут Босне након Дејтона и Косова под међународном управом. Праћењем континуитета овог модела од 1878. преко Анексионе кризе 1908, Првог светског рата, па све до савременог управљања, овај рад позиционира „берлинско решење" као прототип „надзороване аутономије". Суверенитет се у овом оквиру не јавља као инхерентно право, већ као релацијски, условни и трајно оспораван статус. У том смислу, наслеђе Берлинског конгреса огледа се у концептуалном помаку: од једнакости ка хијерархији, од аутономије ка надзору и од апсолутног суверенитета ка спољa обликованом државном поретку. Анализирајући питање суверенитета кроз калеидоскоп Берлинског конгреса и компарацију српског и босанског питања, овим истраживањем указано је како су одлукама Берлинског конгреса димензије суверенитета – правна, територијална и међународна – биле фрагментисане и подложне спољним утицајима. Стога, вредност овог истраживања огледа се управо у повезивању „берлинског модела суверености" са савременим међународним аранжманима, попут Босне након Дејтона или концепта „Косова под међународним надзором", чиме се успоставља директан континуитет између империјалне дипломатије и данашњег међународног управљања. На основу таквих увида оспорава се традиционална вестфалска парадигма државног управљања, а некадашњи концепт апсолутне суверености редефинише у смеру релацијске, условне и подељене суверености подложне флуидности и међународним „аранжманима". Стога, кроз историјски утемељен оквир за разумевање надгледане државности, Берлински конгрес се позиционира не само као прототип „надзороване аутономије" који превазилази границе балканске историографије, већ пружа историјску перспективу и за разумевање савремених изазова у изградњи држава и решавању сукоба. Наиме, савремени модели у Босни и Херцеговини након Дејтона и на Косову под међународном администрацијом понављају управо логику Берлинског конгреса, потврђујући да надгледани суверенитет остаје кључно средство обликовања глобалне политике. Истовремено, овим приступом указује се

на ризике хијерархијског суверенитета који, иако може привремено стабилизовати регионе, дугорочно производи нестабилност ускраћивањем пуне аутономије новим државама.

Кључне речи: Србија, балкански устанци, Источна криза (1875–1878), велике европске силе, Берлински конгрес, суверенитет, босанско питање, геополитика