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# Montenegrin–Bulgarian Relations before and during the First Balkan War

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*Montenegro and Bulgaria were aware that they could not defeat Turkey alone in the war. Therefore, they negotiated intensively with Serbia and Russia.*

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**T**HIS ARTICLE aims to analyze Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations on the eve of the First Balkan War, which led to a military alliance between them. This was not a separate military alliance between these two states against the Ottoman state, but rather the Montenegrin–Bulgarian military alliance was part of the general Balkan League under the patronage of Russia. This article is limited to the analysis of Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations from starting 1878, when Montenegro became an independent state and Bulgaria became an autonomous principality with informal independence. It ends chronologically with the beginning of the First Balkan War, and its aim is not to further elaborate on the war operations of the Montenegrin and Bulgarian armies against the Ottoman Army. That is a separate subject of study.

The article is divided into three parts. In the first part an overview of Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations from 1878 to 1912 is given. At that time, war against the Ottoman state was not specifically being planned. However, Montenegro and Bulgaria were aware that they needed to have

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closer relations, because in the future they would have to fight together against the Ottoman state if they wanted to expand their territories and liberate their compatriots in territories conquered by the Ottomans. The main patron of these relations was Russia. In the second part, the concrete negotiations within the alliance between Montenegro and Bulgaria regarding war with the Ottoman state are discussed. The concept of the negotiations was based on informal talks between the Montenegrin King Nikola Petrović and the Bulgarian King Ferdinand I in 1910 in Cetinje. The negotiations were conducted by the close associates of King Nikola, Generals Mitar Martinović and Janko Vukotić, on the Montenegrin side, and on the Bulgarian side, by the Bulgarian ambassador to Cetinje, Nedyalko Kolushev. Kolushev consulted and informed the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Ivan Geshov, about the negotiations and then Ivan Geshov informed King Ferdinand I. The Russian diplomat in Cetinje, Ivan Potapov, was also involved in the negotiations. In the third part, the concrete military preparations by Montenegro and Bulgaria for the war, part of the general preparations of the Balkan Alliance for war with the Ottoman state, are discussed. Besides, the Montenegrin–Bulgarian negotiations and preparations had a separate character, and Montenegrin Minister Jovan Plamenac took part in them. It is obvious, at least according to Montenegrin sources, that the Ottoman Embassy in Cetinje knew nothing about these negotiations.

## Montenegrin–Bulgarian Relations from 1878 to 1912

**M**ONTENEGRIN–BULGARIAN relations, which led to a military alliance for the war against the Ottoman state (Turkey), were dependent on the Great Powers, especially Russia, France, and Austria-Hungary, who were most interested in the Balkans. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these countries had had different views on whether the Ottoman state would collapse or survive. The 30-year mandate that Austria-Hungary had received from the Great Powers for the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina expired in 1908. The Berlin system regulating the functioning of the Balkans was destroyed by the annexation of this province. As the decisions of the Congress of Berlin also referred to Montenegro, Bulgaria and Serbia, the so-called annexation crisis led to the final collapse of the Berlin system, with knock-on effects for Montenegro and Bulgaria. Bulgaria gained full independence and declared itself a kingdom. Montenegro annulled part of the provisions in Article 29 of the Treaty of Berlin, which limited its maritime sovereignty and also gave Austria-Hungary the right to have a maritime police and sanitary supervision of its coast.<sup>1</sup>

After the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the collapse of the Berlin system, the Balkan states were aware that the conditions were right for a final reckoning with Turkey. After the proclamation of Montenegro as a kingdom and of Prince Nikola Petrović as king in August 1910, the conditions were present for informal negotiations. On this occasion, King Ferdinand I came to Cetinje. It is very important to point out that the son-in-law of King Nikola, King Petar I Karađorđević of Serbia, avoided visiting Cetinje for this ceremony and instead sent his son, Crown Prince Alexander. During 1912, Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations constantly improved. As a consequence of this, on 27 January 1912 the Agreement on Navigation and Trade between Bulgaria and Montenegro was placed on the agenda of the National Assembly of Bulgaria.<sup>2</sup> This agreement was finally adopted on 9 May.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, there were also some trade arrangements. From the available sources, it is not possible to guess who and on which side, the Montenegrins or Bulgarians, promoted the French trading house Mavdo Cohen. In any case, this was mentioned in the conversations between the Montenegrin Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bulgarian Embassy in Cetinje on 28 June.<sup>4</sup>

Special dates were also considered. On 5 February, the Bulgarian minister in Cetinje, Nedyalko Kulushev, informed the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Lazar Tomanović, that 2 August had been set as a national holiday.<sup>5</sup> This was the day when King Ferdinand I of Bulgaria had ascended the throne. Montenegro wanted to have closer relations with Bulgaria, so the President of the Municipality of Cetinje, Milošević, congratulated the President of the Municipality of Sofia, Ivan Geshov, on this national holiday. The latter was very pleased.<sup>6</sup> In terms of state diplomacy, on 5 February, the Bulgarian Embassy requested from the Montenegrin Foreign Minister, Dušan Gregović, in a verbal note, the issuing of a certificate to Bulgarian citizen Ivan Nikolayevich Ribarev from Kalofer, confirming that he had been a volunteer in the Montenegrin Army during the Montenegrin-Turkish war of 1876–1878. Dušan Gregović contacted the Montenegrin Ministry of War and this certificate was issued on 16 April.<sup>7</sup>

During 1912 there were intensive negotiations between the Balkan states about an alliance for a war against Turkey. In that sense, it was necessary to know the opinion of the Great Powers, because they were mostly in favor of maintaining the status quo. During the first half of this year, King Nikola had two major diplomatic missions. He travelled from Cetinje to Petrograd on 17 January,<sup>8</sup> arriving in the capital on 29 January.<sup>9</sup> He had bilateral conversations there with Russian officials and with the Emperor of Russia, Nicholas II. King Nikola returned to Cetinje on 10 February.<sup>10</sup> During these negotiations, King Nikola probably wanted to have more negotiations with the Balkan states regarding a war against Turkey and to see Russia's opinions on it, because Montenegro depended on economic subsidies from Russia. Its court and army were

supported by Russia. In foreign policy, Montenegro was practically a semi-colony of Russia. Shortly before the First Balkan War, on 17 December 1910, Montenegro concluded a military convention with Russia. According to Article 7 of this convention, Montenegro pledged “not to take any offensive actions with its army without prior agreement with the Imperial Government, nor to conclude military agreements with any other state without the approval of the Emperor of Russia.”<sup>11</sup>

A few months later, King Nikola also visited Vienna. He left Cetinje on 24 May,<sup>12</sup> arriving in Vienna two days later, and was welcomed by Emperor Franz Joseph at the train station.<sup>13</sup> He returned to Cetinje on 28 May.<sup>14</sup> Accompanied by King Nikola, the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dr. Lazar Tomanović, and the Minister of War, General Mitar Martinović, arrived in Vienna. At the same time, a high-level Bulgarian delegation led by the President of the Bulgarian Parliament, Dr. Stoyan Danev, and the Bulgarian ambassador to Rome, Dimitar Rizov, visited Vienna. Danev soon became prime minister. Montenegro and Bulgaria probably had preliminary conversations in Vienna about the union. This can be seen from the work *L'Alliance Balkanique* by Ivan Geshov, published shortly after these events in Paris in 1915.<sup>15</sup> In this work, Geshov paid very little attention to forming an alliance with Montenegro.

Clearly Montenegro had fallen behind in its diplomatic activities to harmonize its positions with its allies. There are many facts that testify to this. The Serbian–Bulgarian Treaty, which divided up the spheres of interest in Macedonia, was concluded on 13 March and a military convention with a plan of war actions was signed on 12 May. Bulgaria entered into an alliance agreement with Greece on 29 May and a military convention on 5 October. Montenegro started concrete activities with its allies, first with Bulgaria at the beginning of July, then reaching an agreement on an alliance with Serbia on 6 October.

## Montenegrin–Bulgarian Negotiations about a Military Alliance

**T**HE NEGOTIATIONS between the Balkan states were not held transparently, because the Great Powers also wanted to maintain the status quo. News of the negotiations certainly leaked out, primarily according to information from the diplomats of the Great Powers in the Balkan countries. The newspaper *Cetinjski vjesnik* (The Cetinje herald), published an article on 6 June stating that “it is said that an alliance has been made between Serbia and Bulgaria.” It was further stated that both countries had denied this and explained that the negotiations were held on the modalities “whereby both countries would

take military action against Turkey.”<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, the Balkan states were already preparing the public opinion, as well as the Great Powers, for a war with Turkey, emphasizing a series of violent actions by the Turkish authorities towards the Christian population. The Montenegrin press was following this trend, too. The same article stated that Turkey had tried to implement reforms in Macedonia, but “the Young Turks were not able to carry them out on their own, without foreign assistance.”<sup>17</sup>

Many events took place on 6 August in Cetinje, in front of King Nikola’s Castle, for the purpose of preparing the public opinion for a war with Turkey. The former Minister of Internal Affairs of Montenegro, Jovan S. Plamenac, made an official note of these manifestations. It stated that the people had unanimously welcomed the resolution stating that Montenegro “together with other Serb and Bulgarian brothers will secure our right: ‘THE BALKANS FOR THE BALKAN PEOPLES’; which we will never achieve if we rely on the advice of ‘humanitarian Europe,’ which achieves its goals only through blood and force.”<sup>18</sup>

The conclusion of the Montenegrin–Bulgarian agreement regarding a war with Turkey can be seen in several original sources. Some of them borrow from each other, and some are completely independently drawn up. The first original source is a sort of diplomatic diary kept by Nikolai Potapov, a military attaché in Cetinje. He obtained information mainly in an informal way, in private conversations with high-ranking Montenegrin state figures. On 4 July, he was informed by the Prime Minister of Montenegro, General Mitar Martinović, that General Janko Vukotić and he had sent a formal proposal to the Bulgarian Ambassador Nedyalko Kolushev in Cetinje, informing him that Turkey was in difficulty and this had to be taken advantage of so that they could achieve their political and national goals.

In the introduction of the proposal, the reasons and the occasion for war were discussed. They were associated with border changes which would be disadvantageous for Turkey in Old Serbia, Northern Albania and Macedonia. The interests of both kingdoms in this area were explained as “historical, national, political and economic.” It was assessed that this was a unique opportunity that should not be missed, because failure to do this would obviously be “to the detriment and failure of us Balkan people.” The Great Powers were interested in maintaining the status quo, because the external preservation of Turkey’s borders suited them, so that they could exploit it as a state, and with it the Balkan peoples. The idea of a *Drang nach Osten* was a particularly aggravating circumstance for the Slavic peoples.

The very difficult position of Christians in Turkey and the violence against them would be the reason for the war. This was always present in the press of the Balkan countries, including Montenegro. Two leading Montenegrin gen-

erals were the main negotiators. They were also relatives of the Montenegrin king, and it was their suggestion that Montenegro enter the war. Their goal was to draw as many Turkish forces as possible towards Montenegro, and then Bulgaria would enter the war with Turkey with all its forces. According to their judgment, most Turkish forces would be sent to Bulgaria if they entered the war at the same time. In this way, Montenegro was to enter the war 30 days before Bulgaria did.

In the third part of this proposal, the topic was the expectations from the war. The Montenegrin side believed that the war should lead to the complete expulsion of Turkey from the European part of the Balkans. The two sides did not specify which territories they wanted to have. However, the territorial claims of Serbia and Greece were also considered. In these proposals, it is interesting that both sides considered the establishment of an autonomous Albania. This was contrary to the global policy of the Balkan states and of Montenegro itself, which was planning to expand into Northern Albania. Later events would confirm the accuracy of the evaluation of both parties. The fourth part of the proposal concerned the exact wording of the beginnings of war operations, and the Montenegrin side indicated that this would be, at the latest, on 14 September. The fifth part concerned peace negotiations. They could not be led separately. In the case of any misunderstanding, the arbitration of the emperor of Russia was stipulated or, if he was unwilling, that of the president of the United States.

In this diary, Potapov noted that he had understood from several conversations with Martinović that the Montenegrin side was insisting that the same offers should be presented to Serbia and Greece. The Montenegrin was aware that Turkey could not be fought by these two countries alone. The Montenegrin side obviously did not have any information about the negotiations going on between Bulgaria and Serbia, and Bulgaria and Greece. Kulushev was probably not informed about them, as he was an ambassador in the smallest Balkan capital. For more detailed negotiations, Martinović was ready to send a trustworthy individual from Montenegro to Sofia. Kulushev informed Sofia about Montenegro's proposals by express diplomatic mail. The fact is that King Ferdinand I was not in the capital at the time, so the Bulgarian government suggested to Kulushev, in order to keep the negotiations secret, that he should not send the Montenegrin negotiator to Sofia, but continue the negotiations on his own. The Bulgarian king was probably the key person giving validity to the negotiations. This based on the fact that Kulushev went to Sofia on 18 August, after Ferdinand had returned to the capital.<sup>19</sup>

On 4 July, the Montenegrin Ministry of Internal Affairs contacted the Bulgarian Embassy in Cetinje, to deliver to it 240 sheets of maps of the *vilayets* (administrative regions) of Macedonia and Edirne, at a scale of 1: 2,100,000,

probably to kick off the negotiations. These maps were delivered by the Bulgarian Embassy to the Montenegrin ministry on 20 August, in exchange for 120 Bulgarian leva.<sup>20</sup>

Another source is the treaty and the war alliance between Bulgaria and Montenegro. This agreement is kept in the files of the former Minister of the Interior, Jovan S. Plamenac.<sup>21</sup> This source does not differ from the former one, overall. The first article stipulated that Montenegro would wage war on Turkey first, 10 days after signing the agreement. It would draw to it as many Turkish forces as possible. One month after Montenegro's entry into the war, Bulgaria was to attack Turkey with all its forces. The second article stipulated that the allies would wage war at maximum effectiveness. The third article stipulated that a separate peace could not be made. The fourth article stipulated the territorial gains for the allies regarding Turkey. In case of a dispute, arbitration by the emperor of Russia was stipulated. If he was unwilling, the arbitrator would be the president of the USA. The last article stipulated the conclusion of agreements at the highest level, by the kings of Montenegro and Bulgaria, or rather their envoys.<sup>22</sup> No agreement was made between the two governments.

The third source also came from Minister Jovan S. Plamenac. This was a kind of original and unpublished autobiography of Plamenac, intended for the Yugoslav press. Namely, the memoirs of the former French President, Raymond Poincaré, were published in 1933. Parts of it were published in the Yugoslav press, and also mentioned the formation of the Balkan League. Plamenac reacted to those details, probably with the intention of publishing them in the press. Plamenac rejected Poincaré's statement "that Montenegro joined the Balkan League. This is not true. Montenegro never joined such an alliance. On the contrary: Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece joined the Montenegrin War Alliance."

According to Plamenac, Poincaré's findings were based on French diplomatic reports from the Balkan states. When these countries held negotiations, they partially informed the French diplomats and partially did not, "because we could not and should not allow the Great Powers to fully look at our maps." Therefore, French diplomacy had partly true and partly false information. At first, the Montenegrin diplomacy wanted to make an alliance of Balkan states for a war against Austria-Hungary, in which Turkey would be included. Montenegrin diplomacy thought that the right time to expel Turkey from the Balkans was when war broke out between Italy and Turkey. It was important to start the war with Turkey before all the other Balkan allies, immediately after the end of the war with Italy, and to take advantage of the fact that the Greek fleet was stronger than that of Turkey and would prevent the arrival of Turkish troops in Thessaloniki and in an Albanian port.



According to the Greek Embassy in Cetinje, Greece was the first to be involved. Kulushev knew nothing about those conversations with the Greeks. After that, General Martinović began talking to Kulushev. These were informal conversations between Kings Nikola and Ferdinand at the time when Nikola was crowned in Cetinje in 1910. According to Plamenac, Montenegro was willing to go to war against Turkey on its own if the Balkan League failed.<sup>23</sup>

The fourth set of sources were the memoirs of Generals Mitar Martinović and Janko Vukotić. Mitar Martinović<sup>24</sup> had been writing his memoirs in a serialized form even before the Balkan Wars, during the First World War, and in the interwar period. They were a series of unrelated texts, supplemented on certain topics. For a long time, Martinović's maternal granddaughter, the famous Serbian and Yugoslav actress Jelena Žigon, privately owned them. The memoirs were unknown to researchers. They were published only in 1996.

Martinović claimed that King Nikola contacted the Government of Serbia at the beginning of 1911. He had the idea that Serbia and Montenegro, taking advantage of the difficult situation in Turkey and the great revolt of the Albanians, should attack Turkish territories that had Serbian populations. The Government of Serbia replied that the government was leading diplomatic negotiations with an alliance of Balkan states and, after that, they would inform Montenegro about the results of the negotiations. A year and a half later, there was no information from the Government of Serbia. Therefore, Montenegro decided to make the same offer to Bulgaria, separately from Serbia,

*With a proposal to attack Turkey together. Bulgaria is the strongest state in the Balkans, and it is in the worst position geographically towards Turkey because of its closeness to its military force and power. If Bulgaria accepts this suggestion, Serbia and Greece will be forced to go to war against Turkey, whether they want it or not. However, to persuade the Bulgarian government to do this, we should make an attractive memorandum with this content.*<sup>25</sup>

The plan on the Montenegrin side was to present to the Bulgarian side the fact that the Young Turk regime had invested a lot of money in the reorganization of the Turkish Army with German help. Therefore, it was necessary to go to war with Turkey as soon as possible by means of numerous rebellions on its territory. Turkey was able to muster 100 divisions, so Montenegro and Bulgaria had to stop Turkey from preparing for war with the help of Germany and Austria-Hungary. If they wasted precious time then Turkey would be able to defeat the Balkan states and this would open the way for Germany to easily advance through the Balkan Slavic territories towards the Middle East. To give Bulgaria



serious guarantees that Montenegro would not push it into the war and then leave it to fight alone, Montenegro would offer a guarantee to enter the war a month before Bulgaria. This would draw Turkish forces to Montenegro and provide an easy position for the Bulgarian Army on the Macedonian front.

Martinović stated that he had presented this plan to the government and to King Nikola and General Janko Vukotić. Everyone agreed that a concrete offer should be made to Bulgaria. The starting point was that Montenegro and Bulgaria did not have any territorial disputes, so the agreement should be short and clear. The proposal for the agreement had three points containing everything that Martinović had envisaged. When Martinović and Vukotić finished the draft agreement, they submitted it to King Nikola for review, who immediately accepted it. Martinović did not specify the date, but at 10 o'clock that day they went to the eldest son of King Nikola, Crown Prince Danilo, to hear his opinion. He agreed to the proposal. However, he soon changed his mind, because he was a supporter of Austria-Hungary and considered this alliance a separation from the interests of Austria-Hungary. Danilo was married to a German noblewoman from the Mecklenburg-Strelitz dynasty.<sup>26</sup>

When he got Danilo's initial approval, King Nikola sent Martinović to Kolushev, and they had a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro. At the end of the meeting, Kolushev suggested that Martinović give him the proposed agreement in writing. Martinović explained that there was no need for this now, but that Kolushev should consult his government about this meeting. However, he allowed Kolushev to rewrite Martinović's unofficial proposal in an unofficial form. Then Kolushev went away "very pleased, to make an urgent report to his government about the official messages of Montenegro." Soon, Kolushev received an urgent summons from Sofia to go there as soon as possible, after collecting all the necessary information from King Nikola. Kolushev travelled incognito with his wife, using the excuse that she had to have an operation in Vienna. This was probably done to draw the attention of the embassies of other countries in Cetinje. Before leaving, Kolushev once again had a meeting with King Nikola, "and he, as always, was practical and considerate" and added a fourth article to the draft, according to which Bulgaria would be obliged to pay 700,000 francs to Montenegro every day for the first three months of the war.

After seven or eight days, Kolushev returned to Cetinje with the answer from the Government of Bulgaria, which completely agreed with the proposal. As King Ferdinand I was out of the country at the time, the Bulgarian Government indicated that a final agreement would be made after his return. Martinović stated that a meeting of the Crown Council had been held in Cham-Karija on 13 August, where it was decided that Bulgaria would immediately go to war against Turkey if it did not immediately initiate reforms for the Christian population ac-

ording to the Berlin Agreement. After that, the final answer arrived in Cetinje that the Bulgarian Government had agreed with the entire draft agreement and implementation of it should begin immediately.

When this answer was received in Cetinje, the Montenegrin Government suggested making an official written agreement. Bulgaria replied that the oral agreement that had been made was as valid for this as a written one. Kulushev received the reply:

*If this is the case for you Bulgarians, then it is the same for us Montenegrins, so we will see who will cheat. Martinović stated that this was why no written agreement was made between Montenegro and Bulgaria. According to him, the preparations and the oral agreement were “most accurately, most sincerely and most honorably carried out . . . , which is to the great honor of Bulgaria and Montenegro.”<sup>27</sup>*

The other actor in active negotiations with Bulgaria was Serdar General Janko Vukotić.<sup>28</sup> Unlike Martinović, his memoirs were written over a relatively short period of several months in the first half of 1918, during his imprisonment by Austria-Hungary in Bjelovar, Croatia. Compared to Martinović, Vukotić was briefer in describing the conclusion of the alliance with Bulgaria. He explained that in 1912 Montenegro had realized that the position of Christians in the Balkans was unsustainable and that it required military intervention. For this reason, Montenegro first offered an alliance to Bulgaria. Vukotić stated that he and General Martinović had completed this work “obviously with the approval of King Nikola.”

They talked to Kulushev about this. He submitted the proposals to his government in Sofia. After two days, he received approval to draw up a formal agreement. Vukotić and Martinović made a draft agreement and submitted it to King Nikola for approval. The king studied the proposal for a long time and, in the end, he fully approved it “without adding, subtracting or replacing a single word.” Vukotić mostly repeated the same theses that Martinović had also presented. The proposal was then handed over to Kulushev in the offices of the Montenegrin Ministry of War. After reading the draft agreement, Kulushev turned to Vukotić and asked him: “‘Did you write this, general?’ I replied that Mitar and I had written it together with His Majesty. Then he said: ‘All the diplomatic corps in Cetinje would not have been able to write this.’”

Kulushev sent the proposal to Sofia, and soon received the answer that the proposal had been accepted, and that it should be considered a contract. Vukotić explained the motive of the Montenegrin side to first offer the agreement to Bulgaria, “because we knew that without its participation, the war would be unsuccessful, as well as that Serbia would be destroyed if Bulgaria did not help.” After that, Vukotić described how the negotiations with Serbia went.<sup>29</sup>

In Martinović's memoirs, it was stated that the Montenegrin Crown Prince Danilo Petrović initially immediately accepted the proposal of King Nikola, Martinović and Vukotić for the war against Turkey, but that he soon became hesitant, which also transferred to King Nikola. There were several other details that were connected with the formulation of the agreement between Montenegro and Bulgaria, and referred to Bulgarian financial help to Montenegro, to the date of the beginning of the war, and the dilemma of whether Montenegro would go to war first or do this together with Bulgaria.

The Russian diplomat, Potapov, stated in his diary that Kulushev, before his arrival in Sofia to present the Montenegrin proposal for the alliance, told King Nikola at a reception about King Ferdinand I's intention to approve a loan of two or three million francs to Montenegro. Montenegro should have received an additional annual loan of 700,000 leva. Potapov's claim about entering the war differs from other sources because he stated that both countries were supposed to enter the war at the same time.<sup>30</sup> After a confidential conversation with Minister Plamenac, the Serbian representative in Cetinje, Dr. Milan Gavrilović, informed his government on 31 August that Kulushev, who had returned to Cetinje from Sofia, had brought an answer about forming a military convention in a contract or in some other form. After Montenegro, Bulgaria was to enter the war a month later and to provide subsidies for the war. Montenegro and Bulgaria would not separately conduct negotiations or conclude a peace with Turkey. The spheres of interest were not determined, but each side was to act at its own discretion. Gavrilović also stated that the royal family, for no reason, had gone to its summer residence in Bar on the Adriatic Sea, and that King Nikola was hesitant about entering the war, because of his distrust of King Ferdinand I.<sup>31</sup>

According to Potapov, Kulushev returned to Cetinje on 18 August. All the issues between Montenegro and Bulgaria had been resolved, except the issue of when the war was to start. Martinović insisted that the war should begin as soon as possible, and suggested 27 September as the date. However, both King Nikola and Crown Prince Danilo had reservations about such a quick beginning of the war. There were disagreements regarding this issue between the two rulers and members of the government. The king and the crown prince considered 27 September too so on a date for Montenegro to prepare for war. Potapov suspected that there was an anti-war movement at the court, whose leader was Crown Prince Danilo, who was under the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Cetinje, Wladimir Giesl, and the German Ambassador, Franz Eckart. He even had suspicions that Montenegro was conducting secret negotiations with Austria-Hungary to dissuade it from entering the war, in return for which it would receive some territorial concessions.<sup>32</sup>

## Preparations for War

**M**ARTINOVIĆ EXPLAINED that when the moment came to move from words to deeds and to announce to Bulgaria the date of the beginning of the war in Montenegro, “King Nikola was undecided and almost had the intention not to respond to Bulgaria’s request, and his hesitation lasted about 15 days.” Martinović and his colleagues had a hard time getting him to overcome the “weakness and indecision that came from his family, especially from Crown Prince Danilo, who had a different political orientation.”

In this situation, Martinović claimed that he, together with the government, was willing to resign if the negotiations with Bulgaria were stopped, and thus “justify ourselves before the national consciousness and the Bulgarians.” Fortunately for them, King Nikola finally set the date for Montenegro to enter the war. It was to be 14 September, the Day of the Holy Cross in the church calendar. However, after sending the proposal to the Bulgarian Government, the reply came that the date was not suitable, because they were conducting intensive negotiations with Serbia and Greece over the war with Turkey, and they would send a notification only after that. After the negotiations between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria, it was decided that the Prime Minister of Greece and its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eleftherios Venizelos, would take the initiative regarding Turkey on behalf of everyone. A message was sent from Sofia to Cetinje that, if Venizelos should contact Cetinje with a certain proposal, it was recommended that Montenegro adopt it immediately, because it had already been agreed between Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria.

Soon after, the Greek Ambassador to Cetinje, Evgeniadis, on the instructions of Venizelos, received instructions for Montenegro on the content of the same announcement to Turkey which would be sent by Serbia and Greece as well. This announcement was practically an ultimatum to Turkey, and Turkey was expected to reject it, giving an excuse to go to war. It related to Turkey immediately embarking on reforms that would improve the situation of its Christian population; these reforms were to be supervised by the diplomatic representatives of the Balkan states in Constantinople; the demands were to be communicated to Turkey at the same time and all four countries would announce on the same day the mobilization of their armies.

On 18 September, the emissaries of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece informed King Nikola that their countries had announced the mobilization of their armies on that day and had handed over that note to Turkey. King Nikola was asked to do the same. King Nikola immediately issued a decree on mobilization. However, he did not hand over the agreed note to Constantinople, because he had an obligation towards Bulgaria to agree on the date of declaring war on Tur-

key. Having agreed with Bulgaria, the government and King Nikola planned to declare war on Turkey on 25 September and start military operations the next day. Martinović claimed that King Nikola had declared war in his presence and without much thought. He based this on the fact that the Congress of Berlin had left several unresolved border issues between Montenegro and Turkey. There were many unresolved border disputes, and Turkey still refused to resolve them. “That is why Montenegro entrusts the resolution of all disputes between Turkey and Montenegro to military force,” said Martinović, as stated in the published act of war.<sup>33</sup>

Realizing that negotiations with Bulgaria were at an end and after receiving information about the negotiations among the Balkan states, Montenegro also started negotiations with Serbia, which were held in Lucerne on 15–20 September. On the Montenegrin side, the negotiators were the Minister of the Interior, Jovan Plamenac, and Colonel Jovo Bećir. On the Serbian side, the negotiator was Colonel Petar Pešić. Kulushev had this information based on a private conversation with Plamenac even before the departure of the Montenegrin delegation to Lucerne. While the negotiations were ongoing, he informed Geshov about them on 17 September.<sup>34</sup> The agreements were confirmed in Cetinje and Belgrade on 23 September. On 20 September, King Nikola informed Kulushev about the successfully completed negotiations in Lucerne and Kulushev forwarded that information to Sofia.<sup>35</sup>

Even while negotiations were taking place with Serbia, the Montenegrin government announced the mobilization of its troops on 18 September. A day later, Kulushev informed Geshov that manifestations were being held in Cetinje on that occasion, first in front of the court, where the king and the crown prince were welcomed. Then the crowd went first to the Bulgarian Embassy, where they cheered for Bulgaria and the army. After that, the crowd visited the Greek, Serbian, Italian and French embassies with great applause. Kulushev noticed that the crowd did not go towards the Austro-Hungarian and German embassies.<sup>36</sup>

It is noted that the Montenegrin press largely prepared the public opinion for war. Thus, on 15 September, the newspaper *Cetinjski vjesnik* announced that, due to disturbing news that had been received in recent days about the concentration of Serbian troops near Drenopolje, the Bulgarian Army had been forced to announce a general mobilization.<sup>37</sup> In the issue of 22 September, the same newspaper provided data on the costs of the mobilization and of each day of the war that Bulgaria and Serbia would incur. Each day of the war would cost Bulgaria 230,000 leva, because Bulgaria would take 230,000 soldiers to the battlefield. The Bulgarian National Bank had 59 million leva in cash, 40 million of which was in gold. Based on this, there was 12.2 million leva in paper notes. This amount would be increased during the war, which would raise the price of gold.<sup>38</sup>

The general mobilization of the Montenegrin Army was announced on 18 September 1912. Kolushev, of course, immediately informed Geshov about it.<sup>39</sup> Montenegro's preparations for the war with Turkey proceeded quickly. Thus, on 25 September, Kolushev informed Geshov that the Katun Brigade of the Montenegrin Army, one of the strongest, was moving to the border the next day. King Nikola was supposed to go with his sons, Crown Prince Danilo and Prince Peter, to Podgorica, which was much closer to the border than Cetinje. Therefore, he invited him and the Serbian ambassador to go with him to Podgorica. In this regard Kolushev asked what answer he should give to the king. Two days later, Kolushev informed Geshov that the war had begun.<sup>40</sup>

On 5 October, Bulgarian Prime Minister Geshov informed the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Martinović, that services were being held in the main church in Sofia in the presence of the Bulgarian queen, the Greek and Serbian ambassadors, and large crowds. The telegram stated:

*It is with great pleasure that I inform you about this touching ceremony with which our Holy Church blessed the event, which was celebrated for the first time after four centuries on the Balkan Peninsula. I ask you to accept my heartfelt congratulations and I wish you a happy ending to crown the work for which the first initiative belongs to Your Excellency and the ministry that you represent. I pray to the Almighty that the allied armies will emerge victorious from the struggle that we started as an undoubtedly noble and sublime act, because it united four honorable, advanced nations.*

In the return telegram, General Martinović wrote, among other things:

*I consider myself lucky that Your Excellency has chosen to honor me and my colleagues' participation in the creation of this historic work, and I ask you to accept my warm gratitude for the fraternal attention and my gratitude and recognition to you and your colleagues for your sincere and powerful participation in the creation of this Great Work, in which we are inseparably united. May God bless the chivalrous deeds of the allied nations and grant the glory of success for the exertions of their arms.<sup>41</sup>*

Soon after, on 13 October 1912, *Glas Crnogorca* published the declaration of war by the Bulgarian King Ferdinand I.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, things immediately moved into the domain of the agreed sum of money for the costs of the war in Montenegro, which Bulgaria had promised in the draft agreement. On 28 September, Kolushev informed Geshov that King Nikola was demanding the fulfilment of the agreement on this matter.<sup>43</sup> On 3 October, Geshov informed Kolushev about the transfer of money to a commer-



cial bank in Milan.<sup>44</sup> From this source, however, it is not possible to find out the Milan bank in question, and what kind of arrangement it had with Bulgaria or Montenegro.

## Conclusion

**T**HE CONGRESS of Berlin of 1878 did not live up to the expectations of the Balkan peoples. It failed to end centuries of Turkish occupation. Although it was a big step forward, it was still incomplete. With the Congress of Berlin, Montenegro received formal international recognition of state independence. Territorially, it also significantly expanded. At the Congress of Berlin, Bulgaria did not receive international state recognition of its independence, but it gained autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. After the congress, in 1885 it united its territories in Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. In 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been under its occupation until then. Bulgaria took advantage of that and declared state independence. Thus, the conditions were created for the final expulsion of Turkey from the Balkans. The proclamation of Montenegro as a kingdom and of Prince Nikola as king in 1910 in Cetinje was used for unofficial negotiations between the Montenegrin ruler and the Bulgarian ruler, Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg. Secret diplomatic negotiations were conducted under the guise of a solemn ceremony. Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations in that period cannot be seen in isolation: both countries were also in contact with two other Balkan states—Serbia and Greece—as well as with Russia as a major power, from which support was expected. Montenegro and Bulgaria were aware that they could not defeat Turkey alone in the war. Therefore, they negotiated intensively with Serbia and Russia. If we look at the entire series of negotiations of the Balkan states regarding the war against Turkey in 1912, we can see that Montenegro and Bulgaria came to an agreement relatively quickly. This was facilitated by the fact that Montenegro and Bulgaria did not have any territorial disputes because they did not directly border one another. The main negotiators on the Montenegrin side were Generals Martinović and Vukotić and Minister Plamenac, and on the Bulgarian side the Bulgarian Ambassador to Cetinje, Kulushev. The negotiations resulted in a military alliance. Certainly, the final confirmation was given by the rulers of the Balkan states and the Russian emperor. Thus, Montenegro undertook to attack Bulgaria before all the other Balkan allies. Eventually, the Balkan allies defeated Turkey in the First Balkan War of 1912–13 and after 500 years of occupation they expelled it from the European part of the Balkans.





## Notes

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6. Тодоракова and Каписода, 425.
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8. “Краљ Никола, Народу црногорском,” *Глас Црногорца* (Cetinje) 2 (17 January 1912): 1.
9. “Њ. В. Краљ Господар у Петрограду,” *Глас Црногорца* 4 (31 January 1912): 1.
10. “Дворске и дипломатске вијести,” *Глас Црногорца* 6 (11 February 1912): 2.
11. Archive-Library Department of the National Museum of Montenegro, Cetinje, Montenegro, coll. of King Nikola I, fasc. 1910, doc. no. 136.
12. “Краљ Никола, Народу Црногорском,” *Глас Црногорца* 21 (24 May 1912): 1.
13. “С пута Њ. В. Краља Господара,” *Глас Црногорца* 22 (28 May 1912): 1.
14. “Дворске и дипломатске вијести,” *Глас Црногорца* 23 (2 June 1912): 1.
15. Iv.-E. Guéchoff, *L’Alliance Balkanique* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1915), 71.
16. “Српско-бугарски савез,” *Цетињски вјесник* (Cetinje) 45 (6 June 1912): 3.
17. “Турска за Македонију,” *Цетињски вјесник* 45 (6 June 1912): 3.
18. Archives of the Historical Institute of Montenegro (AHIM), fasc. 81, Spisi Jovana Plamenca, Rezolucija, doc. no. 8.
19. Николај М. Потапов, *Дневник 1906–1907, 1912, 1914–1915*, vol. 2, edited by Радослав Распоповић (Подгорица: Историјски институт Црне Горе, 2003), 466–467.
20. SAM, coll. of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1912, fasc. 205, doc. no. 1838.
21. Jovan Plamenac was a minister of several departments during the Principality (Kingdom) of Montenegro. At the end of 1918, during the unification and creation of the Yugoslav state, he was, as a supporter of King Nikola, the ideological instigator of the uprising of Montenegrin royalists (the so-called Christmas Uprising), which was aided by Italy. Then he fled from Montenegro and was a minister in and prime minister of King Nikola’s government-in-exile in Italy. After the collapse of this Montenegrin government in Italy in 1921, he stayed in several European countries and the United States. He returned to Yugoslavia in 1926. He soon received a ministerial pension and lived in Belgrade during the interwar period, leading various polemics in the press and publishing various historical and political articles. In 1941, he was involved in the combinations of the new Montenegrin state under Italian protectorate, but returned to Belgrade without fulfilling his political ambitions. At the beginning of 1944, he returned to Montenegro. Shortly afterwards, he was killed by Montenegrin partisans/communists on an unknown date as an anti-

communist and an associate of the Italians and Germans. His grave has never been found.

22. АНМ, fasc. 176, Documents of Jovan Plamenac, 55–57.
23. АНМ, fasc. 81, Documents of Jovan Plamenac, 80–85.
24. Mitar Martinović was the son of Montenegrin King Nikola's cousin. He graduated from the Military Academy in Turin, Italy, and was an artillery general in the Montenegrin army, minister of war and prime minister of Montenegro. In the First Balkan War, he was the commander of the Coastal Detachment of the Montenegrin Army, which operated from Bar and Ulcinj to Shkodra. In the first months of the First World War, he was the commander of the Drina Detachment of the Montenegrin Army, which achieved a breakthrough from Foča to Sarajevo against the Austro-Hungarian troops. During 1915, he served on a military mission to St. Petersburg. After his return, at the beginning of 1916, he was briefly the commander of the Kotor Detachment that defended Mt. Lovćen. A few months after the capitulation of Montenegro in early 1916, he was sent for internment in the Kalstein camp in Austria. In 1918, he supported the unification and creation of the Yugoslav state, contrary to the interests of King Nikola. As such, he was transferred to the new Yugoslav Army as a divisional general. Apparently dissatisfied with the treatment in the new army, he applied for a pension in 1921, which he was granted. He lived the rest of his life in seclusion as a pensioner in Belgrade, where he died in 1954.
25. Митар Мартиновић, *Ратне године 1912–1916* (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, 1996), 22–24.
26. The Hessian Princess Jutta of Mecklenburg-Strelitz: after converting to the Orthodox faith, she took the name Milica.
27. Мартиновић, 22–24.
28. Janko Vukotić was a close relative of the Montenegrin Queen Milena and was from a family of Montenegrin tribal leaders loyal to the Petrović dynasty. He graduated from the Infantry Military Academy in Turin, Italy. He was a general, minister of war, and prime minister of Montenegro. In the short period from the end of 1915 until the capitulation of the Montenegrin Army at the end of January 1916, he was also the chief of the Supreme Command of the Montenegrin Army. He was the most capable Montenegrin military leader in the wars of 1912–1916. In the First Balkan War, he commanded the Eastern Detachment of the Montenegrin Army, which liberated the northeastern part of modern-day Montenegro from the Turks, as well as Metohija, where the holy places of Serbian medieval ecclesiology were located: Peć and Dečani. In the Second Balkan War of 1913, he was the commander of the Dečani Detachment of the Montenegrin Army of 12,000 soldiers, which King Nikola sent to help Serbia, and which took part in the battle of Bregalnica against the Bulgarian Army. At the beginning of the First World War in 1914, he commanded the Sandžak Detachment of the Montenegrin Army, which achieved a breakthrough against the Austro-Hungarian Army at Pljevlja and reached Sarajevo. At the beginning of 1916, he commanded the Montenegrin Army in the Battle of Mojkovac, which made possible the withdrawal of the Serbian Army to Shkodra. He

spent the second part of the First World War interned in the Kalstein camp in Austria and in Bjelovar in Croatia. In 1918, he supported the unification and creation of the Yugoslav state, contrary to the interests of King Nikola. He was transferred to the new Yugoslav Army as a divisional general, and was, among other things, the commander of the divisional areas in Sarajevo and Skopje. A few years later, he was promoted to the highest rank in the Yugoslav Army—army general. He was appointed an honorary aide-de-camp by Yugoslav King Aleksandar Karađorđević. He died in Belgrade in 1927, where he was buried.

29. Јанко Вукотић, *Успомене из три рата* (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, 1996), 127–128.
30. Потапов, 2: 467.
31. SAM, coll. of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Department, 1912, fasc. IV, I/1–XVI, XIB/193.
32. Потапов, 2: 467–468.
33. Мартиновић, 26.
34. Тодоракова and Каписода, 427.
35. Тодоракова and Каписода, 429–430.
36. Тодоракова and Каписода, 429.
37. “Мобилизација балканских држава,” *Цетињски вјесник* 74 (15 September 1912): 8.
38. “Трошкови мобилизације,” *Цетињски вјесник* 76 (22 September 1912): 3.
39. Тодоракова and Каписода, 428.
40. Тодоракова and Каписода, 440.
41. Глас Црногорца 44 (6 October 1912): 1.
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43. Тодоракова and Каписода, 441.
44. Тодоракова and Каписода, 443.

## Abstract

### Montenegrin–Bulgarian Relations before and during the First Balkan War

This article discusses Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations before the First Balkan War, which Montenegro and Bulgaria, together with their allies Serbia and Greece, waged against Turkey. Montenegrin–Bulgarian relations improved from 1878 to 1912. These two states had no territorial conflicts, but both were conscious that war against Turkey would be essential if they were to liberate the Balkans from the Ottoman occupation that had lasted five centuries. There was also an emotional basis for this idea of a war. Both countries were Slavic, a feature also shared by Russia, the protector of the Balkan League. Russia wanted to expel the Ottoman state from the Balkans. The Balkan League of States under its patronage was against the thesis of the Central Powers. The way events turned out at the end of the First Balkan War, as well as the fact that Montenegro was ethnically closer to Serbia than to Bulgaria, led to Montenegro going to war against Bulgaria in 1913, although Montenegro had no particular benefit from that war.

## Keywords

Montenegro, Bulgaria, Balkan League, First Balkan War