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The Eastern Question in Russian Foreign Politics in the Early Nineteenth Century (1799-1806)

The Eastern Question was an important problem of Russian foreign politics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Another opinion was also brought forward in historical scholarship that „it had a secondary importance in the period of the Napoleonic wars.”¹ The wars and defeats on the European continent suppressed the events concerning the Near East and the Balkans and these latter ones were judged to be „of secondary importance” by the makers of Russian foreign politics and were handled as such. These statements seem to be contravened by contemporary archive sources, Russian source publications² and the latest research in Russian foreign politics and the history of international relations.³ Research seems to prove convincingly that the Eastern Question continued to be an important and separate problem of Russian foreign policy in the early 19th century. Russo-French relations have also become more comprehensible through these works and the type, essence and course of these relations were formed by the disagreements in the Near East.

The Russian government did not have a final programme of handling and settling the Eastern Question at the end of the 18th century. The two trends that evolved during the reign of Catherine II continued their struggle to decide the principles and policies to be followed. The expansive policy of France in the East had a decisive effect on elaborating the new concept and on its final form. Certain representatives of the divided Russian diplomatic corps (F. V. Rostopchin, A. A. Bezborodko) were ready to co-operate with Napoleon in order to acquire the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian government did not oppose participating in the partition of the European territories of the Turkish Empire and thus forming closer ties with France. Another group of Russian politicians (N. P. Panin, the Vorontsov brothers) were resolved to preserve the unity of the Turkish Empire and counted on its alliance in the struggle against Napoleon. Both ideas reflected the trend of official Russian government policy to solve the question of the Straits the most favourable way

¹ KINYAPINA, N. S.: *Vneshnaya politika Rossii pervoy polovini 19 veka*, Moskva, 1963. 5.

² *Vneshnaya politika Rossii 19 i nachala 20 veka*, Dokumenti Rossiyskovo Ministerstva Inostrannih del, Seria I. t. 1. Moskva, 1960. t. 2. Moskva, 1961. t. 3. Moskva, 1963. – Arhiv vneshney politiki Rossii, fond MID; fond posolstv v Londone (1801-1807); v Konstantinopolye (1801-1806); v Parize (1801-1804). – Centralniy gosudarstvenniy Arhiv, (Stpb.)

³ *Istoriya vneshney politiki Rossii. Pervaya polovina 19. veka*, Moskva, 1995. – Alexandr I. Napoleon i Balkani, Balkanskiye issledovaniya. Vip. 18., Moskva, 1997. – SCHROEDER, Paul W.: *The Transformation of European Politics (1763-1848)*, Oxford, 1994. – SAUL, N.: *Russia and Mediterranean 1797-1807*, London, 1970. – KENNEDY GRIMSTED, Patricia: *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander I*. Los Angeles, 1969. – JELAVICH, Barbara: *A Balkán története I.* (History of the Balkans), Budapest, 1996.

for Russia and to increase her influence on the Balkans, where the Danubian Principalities played the most important role for Russia.⁴

Thus the French expansion of the late 18th century accidentally brought into Russian foreign policy a new, temporary problem, namely that of the Mediterranean. In accordance with the Russo-Turkish alliance pact of 1799⁵ the Russian fleet sailed through the Straits under Admiral F. F. Ushakov's command and started military activity against the French in the Mediterranean. In co-operation with the Turks the Russians could oust the French from the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean and the Ionian Isles. The war ended with success: on 20th February, 1799 Corfu fell as well. Out of the occupied territories the Republic of the Seven Isles was formed under Turkish control and Russian protectorate.⁶

Ushakov's expedition was an important part of the second coalition's (Austria, England, Russia and Turkey) struggle against France. A. V. Suvorov's victories in Italy can also be linked to this period. The military successes of Ushakov and Suvorov decreased French influence in the Mediterranean and increased Russia's weight in the region, which also evoked the enmity of the allies. Austria tried to annul Russian gains in Italy while England tried the same in the Ionian Isles, as none of these powers wished the further strengthening of the Russians. The ungrateful conduct of his allies pushed Paul I to elaborate a new combination of foreign policy. He stopped military action in the Mediterranean and the Russian fleet returned to the Black Sea. With this Paul I declared the „*Mediterranean programme of Russian policy*”⁷ completed, where it stopped French progress. Russo-French opposition seemed to ease up, but the Russian, Austrian and English alliance was falling apart. By the end of the year 1800 Russo-English connections were severed as the English occupied Malta and did not fulfil their promises made to the Russians.

It was in this political situation that the famous plan by Count F. V. Rostopchin, head of the foreign council to partition the Ottoman Empire was born. Rostopchin summed up his ideas in a work entitled 'Notes' and presented it to the sovereign on the 2nd of October 1800. This plan that belonged to the new line of Russian foreign policy, in principle suggested the partition of the Ottoman Empire together with France, Austria and Prussia. According to

⁴ Vostochniy vopros vo vneshney politike Rossii, Moskva, 1978. 48-49.

⁵ On the circumstances of the formation of the Russo-Turkish alliance see in detail BODNÁR, Erzsébet: *Egy furcsa szövetség. Orosz-török közeledés és együttműködés a 18. század végén* (A Strange Alliance Russian-Turkish Approach and Co-operation at the End of the 18th Century) IN: *Hatalmi ideológiák a szláv népek körében, Kelet-Európa és Balkán tanulmányok 1.*, Pécs, 2001. 129-150.

⁶ Cf. STANISLAVSKAYA, A. M.: *Rossiya i Greciya v konce 18-nachale 19 veka*, Moskva, 1976.

⁷ STANISLAVSKAYA, A. M.: *Russko-angliyskiye otnosheniya i problemi Sredizemnomorya 1798-1807*, Moskva, 1962. 124.

Rostopchin's plan from Turkey, „*similar to a hopelessly sick man*”⁸, Russia would have acquired Bulgaria and Moldavia, Austria would have got Bosnia, Serbia and Wallachia, France would have gained possession of Egypt and a republic under Russian protectorate would have been organised out of Greece and the isles. Russia's territorial demands increased significantly compared to the first Russian plan of partition, to the „*Greek Project*”. Catherine II and A. A. Bezborodko drew up an idea that a friendly Greek Empire would have been organised and they did not openly formulate any Russian territorial demands.⁹ Rostopchin on the other hand counted with a significant part of the Balkans. As his concept did not coincide with the official trend of handling the Eastern Question as regards the Ottoman Empire, his plan remained one of the daydreams of Russian diplomacy. Rostopchin chose territories to be annexed by Russia randomly, he would have given Moldavia to Russia and Wallachia to Austria, whereas Russian influence was strongest in these principalities and they formed an important element in the Balkans politics of the Russian government. He did not even make mention of the Straits and Constantinople. Russian politicians received Rostopchin's work with doubt and the sovereign, Paul I summed up his view as follows: „*Having studied your proposal I desire that you start putting it into practice*”.¹⁰ The Russian government took steps contradicting Rostopchin's ideas. In 1800 S. A. Kolichev was sent to Paris to negotiate peace with the French. In the instruction prepared for him the strengthening of the alliance with Turkey is stressed. Kolichev urged France to preserve the unity of the Ottoman Empire and forwarded Paul I's offer to Napoleon to drive the English out of Egypt together and hand the regained territories over to the Sultan.¹¹ The instructions given to Kolichev demonstrate convincingly that the real politics of Russia differed completely from Rostopchin's proposal. If we take into consideration Russia's rapprochement to France then it can be stated that Paul I deemed the continuation of the 1799 Russo-Turkish agreement important and tried to strengthen and ensure the territorial integrity of his ally, Turkey, for example by returning Egypt to them.

Alexander I took over a difficult heritage from his father upon his accession to the throne in March 1801. After the radical change in foreign politics in 1800 and early 1801 performed by Paul I, there was a need to introduce a stable foreign policy. Thus the Russian government aimed to remain neutral in European issues, to stay outside the Anglo-French contest therefore it chose the policy of '*free hands*'. In the Eastern Question however, they remained faithful to a '*peaceful*' Turkish orientation initiated by Paul I, and they wished to further

⁸ Zapiska grafa F. V. Rostopchina o politicheskikh otnosheniyah Rossii v posledniye mesyaci pavlovskovo carstvovaniya, Russkiy Arhiv, 1878. 104.

⁹ STEGNIY, P. V.: *Yiso raz o grecheskoy proyekte Yekaterini II.*, Novaya i Noveyshaya Istoriya, 2002. 4. 105.

¹⁰ Vostochniy vopros (1978), 51.

¹¹ Ibid.

strengthen the Russo-Turkish alliance treaty of 1799.¹² In early 1801 the group was strengthened that advocated keeping the Ottoman Empire together. Its leaders were Nikita Petrovich Panin and Victor Kochubei. Panin in his note entitled „*On the Political System of the Russian Empire*” written in July 1801, stressed that Turkey and the Near East had a special place in Russian foreign policy and that upon looking for allies this fact had to serve as a starting point. In agreement with the Vorontsov brothers - who were in favour of a pro-English policy - they were convinced that Russia could come to an understanding with England concerning the Ottoman Empire. He summed up his view stating that „*France is the major threat to Russia which decides upon the question of appeasement towards England.*”¹³ Kochubei, still as foreign minister illustrated the advantages of an isolationist policy, but at the end of the year, on the 30th of December 1801 in his detailed notes on the Eastern Question for Alexander I, he pointed out that it was absolutely crucial to preserve the unity of the Ottoman Empire, as a weak neighbour was useful for Russia.¹⁴ He advised the sovereign to secure the Russian gains and to transform the Ionian Isles into a defensive base for Russia, to send there ships, artillery and troops.¹⁵ The State Council accepted Kochubey’s proposal in February 1802 and in August Count G. D. Mocenigo, ambassador extraordinary of Russia sailed with five vessels and an expeditionary army of 1600 men from Odessa to the Ionian Isles. Mocenigo was also commissioned to organise companies led by Russian officers consisting of Albanians, Montenegrins and Greeks. In March 1802 Alexander I ordered troops withdrawn from the Kingdom of Naples to the defence of the Ionian Isles. All this illustrates that Russian diplomats understood that progressing French gains in the East endangered the existence of the Ottoman Empire and in defence of the latter one’s existence the previous alliance with the Turks had to be renewed. The official view of the Russian government was summed up by Alexander I in his instructions sent to the ambassadors serving in Europe: „*The basic principle of my political system, for the preservation of which I shall work with all my strength, is to conserve the state the weakness and bad government of which are the valuable guarantees of our defence.*”¹⁶ Alexander I wished to consolidate the result achieved by Ushakov by primarily diplomatic means and to protect the Sultan's court from French influence and therefore offered Russia’s mediating role in the Franco-Turkish peace negotiations, to which he had a right ensured by the third article of the secret convention annexed to the Franco-Russian peace treaty signed on the 10th of October 1801 in Paris.

¹² SIROTKIN, V. G.: *Duel dvuh diplomatij. Rossiya i Franciya v 1801-1812*, Moskva, 1968. 10-15.

¹³ Vneshnaya politika Rossii 19 i nachala 20 veka, (VPR), Dokumenti Rossiyskovo Ministerstva Inostrannih Del, Ser. I. t. 1., Moskva, 1960. dok. 16. 72.

¹⁴ Vostochniy vopros (1978), 51-52.

¹⁵ VPR, Ser. I. t. 1., dok. 50., „*Zapiska o Semi Soedinonnih ostrovah*”, 157-159.

¹⁶ Ibid dok. 12. 54.

The peace treaty between France and Russia did not end the opposition between them in the Eastern Question in the Near East and did not result in the awaited appeasement, just caused a short interval in their fight. It was at this time that Napoleon first outlined his proposal to partition Turkey to the Russian ambassador to Paris, A. M. Morkov. This French idea resulted in uneasiness in the cabinet of St. Petersburg therefore he was prohibited to touch upon this question in his further talks. At the time of the Franco-Turkish peace negotiations Russian diplomacy conducted strong activities both in the Turkish court and in Paris. In his letter to V. S. Tomara, ambassador in Constantinople, Alexander I asked him to do everything possible to weaken French influence.¹⁷ Morkov on the other hand received an instruction to help the work of the Turkish delegation in Paris and to achieve the withdrawal of French troops from Egypt. After long negotiations with Russian mediation finally the Franco-Turkish agreement was signed on the 25th of July 1802.

After the peace treaty Russian diplomats changed tactics and saw the guarantee of decreasing French influence in the Turkish court in drawing Russo-Turkish ties closer together. In line with this they first strived to arrange the status of the Danubian Principalities that counted as a neuralgic point in Russo-Turkish relations and were also central to the Balkans policy of Russia. The Tsar's diplomacy intervened into the affairs of the Principalities based on its right of protector guaranteed by the peace treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarja. They also hoped as a result for the growth of their influence among the Christians living in the Ottoman Empire. Besides, the Danubian Principalities were strategically important for Russia as well. They could not however bring forth the question of unification of Moldavia and Wallachia as long as the Russo-Turkish alliance was functioning well, but they could exercise pressure through diplomatic channels on the Sultan's court so that the Turkish government may ease somewhat the situation of the inhabitants of these regions. The new agreement signed in 1802 was a result of the wave of dissatisfaction in the Principalities. The Porte repeatedly violated the treaties concerning Moldavia and Wallachia and the situation of the Christian population dependant on the Sultan's administration deteriorated continuously. V. S. Tomara, the ambassador at Constantinople protested in writing several times in the name of the Russian government in early 1802, and demanded the restitution of the rights of the Principalities.¹⁸ Alexander I sent his letter to sultan Selim III with the same aim.¹⁹ The Russian government also threatened with the occupation of the principalities and achieved the signing of a new agreement on the status of Moldavia and Wallachia on the 24th of September 1802, in which the Sultan promised to add further articles to the *hatt-i-sherifs* issued in the 70s-90s of the

¹⁷ Ibid dok. 42. 145-146.

¹⁸ Ibid dok. 95-96. 250-254.

¹⁹ Ibid dok. 104. 276.

18th century. The convention settled the term of office of the princes as seven years and the Porte could not propose their removal without the consent of the Russian sovereign. Several articles concerned the amelioration of the economic and legal position of the peasants.²⁰

The convention concluded in 1802 meant the strengthening of Russian influence in the Danubian Principalities and the Balkans, but as its signing resulted in a division within the Turkish government it also contributed largely to the deterioration of Russo-Turkish relations later on. France was quick to exploit the enmity of the Porte towards the convention and aimed at tearing the Russo-Turkish alliance apart and at weakening Russian positions on the Balkans. Based on the Franco-Turkish treaty of 1802 Napoleon appeared as the protector of Turkey and achieved in a short period of time that the francophile line of the Diwan was strengthened. His extraordinary envoys in Constantinople were trying to convince the Sultan that France was the true friend, while „*Ipsilantis and Moruzzi - the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia - were the agents and servitors of Russia.*”²¹ Morkov reported from Paris and the new ambassador, A. Ya. Italinsky from Constantinople reported with terror that France was pushing Turkey towards a war against Russia.²²

Napoleon's „*Eastern plan*”, that is to acquire new territories from the Ottoman Empire, gained a more distinct form by 1803. French agents popularising the French system promised independence to the peoples of the Balkans in Moldavia, Wallachia, Albania, Morea, Greece. On Napoleon's commission General Sebastiani travelled to Syria, Egypt and the Ionian Isles where he established contacts with circles supporting France. The Turkish Porte sensed the two-level French politics, trusted Russia and valued the Russo-Turkish alliance. In response to Napoleon's „*new Eastern plan*” Alexander I continued to support the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Thus alongside European issues, problems of the Near East also motivated Anglo-Russian rapprochement and the formation of the third coalition.²³ Based on the report of Semyon Vorontsov, ambassador to London, his brother, Alexander Vorontsov, the Russian foreign minister in his report to the sovereign on the 6th of March 1803 noted that England wished the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire and was willing to co-operate with Russia to preserve it. He advised Alexander I to make an agreement to end in such a way with England.²⁴ The Russian sovereign however was still in favour of the „*policy of free hands*” at the time and did not want to align himself and did not accept Vorontsov's proposal but he offered to mediate in settling the Franco-English conflict. Negotiations between Napoleon and the English

²⁰ Ibid dok. 115. 301.

²¹ Vostochniy vopros (1978), 54.

²² VPR, Ser. I. t. 1. dok. 155. 382-383.

²³ Ibid dok. 161. 394-395. dok. 154. 381-382.

²⁴ Ibid dok. 159. 389. dok. 162. 396.

ambassador, Charles Whitworth on the disputed questions of the Amiens peace treaty in late 1802 and early 1803 ended without success in Paris. War between England and France started on the 18th of May 1803, and lasted to the end of Napoleon's reign. War speeded up Anglo-Russian rapprochement. In his letter of the 18th of October 1803, A. R. Vorontsov illustrated most spectacularly how expected French conquest in the Near East would result in the disintegration of the Turkish Empire. „*The course of events took a frightening turn in the South: the French government concentrated significant forces to the Kingdom of Naples at the shore of the Adriatic Sea ... it is no question that Bonaparte will soon land in Dalmatia and Greece.*”²⁵ Vorontsov probably „*threatened*” with this to push Alexander I towards an English alliance. He advised that Russia should prepare for war against France. A. R. Vorontsov was the first to formulate that Russia was unable to stop French expansion with just diplomatic means, for a war however they needed an ally, which in this case could be England. Adam Czartoryski was the other supporter of an alliance with England in the Russian cabinet, which he deemed necessary because of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.²⁶ He governed the Russian foreign office instead of the ill A. R. Vorontsov. The Russian government prepared their proposal for the English cabinet concerning the Eastern Question on the 29th of February 1804. They took their stand to maintain the Republic of the Seven Isles, to ameliorate the position of the Greek people, to preserve Russia's right of protectorate in the interest of Christians living in the Turkish Empire. England would have acquired Malta, this strategically important island in the Mediterranean.²⁷

Franco-Russian relations further deteriorated following the execution of the Duke of Enghien (21 March 1804) and opposition further deepened in the Eastern Question as well. Napoleon objected to the raising of the number of Russian troops in the Ionian Isles, which was ordered by Alexander I to counteract the presence of French forces in the Adriatic. On the 17th of April 1804 the State Council discussed the new international situation and the policy to be followed. As between 1801 and 1803, yet again two views collided in the question. Czartoryski, who was practically directing foreign affairs from January 1804, suggested that the Russian court should protest against the execution of the Duke at the same time expressing their grief. He also suggested to sever diplomatic ties with France and to overtly negotiate with England on forming an anti-French coalition. He appeased those opposing by saying that „*severing the ties does not mean the beginning of war,*” that this policy was not dangerous for Russia as it did not have a common border with France and was not threatened by direct attack.²⁸ Those in favour of war against

²⁵ Ibid dok. 222. 527.

²⁶ Ibid dok. 256. 624-627.

²⁷ Ibid dok. 259. 234-237. dok. 260. 639-640.

²⁸ Ibid dok. 278. 693.

France were happy to receive Czartoryski's proposal, those in favour of the policy of „*free hands*” however, were against it. They agreed with expressing grief, but they opposed Russia entering into war for the interest of other European states. In opposition to Czartoryski, Rumyantsev proposed just to „*share the grief and keep quiet about the rest.*” And if Alexander I wanted to express his outrage in a more pronounced form then let him „*suspend contacts with the French for a short period of time, but let him not be drawn into a war against Napoleon.*”²⁹ Even though no decision was made at the session of the State Council but it became evident that the policy of „*free hands*” could not be kept up for long and Russia needed England because of the Eastern Question as well as because she could not defend the long coastline in the Balkans against the French without the help of the English fleet. After such events came the break between Russia and France in 1804.

The disputed issues of the Eastern Question with the French speeded up Anglo-French rapprochement and led to a formation of an anti-French coalition. Russian diplomats felt the growing influence of the French in Constantinople from 1802 onwards and they had exact information concerning Napoleon's „*Eastern plan*” as well. By 1804 it had become clear that in case of the break-up of Franco-Russian ties the main theatre of war would be Europe and therefore Russian policies concerning European issues and the Eastern Question had to be reconsidered for the case of a war against Napoleon.³⁰ The second half of 1804 and the year 1805 were the „*golden period*” in Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations. Supporters of the Anglo-Russian alliance on the Russian side - Czartoryski, Novosiltsov and Stroganov in Petersburg, S. R. Vorontsov in London and Razumovski in Vienna - were all working on forming a strong anti-French coalition. Semyon Vorontsov, the ambassador to London started preliminary talks with the English cabinet and left further negotiations to the emperor's trusted man, N. Novosiltsov, who stayed in London from the 16th of November 1804 to the 7th of January 1805. During his secret mission he met English Prime Minister William Pitt, with whom he discussed the important questions of the proposed Anglo-Russian alliance based on the secret instructions prepared by the emperor on the 11th of November 1804.³¹ The Anglo-Russian alliance treaty was signed on the 11th of April 1805 and Austria joined it ten days later.

At the beginning of his war against England and Russia, Napoleon tried to achieve progress in the Eastern Question by diplomatic means and tried to exert pressure on Turkey. He demanded Selim III to recognise him as emperor. When the Sultan denied this with Russian and English support behind his back the French diplomatic corps left Constantinople in November 1804. Russian

²⁹ Ibid dok. 278. 696.

³⁰ Ibid dok. 240. 577. dok. 241. 581-584.

³¹ VPR, Ser. I. t. 2. Moskva, 1961. dok. 50. 146-151.

diplomacy was victorious with English help in this duel against French diplomats.³² Afraid of a French attack, the Porte immediately asked for Russian support and the confirmation of the alliance treaty of 1799. The Russian government achieved their goal as the „friendly neutrality and support” of the Porte was beneficial for St. Petersburg in case of a Franco-Russian war, thus both parties were interested in reaffirming the treaty of 1799. Besides, the question of closing the Straits for the French navy was already central to Russo-Turkish negotiations from January 1804 onwards. From December 1804 A. Ya. Italinsky, the Russian ambassador conducted negotiations with Turkish ministers on a new alliance treaty, which was signed after long talks on the 23rd of September 1805. The treaty consisting of 25 articles - out of which 10 were secret - regulated the complex relations of the Ottoman Empire and Russia.³³ The treaty was completely anti-French and articles one, two and six were concerned with mutual assistance in case of a war against Napoleon. Turkey confirmed Russia’s rights as protector and granted free use of the Straits to Russian warships. The Parties also agreed that they would provide for the defence of the Straits together. Several articles touched upon the situation of the peoples of the Balkans, the eighth secret article was on the Greeks, and the fourth one was about the Russian occupation of the Ionian Isles. A peculiar point of the treaty, the seventh secret one declared the Black Sea the inland sea of Russia and Turkey. „Both high contracting Parties regard the Black Sea a closed one and will not allow the appearance of any warship or any armed vessel of any power ... Therefore the warships and war supplies of the sovereign of the Russian Empire may pass through the channel of Constantinople to which the Sublime Porte will provide all the help and assistance.”³⁴ Thus the closed Straits secured the defence of Russia’s southern borders for a short period of time in the complicated international situation. According to the treaty Russian warships could get to the Mediterranean, which increased the field of movement in Russia’s war against France and enabled the defence of the Ionian Isles. A fleet sent for the defence of the Ionian islands this time under the command of Admiral D. N. Senavin re-appeared in the Mediterranean and Russian troops were sent to Naples as well.

The Russo-Turkish agreement of 1805 however, remained in force for a very short period of time. After the crushing of the third coalition at Austerlitz (2 December 1805), the forming of which took 16 months and which was destroyed by Napoleon in less than two and a half months, international relations left their trait on Russo-Turkish relations as well. In accordance with the peace treaty of Pozsony (6 December 1805) France acquired Venice and to

³² SHUPP, Paul F.: *The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question 1806-1807*, New York, 1931. 68.

³³ VPR, Ser. I. t. 2. 589-594.

³⁴ Ibid 593.

the dismay of the Russian government Austria surrendered her territories on the Balkans, Istria and Dalmatia. Thus the French got close to the important Russian naval base on the Ionian Isles.³⁵

After Austerlitz Russian diplomacy was divided yet again. The Russian government gathered to discuss the changed situation and the line of foreign policy to be followed in January 1806. In the session Czartoryski read out his note entitled „*The State of Political Affairs in Europe.*” Vivid discussions evolved concerning the policy to be followed by Russia and views were divided on the future of the Ottoman Empire as well. Some suggested its partitioning. At this point the foreign minister, A. Czartoryski was also of this view and he aimed at restoring Poland’s independence and wanted the southern Slav states to become independent of the Turkish Empire. Many agreed with Czartoryski’s plan, among them V. Kochubei, who had been advocating the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire.³⁶ The views of Russia’s leaders concerning the Eastern Question changed due to several reasons, but mainly as a consequence of the French expansion in the Balkans and in the Mediterranean. The Tsar and his entourage were convinced that the Turkish Empire would fall apart in case of a French attack. The internal problems of Turkey seemed to prove this; the Turkish state was rendered increasingly unstable by the separatist aspirations of the pashas, the Serbian revolt of 1804 and the opposition of the court circles to Selim III’s attempts at reform. As a result it was not only in Russia but also all over Europe that plans were made to partition the Ottoman Empire. In early 1806 however, there was no final view yet on what kind of a policy Russia should follow in the Eastern Question. Although the Russian cabinet continued to support the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire and had vested interest in preserving and strengthening the alliance with Turkey and tried to reduce French influence in the Turkish court,³⁷ they also projected that in agreement with England and France and with the guarantees of the peace treaties closing the war of the third coalition a few independent Slav states could be formed in the Balkans under Russian protectorate. This idea would actually have resulted in the partial partition of the Turkish Empire and it was brought up in the Paris peace talks conducted by the Russian ambassador P. Ya. Ubri.³⁸ In exchange for the recognition of Napoleon’s title as emperor and most of his new conquests Russia demanded from him to give up his newly acquired territories in the Balkans and in the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean. The Russians made the first attempt with this policy of compensation at negotiating with the French ruler on dividing Europe into spheres of interest. Napoleon’s plans however were opposite to Russian ideas at the time. During his talks with Ubri, Talleyrand did everything

³⁵ SIROTKIN, V. G.: op. cit. 25.

³⁶ VPR, Ser. I. t. 3. Moskva, 1963. dok. 1. 7-16.

³⁷ Ibid Primechaniya, 651.

³⁸ Ibid dok. 45. Prilozheniye No. 2, 136.

he could to reduce Russian influence in the Mediterranean. He achieved that in the peace treaty signed by the Russian ambassador Russia undertook to withdraw her troops from Cattaro and the region of Montenegro, Dalmatia and Ragusa, and to decrease the number of troops stationed in the Ionian Isles from 11 thousand in the autumn of 1804 to 4 thousand.³⁹ Alexander I however did not want to ratify the agreement, thus negotiations came to an end. The fourth anti-French coalition was formed and hostilities began at the end of September in East Prussia, the results of which also had an effect on the evolution of the Eastern Question. Napoleon crushed the Prussian army at Jena and Auerstadt and by late October Russian troops were facing the French army.

The Russian plan of forming independent Slav states in the Balkans was not supported either by the French or the English. The special mission to London of P. A. Stroganov in 1806 was also without success.⁴⁰ These controversies in Russia's policy concerning the Eastern Question may be explained by the fact that Alexander I, though opposed the complete partitioning of the Ottoman Empire referring to the interest of the Russian state (among others it was because of this that he got into disagreement with Czartoryski and dismissed him as foreign minister), could well imagine and support a partial partition. (Later on this view will serve as a basis for Russia's policies in the Balkans.)

In 1804 and 1805 Turks could still hover between England and Russia or France and could follow a foreign policy according to their security and defence. Turkey needed strong and trustworthy allies because of its grave internal problems, the movements of liberation of the peoples in the Balkans. After Austerlitz Napoleon's influence grew in Europe and in the Near East as well. This defined the alliance policies of the increasingly weak Turkish Empire, too. Those in favour of revanchism were strengthened in the Turkish government and received the news of the Russian defeat at Austerlitz with joy because they hoped that the territories acquired by Russia in the late 18th century could be regained. Already in January 1806 Selim III greeted Napoleon in a letter and recognised his title of emperor. At the same time the Turkish government aimed at decreasing the rights laid down in the Russo-Turkish treaty of 1805. In April 1806 with the pretext of being afraid of French retaliation, the Porte asked A. Ya. Italinsky to relay to the Russian government to reduce the number of warships passing through the Straits to the Mediterranean. Having been informed of the failure of the Franco-Russian negotiations in July 1806, they demanded the same and in the autumn of 1806 they finally closed the Straits to Russian warships. „*Thus our strong and exceptional influence has come to an end and we shall share it with France and this can happen in no other way,*”⁴¹ - summed up Italinsky the events bitterly.

³⁹ Ibid dok. 89. 229-231.

⁴⁰ Cf. in detail: Nikolay Mihaylovich, velikiy knaz: P. A. Stroganov, t. 3. Stpb. 1903. 9-11.

⁴¹ Vostochniy vopros (1978), 58.

From the spring of 1806 there was a serious diplomatic battle going on between the French and the Russians in Constantinople. General Horace Sebastiani, the new French ambassador arrived at Constantinople on the 20th of June 1806 with the instructions to form an anti-Russian alliance with Turkey. (General Gardane tried to achieve the same in Persia.) He used all means to achieve his goal. He got the support of the Turkish government with his promises that the Ottoman Empire could be restored to its borders before the peace of Kuchuk Kaynarja and the Sultan could get back the Crimea and the coast of the Black Sea.⁴² In the awakened spirit of revanchism the Turks prepared for war against Russia. The Russo-Turkish agreements including the one on the Straits and the one on Moldavia and Wallachia were not respected. Princes Constantin Ipsilantis and Alexander Moruzzi were removed from the government of the Danubian Principalities without Russia's consent. In response Alexander I ordered the occupation of the principalities in November 1806. At the end of December 1806, the Russian ambassador, A. Ya. Italinsky left Constantinople, on the 20th of December 1806 the Porte declared war and thus the next Russo-Turkish war started that would last for more than five years.⁴³

The events of the early 19th century in the Near East and the Balkans demonstrate that the resolution of several problems of the Eastern Question depended on the relations between Russia and Turkey. Russians handled the question of the Straits, of the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean and even that of the Balkans with success within the framework of the alliance with Turkey. Changes in international relations, above all Napoleon's successful campaigns in Europe, his increasing activity in the Eastern Question and his growing influence in the Turkish Empire led to the worsening of Russo-Turkish relations, then break-up and war. At the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war the Russian cabinet deemed it important to rethink their policies in the Near East and to elaborate a new programme, which could be achieved after the Franco-Russian peace treaty of Tilsit (25 June 1807).

⁴² SHUPP, Paul F.: op. cit. 75-76.

⁴³ JELAVICH, op. cit. I. 113-114.