Lora Gerd

Russian Policy in the Orthodox East: The Patriarchate of Constantinople (1878-1914)

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Preface

What is the Eastern Question? The competition of European powers–Great Britain, Austria (Austro-Hungary), and France on one side; Russia on the other–in the Near East and European Turkey, their struggle for domination, political and economic penetration of the weakened Ottoman Empire of the 19th and early 20th centuries, is the complex of problems that is usually referred to as the Eastern Question. The Ottoman Empire, that "sick man" as it was once called, was of special interest because of its geographical and strategic position. It lay enroute to the British colony of India, to the countries of Central Asia and China and to Palestine which had always been a land of special religious and political interest to the Europeans since the Crusades. The gateway to the Ottoman lands were the Dardanelles and Bosporus Strait (hereafter the Straits), and the Ottoman capital, Constantinople, the legendary and symbolic city in the history of Christianity. The Ottoman Empire in this stiuation became a genuine actor in contributing to its own fate rather than a passive recipient of European decisions.

After the successful wars of the 1760s-1790s, Russia gained access to the Black Sea. Its further task in this direction then was to procure access to the Mediterranean, and thus to establish new routes for trade and export of raw materials. In addition to economic reasons, Russia had strategic interests as well: the South Russian territories needed protection from the encroachment of Turkey and its European rivalries. The Balkans were the key to the success of this program.

The existing historiography of the Eastern Question usually focuses on the political, military and economic aspects of the problem and ignores the religious dynamics[1] in spite of the fact that the Near East has been at the crossroads of religious and political interests of Christian states since the Middle Ages. Jerusalem, with its Holy Sepulchre, was a center of pilgrimage beginning in the first century CE. The Crusades, aimed at liberating the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracins, led to the formation of several states in the Near East ruled by western Europeans which in turn led to the first serious clash between the west and the Byzantium Empire, the most influential state in eastern Europe. The capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204 CE ended the Byzantine monopoly and began a new era in which separate states in the Balkans were formed. As Byzantium's decline began and its territories taken over by the Ottomans, the Russian state was consolidated and strengthened. Having adopted the

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[1] See, for example, F. I. Uspensky, *Kak voznik i razvivals'a v Rossii Vostochnyj vopros* (St. Petersburg, 1887); B. A. Dranov, *Chernomorskie prolivy* (Moscow, 1948); N. E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean* (Chicago, 1970); B. Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers and the Straits Question, 1870-1887* (Bloomington; London, 1973); Eadem, *St. Petersburg and Moscow: Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy 1814-1974* (Bloomington; London, 1974); B. H. Sumner, *Tsardom and Imperialism in the Far East and Middle East* (London, s. a.); N. S. Kiniapina, *Balkany i prolivy vo vneshney politike Rossii v konce XIX v.* (Moscow, 1994); *Rossia i Chernomorskie prolivy (XVIII-XX stoletija)* (Moscow, 1999); Ju. V. Luneva, *Bosphor i Dardanelly. Tajnye provokacii nakanune Pervoj mirovoj vojny (1907-1914)* (Moscow, 2010), etc.

Christianity of Byzantium, Russia also borrowed its universalist state-political ideology. Byzantium traditionally regarded itself as heir to ancient Rome, which dominated the entire cultural world or Oecumene. Constantinople was the New Rome, and the inhabitants of the state were *Romaioi*, i.e., Romans. Roman state ideology took on a new meaning with the adoption of Christianity as the official religion. Now the barbaric peoples were regarded as an object of missionary policy. Baptizing barbarians drew them into the sphere of Byzantine political and cultural interests, and led to their territories being incorporated into the Empire.[2]

The Byzantine imperial political concept was taken over by Russia. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Russian state viewed itself as the heir to Byzantium. These ideas were theoretically based on Moscow being the Third Rome, at first, in a purely eschatological sense, and much later in a political sense. Like the Byzantines, the Russian political and intellectual elite of the Moscovian period regarded their state a New Israel.[3] The moral right of Russia to be considered the heir to Byzantium was confirmed by the Eastern patriarchs and the numerous clergy who visited Moscow in the 16th and 17th centuries soliciting aid for their monasteries. During the 18th century, Russia's imperial ambitions became more pronounced, and by the beginning of the 19th century the Balkan and Near Eastern dimension became one of the central in the foreign policy of the country.

During the 19th century the Great idea (*Megali idea*) or Greek national identity developed with the goal of restoring the Byzantine Empire and uniting all historic Greek lands into one state with Constantinople as its capital. The first concrete step in the realization of the Great idea was the war of Greek independence of 1821-1829 and the foundation of an independent Greek state. Up until the early 19th century, the Greeks expected their liberation to be brought about by Russia, but beginning in the 19th century, they relied upon the support of the western powers, primarily Britain. The result was a confrontation of two imperial ambitions for the formation of an Orthodox Empire, the imperial Russian one and the national Greek one.

The 19th century was a period of independent state formation in the Balkans and rising Balkan nationalism. The ideological basis for this was the establishment of autocephalous national churches, independent from Constantinople. This process usually followed political independence, though not always.

Beginning in the 1950s, the problem of nationalism and national states has been the subject of much research. E. Gellner linked the appearance of nationalism with

2 D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe. 500-1453* (London, 1971); S. A. Ivanov, *Vizantijskoe missionerstvo. Mozhno li sdelat' iz varvara christianina?* (Moscow, 2003).

3 G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le "césaropapisme" byzantin* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996); D. B. Rowland, "Moscow—the Third Rome or the New Israel?", *Russian Review*, vol. 55, (1996) 4: 591-614; N. V. Sinitsyna, *"Tretij Rim". Istoki i evolucija russkoj srednevekovoj koncepcii (XV-XVI vv.)* (Moscow, 1998).

the historical development of capitalism. "Nationalism is not [the] awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist", he postulated.[4] The theory of "imagined communities", as such nations have been called by scholars, found further development in the work of B. Anderson.[5] Usually modern scholars create a universal system in their theories of nationalism but this provides only a partial analysis of concrete historical events, which can lead to false conclusions. Much more convincing in reference to the Balkans is the research of M. Hroch, who studied nationalism using southeastern Europe as his example. Without rejecting Gellner's main thesis about the creation of nations, he showed that his theory was not plausible for understanding the Balkans. Nationalism here is not connected to industrialism as the Balkans in the 19th century were an agrarian region. According to Hroch, three main phases in the development of nationalism can be identified in the Balkans: 1) a small circle of intellectuals defined the national culture and formulated the idea of a nation; 2) professional agitators spread nationalism and politicized cultural nationalism in the growing cities; 3) ordinary citizens joined in and nationalism became a mass movement.[6]

The principle of succession which grew out of the millet system (applicable to the non-Muslim autonomous communities in the Ottoman Empire) was replaced by separatism, i.e., the reconstruction and formation of national autocephalies.[7] This shift dismantled the fundamental organizational base of the Eastern Christian world. Although justified by the historic memory of the late Byzantine period, it was opposed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Russian reaction to this national-political struggle in its ecclesiastical form and the use of canon law and medieval patterns of the Byzantine and Ottoman periods for achieving pure political goals is an under studied page of late 19th- and early 20th-century diplomatic history and political consciousness.[8]

With the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji of 1774, Russia strengthened its influence on the Ottoman Empire. Its strategic and political initiatives in the Near East were imple-

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4 E. Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London, 1964), 169.

5 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, N. Y., 2006).

6 M. Hroch, *The Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge, 1985).

7 A. D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London, 1998), 65.

8 See: G. G. Arnakis, "The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism", in: B. and Ch. Jelavich (eds.), *The Balkans in Transition* (Berkley, 1963): 134-135; R. Clogg, "The Greek Millet in the Ottoman Empire", in: B. Braude, B. Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the Functioning of a Plural Society, vol. I, The Central Lands* (New York, 1982): 185-207; P. M. Kitromilides, "Imagined Communities" and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans", *European Historical Quarterly* vol. 19 (1989) 2; E. Kraft, "Von der Rum Milleti zur Nationalkirche in Südesteuropa im Zeitalter des Nationalismus", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* Bd. 51 (2003); I. F. Makarova, *Bolgary i Tanzimat* (Moscow, 2010); O. E. Petrunina, *Grecheskaja nacija i gosudarstvo v XVIII-XX vv.* (Moscow, 2010), 371-518.

mented through ecclesiastical avenues; supporting Orthodoxy was the justification of these initiatives. The wide-spread old thesis about the right received by Russia to protect the Orthodox population of Turkey is now completely reviewed;[9] nevertheless, it was that opinion which was dominating in the Russian diplomatic texts up to 1914. Thus Jerusalem and Constantinople became the two main objects of interest for Russia–the first as the city of Christ, and the second as the symbol of Christian monarchy. The old messianic medieval ideology was used by Russian diplomats of the 19th century as an influential political weapon, and gave Russia an indisputable advantage when compared with the western powers. The shared Orthodox faith of a large part of the Ottoman Empire was a strong support for the Russian Foreign office in the Near East. At the same time it resulted in political blindness and many mistakes, which in the end cost Russia the loss of its extraordinary influence in the affairs of the Orthodox East. The Crimean War was an adventure in the style of the Crusaders. The attempted return of the Holy Sepulchre to the Orthodox Church resulted in a tragic defeat for Russia and the loss of its Black Sea fleet. The generous assistance Russia offered to the Eastern churches and monasteries was given, in many instances, with no strings attached and without demanding an accounting for how the money was spent. The diplomatic support extended to the Eastern churches was given in order to help the Orthodox churches in their resistance of Catholic and Protestant missionizing.

In the second half of the 19th century, Russia looked to develop a new policy for the Near East and a new solution of the Eastern Question. After the Crimean War it turned first to fostering a pan-Slavic orientation, and after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, to developing a national imperial policy.[10] The Byzantine ideology of the 1880-90s prevailed in Russian policy; it was supported by scholars, journalists and a flourishing school of Byzantine studies. The theorists of neo-Byzantinism at the end of the 19th century asserted that Russia was the only great power with an Orthodox tsar. For this reason, it should rule over the entire Orthodox world, including eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Near East. This was a modification of the messianic idea of the Third Rome, combined with the imperial colonial ambitions of one of the great powers of modern times.

By the beginning of the 20th century, cracks began to appear in this ideology. On the one hand, supporters of immediate action in the Near East raised their voices, and on the other, involvement in Russia's Far East policy was increased. There were many opponents to shifting the focus of Russian policy from the Near East to the Far East. Russia's defeat in the war with Japan confirmed that it really had been a significant strategic error. Meanwhile the freezing of Russia's activities in the Balkans due to the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905-07 led to Russia's retreat from this

9 See: R. H. Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility": the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered", *Slavic Review,* vol. 35, (Sept. 1976) 3: 463-483.
10 H. Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia 1855-1914* (London, 1952), 318-350.

region. Inspired by the idea of a pan-Orthodox union, the Russian foreign office succeeded in creating the Balkan League in 1911-1912, though it did not follow the orders from St. Petersburg, as its organizers had hoped. The Balkan states that wanted to unify Constantinople and the Straits were stopped by Russia who did not want to see another master of the banks of the Bosporus. The First World War saw the height of Russian imperial ambition and the development of Byzantine ideology; the realization of the dream seemed very close. The Revolution of 1917, however, crushed these plans and put an end to Byzantinism in Russian policy.

In comparing the beginning of the 20th century with the previous two decades, one should note the further politization of the Byzantine ideology in the consciousness of the Russian ruling elite. The theoretical idea of the Third Rome now became a program of practical action and aggression in the Near East. On the other hand, the gap between the grandiose scheme underlying Russia's policy and the viability of its realization become more and more obvious. The imperial slogans propagating domination over the entire Orthodox East and the standard phrases supporting Orthodoxy were at odds with Russia's political weakness in the face of the hostile Balkan states and the European Great Powers that backed them. The success of Russian diplomacy in some areas and the ongoing efforts of such Russian institutions as the imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, the Russian monasteries on Mt. Athos and elsewhere, the Russian Archeological Institute in Constantinople of course bore some fruit, but seemed to be islands in the sea of general unfavourableness toward Russia's handling of the Eastern Question. The crisis came to a head in the middle of the 1910s and erupted as the First World War.

This book traces the development of neo-Byzantine ideology in Russian political consciousness in 1878-1914 and its influence on Russian policy in the Balkans and the Near East. The second goal of my research is to bring to light unedited archival materials from Russia, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey which reveal little-known or even completely unknown pages in the relations between Russia and the Patriarchate of Constantinople during these decades. Several dimensions of Russian policy relating to the Diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are examined: the direct contact between the Russian government and the patriarchate and its head, the patriarch; and the position of Russia in relation to matters of import for Constantinople (the question of the rights and privileges of the church in the Ottoman state, the role played by Russian diplomacy in the ordination of a Serb metropolitan in Skopje, relations with the Anglican Church). Special attention is also paid to the most important ecclesiastical-political topics of the time–the Bulgarian ecclesiastical question and Russian monasticism on Mt. Athos. The chronological frame of the book is bounded by the two most important events of the era–the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the beginning of the First World War.

1 Russian Policy in the Balkans, 1878-1914

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Balkans were the most turbulent region in Europe. On the one hand were the Balkan peoples with their aims of creating their own national states with the broadest borders possible, and on the other, the ambitions of the Great Powers to gain spheres of influence in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire. This led to a continually strained and unstable situation.

1.1 Between the Two Wars: 1856-1877

The Crimean War proved to be the turning point in the relations between Russia and the Near East. After this first serious defeat of the Russian army in a war with the Ottoman Empire, Christians of the Near East and the Balkans looked more and more towards Europe. The image of Russia as the liberator of the Orthodox inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire faded and the authority of the Russian tsar was to a great extent lost. Russian diplomacy after 1856 focused totally on the restoration of Russia's former authority. Of great significance in this process were the activities of Count N. P. Ignatiev, the ambassador to Constantinople from 1864 to 1877.[11] His idea of creating 'Greater Bulgaria', a large south-Slavonic state in the Balkans, as a base for Russian interests and further penetration towards the Straits, received the support of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and coincided with the intentions of Tsar Alexander II. In 1870, the Russian government declared that it would no longer comply with the restrictions of the Paris Treaty of 1856. The declaration of the tsar was ratified by the London Conference of 1871.[12]

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[11] Before his appointment to Constantinople, young Ignatiev successfully led the Russan Mission to Buchara and Chiva in 1858. In 1859-1860 he was an extraordinary ambassador to Peking and succeeded in attaching to Russia the right bank of the Amur River. On Ignatiev's activities in Constantinople see: A. A. Dmitrievsky, *Graf N. P. Ignatiev kak cerkovno-politicheskij dejatel' na pravoslavnom Vostoke: po neizdannym pis'mam ego k nachal'niku Russkoj Duchvnoj missii v Jerusalime archimandritu Antoninu Kapustinu* (St. Petersburg, 1909); P. D. Parensov, "Graf N. P. Ignatiev kak russkij i slavianskij dejatel", in *Pamiati grafa Ignatieva: rechi, proiznesennyje na torzhestvennom sobranii S.-Peterburgskogo Slavianskogo blagotvoritel'nogo obshestva 30go nojabria 1908 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1909): 19-31; A. A. Bashmakov, "Ignatievskaja shkola diplomatii", *ibid.*: 32-41; B. H. Sumner, "Ignatiev at Constantinople 1864-1874", *The Slavonic and East European Review,* 11 (1932-933): 341-353, 556-571; Cyril, patriarch Bylgarski, *Graf N. P. Ignatiev i bylgarskijat cyrkoven vypros: izsledvane i documenti* (Sofia, 1958); G. Huningen, *Ignatiev und die Russische Balkanpolitik 1875-1878* (Göttingen, Zürich, Frankfurt, 1968); T. A. Meiningen, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate (1864-1872): a Study in Personal Diplomacy* (Madison, 1970); D. MacKenzie, "General Ignat'ev, the Berlin Treaty and the South Slavs", *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, 14/15, (1998/ 1999); *idem*, *Count N. P. Ignat'ev—the Father of Lies?* (New York, 2002); V. M. Hevrolina, *Nikolaj Pavlovich Ignatiev* (Moscow, 2009).
[12] L. I. Narochnickaya, *Rossija i otmena nejtralizacii Chernogo moria 1856-1870 gg.* (Moscow, 1989).

The 1840s-1870s was a period of reform (*Tanzimat*) in the Ottoman Empire. The *hatt-i-humajun* of 1856 guaranteed all non-Muslim subjects of the sultan equal rights with the Muslims. A reform of the legislation and of the judicial system would follow, it was promised. However, the reforms were never fully implemented and this provoked further action on the part of the liberation movement of the Balkan peoples.[13] By the mid-1870s, the situation became so tense that revolts erupted in different parts of the region. In April 1875 the Russian government proposed that the fleets of the Great Powers should assemble at Constantinople on both the European and Asian coasts of Turkey. However, the proposal was turned down by Great Britain.

The Russian government realized that Russia was not sufficiently prepared for war. In the event of naval operations, Britain would clearly dominate. A number of attempts at peaceful negotiation of the Eastern crisis failed (for example, the Constantinople Conference of 1876). On January 15, 1877 an agreement on the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary was signed. This was the condition needed for Britain to guarantee its neutrality. In March 1877 at a conference in London, Britain demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Bessarabia, and on April 12, 1877 Alexander I signed a manifest of war which began the Russo-Turkish War. Both the tsar and his minister of foreign affairs, Gorchakov, agreed to the demands of the other powers that there would be no territorial changes in the Balkans and Russia would not occupy Constantinople. Gorchakov intended to create a Bulgarian state extending to the Balkan mountains; Serbia, Montenegro and Romania would receive some new territories; Russia would reclaim Southern Bessarabia and occupy Batumi. As Russia's victory became a surety, the Russian command came to the opinion that dividing Bulgaria into two parts would not be advantageous. At the same time, in January 1878, a British squadron entered the Sea of Marmara. Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich received an order to enter Constantinople, but this meant open confrontation with Britain. So it was decided to halt the advance in the suburb of the capital, San Stefano, where the preliminary treaty was signed on February 19, 1878. According to this treaty, Greater Bulgaria, including the territories of Northern and Southern Bulgaria extending as far as the Aegean, would be created. As the initiator of the

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13 H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton, 1963); W. R. Polk, R. L. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1968). K. Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State 1789-1908", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (1972): 243-81; A. D. Novichev, *Istoriia Turtsii. Novoe vremia*, vol. 4 *(1853-1875)* (Leningrad: n.p. 1978); M. Todorova, *Angliia, Rusiia i Tanzimatyt* (Sofia: BAN, 1980); C. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980); N. A. Dulina, *Tanzimat i Mustafa Reshid Pasha* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984); F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993); I. Ortaily, "Period Tanzimata i posledui-ushchee administrativnoe ustroistvo," *Istoriia Osmanskogo gosudarstva, obshestva i tsivilizatsii,* vol. 1 (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura RAN, 2006); I. F. Makarova, *Bolgary i Tanzimat* (Moscow: Knizhnyi dom Librokom, 2010).

treaty, Ignatiev stressed that such a territorial division would prevent further conflict between the Slavs and Greeks in Macedonia and help mend the Bulgarian Schism.

However, the final treaty signed four months later was not favourable to Russia. The Congress of Berlin (June 14-July 14, 1878) remains one of the most unpleasant episodes in Russian diplomacy. The conditions of the treaty were the creation of a vassal Bulgarian Principality, the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary, the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Romania. Eastern Rumelia received some rights of autonomy while Macedonia and Thrace still remained Ottoman territory.[14]

1.2 After the Congress of Berlin: Fin de Siècle

The reconstruction period after 1878 was a time of reflection for Russia. The Congress of Berlin had leveled a serious blow to pan-Slavic ideas and to Russian imperialism which firmly backed them. The lack of support from the South Slavs became the target of serious self-reflection by diplomats and politicians for the next twenty years. They tried to understand the reasons for the failures of Russia during the last decades. S. S. Tatishchev wrote some years later:

> Our policy in the east right up to recent times was implemented with a persistence that could have been put to better use, but continued to be focused on one goal, the happiness and well-being of our fellow-countrymen and co-believers. The Russian diplomats did not even ask themselves what Russian needs were in the Balkan states, which owed their existence to Russia, i.e. they did not do what they should have done.[15]

Russian policy of the 1880s-1890s was concentrated in two areas: first, to build up the armed forces; second, to find a solution to the Eastern Question. In the first years following the Congress of Berlin, Russian politicians kept in mind the following major considerations: avoidance of diplomatic isolation, security of the Straits, and protec-

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14 B. H. Sumner, Russia and the Balkans, 1870-1880, 399-553, 627-636, 658-669; H. A. Batowsky, "A Centenary: two partitions of European Turkey. San Stefano and Berlin—a comparison", *Balkan Studies*, 19 (1978) 2: 227-237; Chr. Naltas, *I synthiki tou Agiou Stefanou kai o Ellinismos* (Thessaloniki, 1953); *Posle San-Stefano. Zapiski grafa N. P. Ignatieva* (Petrograd, 1916); "P. A. Shuvalov o Berlinskom kongresse 1878 g.", *Krasnyj archiv,* (1933) 4; *Osvobozhdenije Bolgarii ot tureckogo iga* (Moscow, 1964); S. A. Nikitin, "Russkaja politika na Balkanah v nachale Vostochnoj vojny", *Voprosy istorii,* 4 (1946); S. L. Chernov, *Rossija na zavershajushem etape vostochnogo krizisa 1875-1878 g.* (Moscow, 1984); V. A. Zolotarev, *Protivoborstvo imperij (vojna 1877-1878 gg.—apofeoz vostochnogo krizisa)* (Moscow, 1991); V. N. Vinogradov, "Kanzler A. M. Gorchakov v vodovorote vostochnogo krizisa 70-h godov XIX v.", *Slavianovedenie*, 5 (2003): 6-24.
15 S. S. Tatishchev, *Diplomaticheskie besedy o vneshnej politike Rossii. God pervyj. 1889.* (St. Petersburg, 1890), 95.

tion of the Russian position in Bulgaria.[16] After the unfavourable results of the Congress, nothing remained for Russia but to preserve the status quo in the Near East. Despite its great success in the war, Russia was isolated by the other Great Powers, each of which had its own goals in the Balkans. Up until 1881 it enjoyed favour in Bulgaria and Montenegro, but after it lost its standing in Bulgaria, only tiny Montenegro remained sympathetic towards Russia.[17]

Conquering the Straits was considered the most important political task and opinions differed only on the terms of its realization.[18] The main opposition to these Russian aspirations after the 1870s was Great Britain. As D. A. Miliutin, the Russian minister of defense wrote, England was the master of the Straits and of Constantinople; if the British fleet had entered the Black Sea, nobody could have prevented it.[19] Russian-German negotiations at the end of the 1870s and beginning of the 1880s and the signing of the Dreikaiserbund in 1881 were aimed at protecting the Black Sea from British invasion.

In the years immediately following the Russo-Turkish War, Russia still hoped to form a buffer state in the Balkans which would serve its interests. On October 5, 1880 Miliutin proposed a confederation of several Balkan states under a European protectorate. Such a confederation would include Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece. Constantinople and the *vilajet* of Adrianople would also be included in the confederation, remaining at the same time Ottoman.[20] Miliutin did not believe that Constantinople should become an international city. Its internationalization, in his opinion, would lead to British domination. It suited Russian interests better to have it remain in Ottoman hands. It was however, impossible to realize the confederation because the controversies in the Balkan states were not adequately taken into consideration.

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16 Ch. Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism. Russian Influence in the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879-1886* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, 1958), 1.

17 On Russian policy towards Bulgaria and Serbia after 1878 see: *ibid*.

18 The Straits question as the key one of the more general Eastern question is discussed in most of the studies on Russian Near East policy of the XIXth century. See: S. Goriainov, *Le Bosphore et les Dardanelles* (Paris, 1910)*; B*. H. Sumner, *Tsardom and Imperialism in the Far East and Middle East, 1880-1914* (London, s. a.); N. E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean* (Chicago, 1970); Ch. & B. Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States 1804-1920* (Seattle, London, 1977); B. Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers and the Straits Question, 1870-1887* (Bloomington, London, 1973); *idem*, *St. Petersburg and Moscow: Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy 1814-1974* (*Ibid*., 1974); N. S. Kiniapina, *Balkany i prolivy vo vneshnej politike Rossii v konce XIX veka* (Moscow, 1994); S. McMeekin, *Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); R. Bobroff, *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

19 P. A. Zajonchkovskij ed., *Dnevnik D. A. Miliutina*, 3 (Moscow, 1950), 127.

20 See Miliutin's note "Thoughts about the possible solution of the Eastern question in case of final disintegration of the Ottoman Empire" in: N. S. Kiniapina, *Balkany i prolivy vo vneshnej politike Rossii v konce XIX veka* (Moscow, 1994), 15-20.