

British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire during the International Crisis: Bulgaria's Declaration of Independence and the Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1908-1909

Hasan Ünal (Turkey)

The British attitude towards the Ottoman Empire¹ during the period between the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and the outbreak of the First World War has already been the subject of some studies.² From these, it might be inferred that Britain's reluctance to prop up the anglophile Young Turk regime had an important, if not decisive, effect upon Ottoman policy-making, eventually leading the frustrated Young Turks to turn to Germany for assistance and advice, and culminating in Turkish intervention in the First World War on the German side. It might further be inferred that Britain's hesitation to support the Young Turks sprang from her prior commitment to Russia under the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907; this tied her hands, and prevented her from aiding the Young Turks, despite the latter's undoubted anglophile tendencies.³ The utmost that Britain could do in support of Turkey was to replace her previously hostile policy during Abdulhamid II by one of strictly limited benevolence.⁴

Closer examination of the evidence suggests, however, that this thesis is open to challenge. In the first place, it may be questioned whether Britain's policy towards the Ottoman Empire was more influenced by her understanding with Russia than by Turkey's own attitude towards Britain.⁵ The present study does not seek to re-examine

¹ In this study, the terms, Ottoman Empire and Turkey as well as their adjectives are used interchangeably.

² *F. Ahmad*. Great Britain's Relations with the Young Turks, 1908-1914. – Middle Eastern Studies (1966), pp. 302-329; *J. Heller*. British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914, (London 1983); *B. Samardziej*. British Policy towards the Young Turk Revolution, 1908-1914 (Some Problems). – Bulgarian Historical Review (1983), 3, pp. 22-43.

³ *F. Ahmad*. The Late Ottoman Empire. – In: The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire. Ed. by Marian Kent, (London 1984), pp. 13-17.

⁴ *F. Ahmad*. Great Britain's Relations..., pp. 303-304; *J. Heller*. Op. cit., pp. 10-13.

⁵ No-one has so far undertaken extensive archive research on whether or not the Young Turks were likely to pursue a pro-British policy when they made the revolution in 1908. The oft-reiterated difficulty is that the Young Turks or rather the Committee of Union and Progress (hereafter the CUP) left no traces of records as they reportedly burnt all the Committee archives at the end of the First World War. See, *Ş. S. Aydemir*. Makedonya'dan Orta Asya'ya Enver Paşa, 1914-1922 (İstanbul 1972), Vol. 3: p. 493; *F. A. K. Yasamee*. "Ottoman Empire" in Decision for War 1914. Ed. Keith Wilson, (London, UCL Press, 1995), pp. 229-230.

British policy during the whole Young Turkish decade in power from 1908 to 1914, but aims to question established beliefs in Western and Turkish historiography by focusing on British response to the first external crisis faced by Turkey after re-inauguration of the constitutional regime. To this end, extensive use has been made of British archive material.⁶

From the Revolution to the International Crisis: July – September 1908

All evidence confirms that the British Foreign Office was taken unawares by the Young Turk Revolution. True, the CUP leader Ahmed Rıza had written to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, in March 1908, criticizing foreign meddling in Macedonian affairs, and in May the CUP had announced its existence in a memorandum delivered to the Powers' consulates in Monastir⁷; but these signals of the coming revolution seem to have been overlooked.⁸ Even after mutinies had broken out among Ottoman

This has led scholars to the belief that the Young Turks, partisan of parliamentary systems, were pro-British and, by implication, pro-French in terms of their foreign policy inclinations. However, the Young Turks' publications (Mechveret Supplement Français, Şura-yı Ümmet and others) that had come out before the revolution of 1908 are available, and they provide a good deal of information as to what kind of foreign policy ideas they had in mind. It also seems possible to trace their diplomatic activities and their dealings with foreign powers after the revolution through British, French, and Austrian, as well as Turkish archive material. A study on the foreign policy ideas of the Young Turks by 1908 and the activities of the CUP after the Young Turk revolution has cast grave doubts on the conventional assumption that the Young Turks were sincerely pro-British, and that they turned to Britain for advice and support. If anything, that study had concluded that they were distinctly anti-British, and that they expressed their views in this regard quite loudly without any hesitation. That is not to say, however, that they were pro-German, French or anything else; rather they were severely anti-European bordering on xenophobia. This meant, when translated into practical policies, that they did not trust any power, but that, for reasons of expediency, they would endeavour to be on the best possible terms with every state. It is not, therefore, surprising to find out that they were making every effort to cultivate all the Great Powers' friendship, Britain, Germany, France, Austria-Hungary by offering all of them more or less the same terms during the international crisis of 1908-1909. See, for a detailed account of their foreign policy ideas before the Young Turk revolution and their dealings during the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909, *H. Ünal*. Ottoman Foreign Policy During the Bosnian Annexation Crisis, 1908-1909 (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, the University of Manchester, Britain, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, 1992), 41-48. See, also, *H. Ünal*. Young Turk Assessments of International Politics, 1906-1909. – Middle Eastern Studies (April 1996), Vol. 32, no: 2, pp. 30-44. The myths that have gathered around the CUP's Anglophile demonstrations and their overtures to the British after the revolution stem from the fact that previous researchers have relied heavily upon memoirs of the Young Turks as a major source. Naturally all of these memoirs, most of which were written after the First World War, defend the CUP's conduct of affairs and blame Britain for not having aided the new regime at Constantinople. In a similar fashion, authors who have until recently written on the Ottoman decision for war in 1914 have mostly blamed other Powers' attitudes towards Turkey, since they have also mostly relied upon the memoirs of the CUP leaders. However, a recent meticulous study making use of a wide range of archival material has rightly questioned these assumptions and concluded that the Ottoman decision for war in 1914 was a deliberate one taken by the inner circle of the CUP. See, *F. A. K. Yasamee*. Ottoman Empire..., Op.cit., pp. 229-231.

⁶ Turkish, French and Austrian archive material have also been consulted, where appropriate, together with published German documents.

⁷ It is now a region in the Republic of Macedonia called Bitola. The Turkish name for it is Manastır. We have adopted Monastir in this study as it appeared in British documents at the time.

⁸ Heathcote to Barclay, 3 June 1908, FO294/39; Satow (British Consular Officer at Üsküp – Skopje, now capital of the Republic of Macedonia) to Lamb (British Consul-General at Salonica – Thessaloniki, now in Northern Greece), 2 June 1908, FO294/43; FO294/46. See, also, for the text of the memorandum, "Memorandum Aux Puissances", *Mechveret Supplement Français*, 1 July 1908. Ahmed Rıza's letter was not even

troops in Macedonia in June, British officials on the spot were inclined to put the movement down to grievances over pay and promotion⁹, while at the British Embassy in Constantinople the Charge d' Affaires, George Barclay, complained of lack of information, particularly from Monastir, where "it would seem that great excitement prevails... the troops refuse to march against the rebels... there is no doubt that great anxiety is felt at the Porte as to the situation".¹⁰ In London the British Foreign Office remained engrossed in the latest Anglo-Russian scheme for Macedonian reform – a proposal to establish a mobile gendarmerie to pursue armed bands – as late as the middle of July, and a report that the Young Turks had made overtures to the Bulgarian bands drew no comment from the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Charles Hardinge, beyond the observation that "if the Young Turks join the Bulgarian bands, this fact may make the mobile force more palatable to the Sultan"¹¹, who was expected to oppose the scheme altogether. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hardinge did not refer to events in Macedonia when he wrote privately to Barclay two days later;¹² nor was the latter certain as to "how far the rising will spread", or even whether it was likely to "fizzle out". However, Barclay did note that some of his colleagues "have informed their governments that the Young Turk rising renders the moment... unsuitable for the pushing of the proposed reforms... and the object of the rising is said to be to revive the 1876 Constitution" – the first indication that he or any other British official had begun to grasp the revolutionary nature of the movement.¹³

The formal restoration of the Constitution on 23 July brought this guesswork to an end; thereafter the Foreign Office was remarkably quick to formulate a sympathetic attitude. On 27 July Grey instructed Barclay to offer his congratulations to the Grand Vizier, and to assure him that "the welfare of Turkey is earnestly desired by means of a regeneration of the administration". He also instructed him to say that as far as Britain was concerned, "the Macedonian question and others of a similar nature will entirely disappear once good government throughout the Turkish dominions is estab-

acknowledged by the Foreign Office, on the grounds that "we do not answer letters from the Young Turk party... this is our rule" (Ahmed Riza to Grey, 20 March 1908, FO371/540, 9807 and minutes).

⁹ Barclay to Gray, 12 July 1908, FO371/544, 21316 and minutes; Barclay to Grey, 11 July 1908, FO371/544, 24449; Heathcote (British Consular Officer in Monastir) to Barclay, 22 July 1908, FO371/544, 23168; Surtees (British Military Attache at Constantinople) to Barclay, 1 July 1908, FO371/544, 22225.

¹⁰ Barclay to Grey, 9 July 1908, FO371/544, 24315.

¹¹ See Hardinge's minute on July 14, FO371/544, 24315.

¹² Hardinge to Barclay, 16 July 1908, Pte. *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A); cf. H e l l e r, op.cit., 9.

¹³ Barclay to Grey, successive reports, 16th, 17th and 18th July, FO371/544, 24666, 24797. This lack of foreknowledge about the coming revolution was not necessarily peculiar to the British Embassy. Lewis Einstein, attached to the American Embassy at the time explains why all the accredited diplomats were taken aback by the revolution: "... Everyone knew that a group of political refugees had lived for years in Paris and in Geneva, but most of them were believed to have long ago made their peace with the Sultan and the others hardly counted... Few of us moreover had any real contact with the military... Diplomats were still less in touch with the Masonic lodges at Salonica or the military circles in Macedonia, where the insurrection had started. Everyone was amazed to learn that the army, after fighting *Comitadjis* for years, had itself begun a revolution. They were still more astonished by its instantaneous and overwhelming success..."; L. Einstein. *A Diplomat Looks Back* (New Haven & London, 1968), 64-65. See, also, E. Lindow. *Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein als Botschafter in Konstantinopel, 1897-1912* (Danzig, 1934), 101-102.

lished".¹⁴ Indeed the Foreign Office had already decided privately to suspend representations to the Porte on the subject of the proposed mobile force, owing to the "marked improvement" in the situation in Macedonia resulting from the disappearance of armed bands.¹⁵ This represented a radical change in Britain's attitude, given that as recently as 23 July Grey had assured the Russian Ambassador that the scheme for a mobile force should be proceeded with.¹⁶ Nor did Grey hesitate to make his new line public; speaking in the House of Commons on 27 July, he stated that it would be much better that the Macedonian question be settled by herself than by the Powers "pressing partial reforms on reluctant, unwilling and obstructive authorities".¹⁷

Over the next few weeks this favourable attitude towards the constitutional regime was reiterated and made more precise. In appointing Sir Gerard Lowther as Ambassador to Constantinople, Grey stressed that "he should lose no opportunity of letting it be gradually known that our attitude towards the new moment, insofar as it makes for reform and good government in Turkey, is entirely favourable... we shall be ready and willing to assist those who are working towards that end".¹⁸ When writing to Sir Francis Bertie, British Ambassador in Paris, Hardinge likewise noted that "we intend to do all we can to be on the best possible terms with what we hope will be a strong and regenerated Turkey".¹⁹ Writing to Sir Adam Block, the President of the Council of the Ottoman Debt, he declared that "whatever we can do to help and encourage the Turks in their present attempt at the regeneration of the Turkish administration will most certainly be done by us".²⁰

There were some qualifications. Grey foresaw that in certain circumstances there would be practical limits to the support Britain could offer Turkey:

We should avoid making the Turks suspicious by attempting to take a hand where we are not wanted; but we should make them understand that, if they are going to make a good job of their own affairs, our encouragement and support will be very firm, and that we shall deprecate any interference on the part of others from outside. I do not mean that we should go to the length of intervention to prevent them; but that our diplomatic support will be benevolent, and our influence used to secure a fair chance for them.²¹

More specifically, Grey worried about Russia; "the delicate point will presently be Russia, we cannot revert to the old policy of Lord Beaconsfield, we have now to be pro-Turkish without giving rise to suspicion that we are anti-Russian".²² He noted that

¹⁴ Grey to Lowther, 27 July 1908, FO371/544, 26166.

¹⁵ Grey to O'Beirne, 27 July 1908; British Documents on the Origins of the First World War, 1878-1914. Ed. by G. P. Gooch and H. Temperly, Vol. V, (London, 1928-38) no: 212.

¹⁶ FO371/544, 24718.

¹⁷ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, IV. House of Common, 27 July 1908, vol.193.

¹⁸ Grey to Lowther, 30 July 1908, FO371/544, 26664.

¹⁹ Hardinge to Bertie, 30 July 1908, Pte. *Bertie Papers* (FO800/180).

²⁰ Hardinge to Block, 31 July 1908, Pte. *Hardinge Papers*, cited in *J. Heller: Op.cit.*, p. 11.

²¹ Grey to Lowther, 31 July 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

²² Lowther to Grey, 7 Aug. 1908, FO371/545, and minutes.

in the long term, “the effect upon European politics of a strong and regenerated Turkey would be very great”, and he warned Lowther not to give Russia the impression that “we are reverting to the old policy of supporting Turkey as a barrier against her, and should continue to work with Russia when possible”.²³ A further reservation, of which a great deal has been made by some authors, concerned the possible impact of a successful constitutional regime in Turkey upon Moslems under British rule in Egypt and India.

We fully realise, wrote Hardinge, that the success of the Constitutional system in Turkey will have a very serious effect on our position in Egypt... whatever may happen it is very difficult to foresee, but the future will be full of surprises, not unmingled with anxiety for us both in Egypt and in India.²⁴

Grey expressed similar worries, particularly with regard to Egypt:

If Turkey no establishes a Parliament and improves her government, the demand for a Constitution in Egypt will gain great force, and our power of resisting the demand will be very much diminished. If, when there is a Turkish Constitution in good working order and things are going well in Turkey, we are engaged in suppressing by force and shooting a rising in Egypt of people who demand a Constitution too, the position will be very awkward. It would never do for us to get into conflict on the subject of Egypt, not with the Turkish Government, but with the feeling of the Turkish people.²⁵

That said, Grey recognised that these fears were speculative: “...for the moment all we can say is that we want to see what is going to happen in Turkey, and that the development of representative institutions in Egypt will continue to receive constant consideration”.²⁶ Nor was the Foreign Office necessarily opposed to representative institutions for Egypt at least in the longer term. Grey pointed to developments in connection with the provincial councils, and Hardinge was frankly resigned: “... eventually we shall no doubt be obliged to give the Egyptians some form of representative government”.²⁷ The practical impact upon Britain’s relations with Turkey was minimal. Grey did instruct Lowther to unofficially advise the Porte not to appoint a prominent individual as its High Commissioner in Egypt, but in the event it was soon apparent that the Porte had no such intention, and no approach was therefore made at all.²⁸

From Britain’s point of view it was fortunate that Austria-Hungary and Russia appeared to be equally well-disposed towards the new Turkish regime. Despite initial waver-

²³ Grey to Lowther, 11 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

²⁴ Hardinge to Bertie, 30 July 1908, Pte. *Bertie Papers* (FO800/180).

²⁵ Grey to Lowther, 31 July 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

²⁶ Grey to Lowther, 8 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

²⁷ Hardinge to Bertie, 30 July 1908, Pte. *Bertie Papers* (FO800.180).

²⁸ Grey to Lowther, 20 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A); Grey to Lowther, 18 Sep. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); Lowther to Grey, 30 Sep. 1908, Pte. *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A). This was probably the most sensitive issue from the British point of view. See for instance, Gorst to Grey, 12 Feb. 1909, *Grey Papers* (FO800/47).

²⁹ On learning of the outbreak of the Young Turkish revolutionary movement in Macedonia, Aehrenthal, Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary, initially considered it as the spread of “sickness”, so far confined to the

ing²⁹, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Baron Lexa von Aehrenthal informed the Foreign Office in mid-August that he was prepared to assume a “sympathetically expectant attitude”³⁰, while his Russian counterpart Alexander Isvolsky gave his full concurrence to British proposal to suspend representations to the Porte on the subject of the Macedonian mobile force, and added that Britain and Russia should avoid placing themselves in a position of antagonism towards a Muslim movement productive of genuine reforms.³¹ Thus freed from the threat of counter-pressure by other Powers³², and greatly encouraged by the display of anglophile tendencies on the part of the new Turkish government³³, Britain could now afford to take an openly pro-Turkish attitude. Though the Foreign Office continued to receive reports casting doubts upon the ultimate success of the Young Turk reform movement³⁴, Grey was determined to offer the new regime every support:

Balkan territories of the Ottoman Empire, and he took up a cautious attitude. At one stage he even proposed to other Powers that the Sultan be made the master of his house. However, as soon as he realised that the new regime had practically put an end to violence in Macedonia overnight, he did not hesitate to take up a sympathetic attitude. See, for details, *F. R. Bridge*. From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, (London, 1972), p. 302; *F. R. Bridge*. The Habsburg Monarchy and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1900-1918. – In: *M. Kent*. Op. cit., p. 37.

³⁰ *F. R. Bridge*. Great Britain and Austria-Hungary 1906-1914: A Diplomatic History, (London, 1972), pp. 103-104; *F. R. Bridge*. The Habsburg Monarchy..., pp. 37-38.

³¹ O’Beirne to Grey, 30 July 1908, FO371/544, 26555.

³² It appears that, despite the surprise felt by the Powers at the revolution, all of them responded positively on the whole for different reasons. In addition to Austria-Hungary and Russia whose initial attitudes have been touched upon above, France and even Germany were also quick to express their approval. The French, for instance, welcomed the Young Turk revolution with liberal inclinations and foresaw a diminution of German influence at Constantinople. Indeed, their substantial financial interests in the Ottoman Empire, and their position as the biggest creditor led them to hope that France might soon achieve a position of pre-eminence at Constantinople. See, for a French assessment of the revolution, Steeg (French Member of the Macedonian Commission) to Pichon (French Foreign Minister), 30 July 1908, Archives de Ministre des Affaires Etrangères (Quai d’Orsay), Paris Nouvelle Serie. Turquie, 58. According to Stephen Pichon the Young Turk revolution was a “general movement of sympathy for liberal and republican France”. See, *L. B. Fulton*. France and the End of the Ottoman Empire. – In: *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*. Ed. Marian Kent, p. 156. Contrary to all speculations in the press at the time that the revolution put an end to German ascendancy at Constantinople, the German government also took up a very sympathetic attitude, since the German Chancellor saw initially the revolution as a permanent relief from the Macedonian Question and others of a similar nature: “*The Turkish revolution purified, like a storm, the stifling atmosphere which hung over Europe through the mid-summer of 1908. It had partly been provoked by the projects for reform in Macedonia, announced at Reval by Russia and England, plans to which, in the opinion of the Turkish patriots, the Sultan Abdul Hamid, a master of finesse who always went into terror of his life was not offering sufficient resistance*”. See, *B. F. von Bülow*. Memoirs (Berlin, 1930), Vol. III., 321. See, also for further details of the Power’s responses to the Young Turk revolution, *H. Ünal*. Ottoman Foreign Policy..., pp. 57-63.

³³ For public gatherings, rejoicing and all sorts of demonstrations in favour of Britain as mother of parliamentary system of government, see despatches from consular officers in Macedonia and in Constantinople, FO371/544-545; FO195/2330.

³⁴ The knowledgeable Dragoman in the Embassy in Constantinople, G.H. Fitzmaurice, who had been in Turkey for longer than 30 years, expressed his concern, while admitting that the Young Turk revolution offered a golden opportunity for checking German possible expansionism, that the Young Turks would most likely raise all thorny questions like Crete, Egypt, Bosnia, Aden and Lebanon, and that they would certainly resent privileges enjoyed by foreigners as a natural result of their nationalist leanings. See, Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, 25 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/769). The Foreign Office’s adviser, Professor Arminius Vambery, of the University of Budapest for Oriental Languages was not very sanguine as to the Young Turks’ endeavour to blend various nationalities into one body politic since it had not produced positive results in the Austro-Hungarian Empire under much more favourable conditions. See, *Vambery Papers* (FO800/33).

we shall do all in our power, he informed Lowther on 23 August, to encourage them so long as they do well and we shall not embarrass them by demands of our own; just as we used all our influence when the Turkish government was bad to press reforms from outside, so now, if reforms are being developed from inside, we shall use all our influence to prevent their being interfered with from outside.³⁵

One area where Grey was eager to offer practical assistance was finance. The Turkish regime had lost no time in indicating its desire for a foreign loan, and though Grey was anxious to find opportunities for British capital, he added that he would not support demand for “onerous and unsound terms” from Turkey.³⁶ Though concerned to reverse the recent trend towards German domination of Turkish finance, he did not press for exclusive advantages, and when France pressed the Turkish government to accept a French financial adviser he decided not to oppose her, nor to demand the appointment of a similar British adviser.³⁷ Mallet told the Secretary of the Ottoman Bank that “the present was a moment of which British capitalists should not fail to take advantage”³⁸, while Hardinge pressed British financiers to interest themselves in the proposed Turkish loan³⁹, and assured Sir Adam Block, President of the Ottoman Debt Administration that the Foreign Office would do all in its power to improve Britain’s financial position in Turkey.⁴⁰ Meanwhile the Turkish government had appointed Sir William Wilcocks as its adviser on irrigation schemes, and applied for the loan of a British admiral to reorganise the fleet, and an expert to reform the Customs.⁴¹ On the eve of the Bosnian annexation crisis Anglo-Ottoman relations appeared rather cosy, and contrary to the previous authors’ conclusions, Britain seemed eager to prop up the new regime at Constantinople, since the Foreign Office tended to see it as British-oriented.

*Britain and the Ottoman Empire During the Bosnian Crisis:
October 1908 to April 1909*

The first major test of Britain’s new attitude towards Turkey came with the international crisis which erupted in October 1908 as a result of Bulgaria’s declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire, and Austria-Hungary’s corresponding announcement of her annexation of the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, occupied by the Dual Monarchy since 1878. The Bulgarian declaration was well-heralded. The sourness of relations with Bulgaria was created on 12 September by the Porte’s refusal to include Ivan S. Geshov, the Bulgarian Agent at Constantinople among

³⁵ Grey to Lowther, 23 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79); *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193/A).

³⁶ Grey to Lowther, 23 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79).

³⁷ Lowther to Grey, 30 Aug. 1908; Grey to Lowther, 02.09.08, FO371/546, 30181.

³⁸ Lowther to Mallet, 13 Aug. 1908, Pte. FO371/548, 28640; *Lowther Papers* ((FO800/193B); Grey to Lowther, 25 Aug. 1908, FO371/548, 28640.

³⁹ Hardinge to Lowther, 21 Sep. 1908, Pte. *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

⁴⁰ Hardinge to Block, 21 Sep. 1908, Pte. *Hardinge Papers*, cited in Heller, op. cit., 14.

⁴¹ Hardinge to the King, 18 Sep. 1908, Pte. *Hardinge Papers*, cited in Heller, op.cit, 15.

the foreign representatives to a dinner on the occasion of the Sultan's birthday.⁴² When this news arrived at the Foreign Office, officials did not take it seriously; it was treated as an unnecessary and unfortunate squabble.⁴³ But, reports from Sir George Buchanan, the British Minister at Sofia, on the existence of a strong undercurrent in Bulgarian political circles to use this incident as an opportunity for obtaining "... some satisfaction as regards the questions of administrative reforms and of the schools in Macedonia" promptly brought the Foreign Office to home to the approaching crisis.⁴⁴ And Hardinge found the Bulgarian demand absurd.⁴⁵ But the flow of disquieting news from Sofia continued⁴⁶ and Grey decided to take action. He thought it would be best to ascertain the views of the Russian government. Therefore, he instructed Sir Arthur Nicolson, the British Ambassador to St. Petersburg, to enquire whether Russia would act in concert with London in urging Bulgaria "to adopt a prudent course and avoid any provocative action".⁴⁷ Though responding positively in principle, Russia put forward a counter-proposal: Britain and Russia should indicate to the Porte that the two Powers would not recall their gendarmerie officers serving with Ottoman troops in Macedonia lest the tension between Turkey and Bulgaria cause a recrudescence of trouble in the region.⁴⁸ It is clear from private correspondence that this Russian intervention annoyed the Foreign Office enormously, and that it was rejected, though the Foreign Office couched its official reply to St. Petersburg in milder terms.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, tension between Bulgaria and Turkey had reached a new peak, before the Foreign Office took any action, with Bulgarian troops seizing the Oriental Railways lines passing through Bulgaria, which were Ottoman properties in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin. This exacerbated the situation. The Foreign Office was now certain that Bulgaria was about to declare independence.⁵⁰ Sofia's utterances to the contrary did sound unconvincing. Therefore, Buchanan was instructed to make the strongest representations.⁵¹ The Bulgarian Agent in London was also warned by Hardinge, who

⁴² Bulgaria was then under Turkish suzerainty in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin. See, for details, Ün a l. Ottoman Foreign Policy, op.cit., pp. 78-79.

⁴³ See, for instance, minutes on Lowther to Grey, 9 Dec. 1908, FO371/550, 31758. See, also, all the minutes on Lowther to Grey, 12 Oct. 1908 and 13 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 31758, 31783; FO371/550, 32598, 32612, 33138.

⁴⁴ Buchanan to Grey, 14 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 32037.

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also Hardinge's minute: "*the fact that the Bulgarian Agent was not invited to dinner could hardly be a pretext for administrative autonomy in Macedonia...nor in view of the order now prevailing would there be any reason for demand being made*".

⁴⁶ Buchanan to Grey, 18 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 32430.

⁴⁷ Grey to Nicolson, 21 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 32430. He also instructed Lowther to "unofficially and amicably" impress upon the Turks the advisability of closing the matter through diplomatic means. See, Grey to Lowther, 21 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 32430.

⁴⁸ Nicolson to Grey, 22 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 32911. Russia's Acting Foreign Minister, Charykov uttered the same threat to the Turkish Ambassador, Turhan Pasha to St. Petersburg. See, for Ottoman documents, Turhan Paşa to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, 27 Sep. 1908, Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası, Mümtaze Kalemî, *Bulgaristan Evrakı* (hereafter A.B.T.Z.), 170/77.

⁴⁹ Grey to Lowther, 23 Sep 1908; Grey to Nicolson, 26 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 32911, 33124 and minutes.

⁵⁰ See, Hardinge's minute, FO371/550, 33788.

⁵¹ Buchanan to Grey, 29 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 33788.

called the seizure of the railways an act of "brigandage".⁵²

At this stage, the Foreign Office was determined to stand by Turkey while it was clear that Sofia was in no mood to step back. Meanwhile, news from St. Petersburg pointed to the fact that the Russian attitude was fast undergoing a change for the worst. As Nicolson reported, St. Petersburg feared that Austrian flattery of the Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria in Budapest at the time was viewed by Russia to have been designed to increase Habsburg influence at Sofia at her expense. Therefore, the Russians might not, after all, be bothered about the Bulgarian seizure of the railway. In addition, if this incident was to eventually lead to modifications in the Treaty of Berlin, for which Russia had no affection, the Russian government could view them with comparative equanimity. According to Nicolson, all this was due to the Russians' misgivings and uneasiness about the Young Turk revolution. Despite their public assertions that they regarded it with benevolent interest, they apparently saw in it potential danger which might hamper the realisation of "Slav aspirations" in the Balkans. They also feared that a successful Moslem movement could give rise to expectations of an "aggressive" nature among Russia's Moslem subjects with unpredictable embarrassing consequences.⁵³

When translated into a practical line of policy, these Russian anxieties meant wavering and reluctance on the part of St. Petersburg government to join in British representations to Bulgaria on the subject of the railway dispute. But the Foreign Office was in no way prepared to step back. But the Russian dilatoriness had annoyed Hardinge who suggested that the British "should make an effort and take the initiative to arrive at a practical solution". Mallet went even further:

the Russian Government have been acting at Sophia independently of us, as it is quite evident that we do not see eye to eye in this question there is no reason why we should not stick out a line of our own and try in this way to effect a settlement.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, several reports from Sofia confirming Bulgaria's intention to declare independence had reached London.⁵⁵ The Foreign Office immediately sent out a circular to the Powers appealing to them to seriously warn Bulgaria against any such action. Aehrenthal was particularly asked to bring pressure to bear upon the Bulgarian Prince who was still in Budapest.⁵⁶ In order to prevent Bulgaria's move, British representatives explored every avenue⁵⁷ and combined their efforts with those of several

⁵² Grey to Buchanan, 26 Sep. 1908; Grey to Buchanan, 28.09.08, FO371/550, 33436, 33933.

⁵³ Nicolson to Grey, 29 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 33786. See for Nicolson's earlier observations, Nicolson to Grey, 27 Aug. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/73).

⁵⁴ Minutes by Hardinge and Mallet, FO371/550, 33884.

⁵⁵ Buchanan to Grey, 1 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 34400.

⁵⁶ The Foreign Office instructed Lowther at this stage to urge the Ottoman government to similarly appeal to the Powers, signatory to the Treaty of Berlin, with a view to securing an equitable settlement in case Bulgaria declared independence. Lowther was also to urge the Porte to avoid any rash action likely to lead to hostilities and to demands for compensation by several Powers. Grey to Lowther and Grey to Bertie (repeated to other Embassies), 02 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 34400.

⁵⁷ Buchanan to Grey, 3 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 34244, 34337; Bertie to Grey, 3 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 32245, 34247, 34248.

Powers including Germany⁵⁸, and even Russia whose attitude had once again changed and become more co-operative as a result of the approaching Austro-Hungarian action.⁵⁹ But Aehrenthal, who professed to disbelieve that the Bulgarian move was imminent refused to comply with the British request to warn Sofia against a declaration of independence.⁶⁰ Aehrenthal's statement was interpreted by London as a clear sign that Vienna was acting in connivance with Sofia, and that it was about to announce the formal attachment of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Austria-Hungary.

The proclamation of Bulgarian independence and the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary did not, under the circumstances, take the Foreign Office by surprise. If anything, in addition to the well-heralded Bulgarian action, the Foreign Office had been bracing itself for Austro-hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶¹ However, the Foreign Office's preparations did not mean full-front confrontation, since it was well aware that once declared, neither the annexation nor the Bulgarian independence could be reversed; but these actions should not be recognised until and unless Turkey was compensated for its losses: the best solution, the Foreign Office could think of, was as high pecuniary indemnification for Turkey as could possibly be obtained from Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary.⁶² In order to achieve this, the Foreign Office took up a tough line towards what it called the *treaty breakers*. It concentrated at first upon Austria-Hungary. After all, Aehrenthal was, according to Hardinge, the chief conspirator of this "deep-laid plot... which had been studiously concealed" from the British. Though he conceded from the outset that what had taken place was irreversible and had to be eventually recognised, he emphasized that "neither of these should be done without due compensation being given to Turkey..."⁶³

Grey was no less irritated with Austria Hungary. When writing to the Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith, Grey gave vent to his anger and underlined British policy:

It is monstrous that Austria, who was always deprecating any pressure upon the Sultan and his Camarilla for fear of complications should now arrange with Bulgaria openly to flout the Young Turk regime which is really pure and honest. I propose that we should be the Turk's friend in the contest; inclination and policy both point that way, for the Young Turk regime is the injured and deserving party...⁶⁴

Having received Asquith's approval⁶⁵ and the full-backing of the opposition from

⁵⁸ Lascelles to Grey, 4 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 34261, 34274.

⁵⁹ Nicolson to Grey, 3 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 34259.

⁶⁰ Goschen to Grey, 4 Sep. 1908, FO371/550, 34264.

⁶¹ Aehrenthal seems to have given out some hints to Hardinge at Ischl meeting as to the annexation. See, B. C. B u s c h. Hardinge of Penschurt: A Study in the Old Diplomacy, (London, 1980), p. 141; B r i d g e. Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, op.cit., pp. 111-112; L o r d H a r d i n g e o f P e n s h u r t. Old Diplomacy The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penschurt, (London, 1947), pp. 167-168.

⁶² Grey to Nicolson, 6 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 34519.

⁶³ Hardinge to Bertie, 5 Oct. 1908, Pte. *Bertie Papers* (FO800/161).

⁶⁴ Grey to Asquith, 5 Oct. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/100).

⁶⁵ Asquith to Grey, 6 Oct. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/100).

Landsdowne⁶⁶, Grey now acquainted Nicolson with his line, and instructed Sir William Goschen, British Ambassador at Vienna, to make representations to Aehrenthal in the sense that an international treaty could not be altered by a Power without the consent of the others.⁶⁷ But Goschen's representations to Austria-Hungary met with an utter repudiation of any foreknowledge of the Bulgarian action by Aehrenthal, who flatly rejected the British request to reconsider the annexation decision, on the grounds that all the necessary documents had already been signed by the Emperor.⁶⁸ But the Foreign Office was not prepared to be scared off. On the contrary, the news from Lowther that the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Constantinople had made numerous representations to the Porte, using threatening language as regards the Ottoman boycott of Austro-Hungarian goods⁶⁹ with a view to compelling Turkey to waive her protest against the annexation put London on alert. Mallet was quick to suggest to "say something" to the Austro-Hungarian government, since he regarded it as "monstrous that the Austrians bully the Turks in this way..."⁷⁰ And the Foreign Office categorically made it clear to Vienna that the British government did not approve of the moment chosen for the annexation and especially the manner in which it was carried out without any inhibition.⁷¹

In order to arrive at a direct settlement with the Porte, the Austro-Hungarians made some efforts. But they were all foredoomed to failure owing to Aehrenthal's persistent refusal to offer any pecuniary compensation to Turkey apart from the renunciation of the Dual Monarchy's rights in the Sanjak of Novi Bazar.⁷² Yet, the Ballhausplatz (Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry) attributed what it regarded as Turkish "stubbornness" in the matter of the trade boycott to British machinations.⁷³ True, the boycott was boosting British trade, but there does not exist even the slightest clue in British archives indicating that the British undermined the chances for a direct settlement.⁷⁴ What was, of course, anathema to the Foreign Office was to advise the Porte to bow to Austro-Hungarian pressure and step down without pecuniary compensation, as such a move would "incur the odium" of Constantinople.⁷⁵ The break-down of half-hearted negotiations with Turkey conducted by Pallavicini, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador at Constantinople, led to a barrage of invective in the Austro-Hungarian press against Britain because of the alleged intrigues of the British Embassy.⁷⁶ But Hardinge

⁶⁶ *Hansard* IV, 194, cc. 18-20.

⁶⁷ Grey to Nicolson and Grey to Goschen, 5 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 34596, 34597.

⁶⁸ Goschen to Grey, 6 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 34674.

⁶⁹ See, for details of the boycott, *E. Yavuz*. "1908 Boykotu", *Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Gelişme Dergisi: Özel Sayı, Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Araştırmaları* (Ankara, 1978), pp. 163-181.

⁷⁰ Mallet's minute on Grey to Lowther, 16 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35775.

⁷¹ FO371/553, 36146, 36647.

⁷² *Bridge*. From Sadowa to Sarajevo, p. 114.

⁷³ Grey repudiated all these accusations (Grey to Count de Sallis, 26 Oct. 1908, FO371/553, 37545; Grey to Goschen, 26 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37547).

⁷⁴ *Bridge*. Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, op.cit., p. 114; FO371/553, 36626, and minutes.

⁷⁵ Lowther to Grey and Grey to Lowther, 23 Oct. 1908 and 24 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 36886.

⁷⁶ Goschen to Grey, 16 Oct. 1908, FO371/553, 36148.

still thought it “undignified” to deny these “malicious” rumours.⁷⁷

In the meantime, Buchanan had been instructed to make strong representations to Sofia that Britain would not recognise Bulgarian independence until all the Powers especially Turkey had made their views known.⁷⁸ Buchanan’s suggestion that the danger of war could best be averted by bringing about an early recognition of independence leaving to the forthcoming International Conference its ratification together with the question of indemnification was dismissed.⁷⁹ However, this tough line of the Foreign Office did not change the situation on the ground between Bulgaria and Turkey where the outlook looked menacing. In fact Bulgaria had declared her independence at a time when she had 100,000 men under arms.⁸⁰ In view of the rapid mobilisation capability of the Bulgarian Army, the British decided to take the lead in urging the Bulgarians to put an immediate halt to mobilisation, and this move was supported by the French and Russian governments.⁸¹ The categorical assurances from Sofia that Bulgaria had no intention to disturb the peace went unheeded.⁸² Surprisingly, however, the British government saw Turkish counter measures as a good counterpoise to the possibility of the Bulgarians scoring the initial successes in the event of a war, and thus contributing to the peace.⁸³ Despite continued reports on further Turkish military measures⁸⁴ Lowther watered down a Russian request for representations to be made at Constantinople similar to those already made at Sofia, on the grounds that the internal situation rendered the presence of troops extremely necessary.⁸⁵ Not until 3 November, after the Foreign Office had received a vague statement from the Grand Vizier with no mention of a date for discharge of Turkish reserves was Lowther instructed to invite the Porte to name a date by which the number of troops, at least, on the Bulgarian frontier would be reduced to its peacetime strength.⁸⁶ In the meantime Turkey had made an appeal to the signatory Powers to safeguard her interests and compensate her for the losses either by summoning a conference or taking similar steps.⁸⁷ This

⁷⁷ Goschen to Grey, 24 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 36997, and minutes.

⁷⁸ Grey to Buchanan, 6 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 34528.

⁷⁹ Buchanan to Grey, 9 Oct. 1908 and 10 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 35015, 35200; FO371/552, 35354. Buchanan maintains in his memoirs that he espoused the Bulgarian cause, and “acted throughout the whole crisis as their advocate with His Majesty’s Government...” See, for details, G. Buchanan. *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories* (London, 1923), pp. 79-80. However, it is difficult to substantiate his claim by evidence in British archives. Putting aside his personal sympathies, the British policy was distinctly pro-Turkish.

⁸⁰ FO371/550, 34400.

⁸¹ Buchanan to Grey, 7 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 34781; Buchanan to Grey, 27 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37433.

⁸² Buchanan to Grey, 14 Oct. 1908, 15 Oct. 1908, 16 Oct. 1908 and 17 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35743; FO371/553, 36139, 36184; Hardinge told the Bulgarian Agent, in reply to latter’s observations as regards Turkish military preparations that “His Majesty’s Government are well aware that certain precautionary (my emphasis) measures had been taken by the Turkish Government” (Grey to Buchanan, 19 Oct. 1908, FO371/553, 36528).

⁸³ Hardinge’s minute on the Military Attache’s report in Hohler to Grey, 21 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37841.

⁸⁴ Lowther to Grey, 30 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37763, and minutes.

⁸⁵ Grey to Lowther, 30 Oct. 1908, and Lowther to Grey, 1 Nov. 1908, FO371/554, 37877.

⁸⁶ Grey to Lowther, 3 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 38214; Hardinge to Lowther, Pte., *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

⁸⁷ Lowther to Grey, 7 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 34753.

relieved the British from their fears of war.

As regards a direct settlement between Bulgaria and Turkey, the British attitude was equally favourable. But the Foreign Office eschewed giving the Porte any advice as to what should form the basis of any direct settlement for fear that anything said or done in this respect might be interpreted by Turkey as open to question their sovereign rights.⁸⁸ When the Bulgarian Government decided to despatch one of their ministers, Andrej Lyapchev, to open formal negotiations with the Turks, tension subsided, and the British felt more relieved.⁸⁹ From then onwards, the whole matter assumed a purely financial dimension; but, it still was not going to be easy to obtain Bulgarian agreement to pay “compensation” even though Prince Ferdinand had, in his appeal to the French President, referred to it as being due to Turkey, since “la separation qui s’est produite entre les deux Etats ne saurait d’ailleurs nuire aux interets que la Turquie possedait sur le territoire Bulgare...”⁹⁰ With regard to the amount of compensation to be paid by Bulgaria, there was a vast difference between what Turkey could legally demand (up to L.T. 28.000.000) in accordance with her rights under separate headings of the Treaty of Berlin, and what Bulgaria could be reasonably expected to pay. At any rate, the Bulgarian negotiator Lyapchev was by no means prepared to offer more than 82.000.000 francs (L.T. 3.200.000) at the end of November after protracted negotiations. He even pointed out to Lowther that, if Turkey really contemplated a larger sum, “she should go to Sophia to fetch it”.⁹¹

In the meantime, Charykov’s and Isvolsky’s, Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister and Foreign Minister respectively, soundings as regards an international conference to deal with the crisis had reached London. But, the Foreign Office viewed the suggestion with extreme suspicion as Hardinge pointed out:

We should only accept the proposal for a conference on the distinct understanding that it is not to be utilised to exert pressure on Turkey for further spoliation... it would be necessary before going into any conference that there should be a preliminary agreement as to what subjects should be discussed, how they should be dealt with, and in what form Turkey can receive advantage...⁹²

What was worrying the Foreign Office was the possibility that the present rules governing the status of the straits should be put on the agenda of such a conference by Russia.⁹³ Although news from Nicolson was relatively cheerful as to Russian willingness to assist Turkey in resisting what was regarded in Russia “as an attack of Germanism on Slav interests” in the Balkans, the Foreign Office remained unconvinced not least because the Russian public might clamour for compensation that could

⁸⁸ Minutes on Buchanan to Grey, 19 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35901.

⁸⁹ Buchanan to Grey, 5 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 38553.

⁹⁰ “... *The separation which has taken place between the two states will by no means incur any damage to the interests which Turkey has on the Bulgarian territory...*” See, Lowther to Grey, 30 Nov. 1908, FO371/557, 41878.

⁹¹ Lowther to Grey, 30 Nov. 1908, FO371/557, 41878.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Bertie to Grey and Grey to Bertie, 6 Oct. 1908, FO371/550, 34462.

best be accorded by freeing the egress for Russian warships from the Dardanelles in return for St. Petersburg renouncing its claims to further payments by Turkey of the war indemnity imposed upon the Porte after the war of 1877-1878.⁹⁴

Isvolsky, who was on his European tour, was soon made aware of the strongly pro-Turkish stance of the Foreign Office through Bertie in Paris, and this made him relatively co-operative on his arrival in London.⁹⁵ Grey then simply told him, with the approval of the Cabinet, that "it was highly inopportune" to raise the question of the Straits, as it would deal another blow to the Young Turk regime. Isvolsky dwelt upon the complete change in Russian feeling towards Turkey, and Russia's desire to prop her up as a barrier against further Austro-Hungarian encroachments in the Balkans. But that made little impression on London.⁹⁶ The question was then left to be discussed "later on" in a friendly spirit between Turkey and Russia.⁹⁷ Isvolsky also agreed to substitute the wording of "avantages territoriales" for "avantages" only for Serbia and Montenegro. Moreover, at Grey's insistence, the whole question of Crete was excluded from the Conference discussions⁹⁸ and Isvolsky promised full support for the British proposal to make Bulgaria pay considerable compensation to Turkey.⁹⁹ In return for all the concessions which Isvolsky was compelled to make, the utmost Grey was prepared to offer was the conditional promise of 1907, according to which Britain would not oppose in principle the opening of the Dardanelles to Russian men-of-war.¹⁰⁰

The conference programme agreed upon between Grey and Isvolsky consisted of nine points which included a revision of the Capitulations in the Ottoman Empire as well as a discussion of the articles of 16 and 61 of the Treaty of Berlin which stipulated reforms in favour of the Christian subject peoples respectively in Macedonia and in Eastern Turkey. In placing these on to the conference programme Grey had thought of making it more attractive to Turkey. But he fell into a trap of his own. It appeared that, at this stage, the Porte was suspicious of all the Powers, in particular, Russia. It raised several objections to the proposed conference agenda. Firstly the Turks objected to the title of "Czar of the Bulgarians" to be conferred upon Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria which the proposed programme somewhat indicated: this would encourage him to promote his aspirations among the Bulgarian population in Macedonia and elsewhere. Secondly, as long as Bulgaria remained in possession of Eastern Roumelia, it would impose on Turkey the heavy burden of having to keep up a large force on the frontier.

⁹⁴ Nicolson to Grey, 8 Oct. 1908, Pte. *Nicolson Papers* (FO800/337).

⁹⁵ FO371/556, 40467, 40754, and minutes.

⁹⁶ Grey to Nicolson, 12 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35646, 35660.

⁹⁷ Grey to Lowther, 12 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35468.

⁹⁸ British policy was in no way less pro-Turkish on the Cretan question. At Bertie's insistence, Clemenceau had to put aside his philhellenic sentiments, and the whole question was left out of the Conference programme. See, Bertie to Grey, 07 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 34918. Grey's firm stand was soon to bear fruit as the other Protecting Powers informed the Cretan administration on October 28 that the island ought to remain quiet pending discussions with Turkey. See, for details, D. W. S w e e t. "The Bosnian Crisis". In: *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, Ed. by F. H. Hinsley (Cambridge, 1977), p. 185.

⁹⁹ Memorandum by Isvolsky, FO371/552, 35468; Grey to Nicolson, 14 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35660.

¹⁰⁰ S w e e t. "The Bosnian Crisis", op.cit., pp. 186-187.

The Grand Vizier, seeming to take an uncompromising attitude particularly on this point, declared that he would rather have a war than see Eastern Roumelia under Bulgarian control. His alternative to war was this region should be occupied by British, French, Italian and even Russian troops as a buffer state between the two countries. Finally, Turkey objected to submitting to the Conference the Articles of the Berlin Treaty concerning reforms in the Empire as they had, the Turks argued, already become obsolete since the establishment of the constitutional regime, and automatically lapsed.¹⁰¹

Though the annoyance at these arguments is evident in private correspondence of the Foreign Office¹⁰², the official reply to the Porte was couched in milder terms laying stress on how difficult it was for the British to get the Straits question postponed. But, the Porte's argument about Eastern Roumelia was dismissed as impracticable, and would, if insisted upon, serve no purpose but only wreck the diplomatic process aimed at forcing Bulgaria to pay as large a sum as possible to Turkey, since Eastern Roumelia had been recognised to all intents and purposes as an integral part of Bulgaria in 1885, and had almost nothing to do with the present crisis.¹⁰³ The Grand Vizier's scheme to transform the annexed provinces into some kind of independent principality governed by a protestant prince to be selected by the Powers and nominated by the Sultan was found "childish" on the grounds that it would lead to a war and jeopardise the diplomatic activity through which Turkey could receive compensation from Austria-Hungary.¹⁰⁴

However, disagreement on certain points did not bring about any change in Britain's policy which held to its pro-Turkish course. This is strikingly demonstrated in the financial field. There was a genuine desire on the part of the British to come to Turkey's rescue financially.¹⁰⁵ It is possible to infer from the evidence that the Foreign Office was even prepared to consider the abrogation of the Capitulations. Though not in a mood to rush in the direction of abrogation¹⁰⁶, Grey expressed himself favourably to Rifat Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador in London. When the latter made reservations about discussing the Capitulations in the Conference, Grey told him that it would be much better to put it on the agenda of the Conference and use it as a trade-off as against the actions of Bulgaria and particularly Austria-Hungary:

If the Conference had put something on record with regard to the Capitu-

¹⁰¹ Grey to Lowther and Lowther to Grey, 12 Oct. 1908, 13 Oct. 1908, 14 Oct. 1908 and 15 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35514, 34537, 35667.

¹⁰² Hardinge's minute, FO371/552, 35667.

¹⁰³ Grey to Lowther, 13 Oct. 1909, 14 Oct. 1908, 15 Oct. 1908 and 16 Oct. 1908, FO371/552, 35514, 35567, 35667; FO371/553, 36443, 36445.

¹⁰⁴ Grey to Lowther, 26 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37198; FO371/555, 37942; Memorandum by Rifat Pasha, 4 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 38406.

¹⁰⁵ See for details of efforts to find loans for Turkey, FO371/552, 33537, 35666, 35772; FO371/553, 36588, 37012; FO371/549.

¹⁰⁶ When Mallet suggested in his minute the abrogation as an alternative relief for Turkish financial straits, Grey minuted "*the abolition of the Capitulations is in the future*" (Minutes on Lowther to Grey, 19 Oct. 1908, FO371/553, 36079).

lations in connection with the concessions which Turkey was now being asked to make in recognising the independence of Bulgaria and the annexation of Bosnia, Turkey would be in a stronger position to bargain with the Powers. For Turkey could then urge that she had received the promise of the Powers as to the abolition of the Capitulations in return for the concessions which she had already made...¹⁰⁷

Although the danger of war between Bulgaria and Turkey did now seem to be over, at least until the spring of 1909,¹⁰⁸ Anglo-Austrian relations took a very sharp turn for the worse. Frantic press attacks upon each other continued unabated, and even grew in intensity with an unprecedented barrage of invective against both sovereigns¹⁰⁹ making the task of diplomats more difficult. Violent scenes occurred between Goschen and Aehrenthal¹¹⁰ as well as their counterparts in London.¹¹¹ While the Austrians suspected Britain of discouraging the Turks from recognising the annexation and of diminishing the chances to come to terms with Turkey directly, British counter-suspicion of the Dual Monarchy using Bulgaria for further Austro-Hungarian encroachments on the Balkan peninsula intensified.¹¹² In order to forestall what seemed to the Foreign Office to be the nightmare of the establishment of an Austro-German domination over the Balkans threatening to affect the whole balance of power in Europe, the British representatives set about bringing Turkey and all the Balkan States together to prop up a security zone against such a contingency.

In fact, the annexation had already paved the way for Turkey and the Serbo-Montenegrin combination to make common cause.¹¹³ Kamil Pasha had earlier sounded out to Lowther as to some kind of offensive and defensive arrangements with Serbia and Montenegro, but was not encouraged by the Foreign Office, on the grounds that this would lead these Slav States to try to "liberate" the annexed provinces by force of arms.¹¹⁴ The sort of combination that the British promoted between Turkey and the Balkan States was once in which Bulgaria was to be included, as the latter was be-

¹⁰⁷ Grey to Lowther, 7 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 38406, 38794.

¹⁰⁸ Buchanan to Grey, 4 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 38433; Hardinge's minute on Bertie to Grey, 5 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 43992.

¹⁰⁹ Bridge. From Sadowa to Sarajevo, op.cit., pp. 117-118.

¹¹⁰ Goschen told Aehrenthal that "*Vous, Monsieur le Ministre, n'aimez pas la verite...*" See, Bridge. From Sadowa to Sarajevo, p. 113.

¹¹¹ For instance, in a heated conversation with Mensdorff, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador at London, Grey pointed out that "...I, too, felt much irritation with Baron Aehrenthal..." See, Grey to Cartwright, 16 Dec. 190808, Pte. Grey Papers (FO800/40).

¹¹² British suspicion as to Austro-Hungarian intentions does not seem to hold water in the light of Austrian archival material. See, B r i d g e. From Sadowa to Sarajevo, op.cit., pp. 123-124. But it is interesting to note that as late as 1912 in one of the sittings of the *Committee of the Imperial Defence* the British still clung to the belief that it was the mere presence of the British fleet that prevented a further move on the part of the Dual Monarchy at the height of the Bosnian crisis. See, "Situation in the Mediterranean (Secret), July 1912", *Cabinet Papers*, CAB38/20, No. 14.

¹¹³ See for the political atmosphere in these countries following the annexation, H. N o r a d o u n g h i a n. *Vers la Guerre Balkanique et la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Istanbul 1950), pp. 9-13; Whitehead (British Minister at Belgrade) to Grey, 27 Oct. 1908, FO371/551, 35255.

¹¹⁴ Lowther to Grey, 26 Oct. 1908; Grey to Lowther, 28 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37198, and minutes.

lieved to be in a position to turn the scale in favour of the either side.¹¹⁵ That is why the Foreign Office instructed Sir Francis Elliot, the British Minister at Athens, to inform the Greek Government that Athens should only give Turkey moral support in case of an unprovoked attack by Bulgaria.¹¹⁶ However, the Foreign Office was also opposed to an alliance openly directed against Austria-Hungary. For instance, the British poured cold water on negotiations between Turkey and Serbia likely to lead to an offensive and defensive alliance to be directed at Bulgaria¹¹⁷ as well as Austria-Hungary, because they feared it would push Bulgaria into the Austro-Hungarian orbit.¹¹⁸ They also feared that it would cause Rumania, who had always been suspected of having had a military convention with the Dual Monarchy, to actively participate in a war on the Austro-Hungarian side, thus creating a far more powerful combination than the one between Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro.¹¹⁹

Grey and Hardinge strongly urged the idea of an alliance, including Bulgaria upon the two emissaries of the Young Turkish Committee of Union and Progress (hereafter CUP), Ahmed Rıza and Dr. Nazım.¹²⁰ But towards the end of the year hopes for bringing about such an alliance were fading away because of the “inveterate jealousy” among small Balkan States and “of the secret desire of each of them to eat up Turkey” despite the fact that “... the impasse Austria has arrived at in her negotiations with Russia and Turkey”¹²¹ made it all the more desirable to “spell checkmate to Aehrenthal’s policy of obtaining supremacy in the Balkans...”¹²²

The fact that matters were advancing very slowly with little prospect of a peaceful settlement¹²³, did not budge Britain from her pro-Turkish line. The Foreign Office rejected a German suggestion at the end of November that the British put pressure on

¹¹⁵ Buchanan to Grey, 16 Nov. 1908, FO371/556, 39884, and minutes.

¹¹⁶ Elliot to Grey and Grey to Elliot, 11 Nov. 1908, FO371/551, 35255.

¹¹⁷ Whitehead to Grey, 13 Nov. 1908, and Grey to Whitehead, 14 Nov. 1908, FO371/556, 41617.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, and minutes; Whitehead to Grey, 10 Nov. 1908, 11 Nov. 1908, 12 Nov. 1908, and 13 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 39598, 39856.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Whitehead to Grey, 25 Nov. 1908, FO371/557, 41711; Greene (British Minister at Bucharest) to Grey, 9 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 43535. See for Whitehead’s and O’Reilly’s attempts to discourage the Serbs and the Montenegrins from such an alliance, Whitehead to Grey, 2 Dec. 1908, FO371/557, 42134; FO371/558, 43516; Grey to O’Reilly (British Minister at Cetinje, Montenegro), 17 Nov. 1908, FO371/556, 40059.

¹²⁰ Grey to Lowther, 14 Nov. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79).

¹²¹ Hardinge’s minute on Greene to Grey, 23 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 45119.

¹²² Hardinge to Lowther, 1 Dec. 1908, Pte. *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A). The idea to create an alliance in the Balkans between the Ottoman Empire and Serbia-Montenegro originated from the Grand Vizier, Kamil Pasha. It appears, however, that he set out feelers in October only to see how eager the Serbo-Montenegrin combination was for such an undertaking. He then used his negotiations with the Serbs and the Montenegrins to put pressure on the Bulgarian government in order to scare them off from a surprise attack upon Ottoman territories in Macedonia and Thrace. But as soon as the danger of war with Bulgaria eclipsed, he fobbed off the Serbian and the Montenegrin negotiators who had come down to Constantinople with evasive offers, and finally sent them back empty-handed. Kamil Pasha never took these negotiations seriously. Therefore, his motives for alliance negotiations did not seem to coincide with those of the Foreign Office. See, for a detailed study of these diplomatic activities, H. Ün a l. “An Example of Balkan Diplomacy: Ottoman Foreign Policy During the Bulgarian Independence Crisis”. – In: *Balkans: A Mirror of the New International Order*. Eds. by Kemal Saybaşılı and Günay Göksoy Özdoğan (İstanbul, 1995), pp. 37-54; Ün a l. *Ottoman Foreign Policy*, op.cit., pp. 127-133.

¹²³ Hardinge to Villiers, 19 Nov. 1908, Pte. *Hardinge Papers* (FO800/24).

the Turks to bring them to reason. The Foreign Office said that it fell to Austria-Hungary to find a way out of the difficulty of her own making to reconcile Turkish public.¹²⁴ After the first break-down of the negotiations with Turkey, on 10 December, Aehrenthal made another attempt at a direct settlement despite the continuation of the trade boycott with undiminished vigour; but the outcome came to naught once again, since he persistently rejected taking over a portion of the Turkish Debt for the annexed provinces.¹²⁵

Tension had now reached its peak. According to the Italian Foreign Minister, Tittoni, Austria-Hungary was simply itching for a pretext to attack Turkey, and he pointed out that in such a contingency neither Russia nor Italy would render any assistance to the Ottoman Empire. He then ascertained of Sir Rennell Rodd, British Ambassador at Rome, as to what Britain could do to assist Turkey.¹²⁶ Though the Foreign Office did not consult the *Committee of the Imperial Defence*, and finally decided to send a “classic” stereotyped reply as to a hypothetical situation, in private correspondence war was spoken of as not a remote contingency, but a close possibility. “We could hardly with honour avoid fighting” was Tilley’s view in the Foreign Office. Destruction of the Austro-Hungarian commerce and blockade of Fiume and Trieste and even Varna, if Bulgaria were to participate on the Austro-Hungarian side, were contemplated, inter alia, as useful services to be rendered to Turkey.¹²⁷ Grey consulted Asquith privately, and took care to leave open the possibility of intervention:

Tittoni practically says that Russia and Italy cannot help Turkey in a war with Austria, and asks whether we should do so. I propose to reply by saying that as far as continental nations are concerned, I doubt the war being limited to Austria and Turkey, and I have put in a sentence which implies (though it does not commit us), that we might intervene.¹²⁸

In the meantime there were rumours in Vienna as to the real objective behind the presence of the British fleet of Turkish coasts. The German Ambassador in Vienna pointed out to Sir Fairfax Cartwright, the recently appointed British Ambassador to Austria-Hungary, that the sour point with Ballhausplatz lay solely with Britain because the presence of a portion of the British fleet had simply deterred the Dual Monarchy from dispatching her warships to put a sharp stop to boycott and consequently force Turkey to bow to its wishes. This was, according to the Ambassador, the real grievance of Austria-Hungary more than British press attacks.¹²⁹ But the Foreign Office was not to be inhibited. If anything, on Mallet’s suggestion, it immediately consulted the Admiralty asking them to hold the fleet in readiness to send back to Turkish waters in case the political situation in the Balkans got out of control in the Spring of 1909.¹³⁰ In

¹²⁴ Goschen to Grey and Grey to Goschen, 25 Nov. 1908, FO371/556, 41267.

¹²⁵ B r i d g e. From Sadowa to Sarajevo, op.cit., pp. 114.

¹²⁶ Rodd to Grey, 15 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 44131.

¹²⁷ Ibid., minutes.

¹²⁸ Grey to Asquith, 31 Dec. 1908, Pte. Grey Papers (FO800/100).

¹²⁹ Cartwright to Grey, 21 Dec. 1908, Secret, FO371/558, 44564, 45054.

¹³⁰ Ibid., and minutes; Skinner to Montgomery, 8 Jan. 1909, and Skinner to Tyrrell, 12 Dec. 12 Jan. 1909, Pte. Grey Papers (FO800/87).

Vienna Britain was suspected of trying to bring about a general flare-up on the pretext of supporting the Young Turk regime, but with the real object of thwarting the German naval build-up.¹³¹ When Mensdorff, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador at London, mentioned to Grey a rumour that Britain was siding against Austria-Hungary simply because she was an ally of Germany, Grey flatly repudiated it.¹³²

As it was, the Foreign Office could foresee, by the end of the year, either a limited or a general war breaking out in the spring especially in the light of information tending to point to the likelihood of existence of a military understanding between Sofia and Vienna.¹³³ Nothing can better describe this fear than Grey's own private letter to Cartwright on 31 December:

The outlook is dark and your situation is difficult... There are some signs that Bulgaria has got some tie with Austria, and that each is relying upon the other to carry things with a high hand. It is a dangerous game. D'Aehrenthal ought to realise by now that forces are aroused, of which he, Isvolsky and Tittoni have found that out in Russia and Italy; if D'Aehrenthal does not realise that, just as his diplomacy produced a diplomatic storm which he did not expect, so a breach of peace will provoke a conflagration greater than anyone can see; he is living in a fool's paradise. It is dangerous to light a fire out of doors when there is a lot of combustible material about, and when the wind is blowing strong, and that is the diplomatic condition just now.¹³⁴

British intention of intervening in a war, however hypothetical, whether between Austria-Hungary and Turkey or between an Austro-Bulgarian combination against Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro should be read as a serious commitment to Turkey, especially since Grey had given an evasive answer to Benckendorff, Russian Ambassador at London, at the outset of the crisis as to what line Britain would take up in the event of hostilities between Russia and Austria-Hungary, the former supported by France and the latter supported by Germany.¹³⁵

Aehrenthal's move to offer Turkey L.T. 2,500,000 as compensation on January 11, 1909 broke the deadlock, and the negotiations were swiftly brought to a conclusion with the signing of a protocol on 26 February.¹³⁶ Though the main hurdle had now been surmounted, the Bulgarian question would prove to be more difficult. In actual fact,

¹³¹ Cartwright to Grey, 21 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 44602.

¹³² Grey to Cartwright, 6 Jan. 1909, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/41). Grey called these allegations "*preposterous and utterly absurd*" (Grey to Cartwright, 23 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 44602).

¹³³ Hardinge's minute on Buchanan to Grey, 25 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 45052; Tilley's minute on Lowther to Grey, 2 Oct. 1908, FO371/557, 42115; Lord Hardinge of Penhurst. *Old Diplomacy*, op.cit., pp. 168-169.

¹³⁴ Grey to Cartwright, 31 Dec. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/40).

¹³⁵ Grey to Nicolson, 10 Nov. 1908, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/73).

¹³⁶ "Turkish Revolution and Its Consequences", prepared by Tilley, FO371/770, 13516. See also Grey's expression of satisfaction with it, Cartwright to Grey, 25 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 3115; See for the protocol, Cartwright to Grey, 27 Feb. 1909, FO371/752, 8210.

Buchanan had, prior to Austrian offer of compensation to Turkey, sent a private letter to Hardinge sketching out a gloomy picture and underlying the Bulgarian determination not to go far beyond 82.000.000 frs.¹³⁷ But Grey simply thought that the Austro-Turkish agreement had greatly changed the situation.¹³⁸ But the Bulgarians had made it pretty clear on every occasion that they would sooner fight than pay more than 82.000.000 frs.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the British had sort of made up their mind that a lump sum should be fixed upon not according to how much Turkey was entitled to demand, but on how much would be within the ability of Bulgaria to pay. To this end, Block had been consulted as to what Turkish claims amounted to, and at the same time the Foreign Office had called upon the French, who had an intimate knowledge of Turkish and Bulgarian finances to express an opinion.¹⁴⁰ In the meanwhile, the Turkish Ambassador had informed the Foreign Office that they would demand L.T. 10.000.000¹⁴¹ though they could legally ask for L.T. 28.000.000.

The first French estimates had fixed the amount at L.T. 5.680.000, which coincided with that of the Foreign Office.¹⁴² However, further information from Buchanan showed that the Bulgarian budget deficit was more than it had first been thought to be.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, the French had changed their first estimate maintaining that Bulgaria could not possibly bear a charge of more than 100.000.000 frs (L.T. 4.000.000) without being crippled. According to their explanation, the first estimate had been prepared by the Quay d'Orsay, not by the Ministry of Finance.¹⁴⁴ But the British remained unmoved. While endeavouring to bring France and Russia into line¹⁴⁵, they expressed surprise at "the meaning of the new opinion from the French financial experts..." Hardinge even imagined that the French might have been bribed by the Bulgarians, and therefore suggested that the Foreign Office should keep out of this proposal.¹⁴⁶ By the same token, he

¹³⁷ Buchanan to Hardinge, 6 Jan. 1909, Pte. *Hardinge Papers* (FO800/192).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Grey's minute.

¹³⁹ Buchanan to Grey, 5 Dec. 1908, 6 Dec. 1908 and 23 Dec. 1908, FO371/557, 42509, 42510; FO371/558, 45052; FO371/747, 2051, 2056. See for Isvolsky's efforts to move the Bulgarian government to raise their offer and the Bulgarian reaction. Nicolson to Grey, 26 Dec. 1908, FO371/558, 45031; Bertie to Grey, 8 Jan. 1909, FO371/747, 1003.

¹⁴⁰ FO371/770, 13516; Grey to Benckendorff, 12 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 39336; Grey to Nicolson, 13 Nov. 1908, FO371/555, 39495.

¹⁴¹ Grey to Lowther, 26 Oct. 1908, FO371/554, 37601, Kamil Pasha had earlier expressed his readiness to accept L.T. 6.000.000 (Lowther to Grey, 8 Jan. 1909, FO371/747, 999).

¹⁴² Bertie to Grey, 17 Jan. 1909, FO371/747, 2145, and minutes.

¹⁴³ Buchanan to Grey, 10 Nov. 1908, FO371/556, 39886, and minutes; Buchanan to Grey, 24 Nov. 1908 and 5 Dec. 1908, FO371/557, 41670, 42823.

¹⁴⁴ Bertie to Grey, 12 Jan. 1909, FO371/747, 1642; Bertie to Grey, 17 Jan. 1909, 18 Jan. 1909 and 19 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 2612. See, for previous correspondence with Russia and the Foreign Office's attitude, minutes on Nicolson to Grey, 21 Nov. 1908 and 11 Dec. 1908, FO371/556, 40591; FO371/558, 45545.

¹⁴⁵ Grey made it quite clear to Rifat Pasha that Britain would not take part in representations, if made, to the Porte with a view to bringing Turkey to accept 100.000.000 frs. (Grey to Lowther, 25 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3903); Minutes on Buchanan to Grey, 24 Nov. 1908, FO371/557, 41671; Grey to Buchanan, 2 Dec. 1908, FO371/557, 42433; Grey to Bertie, 30 Dec. 1908, FO371/747, 640; Grey to Bertie, 22 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 2612; Grey to Bertie, 27 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3838; Bertie to Grey, 8 Jan. 1909, FO371/747, 1003.

¹⁴⁶ Hardinge to Grey, 15 Jan. 1909, *Grey Papers* (FO800/93); Hardinge to Bertie, 14 Jan. 1909, Pte. *Hardinge Papers* (FO800/192).

told the Bulgarian Agent, who had broached the idea of an alliance with Turkey as a trade-off as against any increase in the Bulgarian offer, that "it would be useless to propose an alliance with Turkey, unless they first raised their offer". "This", the Agent sharply replied, "they could not do". Yet, Hardinge was convinced that it would be done.¹⁴⁷

Hardinge was apparently mistaken. Not only did Bulgaria remain firm, apart from the fact that she occasionally gave out some indications that the amount might be raised to 100.000.000 frs.¹⁴⁸ but she was very quick to order partial mobilisation when the Grand Vizier's scheme of a slight frontier rectification in Turkey's favour was brought to light.¹⁴⁹ The British Embassy at Constantinople was again suspected of backing the scheme.¹⁵⁰ In the face of the threat of war that appeared once again on the horizon, the Foreign Office and Buchanan did think that war was imminent¹⁵¹ as opposed to the Turks who regarded the menacing attitude of Bulgaria as mere "bluff".¹⁵²

At the beginning of February, Isvolsky's proposal, which, at first sight, appeared to have provided a basic solution acceptable to both sides came to the Foreign Office therefore as a Godsend.¹⁵³ According to the whole transaction, Russia was to waive her claims to further annual payments by Turkey of the 1878 war indemnity for a certain period to cover the L.T. 5.000.000, demanded by Turkey. Bulgaria was to repay only L.T. 4.000.000 in instalments in 75 years.¹⁵⁴ Bulgaria expressed her willingness to accept the proposal in principle, but Turkish acceptance was not forthcoming. The attitude of the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, which was, from the British standpoint, very awkward worsened the situation. The fact that he did not make any communication to the Porte with regard to the proposal until 5 February, and that Turkey had received information about it from other Powers contributed to a great extent to the already suspicious mind of the Porte.¹⁵⁵ So much so that Grey having been informed on 4 February that no communication whatever had yet been made to Turkey¹⁵⁶ decided to suspend British support for the proposal until Turkey had been duly informed.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁷ Hardinge to Lowther, 12 Jan. 1909, Pte. *Hardinge Papers* (FO800/192); *Lowther Papers* FO800/193A).

¹⁴⁸ Nicolson to Grey, 7 Dec. 1908, FO371/557, 42805; Buchanan to Grey, 13 Jan. 1909, FO371/747, 1764; Grey to Buchanan, 22 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 2899.

¹⁴⁹ Buchanan to Grey, 24 Jan. 1909, 25 Jan. 1909 and 26 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 3079, 3080, 3361; Grey to Nicolson, 26 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 3360; Grey to Buchanan, 5 Feb. 1909, FO371/750, 4831; Buchanan to Grey, 13 Jan. 1909, FO371/750, 5111, 5112; Nicolson to Grey, 23 Jan. 1909 and 24 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 3070, 3072, 3073.

¹⁵⁰ Lowther to Grey, 26 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3466, and minutes. In fact, Grey did not seem to have responded unfavourably to the idea of a slight frontier rectification as a trade-off (Memorandum communicated to Benckendorff, 28 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3688, 3827.

¹⁵¹ Buchanan to Grey, 25 Jan. 1909, FO371/748, 3362; Buchanan to Grey, 27 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3609.

¹⁵² Lowther to Grey, 27 Jan. 1909 and 28 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3688, 3827.

¹⁵³ Memorandum communicated by Benckendorff, 27 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3844; Nicolson to Grey, 29 Jan. 1909 and 30 Jan. 1909, FO371/749, 3947, 4099.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Lowther to Grey, 1 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4342; Lowther to Grey and Grey to Lowther, 3 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4587.

¹⁵⁶ Lowther to Grey, 4 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4618.

¹⁵⁷ Grey to Nicolson and Bertie, 4 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4618.

Turkey at first suspected Russia of preparing to raise the question of egress for Russian vessels from the Dardanelles.¹⁵⁸ But, Britain reassured the Porte that no such proposal was forthcoming.¹⁵⁹ The Turks were also frightened of the likelihood that Bulgaria, which would not be crippled financially under the mild terms of the Russian proposal would continue to spend a great deal on the military, thus forcing Turkey, not unnaturally, to reciprocate. They also argued that Bulgaria would be drawn into the Russian orbit, and then become the vanguard for a further Russian drive towards Constantinople.¹⁶⁰ Not until the British had applied pressure at Constantinople even risking their popularity did the Turks accept the proposal in principle.¹⁶¹ Hardinge's rather blunt remarks to Lowther in his private letter on 6 February leaves no doubt as to the whole-hearted support of the Foreign Office for the Russian proposal:

This Russian proposal must be accepted. It would be insane of the Turks to reject it... We have done our best for them in obtaining a hundred and a twenty millions, which, but for us, they would never have had the chance of getting... The Turks appear to be living in a fool's paradise in Constantinople... War would be a terrible blow for them, even if successful, they would get nothing...¹⁶²

Grey was even more precise in his private letter to Lowther in explaining the reasons for his support for the Russian proposal. It was, according to the Foreign Secretary, the only chance of avoiding a war until and unless Turkey was prepared to accept what Bulgaria offered namely 82.000.000 frs. In addition,

Inasmuch as the Russian proposal offered Turkey pecuniary terms which she was known to have been willing to accept previously, her rejection of the offer would have caused her to be looked upon by the public opinion of Europe as obstructive to a peaceful settlement for reasons which would not have been very clearly understood....

Moreover, British refusal to support the proposal would have certainly led to a diplomatic separation with Russia and thrown her "... into the old belief that we were bent upon supporting Turkey against her, and disliked seeing her and Turkey drawn together". Furthermore, Grey dismissed Turkish fears that Bulgaria would now be better placed to play the role of a Russian vanguard as illusive since her attitude was quite "obstinate" and "independent."¹⁶³

But, Grey categorically refused to comply with a Russian request that he uses his influence with the Porte to bring Turkey to accept the proposal as it stood.¹⁶⁴ Instead,

¹⁵⁸ Lowther to Grey, 4 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4618; Lowther to Grey, 30 Jan. 1909, FO371/750, 5066; Nicolson to Grey, 3 Feb. 1909 and 4 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4584, 4762, 4770.

¹⁵⁹ Grey to Lowther, 2 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4588.

¹⁶⁰ Lowther to Grey, 1 Feb. 1909, 2 Feb. 1909, 3 Feb. 1909 and 4 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4342, 4618, 5066; Lowther to Grey, 5 Feb. 1909, FO371/750, 4861.

¹⁶¹ Grey to Lowther, 2 Feb. 1909, 3 Feb. 1909 and 5 Feb. 1909, FO371/749, 4342, 4587, 4588, 4618.

¹⁶² Hardinge to Lowther, 6 Feb. 1909, Pte. *Lowther Papers* (FO800/193A).

¹⁶³ Grey to Lowther, 08.02.09, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/79).

¹⁶⁴ Grey to Nicolson, 12 Feb. 1909, FO371/750, 5893.

he supported the Turkish counter-proposal that the whole indemnity¹⁶⁵ that amounted to L.T. 7.650.000 should be written off.¹⁶⁶ Nicolson was instructed to impress upon the Russians the utmost necessity of getting rid of the remainder of the indemnity.¹⁶⁷

Negotiations with Russia dragged on for weeks. Not until Rifat Pasha, in the meantime appointed Foreign Minister had gone to St. Petersburg on his way to Constantinople to take up his portfolio in the cabinet were the negotiations concluded.¹⁶⁸ In return for Russia's agreement to clear off the remainder of the indemnity, Isvolsky sought to obtain concessions from Rifat Pasha.¹⁶⁹ These included the goodwill of Turkey towards the settlement of the Turco-Persian boundary dispute to which Rifat Pasha agreed on the principle that it was to be resolved in accordance with the legal aspect of the case. But he was by no means prepared to undertake any responsibility for assistance in obtaining railway communication for Serbia to the Adriatic either through Novi Bazar or elsewhere. His verbal promise to consider any scheme favourably later on did not carry much weight with Isvolsky unless it were put in writing.¹⁷⁰ This, Rifat Pasha could not do without consulting his colleagues.¹⁷¹

As for the clearance of the remainder of the indemnity, Rifat Pasha suggested that a loan should be raised on all annuities, and Turkey would then keep 125.000.000 frs. while handing over the rest to Russia. As this transaction was to yield 141.000.000 frs. Russia would receive 16.000 frs. This, the Russians argued, would be equal to the amount of two annuities unless Turkey raised a 4 percent loan at par, which would enable Russia to receive 60.000 frs. On the other hand, this would admittedly necessitate Turkey paying L.T. 80.000 a year more than she was paying at the time. Nicolson's interventions in favour of Rifat Pasha's suggestion came almost to no avail.¹⁷² In the end, it was agreed that a certain number of annuities covering the amount of 125.000.000 frs. would be capitalised, and no further payments in the following years for the capitalised years would be demanded from Turkey. At the end of this period, Turkey would then pay the rest in one instalment.¹⁷³ Nicolson, though unable to move the Russians,

¹⁶⁵ There is a useful article on the whole indemnity question, R. M. M i l g r i m. "An Overlooked Problem in Turkish-Russian Relations: The 1878 War Indemnity". – *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5, (1978), pp. 529-537.

¹⁶⁶ Grey used his influence with the Russian Charge d'Affaires. See, Grey to Poklewski, 12 Feb. 1909, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/73).

¹⁶⁷ Grey to Nicolson, 2 Feb. 1909, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/73). But the matter was not received favourably in St. Petersburg. See, Nicolson to Grey, 10 Feb. 1909, Pte. *Nicolson Papers* (FO800/337); *Grey Papers* (FO800/73).

¹⁶⁸ Grey instructed Nicolson to do his utmost to help Rifat Pasha (Grey to Nicolson, 27 Feb. 1909, FO371/752, 7914; Nicolson to Grey, 4 March 1909, FO371/752, 8578).

¹⁶⁹ In fact, Nicolson privately informed Grey that the Russians were contemplating some economic concessions for Serbia in return for the rest of the indemnity. See, Nicolson to Grey, 9 Feb. 1909, Pte. *Grey Papers* (FO800/73).

¹⁷⁰ Nicolson to Grey, 4 March 1909 and 5 March 1909, FO371/752, 8693; Nicolson to Grey, 8 March 1909, FO371/753, 9768.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Nicolson to Grey, 7 March 1909, FO371/752, 8857.

¹⁷³ Nicolson to Grey, 15 March 1909, FO371/753, 10008.

now supported the final proposal. He told Rifat Pasha that “in thirty years, so much might happen, and even the indemnity might be forgotten”.¹⁷⁴ Though Rifat Pasha had now achieved a settlement with Russia¹⁷⁵, his further negotiations with the Bulgarians as to details, e.g. the future status of Turkish religious foundations in Bulgaria, became bogged down, owing to what is known as the “Incident of the 31st March” in Turkish historiography¹⁷⁶, which threatened the peace once more between the two countries.

The interruption of negotiations introduced a new disturbing element into the turmoil-like scene, that is, early recognition of Bulgarian independence. The Bulgarian Finance Minister’s threatening language in St. Petersburg that his country was about to order a general mobilisation to be followed by a declaration of war unless the Powers recognised their independence startled Isvolsky. The latter then used it, as an excuse for suggesting to Britain and France that, in order to avoid a catastrophe this request ought to be complied with. Unqualified French support of the proposal made but little impression on the Foreign Office, who, despite some of its officials wavering, stood against it.¹⁷⁷ Tilley was favourably disposed to the idea of an early recognition for fear of war, whereas Mallet was as adamant as ever. He treated these utterances as a mere “bluff” on the part of the Bulgarians, who would, if an early recognition by the Powers were brought about, be encouraged to take advantage of Turkey’s difficulties during the 31st March Incident.¹⁷⁸ Isvolsky was then reminded of the fact that Britain had, from the outset, always pointed out that she would not recognise Bulgarian independence until and unless Turkey had consented to it.¹⁷⁹

Thanks to Lowther’s strenuous efforts to bring Rifat Pasha and Lyapchev together while the Incident was still in full swing, a protocol was signed to be ratified by the Ottoman Parliament later in its first sitting.¹⁸⁰ In order to ensure that the troops gathering in Salonica to march on Constantinople to overthrow “illegally” formed cabinet had no objections to the protocol signed by such a government, it was sent to the Bulgarian Consul there. The latter met Mahmud Sevket Pasha, Commander-in-Chief of the “Army of Operation”, who gave assurances in the most categorical manner that they would do all in their power to get the protocol ratified, as they earnestly wished to improve relations with Bulgaria.¹⁸¹ The “National Assembly” finally ratified it on 23 March in

¹⁷⁴ Nicolson to Grey, 8 March 1909, FO371/753, 9768.

¹⁷⁵ See for the settlement, “Rifat Pasha to Haridjie” in Lowther to Grey, 18 March 1909, FO371/754, 10803.

¹⁷⁶ For a detailed account of this counter-revolution, which came up as a reaction to the CUP, see. S. A k ş i n. 31 Mart Olayı (İstanbul, 1972). See, also A h m a d. “Great Britain’s Relations...”, op.cit.. According to these, the British Embassy and some British officers supported the counter-revolutionaries. However, the present author has concluded, after years of investigation in British archives, that these claims need to be taken with a pinch of salt.

¹⁷⁷ Nicolson to Grey, 15 April 1909, FO371/757,14199, and minutes; Buchanan to Grey, 13 April 1909, FO371.757, 13945, and minutes.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Mallet’s minute; FO371/757,14324.

¹⁷⁹ Grey to Nicolson, 16 April 1909, FO371/757,14199

¹⁸⁰ Lowther to Grey, 14 April 1909, 15 April 1909, 16 April 1909 and 17 April 1909, FO371/757, 14034, 14122, 14176, 14188, 14192, 14199, 14414, 14490.

¹⁸¹ Lamb to Lowther, 24 April 1909, FO195/2330

its first sitting since the Incident outside Constantinople.

Through the likelihood of war had now eclipsed from the scene for good, the title to be assumed by Prince Ferdinand and the date on which the independence was to be recognised were the latest phases of the whole crisis where British policy fell apart from her Entente partners. Russia soon took the lead in recognising the independence, and Prince Ferdinand was addressed as “Czar of the Bulgarians”. France followed suit.¹⁸² But the Foreign Office had no intention of doing so before Turkey, running the risk of alienating her Entente partners and of antagonising Bulgaria. Not until 12 May, after the new Grand Vizier Huseyin Hilmi Pasha had informed Lowther that Turkey was now prepared to recognise the independence, but that Prince Ferdinand would merely be addressed as “Roi de Bulgarie”, did the Foreign Office decide to move in the direction of recognition.¹⁸³

* * *

During the crisis that dragged on for nearly six months, British policy was active on two fronts: Sofia and Vienna. Whereas in the former capital the British always counselled prudence and urged the Bulgarians to come to terms with Turkey by offering the latter pecuniary compensation and not to make common cause with Austria-Hungary; in the latter capital, the British line was to an extent influenced by Aehrenthal’s peremptory policy. In broader terms, the more the Austrian attitude was “arbitrary” and “bully”, the stronger did the British reaction become.

The allegation of a “negative” effect of the Anglo-Russian Convention upon British policy towards Turkey does not seem to be borne out by evidence, since it is clear that the Foreign Office policy towards the Ottoman Empire was not dominated by its Russian policy, at least, from the revolution to the end of the Bosnian crisis. Rather, Britain was always able to mould her line of policy, and then seek Russian support to execute it. This is not to say, however, that Britain, which had concluded her entente agreements with France and Russia before the Young Turk revolution came about, did seriously try to replace Russia with Turkey. If anything, Britain was quite aware of the importance of the Russian Convention, and particularly towards the end of the crisis she appeared prepared to do all it could to keep Russia on the same boat. Britain, which was then pursuing a conservative policy across the globe, wanted, therefore, a Turkey that could gradually become strong, since only such a Turkey would be a guarantee for peace and stability. But the Young Turkish perception of British policy towards the Ottoman Empire needs to be studied, since an earlier study on the CUP’s assessment of international politics seems to suggest that the CUP wished Britain to prop Turkey up as a barrier against Russia. It revealed that the CUP always resented British policy towards the Ottoman Empire in their publications, while they were in

¹⁸² Grey to Buchanan, 21 April 1909, FO371/757, 15142; Grey to Nicolson, 4 May 1909, FO371/757, 16472; Bertie to Grey, 4 April 1909 and 5 April 1909, FO371/758, 16950, 17123.

¹⁸³ Lowther to Grey, 9 May 1909, FO371/758, 18450 and minutes.

opposition from 1906 to 1908.¹⁸⁴

Although at the outset of the Young Turk revolution the Foreign Office was only cautiously optimistic about the success of the new regime, and therefore displayed a limited benevolent attitude, the extent to which Britain was committed to protect Turkey was gradually stretched as the crisis showed signs of turning into a full-scale war. In both phases of the International Crisis, British policy was designed to obtain material compensation for Turkey for her “shadowy” losses, and to prevent the new regime from being humiliated. But for British assistance, Turkey would hardly have obtained any material satisfaction at all.

From the British standpoint, the Ottoman government was not able, throughout the crisis, to formulate “practical” policies. Whenever it came up with some formulas, they were either “impracticable” or “extravagant”, and, if put into execution, would have caused a general flare-up. This led Britain to formulate policies and then recommend them to Turkey. But whenever this was done, care was taken not to press Turkey to accept them. Yet, paradoxically, Britain was to incur the odium of Constantinople in the years of 1910-1911 possibly more than any other Power.

¹⁸⁴ See, for details, Ün a l. “Young Turk Assessments”, op.cit., pp. 30-44. See, also, note 5 above.