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The Austro-Hungarian Creation of a “Humanitarian” Pretext for the Planned Invasion of Serbia in 1912–1913: Facts and Counter-Facts

Abstract: This paper argues that reporting on the Balkan Wars by some of the Austro-Hungarian media and state officials on the ground was not impartial, but rather aimed to obtain international public support for the planned military intervention against Serbia in late 1912 and mid-1913. The primary task of the newly-established Albanische Korrespondenz Büro or Budapest Korrespondenz Büro was to disseminate horrifying news from the Balkan theatre of war, especially on the alleged Serbian misconduct, to the media in Europe and the United States of America. The famous *New York Times*, alongside other papers, put those Austrian-made reports on its front pages. Historians believe that influenced the Carnegie Endowment to start a comprehensive inquiry in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. As early as the spring of 1913 the propagandist and journalist, Leo Freundlich, published in Vienna his still famous book *Albania's Golgotha: Indictment of the Exterminators of the Albanian People*, calling out for someone to “stop those barbarians”: “Tens of thousands of defenceless people are being massacred, women are being raped, old people and children strangled, hundreds of villages burnt to the ground, priests slaughtered. And Europe remains silent!” Austria-Hungary mobilized its army, but its ally Germany pulled back. This paper offers facts listed in those reports as well as stories that circulated at the time, along with the Serbian primary sources intended for internal purposes and some narratives of foreign observers on the ground who were often annoyed with the Korrespondenz Büro's reporting or other papers of the kind. It suggests, however, that responsibility for the atrocities committed in the war still needs to be examined carefully, just like it was concluded long ago: “The wrong they did leave a sinister blot upon their record, but it must be viewed in its just proportion.”

Keywords: Austro-Hungary, Serbia, Balkan Wars, “Humanitarian” Pretext.

The 1990s Balkan crisis has once again aroused much interest in Balkan history. A host of analysts or historians was keen on producing theories which would explain deep (historical) roots of these events. Some resorted to “ancient hatreds” or “civilization incompatibilities” as paradigms to explain the “real” roots of the crisis. Somehow, the legacy of the Second World War in the western parts of Yugoslavia was overlooked, and so was the legacy of the First World War in Serbia, not to mention comparative studies of European experience. Instead,

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the emphasis was placed on the Balkan Wars. Media reports or commissions' reports of the time were "reinvented" in the 1990s.¹ In the opinion of some, including Morton Abramowitz, the Balkan conflict once again tormented Europe and "the conscience of the international community, and when our willingness to act has not matched our capacity for moral outrage".² Many jumped to support such views by quoting from "discovered" reports. Even a cursory glance at some well-known accounts would suffice to prove that.³ Historian Maria Todorova felt provoked to respond, finding that the excerpts were grossly taken out of historical context.⁴

My personal experience with the content of official records and many personal papers concerning the issue, in conjunction with the republished reports, aroused my professional curiosity. I set out to go back over my understanding of the issue through the bundle of evidence, and have since published several articles.⁵

¹ *The War Correspondence of Leon Trotsky: The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913* (Pathfinder Press, 1991); *The Other Balkan Wars. A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospective with New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict*, prefaced by George F. Kennan (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment Book, 1993), a reprint of *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914); Leo Freundlich: *Albanian Golgotha: Indictment of the Extermination of the Albanian People* (Riverdale, NY: Juka Pub. Co., 1998; first published in German, Vienna: J. Roller, 1913), http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_1/AH1913_1/html; Dimitrije Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija. Jedan prilog kritici zavojevačke politike srpske buržoazije* (Belgrade: Most Art, 2011; first published in 1914); *Die Albanische Korrespondenz. Agenturmeldung aus Krisenzeiten Juni 1913 bis August 1914*, ed. Robert Elsie (Munich: Oldenburg, 2012).

² *The Other Balkan Wars*, 1.

³ Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1995); Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1998); Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Tim Judah, *The Serbs, History, Myth & Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2000); Francois Grumel-Jacquignon, *La Yougoslavie dans la stratégie française de l'entre-deux-guerres (1918–1935) aux origines du mythe serbe en France* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999); Holm Sundhussen, *Geschichte Serbiens, 19.-20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Bohlau, 2007).

⁴ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. Foreword.

⁵ E.g. Mile Bjelajac, "The Other Side of the War: Treating Wounded and Captured Enemies by Serbian Army", in *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the First World War* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2005); Mile Bjelajac, "Instrumentalizacija instrumentalizacije: Uporno oživljavanje propagandne interpretacije o dobrima i lošima na Balkanu tokom i neposredno posle Balkanskih ratova", paper submitted at the International Conference "The First Balkan War 1912/1913: The Social and Cultural Meaning", Vranje June 1–3, 2012.

The period in question has since 1914 been discussed worldwide in historical accounts and personal diaries. This period was always presented as a part of the history of global rivalry among the Great Powers at the time. The discussion about Austro-Hungarian plans and its strife with Serbia is older than the 1990s crisis. The accounts were also based on research conducted in Vienna archives. The reporting of Austrian or British consuls from various parts of the Balkans was performed also in capacity of historians and was cross-examined as well. In brief, neither their reports nor the media coverage of the time were completely impartial, especially after the outbreak of the war and during the "humanitarian crisis" in 1913.⁶ One should bear in mind the words of a British reporter from the Balkan battlefields:

To-day the first and primary object of a belligerent nation is to try and convince the world that the enemy is using or planning to use every dirty underhand trick which could be devised by the human brain. To disseminate this news the agents or representatives of that nation do not hesitate to make use of the Press of a neutral and supposedly impartial people, a Press which in many cases is represented locally by those who have the very best reasons for not being impartial themselves.⁷

The view expressed above can be extended to all involved in the crisis with their respective interests in the region.

In light of their records, the Austro-Hungarian consuls proved sometimes intentionally partial observers. They had to carry out the policy of their ministry, which was hostile to the Serbian interests. Historian Novica Rakočević has shed light on the "Ballhausplatz" mechanisms, which had been in operation since the Annexation crisis of 1908. One example shows the extent of clandestine preparations undertaken in order to disturb Montenegro along its eastern borders. Special agents were sent from Vienna. "On 21 October 1908 the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Aerenthal informed the ambassador in Athens and the consulates in Salonika and Scutari that he has the intention to recruit and arm the Albanian tribes on the border of Montenegro if the latter should attack Bosnia and Herzegovina." The minister felt that such action might discredit

⁶ Andrej Mitrović, *Prodor na Balkan: Srbija u planovima Austro-Ugarske i Nemačke 1908–1918* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1981; 2nd ed., 2011); Bogumil Hrabak, *Arbanaški upadi i pobune na Kosovu i u Makedoniji od kraja 1912. do kraja 1915. godine* (Vranje: Narodni muzej, 1988); Andrej Mitrović, "Albanians in the policy of Austria-Hungary towards Serbia 1914–1918", in *Serbs and Albanians in the 20th century* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1991), 107–133; Novica Rakočević, "Montenegrin-Albanian Relations 1878–1914", in *Serbia and the Albanians in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, 1990), 61–197; Teodora Toleva, *Uticao Austrougarske imperije na stvaranje albanske nacije 1896–1908*, transl. from Bulgarian (Belgrade: Filip Visnjic, 2016).

⁷ By a 'Special Correspondent' [Cyril Campbell], *The Balkan War Drama* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1913), 181. Campbell was a correspondent for the *London Times*.

the consul in Scutari and asked the consul in Salonika if he could quickly supply Albanians with arms, ammunition and an unlimited supply of money. The consuls, for their part, suggested concrete measures: "The consul, however, proposed organizing raids by Mirëditët on Podgorica and the first person he intended to recruit was their priest Dolcia who was known for his avarice. Negotiations with him were to be conducted in Trieste and Rijeka. The ambassador in Athens was more cautious ... Austro-Hungarian consul Kral in Skutari reported that the Catholic Albanian tribes were willing to attack Montenegro, but he feared the Muslim Albanians and Turkish troops in their rear. ... It was necessary to prepare a certain number of arms and ammunition for Albanians." Other Austro-Hungarian diplomatic officials were also involved in recruiting Albanians against Montenegro and they made suggestions; Consul Openheimer developed a plan: "1) To provoke the Montenegrin military command to action and thus pin the Montenegrin army down on the southern border, and 2) Action should be organized in such a way that Albanians seem to be taking up arms for defence, not for attack."⁸

Nothing changed during the new crisis in 1912/13, and consuls again acted alongside Catholic priests. Consul Oskar Prochaska and Vice-consul Pözel in Prizren, Ladislav Tihi in Mitrovica, and others were fully engaged. The rumours that Prochaska was mistreated and even killed by the Serbian Army provoked the Ballhausplatz to send Theodor Edel, special envoy to Serbia, to check the situation of the Austrian consuls himself. According to the report of the Serbian Consul, Milan Rakić, who accompanied him, he told him that no one complained about priests and nuns being mistreated and that no one was kicked out from the Consulate. As for atrocities against Albanians, "he received basically false or exaggerated accusations".⁹

While the "Prochaska Affair" was still shaking public opinion in Austria, the Serbian 3rd Army prepared an entire dossier about the case and sent it to the Supreme Command. One can find an interesting point in Appendix (ad.19) about the letters written on 23 October, sent by Prochaska and seized at the Post Office in Ferizaj (Uroševac). Prochaska claimed that the "Serbian Army bombarded and set Priština on fire and massacred its inhabitants". He labelled Serbs and Montenegrins as savages (*die Wilden*), writing about them with hatred. He reported that 3,000 Albanians from Ljuma/Luma in Prizren were not Turkish regulars. Contrary to his false report on Priština, "no house

⁸ Rakočević, "Montenegrin-Albanian Relations", 167.

⁹ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije* [Documents on the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia; hereafter DSPKS], from 5 October 1912 to 31 December 1912 (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, 1986, vol. 5/III, doc. 351, Rakić to Pašić, 18 Nov. (1 Dec.) 1912.

was destroyed or burned in Priština and peaceful inhabitants were protected". Both letters were immediately handed over to Prince Alexander.¹⁰

Vice-consul Pözel in his report from Prizren to the Ballhauseplatz of 23 March 1913 described British involvement in his mission: "Miss Gibl was sent by the British consul from Uskub to gather data on Serbian atrocities, under the pretext of delivering 5000 Fr from the Macedonian relief fund to inhabitants of Prizren. She met the Serbian Mayor, a hodja and Don Paskvale Krasnići, a Catholic priest. She had demanded from Don Paskvale to inform her on the issue. He then turned to the vice-consul for information and for instruction what stance to take and how to speak."¹¹

One who analyzes the media coverage of the time will easily see that many of the reports, basically second-hand accounts, circulated as unquestionable "proofs" even in some scholarly accounts. A few examples would be enough to demonstrate that the media coverage must be verified before any further use.

The Norwegian Colonel Henrik August Angell and his fellow countrymen (including Captain Nandrup, medical doctors Øyvind Platou, Gran, Videre, Harold Natvig, Captain Dr H. Schen, Captain Dr Bang, nurse Magda Dirhorn), showed great admiration for the Serbian Army, its men, its wounded and, especially, for the way they treated the locals. Angell had been attached to the Montenegrin and Serbian army as an observer long before the wars, so he knew the language. In his published memories he felt invited to challenge propaganda and claims made by the "Hungarian" press and reporters as well as their further dissemination elsewhere in the European press. In the chapter entitled "Unspeakable brutality' by Serbian soldiers (!?)" he remembers completely fabricated reports by a Budapest correspondent, which were published in British dailies. One of these reports spoke of the thousands and thousands of massacred and hanged Albanians along the road from Kumanovo to Uskub. Angell explained: "The correspondent lied far beyond modest arrogance, since there are no trees along the road but a shrub here and there, not big enough to hang even a cat. Near Kumanovo there are only dozens of poplars but no hanged Albanians there. ... I happened to be there and I stayed at the police chief's house ... I have been all around, and I followed the trail of Turkish retreat and Serbian advancement. I had to be blind and deaf not to see or hear about thousands hanged." Since all the Norwegians were there (Kumanovo, Uskub), especially Captain Nandrup, a member of the international police department in Uskub, they knew about the crimes committed against Christians before the hostilities and witnessed the subsequent cases of revenge but, as they put it, these were "understandable cases". On one occasion Colonel Angell himself shared a shelter

¹⁰ Ibid. doc. 262, pp. 362–364, Report of 7/20 Nov. 1912.

¹¹ Hrabak, *Arbanaški upadi i pobune*, 19 (based on HHSA, PA XXXVIII, box 405, No 3458, von Pözel from Prizren, 23 March 1913, tlg. no.15; tlg. no.10. of 7 March 1913).

with Muslim refugees and saw how troops looked after them, providing them with food and transport. All they got from their local compatriots in the village was tobacco. The refugees felt safe with Serbs, so when the Serbs moved, they immediately moved too. In conclusion of his chapter, he repeated: "I and several of my Norwegian friends saw Macedonian villages occupied by Serbs, we saw how police officers dealt with them, we accompanied Serbian troops, and we saw and came to view them in a completely different light from those sitting in Budapest. I left with full admiration of how the Serb civilian and military authorities dealt with the population in the new territories. In Kočani, I saw them feeding helpless women and children, distributing flour and firewood, and on equal or even larger scale than in Monastir..."¹²

It was noted that some horrifying rumours regarding the attitude of the commander of the Ibar Army, General Živković, towards prisoners and civilians had circulated among a small number of correspondents on the ground. Allegedly, he had not sent back any prisoners whatsoever and one among them had learned from the Serbian officer "that none were expected". A British correspondent commented, "Let us hope that he is only boasting." He also expressed professional scepticism about what he heard or read.¹³ If one turns to official or private diaries of the time, one will easily find where the prisoners of war were sent from the western front, what their ethnic origin was etc. The first POWs captured by the Ibar Army arrived in Kraljevo on 15/28 October 1912. Those captured on Mt Javor were sent to Užice (180).¹⁴ On the other hand, the Serbian press reported on Serbian refugees fleeing to Serbia or hiding in the woods of the very same region, as well as on the atrocities committed by local Turkish irregulars (*basibozuk*).¹⁵

General Mihailo Živković was also the main figure in the *New York Times* article "Serbian army left a trail of blood" (based on Hungarian reports) on 31 December 1912. He was linked to the execution of 950 Turkish and Albanian

¹² Henrik August Angell, *Naar et lidet Folk Kjamper for Livet. Serbiske soldaterfortællinger* (Kristiania: H. Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard), 1914), Serb. ed.: *Kad se jedan mali narod bori za život. Srpske vojničke priče* (Belgrade: Itaka, 1995), 19, 20, 73–77.

¹³ *Balkan War Drama*, 184. He also added a comment: "Enough, however, has been said to show how in many cases the Press is used, often, alas, deliberately, to stir up the vilest passions of men."

¹⁴ Stanoje M. Mijatović, *Iz rata u rat, 1912–1920: ratni dnevnik* (Belgrade: Potez, 2004), 14; General Miloje Jelisijević, "Ibarska vojska u ratu 1912 godine", *Ratnik XI–XII* (1928), 27, stated that enemy casualties during the battle for Novi Pazar were 300 dead, 700 wounded and around 200 captured.

¹⁵ *Politika* (Belgrade), 30 Sept./13 Oct. 1912; 5/18 Oct. 1912; 11/24 Oct. 1912,

notables in Sjenica. The alleged witness was a doctor of the Red Cross.¹⁶ Had such doctor really existed, he could not have seen General Živković there since the small town of Sjenica was out of his reach. Another formation with a separate chain of command was in charge there – the *Javor* Brigade.¹⁷ In contrast to the *NYT* article, a personal diary recorded the General's attitude as follows: "Today (8/21 November) is the great Turkish feast, Kurban Bayram. Early in the morning, after the hodja's call to prayer, Muslims have gathered at the mosque, young and old, and teenagers too ... Our commander of the Ibar Army [General Živković] issued the strict order to his troops to behave in a decent manner and act kindly towards Muslim women and hodjas."¹⁸ The new authorities made sure that the Muslims in Skopje celebrated Bayram according to their custom.¹⁹

The Belgrade- and Sofia-based correspondent, Leon Trotsky (alias Otto Antid), suggested that even Pavel Nikolayevich Miliukov, a member of the Carnegie Commission, was ready to blame the Serbian side, even King Peter himself: "Perhaps Mr. Miliukov heard in well informed circles in Serbia, where this amazing episode has become well known, how King Peter, encountering on the way to Kumanovo a party of Albanian prisoners who were being led away under the escort, stood up in his car, in all his little height, and shouted: 'What use are these men to me? They should be killed, not by shooting, that would be a waste of ammunition, but with clubs.'"²⁰

If Trotsky did not invent this rumour, he obviously did not try to investigate it. In reality, according to the Serbian press, the King left Vranje by train and travelled directly to Skopje, where he arrived at 3:15 p.m. on 19 October (1 November) accompanied by the Prime Minister and his nephew Prince Paul. His arrival took place nine days after the Battle of Kumanovo and, also, the railway did not pass through Kumanovo at the time. At the Skopje railway station, the King was welcomed by dignitaries of all three religious' communities, Serbian, Bulgarian and Muslim. By his gestures King wanted to encourage Muslims. During his brief stay he paid a visit to the Sultan Murat Mosque and

¹⁶ Zločini nad Albancima u Balkanskim ratovima, http://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zločini_nad_Albancima_u_Balkanskim_ratovima, Wikipedia, *NYT* article: "Serbian Army left a Trail of Blood" (Say Hungarian Reports), 31 December 1912.

¹⁷ Mile Bjelajac and Predrag Trifunović, *Između vojske i politike. Biografija generala Dušana Trifunovića 1880–1942* (Belgrade: INIS, Kruševac: Muzej Kruševca, 1997). Trifunović was the Chief of Staff in the *Javor* Brigade (12,000 men). I have never seen any document that suggests any difficulties with the civilian population in their war zone. On the contrary, it was frequently reported that refugees returned to their homes soon. A person who alleged that Sjenica was the scene of such horror apparently did not know that it was too small a place to have as many as 950 notables.

¹⁸ Mijatović, "Iz rata u rat", 17 (entry for 8 Nov. 1912).

¹⁹ *Srpske novine*, 10/23 Nov. 1912, report of 9/22 Nov. from Skopje.

²⁰ Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, 290.

invited the representatives of all religious groups to dinner. He also paid visits to all hospitals.²¹ With all this view, the real question is what was the purpose of Trotsky's false account – to discredit his political opponent Miliukov or to “expose” the Serbian king at all cost, or perhaps both?

The publicist and leftist political propagandist, Leo Freundlich, vehemently claimed: “The Serbs came to Albania not as liberators, but as exterminators of the Albanian people. The Ambassadors’ Conference in London proposed drawing the borders of Albania according to ethnic and religious statistics to be gathered on site by a commission. The Serbs have hastened to prepare the statistics for them with machine guns, rifles and bayonets. They have committed unspeakable atrocities.”²² Was this really the intention of the Serbian government? Is this claim based on the verified information? What were his sources at this early stage of the crisis? He himself would encounter Albania for the first time in 1915.

His fellow socialist on the Serbian side, Kosta Novaković, came out with the claim that some 120,000 Albanians had been killed.²³ On the other hand, some historians are not inclined to accept his estimates and turn to the testimonies of Lazër Mjeda, Catholic Archbishop of Skopje, who claimed that 25,000 Albanians had been killed in Kosovo by the end of 1912. Noel Malcolm writes: “This was in agreement with the other reports in the European Press, which had given an estimate of 20,000 in early December.”²⁴ But who could supply the European Press with accurate information amidst the war? Who supplied the consuls with such information? How did Archbishop Mjeda collect his data for the Muslim enclaves?

According to historian Tamara Scheer, no media in Austro-Hungary questioned the accuracy of the reports on atrocities in the Balkan Wars committed by belligerents, namely Serbs and Montenegrins. The *Marburger Zeitung* expressed sympathies for the Turks, claiming that all decent Europeans should feel the same.²⁵

²¹ *Politika*, 22 Oct./2 Nov. 1912; 27 Oct./9 Nov. 1912.

²² Freundlich, *Albania's Golgotha* (http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_1/AH1913_1/html).

²³ Kosta Novaković, *Srbizacija i kolonizacija Kosova* (http://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zločini_nad_Albancima_u_Balkanskim_ratovima).

²⁴ Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 254. Malcolm considers the claim that 120,000 fled in exile probably overestimated. He referred to the Austrian official record that 20,000 men from the Gjakova district and 30,000 from Prizren had fled into Bosnia, together with 21,000 from the Muslim clans of those areas (ibid. 358); Sundhaussen gives the estimates of 20,000 killed and 60,000 forced into exile (H. Sundhaussen (Serbian edition), 238).

²⁵ Tamara Sheer, “The First Balkan War from the Perspective of Habsburg Empire’s German Media”, in *The Balkan Wars 1912/1913: New Views and Interpretation* (Belgrade: Strategic Institute and Institute of History, 2013), 277–291.

If we doubt the trustworthiness of the aforementioned claims and reports disseminated throughout the media in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, should we fully trust the opposite claims by the journalists who had access to battlefields, including a German one (correspondent to the A.B.C and *Leipziger Nachrichten*)? So, what about correspondents for the French *Journal*, *L'Illustration*, the Swedish *Svensk Lakartidning*, *Alfonbladet-Dagen*, *Stocholms Dagblad*, not to mention the Russian press or the letters and diaries of many foreign medical staff assigned to various hospitals.²⁶ At least they offer a more complex approach and picture. Interestingly, it did not take them long to notice differences in conduct between the regular armies, even the Ottoman one, and irregular troops on all sides. Unlike Austro-Hungarian reporting, they observed misdeeds of Albanians in the recent past and present.

It is worth clarifying a frequently misused episode of a sudden Albanian attack across the demarcation line in September 1913 directed towards Djakovica, Prizren and Debar, with about 10,000–12,000 troops against 3,000 Serbian and Montenegrin troops stretched along a 140 kilometres long line.

Instead of reporting on what really happened, we can confirm an obvious tendency in the Austro-Hungarian media at the time to put the blame on the Serbian government's maltreatment of the new subjects that provoked an uprising, that is to say behind Serbian lines. Count Berchtold and General Conrad von Hötzendorf firmly insisted on this interpretation. The official line was followed by Albanische Korrespondenz Büro, which put emphasis on the alleged killing of some 1,070 Albanians, including several notables, by Serbian authorities. In addition, reports on the advancement of the Serbian 8th Regiment to Peshkopia were far from the truth. In order to toe the line, the well-organized Albanian attack across the demarcation line that came after Serbian demobilization and the Bucharest Treaty in August 1913 was or still is downplayed as a simple revolt that started in the village of Fshaj. The story goes like this: "In September, after a Serbian officer tried to rape an Albanian woman and had been shot dead by her husband in the village of Fshaj, that village and two others were destroyed and thirty-five Albanians burnt to death." Then the revolt spread across Ljuma.²⁷ The *Radničke novine* republished the Albanische Korrespondenz report that the Malisory tribe took to arms because of terrible crimes committed by Serbian troops in Fshaj (Išan). Serbs had attacked the village and completely burned it down along with four families as well as six persons in the village of Spisaj.²⁸ This report made no mention of rape.

²⁶ Johannes Tangeberg, "Semi-barbarians, courageous patriots and Orientals: Swedish views of the Balkan Wars in 1912–1913", *Annual of Social History* 11/1 (2004), 55–69.

²⁷ Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 257–258 (based on the Kohlruess report, 18 Sept. 1913 (Fshaj); *Cana Socialdemokracia*, p. 147 (Fshaj).

²⁸ Albanische Korrespondenz Büro, Vienna 16 September 1913; *Radničke novine*, Telegrami, 18 Sept. 1913.

How then should we take Leon Trotsky's statement that the Serbian Army forbade rape and made efforts to strictly ensure the observance of that order? Trotsky gives the example of how at night, when the troops stopped in a Muslim village, a patrol led by an officer first collected all Turkish women and moved them into one part of the village: "The soldiers were billeted in houses only when men were left. If some women were left in harem, access to it was barred to the soldiers by an N.C.O. under threat of most severe punishment. The soldiers often grumbled like, 'If the Turks came into our country they would not behave like this.' In Monastir, a soldier was severely punished for lifting a Turkish woman's veil as a joke."²⁹ Did it depend then on individuals whether they would obey orders or not?

A person that followed media reports at the time would never find out what was the basic attitude of the Serbian military and leadership as regards POWs, the wounded or civilians and, consequently, what was really considered improper behaviour of individuals or groups. There is no discussion of the reprisals permitted under the international war law.³⁰

Good Faith towards Civilians, Conduct in Practice and Different Narratives

Several days before the war was declared, the Serbian Minister of War, Colonel Radivoje Bojović, had requested that the Chief of the General Staff, General Radomir Putnik, issue the following order to all troops: "In the future war, when our Army crosses the border it must handle with the utmost care and spare peaceful citizens, women and children from suffering. Force should be applied only against those who side with the enemy in armed resistance."³¹ The spirit of the aforementioned instructions was captured in King Peter's war proclamation to his Army, as well as in the proclamation made by Prince Alexander, Commander-in-Chief of the First Army (126,000 men). Finally, the instructions were included in the order issued by the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, General Putnik:

²⁹ Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, 121.

³⁰ *Medjunarodno ratno pravo sa pravilnikom* (Belgrade), 3, ad. 17 (When reprisal is allowed: When one belligerent does not respect the Law of War, the other one has the right to return "eye for an eye". The order for reprisal should be issued by the commander of the troops against whom violation of the law was committed ... Retaliation must not be applied on peaceful civilians.)

³¹ Velimir Ivetić, "Brutality of all the participants of the Balkans Wars according to Holm Sundhaussen. The case of Serbia in the First Balkan War", paper submitted at the International Conference "First Balkan War 1912/1913: The Social and Cultural Meaning", Vranje 1–3 June 2012, 8–9 (based on Vojni arhiv [Military Archives; hereafter VA], Belgrade, P 2, f 1, g 2, doc. 1).

There, my soldiers, our brothers wait for us. All those longing for freedom, peace and order wait for us there. There, you will find not only Serbs, but also Albanians of different confessions. Do not attack those among them who do not take side with Turkey and who accept us in a friendly manner; furthermore, do not attack their children, their homes and their lands. Soldiers, be led by this grand and illustrious popular saying: War to the enemy, brother to the friend! Brother is dear no matter what his religion is! Peter, signed by his own hand³²

A similar attitude was expressed in Prince Alexander's proclamation:

The enemy who is defeated and surrendered should be treated as human beings, mercifully, because they then cease to be enemies and become only humans, and humans should be treated kindly. The houses, properties, honour and pride of the defeated enemy and their families should be preserved and protected just like the houses, lands and honour of our own people; this is not only required by the laws of humanity and Orthodoxy, but this is also heroic behaviour, thus the enemy will prefer to surrender instead of pursuing infinite combat, because they know that they face heroes, and that neither they nor their wives and children should fear such soldiers...³³

In his last instruction to the division commanders before the outbreak of hostilities, General Putnik said: "The Albanians should be treated nicely, but when nice behaviour does not help, force should be applied."³⁴

King Peter also addressed all Serbs on 5/18 October and emphasized once again that they would bring freedom, brotherhood and equality to all inhabitants, including Serbs, Serbs of Muslim faith, Albanian Christians and Muslims "with whom they have lived for thousand and three hundred years sharing good and bad".³⁵ This proclamation was commented on in foreign circles and the press. *Die Zeit* (20 October) underlined that the King did not want to ignite religious fanaticism and to mobilize the Cross against the Crescent. He portrayed harsh conditions in Old Serbia very accurately. Unlike the Bulgarian proclamation, there were no ambiguities in his words.³⁶ The same daily com-

³² An extract from King Peter's Proclamation to his Army, October 1912, in Bjelajac, "The Other Side of the War", (based on Aleksandar M. Stojićević, *Istorija naših ratova za oslobodjenje i ujedinjenje od 1912–1918* (Belgrade: Štamparija Gl. Saveza Srpskih Zemljorad Zadruga 1932), 69). For a distorted translation of this proclamation see Freundlich, *Albania's Golgotha* (http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_1/AH1913_1/html).

³³ An extract from Prince Alexander's order to his First Army, in Bjelajac, "The Other Side of the War", 128.

³⁴ The instruction of General Radomir Putnik, Chief of the General Staff, during his meeting with the highest officers of the First Army in Vranjska Banja, 3/16 Oct. 1912, in Dragutin Milutinović, *Timočka divizija II poziva u I i II Balkanskom ratu 1912–1913* (Belgrade: Štamparija Skerlić, 1926), 12.

³⁵ *Srpske novine*, 6/18 Oct.

³⁶ *Srpske novine*, 11/23 Oct. 1912, Review of the Press.

mented on the Sultan's proclamation not without irony – "Too late". The commentator referred to the Sultan's call to his troops to spare women and children of suffering.³⁷

Soon after the fall of Monastir (6/19 November), the Serbian Supreme Command disseminated the general instructions as regards the attitude towards civilian population and emphasized that all necessary measures would be undertaken to eradicate any behaviour that could provoke unrest, suspicion and mistrust among civilian population in the new territories. Once again it was stressed that all citizens must be treated equally. As regards the Turkish and Albanian population, the instructions demanded that military and other authorities should take a firm, but legally justified, attitude. But of no less importance was the demand that Turks and Albanians be protected from any violent acts by the native Serbian population, especially "since the Serbian population was still intoxicated by hatred and eager to take revenge". It was repeatedly forbidden to violate any religious rights, property and family. In addition, it was strictly forbidden to take property and supplies from civilians without paying an adequate price. The subordinate authorities were warned not to give false promises and to respect previous agreements. In selecting police personnel, special attention was to be paid to their moral qualities and strict control was to be imposed over all personnel, whether senior or newly selected. In all places where Muslims showed loyalty and lived in large numbers, the subordinate authorities should not hesitate to select them for the posts in municipalities. The instructions also referred to the month-long experience with irregulars and their impact on peace and order: "Pay attention to many armed persons moving about ever since and calling themselves 'komitaji', who in fact are plundering, taking revenge and committing violence against local people. They must be disarmed and punished or brought before the military court."³⁸ Finally, *Decree on the Management of the Liberated Areas* was introduced on 14 December 1912. The pre-war municipal boundaries were preserved, just like Muslim courts for Muslims in the domain of matrimonial law, in the eleven new territorial districts.³⁹

Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, in part guided by political reasons, demanded that Albanians be treated humanely. He permanently insisted that the Supreme Command should treat Albanians of both faiths with care, especially Muslim lords and other notables, given their dominant influence on the com-

³⁷ *Srpske novine*, 13/26 Oct. 1912, Review of the Press: *Die Zeit*, 22 Oct. 1912 ("Too late").

³⁸ Ivetić, "Brutality", 21–22, n. 57, quotes the whole instruction in nine points (based on VA, P 2, box 18, f 1, doc. 2 and 3).

³⁹ Miroslav Svirčević, *Lokalna uprava i razvoj moderne srpske države* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2011), 547–549.

mon people.⁴⁰ He believed it to be the best way to counter Austro-Hungarian propaganda and intrigue. In addition, he counted on Albanian lords to support Serbia's claims at the upcoming Peace Conference. Pašić also believed that Serbian authorities should protect Albanians from potential Montenegrin rage and misconduct: "Upon the request of our Government, it is absolutely necessary to behave properly towards Catholics and Muslim Albanians who might flee the Montenegrin zone and seek refuge on our side. We must receive these refugees well and provide them with food. In the places where both authorities coexist, our authorities should prevent any crime against Albanians since it would create bad impression abroad and negatively impact common interest."⁴¹

The Montenegrin authorities in Metohija, including district authorities in Peć, as the highest administrative authority, did not always treat the Albanian population as they should have. As soon as Montenegrins arrived, some individuals expressed the wish to convert from Islam to Orthodox Christianity. In 1913, the conversion turned from voluntary to forced one, which had a deplorable effect on the Albanian Muslims. Taking into consideration complaints from the Serbian side and from abroad, the Montenegrin government instructed its authorities in May 1913 to abandon this policy and thus Albanians were allowed to return to the Muslim faith if they preferred so.⁴²

Pašić wanted to be absolutely sure as to what was going on as regards religious conversion in the Serbian zone. The Supreme Command responded to his inquiries on 26 March (8 April) 1913 that in the Kosovo divisional district only South Slav Muslims who had fled Bosnia after 1878 converted to Christianity of their own will (117 men, 98 women, seven children).⁴³

Somewhat earlier, the Chief of the General Staff, Field-Marshal Putnik, and his first assistant General Mišić issued the order with similar demands: "We

⁴⁰ Similar suggestions also came from other quarters. The first mayor of Skopje, Panta Gavrilović, suggested to the Supreme Command to order that local notables and their properties in the environs of the city must be protected. In his words, the Christians still plundered their lands and possessions outside the city. Since they had a great influence on local Muslims (mostly Turks and some Albanians), it would be useful to win them over by being sympathetic and meeting their needs. See DSPKS, vol. 5/III, doc. 122, p. 245, 24 Oct./6 Nov. 1912.

⁴¹ VA, P 2, box 50, f 1, 1/7, Third Army Command, Prizren, 8 March 1913, to Mayor of Prizren; Chief of Prizren District; Commanders of the Šumadija Division 1st and 2nd age groups; Kosovo Divisional District; Commander of the City of Djakovica. The request was transmitted to the Chief of Novi Pazar District too.

⁴² Rakočević, "Montenegrin-Albanian Relations", 193–194; See also DSPKS, vol. 5/III, docs. 198, 209, 256 (HQ of the Serbian Third Army to the Supreme Command on the situation in Djakovica, 7/20 November 1912), doc. 303 (Prime Minister to the Legation in Montenegro, on the situation in Sjenica and Prijepolje, 14/27 November 1912).

⁴³ VA, P 2, box 18, f 33, doc 1. See also VA, P 2, Box 52, f 32, doc 16.

have information that Albanians have prepared an attack against us. It has been said that they will be supplied with rapid-fire guns and plenty of ammunition, instigated by both known rivals from the Adriatic. Take measures to prevent agitation. Issue the orders for the utmost vigilance to prevent any surprise. Try to inspire good mood among Albanians on our behalf. Frequent reports on the aforementioned points are required.”⁴⁴

Bearing in mind many “testimonies” and “explanations” concerning what was “really” going on during the war, it is worth mentioning that the Serbian Supreme Command intervened with its own Ministry of Foreign Affairs to solve the problem of misconduct of Bulgarian and Greek irregular units in the Serbian-occupied zone in Macedonia. The Supreme Command demanded from the Foreign Ministry to request urgently from the Bulgarian and Greek governments to recall their irregulars; otherwise, the Supreme Command did not rule out potential clashes, since local population had already demanded protection. It also emphasized that it was absolutely necessary to preserve peace and order. Disorder and plundering were reported in Štip, Radovište, Struga, Dojran, Kukus, Kratovo, Gevgelija, Sveti Nikola and in many smaller villages.⁴⁵ This observation tallies with that of General Milutinović as recorded in his operational diary.⁴⁶

The Serbian military authorities asked ethnic Albanian or Turkish notables to encourage the fearful refugees, suffering under winter conditions, to return home. They, however, should give guarantees of full loyalty. The response was always quick. The subordinate military authorities were ordered to help refugees with food and shelter if their homes had been destroyed. The only precondition for them was to surrender their arms. The deserted villages such as those in the Lab valley, or south of Prizren, or in the vicinity of Debar, on which the Army had reported during its advance became centres for the returning refugees. It was not only Muslims who returned to their homes, but also Christians. They had fled into the mountains or nearby woods and hills at the beginning of the operations.

The limited space makes it impossible to list numerous examples of how the military and civilian authorities saw the problems and what their recommendations for proper action in the best Serbian interest were.

⁴⁴ VA, P 2, box 50, f 1, 1, 1/1 VK [Supreme Command] ord. no. 2547, 4 Jan. 1913, to Commander of Third Army in Prizren 12:53 h.

⁴⁵ DSPKS, vol. 5/III, doc. 317, Supreme Command no. 1292, 15/28 Nov. 1912. Prime Minister Pašić made a note on the verso: “To tell the Bulgarian and Greek commands to issue orders for withdrawal, otherwise the military would pursue them because they are in the habit of plundering”.

⁴⁶ Milutinović, *Timočka divizija*, 48.

The action aiming to take the large quantities of arms from civilians was actually at the heart of discontent among some locals. The fact was that large quantities were distributed on the eve of the war by Turkish authorities (some 60,000 pieces). On the other hand, the local way of life and customs, Albanian most of all, suggested that the real figure was considerably higher. From the Serbian point of view, it was out of question to tolerate such situation when the majority of troops left Kosovo and the war was not finished yet. In light of the Austro-Hungarian intrigue to instigate revolts, on the one hand, and sporadic attacks on individuals, on the other, the military authorities decided to seize arms from the civilian population. The order was issued on 27 October 1912 by the commander of the Third Army. The usual procedure required a proclamation to the locals to surrender their arms without any consequences. If they disobeyed or tried to hide their arms, they were threatened even with death penalty.

Within a day, more than 5,000 rifles were seized in Priština alone, where many Albanians from the Lab Valley ended up hiding in Albanian homes. Only in a few cases the actions to seize arms in central Kosovo encountered difficulties and required the use of force (the Zborce Hana, Crnoljevo, Našec, Skulanovo and Kabaš villages). The 6th Regiment suffered casualties (10 dead and 50 wounded) in Crnoljevo. There were incidents in the vicinity of Uroševac (Ferizaj), where small Serbian detachments came under attack. In Priština, several Albanians were executed in public for shooting at soldiers. Krakov recorded that 27 Albanians were executed for having made a night attack on a military camp, resulting in casualties. Two were sentenced to be hanged for murdering a solitary soldier. At Gazimestan some 60 people were shot.⁴⁷ The villages like Zborce Hana and Crnoljevo were actually on the front line fiercely defended by irregulars from Ljuma (*basibozuk*) before Prizren was captured. The village of Našec, southwest of Prizren, was a different case. Since the villagers had rejected the call to surrender arms and opened fire on soldiers, it was burned down to make an example of it. One of the participants in the action concluded that it made other villages surrender their arms peacefully.⁴⁸

According to the records, it is obvious that the quick collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the credible Serbian force caused most locals to comply. The following example suggests that some pre-war connections also played a role. Father Mitrofan from the monastery of Devič was a mediator in the Drenica district. He kept in touch with Sadik Rama, a local warlord. Without military pressure the locals surrendered 400 rifles and stored them at the monastery. Mi-

⁴⁷ Ivetić, "Brutality", n. 32 (based on VA, P 2, box 47, f 2; box 49 f 23; box 64, f 1); On Priština, see also Stanislav Krakov, *Ratni dnevnik 1912–1916* (Novi Sad: Prometej; Belgrade: RTS, 2019), 45–57.

⁴⁸ Nikola Hristić (Colonel), "Zauzeće Prizrena i Djakovice 1912 godine", *Ratnik*, VII–VIII (1926), 50 (operational diary).

trofan guaranteed that in 150 local villages no rifle would ever be fired at Serbs.⁴⁹ In the following period no incidents were reported from that part of Kosovo. Unrest was not reported before 6 December 1912 (in Lopušnik, near Peć).⁵⁰

The events in the areas which would become part of the future Albanian state (the Drin valley and Ljuma) developed differently. The first Serbian march through this area toward the Adriatic was carried out peacefully and in close co-operation with several local tribes, Mirëditët above all. But as soon as two strong detachments had reached the coast and were engaged in combat against Turkish forces, revolts in the rear (Ljuma) were reported. It prompted the Serbian Third Army to undertake disarming of villages along the main route.⁵¹

South of Prizren, three detachments were engaged in disarming population between 8 and 13 November 1912. One of them came under attack in Ljuma. At first, an estimated 600–800 Albanians were engaged. Even reinforcement from the 10th Šumadija Regiment sent on 14 November could not accomplish the task. The Serbian forces had 176 dead and 88 wounded. To overcome this resistance, the Serbian Command sent reinforcements, four battalion-strong. Finally, on 5 December, resistance in Ljuma was suppressed, but at the price of destroying villages from Feta to Spas, all of which offered armed resistance.⁵² The Serbian authorities blamed the Austro-Hungarian consul in Prizren, Prochaska, for his clandestine activities aimed at instigating local population to disobey the orders and undertake or continue armed resistance, promising them Austro-Hungarian assistance.⁵³

In the autumn of 1913, this area was assigned to the newly-created Albanian state but partly remained under control of the Serbian forces until the final delimitation of the border, which was to be carried out by an international commission. The Serbian Army was demobilized, and only 3,000 soldiers were

⁴⁹ VA, P 2, box 13, f 1, doc. 2, 1/3. Two letters from Fr Mitrofan to General Živković (Mitrovica), 22 Oct./4 Nov. 1912; 29 Oct./11 Nov. 1912.

⁵⁰ Borisav Ratković, *Oslobodjenje Kosova i Metohije 1912* (Belgrade 1997), 258–268.

⁵¹ Nikola Hristić (Colonel), “Marš Drinskog konjičkog eskadrona II poziva kroz Albaniju 1912 godine”, *Ratnik IX* (Sept. 1926), 52–76; Dušan D. Krsitić (Colonel), “Operacije Albanskog odreda 1912 godine”, *Ratnik V* (May 1927), 32–50; Vojislav U. Ilić (Colonel), “Operacije Jadranskih odreda ka Jadrano 1912–1913”, *Ratnik XII* (Dec. 1937), 32–42; I (Jan. 1938), 42–53; Dragiša Vasić, *Karakter i mentalitet jednog pokolenja* (Belgrade: 1919; reprinted Belgrad: Altera, 1990), 37–38.

⁵² Ratković, *Oslobodjenje Kosova i Metohije*.

⁵³ DSPKS, vol. 5/III, doc. 262, pp. 362–364, Report of the Third Army to the Supreme Command, 7/20 Nov. 1912 and Annex on the conducted investigation in 22 points, Prizren, 1/14 Nov. 1912. Point 19 contains the description of two letters sent by Prochaska just before the outbreak of war operations and captured at a post office in Uroševac (Ferizaj). The letters were sent to private addresses. Both letters were forwarded to Prince Alexander. See also docs. 241, 244, 250 (Pašić demanded complete evidence regarding the Prochaska affair).

deployed along the 140 km long border. Weak at many points, Serbian troops would face a great challenge in mid-September. The well-organized and simultaneous attack from Albania (the so-called uprising) advanced successfully in three directions (Prizren, Debar, Ohrid). As a result, two Serbian regiments (10th and 19th) were almost destroyed. Some locals sided with the advancing troops. After the tide turned and the quickly mobilized and reinforced Serbian Army pushed the invaders back, acts of revenge and brutality took place on both sides.⁵⁴ In particular, the survivors of the 10th Regiment took revenge under the pretext of local resistance to disarming in the villages of Suraj, Penaca, Kaljisi and Vilja.⁵⁵

On the eve of the Serbian counteroffensive, the Minister of War issued a special order regarding the treatment of civilians both in Serbian and in Albanian territory, insisting on the harshest measures permitted by the law and avoiding brutality.⁵⁶

The chief commander of the operation followed suit by issuing his own orders in eight points.⁵⁷ He emphasized that although the armed Albanians should be regarded as rebels, "it is forbidden to plunder or carry out atrocities; maltreatment of women, children and the people who have not participated in the rebellion". In addition, he insisted that all measures, even the harshest ones, should be applied in strict conformity with law and that the innocent be protected. As a measure of precaution, he let the locals know that any further attempt of rebellion could lead to punishing entire settlements. It was also ordered that the movement of locals between villages or towns would be restricted during the upcoming operations.

The most detailed procedure was ordered by division commanders. The commander of the Drim Division ordered that peaceful locals who had fled should be allowed to return and assisted. Orphans should be given special care. Private property should also be protected. "Those who have sided with Albanian units or are suspected must be imprisoned and the commander must be informed."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Mirko Gutić (Lt.-Colonel), "Oružani sukobi na srpsko-albanskoj granici u jesen 1913. godine", *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 1 (1985), 242; even the Social Democrats' newspaper (*Radničke novine*, of 23 Sept./6 Oct. 1913), highly critical of the government's Albanian policy, predicted the possible course of events: "This Albanian invasion could cost both sides many and pointless victims [...] While they were on the Serbian soil they were plundering, killing and setting on fire. If our troops cross into the Albanian land, they will do the same. Revenge will be horrible."

⁵⁵ Gutić, "Oružani sukobi", 61; "Pokolj u Ljumi", *Radničke novine*, 22 Oct./4 Nov. 1913.

⁵⁶ Gutić, "Oružani sukobi" (based on VA, P 2, box 81, f 12/1, doc. 53/9), 29 Sept. 1913.

⁵⁷ Ibid. (based on VA, P 2, box 81, f 12/1-2).

⁵⁸ Ibid. (based on VA, P 2, box 81, f 12/1-4).

In spite of these orders, it was noted that some villages were burned down once their resistance was crushed. In some cases artillery support was called in. That was the fate of the village of Rečane near Gostivar. Some villages were burned down by retreating Albanian units (Zajas, Sebist, Zabzun, Klenja). Some were spared owing to the Christians who guaranteed for their Albanian neighbours. There was an interesting episode attesting to humanity of the lower-ranking Serbian officers and their superiors. At one point, the commander of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, Lt.-Colonel Colović, suggested that the village of Žirovnica be spared since its inhabitants had been peaceful. His superior, Colonel Andjelković, commander of the Drim Division, taught him a lesson in his reply: "Who has authorized you to burn down villages and, consequently, to suggest that Žirovnica be spared."⁵⁹

In order to avoid the fury of the retreating Serbian troops, because of fear or some other reasons, Albanians usually fled their villages, taking their livestock with them. After the operation was terminated, their return from Albania became the subject of negotiations between local notables and Serbian authorities. The only precondition for their return was usually the surrender of arms.⁶⁰

A historian may pose the question as to whether the Serbian army officers or soldiers complied with their ruler's or superiors' orders and demands. Or, if they did not, how far did they go in non-compliance, how many of them, and where? How did the dynamic of war situations sometimes lead to ferocity and improper behaviour that would later be condemned? The same officers and men were engaged in combat again a few months later. How did they respect humanitarian law and what was the attitude of other belligerents?⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid. (based on VA, P 2, box 81, f 6/2, doc.28/16).

⁶⁰ DSPKS, vol. 7/II, doc. 70, pp. 198–201 (most came from the Debar region; some 5,000 in Tirana and some 2,000 in Elbasan); doc. 97, pp. 227–228; doc.131, pp. 260–261; doc. 363, pp. 495–496; doc. 593, pp. 593–594.

⁶¹ Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction, Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2007) or Jonathan E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ferenc Pollman, "Austro-Hungarian Atrocities against Serbians During the WWI", in *Prvi svetski rat i Balkan – 90 godina kasnije/WWI and The Balkans 90 Years Later* (Belgrade: Institut za stratejska istraživanja, 2011), 133–142; Dr R. A. Reiss, *Rapport sur les atrocités commises par les troupes austro-hongroises pendant la première invasion de la Serbie présenté au gouvernement Serbe* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1919); R. A. Reiss, *Comment les Austro-Hongrois ont fait la guerre en Serbie. Observations direct d'un neutre* (Paris: A. Colin, 1916); Dr A. Van Tienhoven, *Avec les Serbes en Serbie et en Albanie 1914–1916. Journal de guerre d'un chirurgien* (Paris: Imprimerie typographique H. Richard, 1918); C. Sturzenegger, *Die Wiederauferstehung Serbiens seine gloreichsten und dunkelsten Tage* (Bern-Berlin 1920); Henry Barby, *La Guerre mondiale. Avec l'Armée serbe* (Paris: A. Michel, 1918).

Treatment of Prisoners of War and Wounded Enemies

The Serbian Army had a long tradition of respecting the international rules regulating the treatment of the wounded and captured enemies. The Serbian commanders in the wars of 1876–78 and 1885 issued orders to that effect as well as those concerning proper treatment of civilians. They also forbade pillage. Among the guidelines were the rules of the Geneva conference of 22 August 1864.⁶² The rules adopted by the Ministry of War in peacetime envisaged that every future doctor in the Medical Corps (Service) would be instructed about the Geneva Convention and the role of the Red Cross. That was part of the examination for the medical reserve lieutenants.⁶³ The temporary regulation for the wartime Medical Service issued in 1908 stipulated (Art. 115) that medics in the field had to fulfil procedures for quick aid and evacuation not only for their own troops but also for the wounded enemy. This regulation was part of the annual training courses for reservists.⁶⁴ The cadets in the Military Academy had courses on International and War Law.⁶⁵

The wars of 1912–13 put to test the application of the rules concerning POWs. Some of them, previously wounded, were found left in hospitals, or even in abandoned trains. During the first weeks of war, the concentration points for POWs were in Skopje (the city fortress) and Priština. In November, Niš and Belgrade became the largest centres for prisoners. In the first half of the month, some 2,000 (100 officers) arrived in Belgrade and another 271 wounded (21 officers). Many of them were Albanians, Greeks or other Christians. 183 who arrived in Valjevo were previously held in Užice. They had been captured on Mountain Javor (western front). Many among them were Muslims from Bosnia.

⁶² Nikola P. Ilić, *Oslobodjenje Južne Srbije 1877–1878* (Belgrade: Sloboda, 1977), 152–153; Dr Vladimir Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog vojnog saniteta: naše ratno sanitetsko iskustvo* (Belgrade: Drzavna stamparija, 1925; 2nd ed., 1992), 75; Aleksandar S. Nedok, *Balkanski ratovi 1912–1913. Rad srpskog vojnog saniteta* (Belgrade: Medija centar Odbrana, 2012), 36, 46. Before the outbreak of the Balkan Wars the Serbian Red Cross was recognized as an important element of society with high international reputation. It was given special recognition by the International Red Cross in Geneva: "...Be as human as Serbia was in 1885..." See *Srpski vojni sanitet u Balkanskim ratovima*, eds. Branislav Popović and Veljko Todorović (Belgrade: Medija centar Odbrana, 2012), 230.

⁶³ Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog vojnog saniteta*, 157–158; Nedok, *Balkanski ratovi*, 36.

⁶⁴ Ministarstvo vojno (Sanitetsko odeljenje), *Privremeni uput za ratnu sanitetsku službu* (Belgrade 1908); CVNDI [Centre for Military-Scientific Documentation and Information, Belgrade], rare doc. no 2022, 34; doc. no. 2022 Belgrade, rare document, no. 2022), 34. The text of the Geneva Convention was included as an appendix.

⁶⁵ *Spomenica sedamdesetpetogodišnjice Vojne akademije 1850–1925* (Belgrade 1925), 62, 77, 78.

In addition, some 4,000 POWs were transported to Niš, Pirot, Užice, Kraljevo and Kladovo.⁶⁶

Their number rose after the battles of Prilep and Bitola (Monastir) in the second half of November (5,600). The inflow of the wounded was steady as well.⁶⁷ As a result of the shortage of accommodation in Belgrade, 164 POWs were transferred to Kladovo.⁶⁸ In the same period, the prison in Niš had 730 POWs (60 officers).⁶⁹

The prisoners of war captured in Albania were also transported to Serbia by steamers from Durazzo (Dures) via Salonika.⁷⁰

At the beginning of the war the Serbian Army was releasing the captured Albanians. Since they rose to arms again and engaged in fighting soon afterwards, they were, after having been captured again, sent to POW camps.⁷¹ Many were rounded up in Priština, where they sought to hide after engaging in clashes outside of the city.

Turkish documents report of high numbers of Turkish prisoners, notably after the fall of Bitola (Monastir), but historians agree on the figure of 5,600. Those transported from Durazzo had to march to Bitola POW camp for repatriation after the war, which caused suffering.⁷²

More than 3,000 Bulgarian POWs were in Serbia at the end of the Second Balkan War. They departed for Bulgaria on 15 September 1913 in two trains. The officers were transported in passenger cars. In return, 2,828 Serbian officers and soldiers were released from Bulgarian captivity.⁷³

⁶⁶ "Zarobljenici", *Politika*, 23 Oct./5 Nov. 1912; "Novi zarobljenici", *Politika*, 24 Oct./6 Nov. 1912; "Dolazak zarobljenika", *Politika*, 25 Oct./7 Nov. 1912.

⁶⁷ "Ranjenici sa Prilepa", *Politika*, 3/16 Nov. 1912. It was announced that a train had arrived with 106 wounded Turks out of total of 345 wounded; "Izdržavanje zarobljenika", *Politika*, 6/19 November 1912. The article informed about the arrival of another 50 POWs.

⁶⁸ "Premešteni zarobljenici", *Politika*, 7/21 Nov. 1912.

⁶⁹ "Zarobljenici u Nišu", *Politika*, 11/24 Nov. 1912. According to Albanian historians from Kosovo, some 650 were sent before 27 October and additional 700 on 30 October 1912 (*Istorijski institut Albanaca i kolonizacija Kosova II* (Priština: Istorijiski institut, 1997).

⁷⁰ *Srpske novine* no. 1, 1 Jan. 1913.

⁷¹ According to The Hague Convention of 1907 (Ch. 2, Art. 12): "Prisoners of war liberated on parole and recaptured bearing arms against the Government to whom they had pledged their honour, forfeit their right to be treated as prisoners of war, and can be brought before the courts."

⁷² Ugur Ozcan, "Ottoman prisoners of war and their repatriation challenge in Balkan Wars", in *First Balkan War 1912/1913: The Social and Cultural Meaning*, 159–182 (Nis: University of Nis, 2012).

⁷³ "Razmena zarobljenika sutra", *Politika*, 1/14 Sept. 1913

Unlike the situation in the First World War, Serbia did not establish a central POW command during the Balkan Wars. Combat units fed and guarded prisoners for a while and usually escorted them deeper behind the front lines. Their further destinations were Skopje, Niš, Kraljevo and Užice, and, finally, Belgrade. They were accommodated in suitable military barracks or in regular prisons. All of their needs were met by local military commands. Sometimes they received aid from the Red Cross. Food and hygiene supplies were similar to those received by Serbian peacetime units. Officers were accommodated separately and more comfortably than soldiers.

Immediately after the Second Balkan War the Serbian Socialist paper *Radničke novine* published the testimony of an alleged witness of the killing of captured Bulgarians in the field, with an estimated figure of 300 killed.⁷⁴ We cannot verify this figure.

Serbia was prepared for providing medical services and assistance due to her bitter experience between 1876 and 1878. The Serbian personnel were reinforced by foreign medical missions and volunteer doctors. They prepared not only mobile field hospitals, but also a vast chain of reserve hospitals. For that purpose, they adapted all suitable schools and public buildings, even some factories, across the country.⁷⁵ The Turkish army, for its part, was prepared as well. Foreign medical missions arrived in Macedonia and public buildings, including schools, were prepared as war hospitals.

When Serbian forces drove the Ottoman troops out of Macedonia, they had to cope with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of the wounded and sick enemies who were left behind, in addition to their own men. The railway network was not sufficiently developed, and therefore evacuation from the field could take days.

From the beginning, the Serbian and Ottoman wounded were evacuated together. After the Battle of Kumanovo, the Serbs found an abandoned train with wounded enemy soldiers and they had to provide assistance to them. The nearby city of Skopje was already overcrowded with the wounded Otto-

⁷⁴ *The Other Balkan Wars. A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry*, 216 (based on *Radničke novine* no. 162, 12/25 Aug. 1913). The quoted paragraph gives no indication whatsoever about the motives or context, but the Commission placed full confidence in the alleged witness. The article was based on an anonymous account given in a military hospital. There is no indication where the alleged event took place or which particular unit was involved.

⁷⁵ Out of 93 reserve hospitals in Serbia, 34 were established in Belgrade alone. Foreign Red Cross missions worked in many of them and even in the permanent Main Military Hospital in Belgrade. See *Srpski vojni sanitet u Balkanskim ratovima*, 111–113. The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs closed all schools and the University until October 1913. Female students had the duty to make bandages, sheets, socks, gloves etc. See *Srpske novine*, 7 Oct. 1912; "Škole – bolnice!", *Politika*, 28 Sept./11 Oct. 1912.

man soldiers. All hospitals and many public buildings were full to the brink.⁷⁶ In order to improve the situation, the Serbian military authorities directed to Skopje the mobile field hospital “City of Moscow” which had recently arrived in Serbia. The hospital with 153 beds and a surgical ward started to operate on 8 November; they established a separate ward for Muslim women. Soon, another two Russian hospitals started to operate in Skopje.⁷⁷ In Veles, Prilep and Bitola (Monastir), all schools were converted into hospitals, just like many hotels and private buildings in the surrounding areas. In Prilep, the biggest one was the so-called “Bulgarian School” staffed with Swiss doctors. In Bitola, Serbian troops found some 1,500 Turkish soldiers wounded and sick in three schools and a Greek hospital. It was hard to find a place for Serbian casualties. In Djakovica, the Drina Division mobile hospital operated alongside and in close cooperation with the personnel of the former Ottoman hospital (Major Dr Nahif Arif).⁷⁸ They continued to tend to 40 Ottoman wounded and provided some extra space in a school for another ward since the number of the sick rose dramatically to 266.⁷⁹

The operational diaries of the Serbian field hospitals contain much information which shows that the wounded soldiers and the Ottoman medical personnel were treated in full compliance with international humanitarian law.

During the joint operations in Thrace all wounded in the Serbian sector were taken to the field hospitals of the Timok and Dunav divisions with the quarantine set up for the prisoners because of cholera and typhus epidemic. The Serbs lived up to their reputation before the eyes of foreigners assigned to the hospitals, journalists on the ground, military attachés and the Ottomans. It was noted in the Timok hospital diary (entry on 14 March 1913) that Ottoman officers were surprised to see how well their wounded were tended and expressed gratitude for their evacuation along with the Serbs. It was also recorded that “Bulgarian soldiers could not understand why we tended the Turkish wounded just like our own... On this occasion they demanded that the wounded be killed ... but our soldiers did not allow them to do so.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Stanoje Stanojević, “Bitka na Kumanovu”, *Ratnik* 2 (1928), 8, 12.

⁷⁷ Galina Igorevna Sevcova, “Etapna poljska bolnica ‘Grad Moskva’ u Skoplju (Uskub) 8. novembra 1912 – 24. februara 1913”, in *Srpski vojni sanitet*, 125–130; The Kijevo and Kaufman Red Cross hospitals operated in a large Turkish school (Nedok, *Balkanski ratovi*, 65).

⁷⁸ On 6/19 November 1912 the Major and his eight compatriots-medics were granted permission to leave after all patients had been cured (Operations log of the Second Drina Field Hospital). See Nedok, *Balkanski ratovi*, 98–99; Stanojević, *Istorija srpskog vojnog saniteta*, 238–239, 248–249.

⁷⁹ Nedok, *Balkanski ratovi*, 98.

⁸⁰ Nedok, *Balkanski ratovi*, 121–122.

There were many witnesses to how the Serbian military treated the wounded. Many foreign doctors left their testimonies. According to them, the treatment was completely in line with the Geneva Convention and even went beyond the proposed guidelines.⁸¹ Only a few incidents have come to our knowledge. These took place during the first days of the war. It was recorded that some wounded enemies fired on or knife-stabbed Serbian medical personnel and were shot on spot as a result.⁸²

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⁸¹ Dr Ivan Orežan, *Med ranjenimi srbski brati* (Ljubljana: Sokolska matica, 1913); Zvonka Zupanič-Slavec and Franc Štolfa, *Dr Ivan Orežan, dobrotnik Medicinske fakultete in slovenskega naroda* (Ljubljana: Medicinska fakulteta, 1998); C. Sturzenegger, *Serbisches Rotes Kreuz und internationale Liebestätigkeit während der Balkankriege 1912/1913* (Zurich: Orell Fuessli, 1914), 1–128; Tangeberg, "Semi-barbarians", 55–72.

⁸² M. Mladjenović, "Dnevnik: Rat sa Turcima 1912. godine", in *Ratni dnevnički Užičana 1912–1918* (Užice: Istorijski arhiv Užica, 1995), 79; *Ratovanje Petog pešadijskog puka "Kralja Milana" 1912–1918*, ed. Svetomir G. Nikolić (Valjevo: 1998), 11. This account is based on the wartime operations log of the regiment supplemented by some additional sources.

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