

Zitierhinweis

Panichi, Oliver: review of: Ian D. Armour, *Apple of Discord. The "Hungarian Factor" in Austro-Serbian Relations, 1867-1881*, West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 2014, in: *Südost-Forschungen*, 77 (2018), p. 335-337, <https://recensio-stag.lorax.syslab.com/r/7301e3e1fc8d438486c0e46634c3b460>



copyright

Dieser Beitrag kann vom Nutzer zu eigenen nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken heruntergeladen und/oder ausgedruckt werden. Darüber hinausgehende Nutzungen sind ohne weitere Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber nur im Rahmen der gesetzlichen Schrankenbestimmungen (§§ 44a-63a UrhG) zulässig.

Ian D. ARMOUR, *Apple of Discord. The “Hungarian Factor” in Austro-Serbian Relations, 1867-1881*. West Lafayette/IN: Purdue University Press 2014 (Central European Studies). XXIII, 347 S., 14 Abb., ISBN 978-1-55753-683-9, US-\$ 39,92

This meticulous book on Austro-Serbian diplomatic relations describes the dichotomy which occurred after the 1867 *Ausgleich* between the policies pursued by the imperial foreign minister Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust and the Hungarian prime minister Gyula Andrassy, regarding Serbian aspirations to the Ottoman province of Bosnia. Despite the title, Armour deals only marginally with the events after 1871. Among twelve chapters, only the last two are devoted to them. The author focuses his attention between 1867 and 1871 instead, arguing that this period was crucial for the subsequent evolution of Austro-Serbian relations. Reconstructing this period, the book provides its most original documentation and interpretation.

Andrassy particularly influenced Habsburg policy toward Serbia. From 1868 onwards, his main collaborator was Benjámín Kállay, a Magyar himself, who was appointed Austro-Hungarian consul in Belgrade on Andrassy's request. The primary aim of this Hungarian factor, as Armour defines it, was the neutralisation of Russian influence over the Principality of Serbia. This target, in itself, was shared with Beust. However, what differed were the means by which they aimed to achieve it. While Beust pursued conservation of the status quo in the Ottoman provinces, Andrassy was open to redesigning the borders of the Monarchy's neighbours. When Beust convinced the Turks to leave their last military garrisons in Serbia, he did so only to prevent an anti-Ottoman insurgence in the Balkans, which would have provoked a destabilising Russian intervention in support of the Orthodox Slavs subject to the Porte. Any territorial gain by Serbia, however, was firmly ruled out by Beust. In contrast, Andrassy considered a Serbian administration in Ottoman Bosnia as something possible, even desirable for the Habsburg Monarchy. In this strategy, allowing Belgrade to gain at least a part of Bosnia, albeit preserving the formal suzerainty of the Porte, would have resulted in the taming of Serbian nationalism, such that Serbia would have turned into the Monarchy's loyal ally. This was the main aim of what Armour defines as the Bosnian scheme. The Serbian government would have undertaken to cut any relations with Russia and avoid stirring up the Serbs living in Hungarian Vojvodina. Ottoman obduracy in refusing any proposal regarding Bosnia proved to be one obstacle to the plan, though not the only one.

The negotiations started in 1867, when Andrassy met the Prince Mihailo Obrenović in the latter's estate of Ivánka, in northern Hungary. Armour calls special attention to this meeting because of the controversial interpretations that many historians, mainly Yugoslav ones, have produced about it. The main point here is the debated collusion between Beust and Andrassy. The foreign minister knew Andrassy's plan to court Serbia but did not approve it. Armour's opinion is that the Bosnian scheme was then a purely Hungarian initiative, not an Austro-Hungarian one.

In September 1868, Andrassy “took the matter directly to the Emperor. The result, for reasons still obscure, appears to have been a qualified approval by Francis Joseph” (122).

From April 1868 onwards, Benjámín Kállay had come on the stage of the Bosnian scheme. His diary, both in the Serbo-Croat edition and in the original Hungarian version, represents one important primary source in Armour's study. Kállay was a diplomat and a scholar; he had translated John Stuart Mill's "On liberty", meditated on a Danubian confederation under Austro-Hungarian control, and planned with no repercussions the murder of Svetozar Miletić (169-170), as we know about from his diary. He was an intermediary between "Hungary-Austria" – as Armour quotes from a diplomatic correspondence of Rosen to Bismarck in January 1869 (60) – and the Regents Milivoj Blaznavac and Jovan Ristić in Belgrade, the Serbian leaders after Prince Mihailo's assassination of 10 June 1868.

Armour pays great attention to Kállay's negotiations with the Regents, by means of careful research on Austro-Hungarian, British, Prussian, Serbian and sometimes Italian diplomatic correspondences. The outcome of this work is an incisive understanding of how Hungarian influence played a role in Habsburg foreign policy, even if it was ultimately ineffective.

According to Armour, Beust's conduct is revealing of the "institutional schizophrenia" which affected the Habsburg Monarchy between 1867 and 1871 (5). It can be described as "supine acquiescence" (140) to the Hungarian plan. Beust felt that he could not control Andrassy's diplomatic activism, because the latter had the confidence of the Emperor. During the negotiations of the Bosnian scheme, a partition of the Ottoman province between Serbia and the Monarchy did emerge as a possibility, supported by the Hungarians. Armour notes that this had something in common with the memoranda produced in 1869 by the Emperor's military experts: namely, the push to gain a part of Bosnia for the empire, to better defend Dalmatia and to secure some trade routes. Francis Joseph's reaction to these memoranda remains a matter of research, due to the lack of documentation. However, if the idea of gaining territory appealed to him (as was eventually confirmed by the occupation of Bosnia by Austria-Hungary in the late 1870s), this could be the reason he did not reject Andrassy's strategy (137), as was done instead by Beust and by the ambassador in Constantinople, Anton von Prokesch-Osten. The latter's point of view represented the more traditional worry of Vienna's military circles: gaining Bosnia, the newly formed Greater Serbia would have become "an ever greater attractive power over our South Slavs" (132, citing Prokesch-Osten's words). Incidentally, from the Hungarian perspective, giving Bosnia to Serbia would have meant the dissolution of the rising Yugoslav idea: the exact contrary of Serbia's attempts to act as the Piedmont of the Balkan Slavs.

Armour argues that the principle of *divide et impera* marked the Hungarian strategy, Bosnia being a common aspiration for both Serbians and Croats. Besides the correspondence between Andrassy and Kállay, he adduces evidence from a reflection written by Kállay in his diary in November 1868. From this page, moreover, Armour takes the quotation for his book's title: "The Bosnian question, consequently, is an apple of discord which, thrown in between them [Croats and Serbs] skilfully and at the right time, can naturally alienate them from one another" (159).

The Bosnian scheme ultimately failed. The Regents – both the anti-Russian Blaznavac and the more suspicious Ristić – lost their confidence in Andrassy and Kállay's promises.

Two events marked this deterioration, according to Armour: the outcome of the Aleksandar Karađorđević trial and the publication of Beust's circular in 1871. Karađorđević's acquittal contradicted the assurance that Kállay made to the Regents. The Hungarian judges indeed discharged the former Prince from implication in Mihailo's assassination and this fact annoyed Belgrade's government. Beust's circular officially contradicted any hypothesis of Serbian enlargement in Bosnia and threatened Serbia with war if it endangered the status quo. Armour shows that some months earlier Kállay deliberately avoided mentioning the circular to the Serbian Regents, as Beust enjoined him to do, the document having been initially an instruction to the consul. Belgrade knew of its existence, having read it in one of the Austrian Rotbücher (198). It was the end of the Bosnian plan. Once of age, Prince Milan Obrenović reconciled Serbia with Russia. In the same year (1871) Andrassy was appointed foreign minister of the Monarchy. The creator of the Bosnian plan turned to be diffident of Serbian intentions and ultimately evaluated the Serbo-Russian *rapprochement* as a betrayal.

The last fifty pages of this book deal with the events, which eventually led to the Austro-Serbian treaties of 1881. Using a trade agreement, Serbia turned into an economic satellite of the Monarchy, which became "virtually the sole market for Serbian agricultural products" (311). Through a secret political treaty, Prince Milan committed his State not to support nationalist rebellions in Austro-Hungarian Bosnia and Hercegovina. Armour underscores the consequence of these restraints in Serbian internal politics, namely the unpopularity of the Obrenović dynasty, culminating in the violent coup of 1903 in Belgrade. His book overtly extracts a "morality tale" (XIX) from "the essential futility of bullying", that is to say, the Monarchy's dictates which led to the 1881 treaties as well as the Hungarian strategy of 1867-1871. Armour has no doubt that "when, after 1867, Hungarians were in a position to influence policy towards Serbia, their involvement made things worse", sowing the seeds of "unconquerable suspicion on both sides" and paving the way to the juxtaposition of Serbian nationalism and the Habsburg Monarchy which culminated in the outbreak of the First World War (XX).

In the opinion of this reviewer, such an assertive argument raises further questions, which could in part weaken it. Was the Hungarian plan really evil in itself, as Armour suggests, since it was based on manipulation? We wonder if relations between empires and small nations were possible, in this period, remaining free from the 'survival of the fittest' mechanism and its aftermaths. Maybe the outcome of the Hungarian plan (a partial Serbian control over Bosnia) had the potential to defuse an explosive situation but suffered due to the errors of its executors. After all, Armour suggests that "there seems no reason to doubt the sincerity, however self-interested, with which Andrassy promoted the Bosnian scheme up to the beginning of 1870" (147). Here is a further point: was it possible for Hungary, such as for any other nation, to act against its own interests, or at least against what it believed was its interest? These questions, however, are not intended to lessen the high value of this work, and of its sequel, which Armour himself has announced.

Teramo

Oliver Panichi