THE GREAT POWERS AND THE BALKANS
1875–1878
THE GREAT POWERS AND THE BALKANS 1875–1878

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PREFACE

THE CRISIS of 1875–1878 may be considered as a prelude to the World War of 1914, so far at least as Europe was concerned. It opened in the Balkans with a question which seemed to be a local one, but which in fact cut deeply into the question of predominance in the Balkans, and therefore had great repercussion upon the position of the Powers in general. The main factors which determined the grouping of the Powers in 1914 were already in existence at that time. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1 had created an unbridgeable gulf between them; the Crisis of 1875–8 had revealed the irreconcilability of Austrian and Russian aspirations in the Balkans. Like Germany and France after 1871, Austria and Russia were now driven to seek for support from outside in order to be able to maintain their position and realise their aims. The question of predominance on the Rhine was thus connected with the question of predominance in the Balkans and they formed an axis which divided Europe into two hostile camps. It is therefore important to make a more detailed research into this period and see how far those responsible for the conduct of affairs were conscious of the consequences of their actions, and how far they contributed to render the war of 1914 inevitable.

Although both Russia and Austria were prepared to make concessions and to come to an agreement as to the solution of the Eastern Question, the development of the Crisis demonstrated clearly the impossibility of a lasting agreement between them. Russia and Austria could have agreed upon the partition of territories, as they did at Reichstadt in 1876 and at Budapest in 1877, but these agreements could not reconcile their conflicting interests. For both of them aimed at completely dominating the Balkans, which neither could achieve except by expelling the other party. Their agreements had therefore more the character of diplomatic moves, intended to pave the way towards their final goals, than that of a plan which might be realised to the satisfaction of both of them. This comes out clearly from the fact that both Austria and Russia intended after the war to
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play off their treaty obligations: Russia, to deprive Austria of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which she had already ceded to her, and Austria, to force Russia to submit the terms of peace to the approval of the Powers, though she had engaged to defend them, and to obtain a European mandate for the occupation of the provinces, which had been ceded to her as a reward for her neutrality and her diplomatic support. Andrassy had no illusion as to the possibility of co-operation with Russia, and therefore endeavoured to restrict it to "avoiding collision". Russia only came to this conviction after the Congress of Berlin.

Behind the struggle between Russia and Austria for supremacy in the Balkans was a conflict between Serbia and Austria over the liberation and union of the Southern Slavs. It came to the fore during this Crisis for the first time, and was left to be decided only by the World War. The insurrection in Bosnia and Herzegovina compelled Serbia to intervene in the struggle and solve this question to her advantage. The union with these provinces was considered in Serbia as her vital interest, as the question upon which even her own existence depended. But in Austria it was considered of equal importance to prevent this union. The liberation of Serbia's kinsmen in Turkey and the creation of a great Slav state was looked upon by Austria as a death blow to her own existence. There was therefore no possibility of an arrangement between them. Having subordinated her Slav element, though predominant in the Monarchy, to the domination of the Austrians and the Hungarians, the Vienna Government sought to neutralise their dissatisfaction, especially that of the Southern Slavs, by preventing the creation of a great Slav state on her borders and by annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina to herself. The Congress of Berlin sanctioned Austria's claims, but though Serbia remained small, Austria failed to content her Slavs and suppressed their aspirations for an independent state. Following the path she had taken then, she was logically driven in 1914 to annex Serbia herself, the attempt which brought her into conflict with Russia and provoked the European War.

But the Austro-Russian conflict had not yet become insoluble in 1875. Russia was ready to sacrifice Serbia's aspirations to an agreement with Austria, and Germany was endeavouring to remove their divergences and help on to a definite solution of the
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Eastern Question. Nevertheless, the interests which divided the Powers already at that time could be clearly traced. Although Germany desired to avoid a conflict between her two allies, the existence of Austria as a Great Power was considered by her as a vital interest of her own, and she was prepared to defend it arms in hand. The promotion of Austria’s interests in the East was therefore a natural task of Germany’s policy. Bismarck did it only with more tact and skill than his successors. France realised that so long as Germany kept Alsace-Lorraine her security could be protected by Russia and England only, who showed in May 1875 that they would not allow her further weakening. She endeavoured to support Russia’s policy and to mediate with England in her favour. But the antagonism between Russia and England rendered her action nugatory, and at the end of the Crisis she found herself on the side of England. Italy, like France, was not in a position to take a more pronounced attitude, but her interests were opposed to Austria’s spreading in the Balkans, and her aspirations to the Trentino found expression in her press. These interests would bring her in 1915, though a member of the Triple Alliance, to the side of the Triple Entente. England was equally determined to preserve her interests in the East and to prevent Germany’s predominance in Europe. Her conduct in the war scare of 1875 and her resistance to Russia’s designs during the Crisis leave no doubt of her intentions. Yet if she had to choose between the two, her interests in the West would be nearer to her and more vital. For this reason Disraeli endeavoured to deter Russia from war when in 1877 he feared Germany’s attack upon France. Subsequent events had demonstrated this more clearly and had thrown her entirely on the side of France and Russia.

It is therefore safe to affirm that the grouping of the Powers in 1914 was virtually determined by the interests which existed already in 1875–8. In the course of the next decade Bismarck succeeded in keeping his opponents divided and turning their rivalries to his profit. But his successors were not capable of playing this game, and after his retirement things returned slowly to their natural position.

The present work was originally written as a thesis for the Ph.D. degree, and was approved by the University of London.
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in 1930 under the title: "Serbia in International Politics, 1875–1878." It has been revised and completed since, so that in its present form it differs considerably from the earlier manuscript, comprising both new material, hitherto unpublished, and new views on some questions. These alterations imposed also the change in the title.

The dissertation had been worked out on the basis of the then unpublished documents from the British, Austrian and Serbian archives—the papers of Sir Henry Layard and the archives of the Russian Embassy in London. Much of this material has been made public since in the works of Prof. R. W. Seton-Watson, Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question, David Harris, A Diplomatic History of the Balkan Crisis of 1875–1878, and Humphrey Sumner, Russia and the Balkans, 1870–1880. Except David Harris, who has hitherto discussed only the first year of the Crisis, the other two writers deal essentially with the policy of a single Power: Britain and Russia respectively. I have discussed the question from a European standpoint and have endeavoured to disentangle and analyse all the factors that determined the character and the development of the Crisis.

The publication of this work has been made possible by grants from the School of Slavonic Studies and the Serbian Minister’s Fund in London. To both of them I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Serbian Minister’s Fund in London for a fellowship which has rendered my studies possible, and particularly to Prof. Dr Dragutin Subotić for his constant support and encouragement. I wish to express my warm thanks to Prof. R. W. Seton-Watson for his invaluable advice and interest in the publication of this work, and to Prof. G. P. Gooch and Baron Alexander Meyendorff, of the University of London, and to Prof. Slobodan Jovanović, of the University of Belgrade, for their important suggestions. Finally, I am greatly indebted to my former colleague, Dr Winifred Taffs, who has been kind enough to read the manuscript, for which I wish to express my special thanks.

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BELGRADE

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.A. Austrian Archives (Haus-Hof und Staatsarchiv). Wien, 1875–8.
A.C. Aktenstücke aus den Correspondenzen des Kais. und Kön. gemein-
samen Ministeriums des äusern über orientalische Angelegenheiten.
Mai 1873—Mai 1877. Wien, 1878.
Stuttgart, 1910.
D.F. Documents diplomatiques Français (1871–1914), Ie série, tome II.
Paris, 1930.
2 Band, Der Berliner Kongress und seine Vorgeschichte. Berlin,
1922.
Layard. Papers of Sir Henry Layard (British Museum). Memoirs,
vols. v, vi and vii.
Queen Victoria. The Letters of Queen Victoria. 2nd series, vol. II.
London, 1926.
R.D. Russian Documents. Published by R. W. Seton-Watson in the
Slavonic Review, 7th series, Nos. 8–12, 14 and 17. The year 1878
is not published.
Salisbury. Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury, vol. II. By Lady G. G.
S.A. Serbian Archives (Ministarstvo inostranih dela). Beograd,
1875–8.
Schweinitz. Denkwürdigkeiten des Botschafters General von Schweinitz,