The Buxton Mission. British diplomacy in Bulgaria 1914–1915

BALÁZS BALATONI
UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

Noel and Charles Roden Buxton write in the preface of their book, *The War and the Balkans*, that no one can deny the supreme importance of the Balkans in the European War.[1] However, in spite of their contemporary statement, the assumed importance of the Balkans in the course of the Great War painstakingly faded away in the later memories of contemporaries as well as in historiography as well. As Keith Robbins pointed out that there are several accounts on the Dardanelles campaign but none investigated British Balkan policy in 1914–1915 as a whole.[2] In his glamorous book, David Dutton reconstructs the French–British policies in the Balkans between 1914 and 1918, but as a matter of fact, his analysis was made rather from the military's point of view. Therefore, previous literature left enough room for further research into the diplomatic scrambles of 1914–1915.

In my paper I am going to focus on the quasi-diplomatic mission of Noel and Charles Roden Buxton in the Balkans in 1914–1915 by analyzing the personal correspondence of Noel Buxton. Therefore, I will not be able to cover the British diplomacy as a whole. In the first part of my paper I briefly sum up the Buxtons involvement in the affairs of the Balkan peninsula, and then I will provide a short overview of the period preceded the First World War. In the third part of this paper I will turn to the Buxton-mission of 1914–1915.

The Buxtons and the Balkans prior to 1912

British engagement with the European territories of the Ottoman Empire was particularly strong throughout the 19th century. The well-known Easter Question connected Great Britain to the region despite it had not had crucial economic interest there. However, the fate of the withdrawing Ottoman Empire had raised political and strategic concerns among the great powers of Europe as the possible outcomes would have highly affected the delicate contemporary balance of power in the region.

The various Balkan nationalities gradually gained independence from the Porte during the 19th century. By the last third of the century, the Ottomans' possessions in Europe were confined merely to Albania, Thrace, and to the areas which contemporaries usually referred to as Macedonia, a shifting and evolving term in both space and time.[3] Contemporaries usually meant by Macedonia three Ottoman administrative units in Turkey-in-Europe: the

[1] Buxton – Buxton, *The War*, 9.
[2] Robbins, *British Diplomacy*, 560.
[3] Akhund, *Stabilizing a Crisis*, 588. For further literature on the delimitation of historical Macedonia see: Dakin, *The Greek Struggle*, 3.; Livanios, *The Macedonian Question*, 3. and Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics*.

vilayets of Salonica, Monastir and Kosovo. Ottoman Macedonia was inhabited by various ethnic and religious communities which did not share a common national identity in a modern sense; they rather identified themselves in pre-modern terms such as religion and language and other non-national loyalties.[4] However, this population had become the main target of each of the neighboring Balkan states' national propaganda, as they all claimed some parts of this territory according to their national unification programs. To this end, since the last third of the 19th century, a vast body of literature has been published by various Balkan intellectuals and scholars in order to justify their rightful national claims for the territory both in their respective countries and in Western Europe too.[5]

The role of public opinion gradually became a crucial factor in the conduct of foreign policy making in the 19th century.[6] Influential segments of the Western European societies, such as journalists, scientists, politicians, etc., formed various lobby-groups in order to promote different causes or support various nationalities, and drew the attention of their government to these, and put the issue in the very midst of domestic public debates. After the turn of the 20th century numerous similar groups were formed to promote just the cause of the Balkan nationalities. As one prominent British journalist at the time, Henry Nevinson noted that "every English person who knows anything at all about them has adopted one or other of the Balkan races as a favourite pet."[7] In the pre-World War period one of the most important group of this kind was the Balkan Committee which was founded by Noel and Charles Roden Buxton in 1902.[8] The Committee's main goal was to make the British Government (and the Concert of Europe) to compel the Ottoman Empire to introduce reforms in its land inhabited by Christians. Just before the well-known Ilinden Uprising of 2 August 1903 the Committee launched its agitation campaign which, however, highly resembled the great Bulgarian Agitation of William E. Gladstone in 1876. Noel Buxton and the Balkan Committee tried to keep the Macedonian question in the center of British political discourse for almost a decade. Although the group ventured to maintain an outward appearance of unity, in reality the Committee was deeply divided along (Balkan) national lines. Generally the Balkan Committee was regarded as a Bulgarophil organization.[9] By the time of the overwhelming victory of the Balkan Alliance in the first Balkan War, the Balkan Committee became as divided as the Balkan countries themselves.

The prelude to World War I: The Balkan Wars 1912–1913

As Richard C. Hall points out, the Balkan Wars were a rehearsal to the Great War in many sense: the using of rapid-fire artillery; trench warfare, the extensive impact of the war on the civilian population, all these would be the characteristics of the coming European war.[10] In regard of my topic, it is important because it fundamentally determined the relationship be-

[4] Brown, *Loyal unto Death*, 14–21.
[5] Ilchev, *My Country*, 32–50.
[6] Case, *The Quiet Revolution*, 111–113.
[7] Cited in Destani – Tomas, *Albania's Greatest Friend*, xx.
[8] De Bunsen, *Charles Roden Buxton*, 54–55. Though the foundation of the group was announced only on the pages of the 28th July 1903 issue of the *Manchester Guardian*.
[9] Gooch, *Foreword*, 6.
[10] Hall, *The Balkan Wars*, 132–135.

tween the Balkan states, and this also hampered the Entente's room of diplomatic maneuver in the first years of World War I. The Balkan Alliance of 1912, which was made up mostly under Russian patronage, was a result of a series of bilateral treaties concluded between the Balkan countries. Contrary to the original Russian design, the Balkan bloc's aim was to 'liberate' the European territories of the Ottoman Empire. However, by the eve of the war the concluded arrangements, except the Serbo–Bulgarian Treaty, dimly outlined the territorial distribution of the future war spoils, and left this question open until the end of hostilities.

The First Balkan War started on 8th October 1912 by Montenegro, and soon the rest of the Balkan allies declared war on the Ottomans too. After a couple of weeks of fighting, the Ottomans suffered a devastating defeat from the allies, and by the time of the truce of 3rd November, they lost almost all of their European possessions, and their control actually was confined to three major fortifications, namely, Scutari, Janina and Edirne.[11] Due to the pressure exerted by the Great Powers, the belligerent countries met in London to negotiate the terms of peace. Parallel to this, another conference was held at St. James Hall by the ambassadors of the Powers in order to settle questions raised by the unexpected victory of the Balkan states.

Although the negotiations between the Balkan Alliance and the Ottomans were interrupted and the war continued, the talks between the representatives of the Great Powers were keep going on. After serious debates, the ambassadorial conference decided to establish an autonomous Albania in December 1912. However, this decision jeopardized Serbia and Greece's designs in this part of the peninsula, and this naturally led these countries to sought territorial compensation elsewhere, namely in Macedonia.[12] The symptoms of growing discord between the allies were palpable already in the spring of 1913. The Serbian prime minister, Nikola Pašić raised the necessity of the modification of the Serbo–Bulgarian Treaty as early as February 1913.[13] James David Bourchier, the Balkan correspondent of *The Times*, also noted the signs of rupture in a letter to Noel Buxton: "The truth is that the Servian officers finding themselves in possession at Monastir, etc., don't see why they should go out, and regard treaties as waste paper… The only remedy for the situation is arbitration is some form or other. Another campaign would be a scandal and a disgrace."[14] Finally, after the Scutari crisis the Great Powers demanded a complete cease-fire and peace negotiations were reopened in London. The Treaty of London, signed 30th May, settled many question which had arisen from the Ottoman defeat. Firstly, the Ottoman Empire had to cede all its territories west from the so-called Enos–Midia line. The treaty also settled the status of Crete, and handed over most of the Aegean islands to Greece, and, as I mentioned earlier, an autonomous Albania was to be established.[15]

Soon, however, the victorious Balkan allies ruptured over the spoils of war. Less than a month later the Balkan cooperation entirely collapsed. Feeling deprived from its "natural gains", Bulgaria attacked its former allies on the night of 28–29th June: the second Balkan War begun. After some initial success the Bulgarian troops had to withdraw, and especially after Romania and the Ottoman Empire also entered the conflict, the fate of the war was

[11] Ibid. 80–95.
[12] Anastasakis et al., *Introduction*… 6.
[13] Demeter, *Kisállami törekvések*, 303.
[14] Cited in Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, 56.
[15] *Treaty of Peace between Turkey and the Balkan Allies*, 12–13.

decided. The representatives of the Balkan countries met in Bucharest to discuss the details of the settlement. As Richard C. Hall noted, for Greece and Serbia, the treaty was a complete success beyond their expectation. On the other hand, for Bulgaria it was a catastrophe.[16] It lost vast territories in Macedonia, and it also had to cede the Southern Dobrudja to Romania, not to mention the recapture of Adrianople (Edirne) by Enver Pasha. On the eve of the Great War the Balkan countries had serious conflict of interests which made cooperation between them almost inevitably impossible.

The Buxton Mission in the Balkans

At the outbreak of the war many Europeans shared the optimism of Emperor Wilhelm II that the war would be short, and the soldiers "will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees". However, both the Entente and the Central Powers attempted to win over new allies to their side in order to prevail in the world struggle. To this end, some British politicians were convinced that the key of victory laid "in the East". During the year of 1914, for British observers gradually realized that the Ottoman–German rapprochement eventually would be formalized in an alliance between them, which would have threatened basic British imperial interests, e.g. in Egypt. Although the Entente was keen to keep the Ottoman Empire out of the conflict, due to the conflicting interests of its diplomacy, finally, the Ottomans joined the Central Powers in September 1914.[17] At this point the stance of the Balkan States became crucially important to both power blocs. Some members of this British Cabinet, and other British politicians alike, had thought that the best way to relieve the Western and Eastern fronts, and subsequently to win the war, was to open a new front in the Balkans. Naturally, Serbia was considered as an ally to the Entente powers, however, the rest of the Balkan states remained neutral. Winston Churchill aptly noted in his World War I memoirs that in 1914 there were equally strong groups of supporters of the Entente and of the Central Powers in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania too.[18] In light of this, some quarter of British politicians started to emphasize the importance of a diplomatic mission to be sent to the Balkans in order to secure either support or, at least, benevolent neutrality of those countries. However, the attempt to revive the Balkan bloc of 1912 proved to be a very difficult task due to, as I pointed out earlier, the results of recent events occurred in the Second Balkan War.

The supporters of the "Eastern solution" within the British Cabinet, particularly David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, First Lord of Admiralty, and Charles Masterman, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster – the latter was being the friend of the brothers – naturally sought the assistance of the main figures of the Balkan Committee, namely, Noel and Charles Roden Buxton, as they assumed that they could utilize the Buxtons' networks in order to win over the neutral Balkan countries, particularly Bulgaria. As early as the end of August 1914, discussions had started to decide that in what capacity should the Buxtons be sent to Bulgaria and what were the exact objectives of their visit. At the early stage of the war David Lloyd George was keen to open a new front in the

[16] Hall, *The Balkan Wars*, 124–125.
[17] On the Ottoman entry to war see: McMeekin, *Ottoman Endgame*, 95–133.
[18] Churchill: *The World Crisis*, 1:431.

Balkans, and he [thought] that two factors were essential to make the Balkan countries commit themselves to the Entente cause: a vast loan and a military landing either in South Dalmatia or in Salonica.[19] In a letter to Buxton, 22th August 1914, he authorized him to make credit arrangements with any Balkan country who decided to throw its lot with the Triple Entente.[20] Churchill wrote a letter to Noel Buxton regarding this mission, in which he asked him to "make [his] friends in Greece and Bulgaria realize the brilliant but fleeting opportunity which now presents itself".[21] He claims that the Balkan states cannot expand without "internecine war", but the "application of the principle of nationality in the southern provinces of Austria-Hungary would produce results so advantageous to the Balkan states that the memory and the consequences of former quarrels could be assuaged for ever [sic!]. The creation of a Balkan Federation comprising Bulgaria, Servia, Roumania, Montenegro, and Greece, strong enough to play an effective part in the destinies of Europe, must be the common dream of all their peoples."[22] Notwithstanding that the abovementioned members of the Cabinet wanted a formal diplomatic mission undertaken by the Buxton brothers, the Foreign Office did not shared their enthusiasm, and it did not support neither Lloyd George's '*blank cheque*' nor the official use of Churchill's letter. Sir Edward Grey, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, refused to send Buxton as a Special Agent, because in his view "in that capacity more harm than good might be done", and Buxton should travel there in a purely private visit as "sympathetic friend of Bulgaria".[23] Keith Robbins argues that the Foreign Office reluctance to support Buxton's mission ensued from two important factors. First, that from the very beginning of the war, the British diplomatic corps in Sofia regarded Bulgaria as already lost to the Entente. On the other hand, the F.O. did not really like the idea that an outsider, a troublemaker to use A. J. P. Taylor's phrase,[24] penetrated into their domain of foreign policy making.[25]

Eventually, Noel and Charles Roden Buxton had set off to Bulgaria in the early days of September 1914. Noel wrote in his diary about his feelings about the subsequent mission during the journey to Sofia: "It is horrible to urge a people to war, but it would be in Bulgaria's interest to do so, this being the best (and probably the last) opportunity of recovering her rights. This war offers what has never been possible before and could not be gained without the curtailment of Austria-Hungary, namely a final and permanent solution of the Balkan question. Also, the entry of Bulgaria would have the most marked effect in shortening the war."[26] They arrived to Paris in the shadow of the German advance to the French capital, and continued their journey with several detours to Italy, to the port of Brindisi,

[19] Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 22.
[20] MS 951 c2/25. Spec. Corr. D. Lloyd George, 1913–1941: Lloyd George to Noel Buxton, 22th August 1914.
[21] MS 951 c.1/34. Spec. Corr. Winston Churchill 1914–1944: Winston Churchill to Noel Buxton, 31 August 1914. (copy)
[22] Ibid.
[23] MS 951 c.2/10 Spec. Corr. Grey of Fallodon 1906–1916: Sir Edward Grey to Noel Buxton, 29 August 1914.
[24] Taylor, *The Trouble Makers.*
[25] Robbins, *British Diplomacy*, 563.
[26] Quoted in Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy*, 88.

where to Churchill dispatched the HMS Hussar, a torpedo gunboat, at their disposal to swiftly sail off to Salonica.[27]

Although, they were enthusiastically welcomed by the local populace of Sofia, the brothers found themselves in a very discouraging political atmosphere. King Ferdinand and the Radoslavov Government were generally considered as pro-German, and the Buxtons had connections mainly with the leading figures of the opposition, like former Bulgarian prime minister Ivan Gešov, but not with the government. Their primary objective was to ascertain "the price" of Bulgarian entry to war. Mosa Anderson, the biographer of Noel Buxton, suggests in her book that he and his brother Charles actually outlined a territorial scheme for the Bulgarians in exchange for their commitment to the Entente's war aims,[28] despite the fact that, as I earlier pointed out, Sir Edward Grey did not authorized them to make such offers. According to Anderson the scheme promised to Bulgaria "(1) the central Macedonian districts which had been ascribed to Bulgaria under the Serbo–Bulgar Treaty in 1912; (2) certain districts in the Dobrudja, now occupied by Rumania, and (3) in the event of Turkey entering the war against the Entente, the so-called Enos–Midia line. Bulgaria in return was to promise benevolent neutrality to Serbia, Rumania and Greece".[29] […]

Noel Buxton recorded a quite hostile attitude of the British diplomatic corps both at home and at Sofia as well. On the one hand, even before his departure from London, one of the highest officials of the Foreign Office suggested that he could spare the trouble to going to Sofia as Bulgaria was already lost.[30] On the other hand, he was convinced that the Foreign Office drew the wrong conclusions from the "unduly pessimistic and misleading" reports sent by Henry Bax-Ironside, British Minister in Sofia (1911–1915), who was regarded as a "friend of Serbia", and thus he was very unpopular in Bulgarian political circles. Looking back to the events of autumn 1914, he also notes in this letter to Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1915–1919), that the First Secretary of the Sofia Legation, "O'Reilly […] did much to diminish the unhappy effects thus produced. He was recalled in the Spring on the ground that he had kept up social relations with Germans his wife being a German. His value as bringing the best and latest inside information might have been immense. It was precisely information that was wanted. But not only was he not put into the War Department (where his knowledge would be of daily use) but he was not even seen by Grey or Nicolson on his return."[31] Consequently, Buxton blamed the Foreign Office that the diplomatic corps had mismanaged this issue, and even regarded their work as amateurish. However, it is quite striking if we compare these observations with the memoirs of Sir Edward Grey. Although Grey's memoir might be biased with the intention of self-justification, as all memoir might be, it seems he supported the idea of a revived Balkan bloc, though, as an experienced foreign policy maker, he saw also the great difficulties of such policy. However, he recorded that "[…] if, as a result of the present war, Serbia obtained access to the Adriatic and a large acquisition of territory to the west of her inhabited by Serbs, the settlement of the Macedonian question should thereby be made more

[27] Ibid. 90.
[28] Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, 64.
[29] Ibid. 64–65.
[30] MS 951 c.25/6 Balkans Jan.–Jun. 1915, Noel Buxton to Lord [Robert] Cecil, 21 June 1915.
[31] Ibid.

easy, and I saw very favourable possibilities as a consequence of this war".[32] All in all, in the light of the examined sources, it seems that British diplomacy in the Balkans was very indeterminate (at least on the surface), and apparently it worked rather half-heartedly towards the adhesion of Bulgaria to the Entente side. Robbins also suggests that from the beginning of 1914, behind the scenes, there was a struggle between Russia and Britain in Sofia for diplomatic supremacy.[33] Noel Buxton wrote at a later date about his frustration over Grey and the Foreign Office's reluctance to attain the cooperation of the Balkan countries: "It was more irritating to be encouraged to come, to leave all manner of work and also wife and family, to incur great efforts and expense, and (as it turned out) great dangers… and then to find that every suggestion for action either from ourselves or any other quarter was rejected and shelved, and generally that a steady stream of cold water was turned on so far as any forward policy was concerned."[34]

After a couple of weeks of negotiations, being disappointed in Grey's decisions, the Buxtons left Sofia for Bucharest where they found a generally pro-Entente sentiment. However, as Buxton remarked to Cecil, according to the British Minister, Sir George Barclay (1912–1920), that as late as October the local government had not been informed yet that Romania's help would be welcome by Entente.[35] They were also received by King Charles I (r. 1866–1914) and Queen Elisabeth who were very cordial with their English visitors but expressed their strong commitment to Germany. They also met with prominent Romanian politicians, such as Ion C. Brătianu, Take Ionesco, and certainly, the personnel from the British Legation.[36] However, their stay in Romania was unexpectedly interrupted by the death of King Charles on 10th October 1914.[37] On the morning of the royal funeral, 15th October 1914, the brothers were about to leave Bucharest by roofless car to one of their friend's nearby estate when suddenly shots were fired on them. Noel Buxton had been shot through his jaw, and Charles was wounded on his chest, virtually the bullets went through his lungs. The assassin, a young, 21 years old Turkish student who studied political science and philosophy in Paris, Hassan Taksim was hold down by the driver of the car. They were brought back to their hotel room where a great crowd gathered to witness the brothers' agony, and where a rather absurd and tragicomic scene occurred. Lady Grogan, the biographer of James David Bourchier, recorded in her book this moment as follows: "The wounded men were in a bad predicament, for, of the two other Englishmen present, the Minister, Sir George Barclay, was very short-sighted, and Bourchier extremely deaf. At last, Noel managed to gesticulate to Bourchier, who brought him a scrap of paper on which Noel wrote a line telling him to clear the room. If Bourchier had not acted on these instructions immediately, there is little doubt that one of the brothers would have succumbed."[38] Moreover, the Romanian gendarmeries brought to the hotel room the assassin as well in or-

[32] Grey, *Twenty Five Years*, 2:185.
[33] Robbins, *British Diplomacy*, 565.
[34] Cited in Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, 65.
[35] MS 951 c.25/6. Balkans Jan.–Jun. 1915, Noel Buxton to Lord [Robert] Cecil, 21 June 1915.
[36] Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy*, 95.
[37] A rumor (enhanced by the Central Powers propaganda) immediately spread that the Buxtons poisoned the decidedly pro-German king.
[38] Grogan, *The Life of J. D. Bourchier*, 162. Another description of this event can be found: Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, 66.

der to the Buxtons identify him. However, both of the brothers survived the assassination attempt, and spent about a month in a sanatorium near to the Romanian capital.

From a letter that Noel Buxton wrote from the hospital to his wife we know that he was warned by Sir George Barclay because according to the intelligence provided by the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Louis Mallet (1913–1914), further attempts to murder them was expected.[39] After recovery from their wounds the Buxtons paid a visit to their would-be assassin, Hassan Taksim in prison. Noel wanted to know his motivation behind the failed assassination, and he also suggested to Taksim that his action might help them, and indirectly the cause of the Entente, in Bulgaria. The young Turkish responded quite cheerfully to this assumption: "Then I shall receive a decoration from the Balkan Committee!"[40]

The brothers were received back in Bulgaria as national heroes who spilled their blood for the country.[41] Unfortunately the sources are quite laconic about the happenings of the following weeks. What is certain is that the Buxtons went to Niš, where to the Serbian government and parliament fled from the Austro-Hungarian offensive, however, our sources are quite inconclusive whom they met there. However, it is quite clear that the brothers arrived to Athens by the middle of December 1914. In a letter which never been sent to his wife, Noel Buxton still reports that they were feared from further assassination attempts. In this letter he also elaborates his personal motives about going to this mission and also about taking an active role in public life because he thought "partly because you are interested, & partly because (in addition) my friends, & especially my nephews & nieces, would like to hear them if I were killed".[42] However, his fears proved to be unreal and they continued their journey back to Great Britain via Rome[43] and Paris where they discussed their experience with Georges Clemenceau who was then the editor of *L'Homme Enchaîné*, and Alexander Izvolsky, Russian Ambassador to Paris.[44]

Activities and Failure in London

Upon their return back to Great Britain, the Buxtons thought that Bulgaria was still persuadable to join the Entente. Therefore, their next goal was to convince British political circles and public opinion alike about the utmost importance of bringing in Bulgaria to the war. In doing so, they utilized their earlier experience (and channels) in public agitation: a substantial body of articles appeared in various newspapers and journal favoring the claims of Bulgaria, and public meetings were held throughout the country as well in order to promote the Bulgarian adhesion to the Entente war aims. In the spring of 1915, Noel and Charles Roden Buxton published a book, *The War and the Balkans*, in which they summarized their

[39] MS 951. c8/8. On Risks, Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton, 27 October 1914.
[40] Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, 69. Unfortunately neither historical scholarship nor the sources gives reliable hints on the later fate of Hassan Taksim. He was sentenced to ten years in a labour camp in Romania which actually was consistent with a death sentence. However, according to Conwell-Evans, Taksim returned to Turkey when the Central Powers overran Romania in 1916–1917, and eventually died in İzmir (Smyrna) during the Greek occupation. Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy*.
[41] Ibid.
[42] MS 951 c.8/8. On Risks, Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton, 20 December 1914.
[43] MS 951 c.8/8. On Risks, Noel Buxton to Lucy Buxton, 30 December 1914.
[44] Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, 69–72.

views about the the general political situation in the Balkans, and also they evaluate the military strength of each states too. In the first chapter of their book ('The Balkans and the war') the authors express their hope that, as the Entente made the principle of nationality its primary war objective, the settlement of the 'Balkan problem' on the basis of nationality would build up "a permanent fabric of peace".[45] Moreover, the Buxtons' also argued that, from a military point of view, a re-instrumentalized Balkan bloc would meant additional 1.300.000 troops to the Entente forces which fact could be decisive in the course of the war.[46]

The main purpose of the book was to emphasize the possibility of Balkan cooperation. After providing the reader the general characteristics of each Balkan country, the authors depicted the 'rightful' Bulgarian territorial claims. These territories, which Bulgaria considered for herself, were mainly 'robbed' from Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War. They laid the claim for 'Serbian Macedonia', which technically covered those areas of Macedonia which were unconditionally allotted to Bulgaria by the Serbo–Bulgarian Treaty of 1912 (but not the so-called contested zone). Besides this, the Bulgarians wanted an outlet to the Aegean Sea at Kavala. In his private letters, Noel Buxton recurrently suggested this possible concession to the Foreign Office, as Eleftherios Venizelos, Greek prime minister at the time, tended to accept this in exchange for territorial gains in Asia Minor with the consent of the Entente.[47] Bulgaria had claims for two other areas as well, both lost in the Second Balkan War, namely, Southern Dobrudja and Thrace (up to the Enos–Midia line).[48] James David Bourchier, in a letter to Noel Buxton, outlined a scheme which included a territorial reorganization of the Balkans too. Bourchier suggests in this letter that cooperation between the Balkan states could only obtained by decisive Entente agency. First of all, the Entente would have to declare that it would support, on the one hand, Serbia's claim to Bosnia and Northern Herzegovina, and to one or two ports on the Adriatic; on the other hand, Montenegro's claim to Southern Herzegovina and to Cattaro (Kotor), Budva and the district of Spizza (Sutomore) in Southern Dalmatia. Bulgaria could gain the desired territories if she would undertake a strictly benevolent neutral policy towards Serbia, Greece and Romania. As to Thrace, Bulgaria could have taken it in case she would declare war on the Ottoman Empire.[49] I think what is striking here, is the complete neglect of the Jugoslav solution of the 'Balkan problem', even if we know that at the time of publishing of the Buxtons' book and presumably at the time of Bourchier letter, the Yugoslav Committee had not been established yet. David Dutton noted with a dash of irony that the Buxtons' attempted to develop a "seductively simple programme of territorial rearrangements designed to bring the whole peninsula to the allied camp".[50] Nevertheless, the Buxton brothers and their supporters were right on that the mediation of the Entente powers was a necessary requirement to facilitate the rapprochement of the Balkan countries. Lord Newton, an old comrade of Buxton from the time of the Macedonian agitation campaign, emphasized this necessity in a letter he wrote to Buxton. He stressed that if the Balkan states could not come to an agreement then the Entente ought to force them to do so. Regarding the work of the Foreign Office he

[45] Buxton – Buxton, *The War*, 16.
[46] Ibid. 18.
[47] MS 951 c.25/6, Balkans – Jan.–June 1915, 'Kavala I'.
[48] Buxton – Buxton, *The War*, 73.
[49] MS 951 c.25/7 Balkans – July–Sept., James David Bourchier to Noel Buxton, undated.
[50] Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 19.

also added that "it seems to me that British diplomacy as regards the Balkans has never been so intensely futile before. Here we are, fighting the Turks and without getting any assistance from the Turks' natural enemies".[51]

With the exception of Lloyd George, the members of the British Cabinet showed less and less interest in the possibility of bringing in Bulgaria to the war on the allies' side. Sir Edward Grey doubted this option from the very beginning, and also feared that making promises in Sophia would destroy Serbian morale without any guarantee of real support or at least neutrality from Bulgaria.[52] On the other hand, Grey was more interested in securing Italian support than Bulgaria, and therefore the idea of forcing Serbia to make concessions to Bulgaria became almost impossible for him, as Italian designs on the east shore of the Adriatic confronted Serbian (Jugoslav) territorial claims.[53] Churchill and Lloyd George seemingly dropped the Bulgarian option as well, because they put their lot in the on-going great British offensive in the Dardanelles. Despite all of this, Noel Buxton could arrange two dinners at the Savoy Hotel with the Bulgarian Minister in London to discuss the conditions of the entry of Bulgaria to war but this could not change anything decisively.[54] The British Cabinet still communicated contradictory: what Lloyd George promised on one day, Sir Edward Grey confuted on the other day. This uncertainty also made the Bulgarian Minister in London to consider his resignation from his post. As I emphasized earlier, by the summer of 1915, British Cabinet members put their money on other horses: Grey hoped an all-pervading victory from the Italian entry and Churchill from the breakthrough at the Dardanelles.

Conclusion

Finally, Bulgaria entered World War I on the side of the Central Powers on 10th October 1915. Behind this fateful decision there were several different reasons. First of all, the Central Powers could offer more to Bulgaria without forcing any of their allies to make concessions. On the other hand, by autumn it seemed that the German-led bloc would win the war.[55] However, the history of the diplomatic scrambles in Bulgaria during this period also shed some light on the discrepancies of foreign policy making at least on two levels. First, from the papers of Noel Buxton it seems that the conflict between the Foreign Office and other branches of British administration caused serious problems when urgent decision-making was needed. On the other hand, historical literature suggests that the joint diplomacy of the Entente did not work as smoothly as it was assumed before.

Noel and Charles Roden Buxton's mission to Bulgaria also shed some light on both aspects. What is strikingly obvious from Noel Buxton's paper is the ongoing struggle within the British political elite for power in the foreign policy decision-making process. In the long run, dissenters like the Buxtons were outmatched by other self-claimed foreign policy,

[51] MS 951 c.25/6 Balkans – Jan.–June 1915, Lord Newton to Noel Buxton, 6 May 1915.
[52] Grey, *Twenty Five Years*, 191.
[53] Robbins, *British Diplomacy*, 570. However, it is interesting to note that Grey in his recollections claims that he supported the scheme outlined by Noel Buxton about the possible territorial concessions to Bulgaria, and he conducted his policy with the other Great Powers accordingly. Grey, *Twenty Five Years*, 199.
[54] Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy*, 109.
[55] Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 138.

more precisely: Balkan, experts who claimed their share in the re-shaping of this part of the world according to their sympathies and mostly biased presuppositions.

Bibliography

Noel-Buxton Papers, MS 951, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Library, Montreal.
Akhund, Nadine: Stabilizing a Crisis and the Mürzsteg Agreement of 1903: International Efforts to Bring Peace to Macedonia. *Hungarian Historical Review* (3:3) 2014.
Anastasakis, Othon – Madden, David – Roberts, Elisabeth: Introduction: The Past is Never Dead… IN: Anastasakis, Othon – Madden, David – Roberts, Elisabeth (eds.): *Balkan Legacies of the Great War: The Past is Never Dead.* Palgrave-Macmillan. London 2016. 1–12.
Anderson, Mosa: *Noel Buxton. A life*. George Allen & Unwin, London 1952.
Brown, Keith: *Loyal unto Death. Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington – Indianapolis, 2013.
Buxton, Noel – Buxton, Charles Roden: *The War and the Balkans.* George Allen & Unwin, London 1915.
Case, Holly: The Quiet Revolution: Consuls and the International System in the Nineteenth Century. IN: Synder, Timothy – Younger, Katherine (eds.): *The Balkans as Europe 1821–1914.* University of Rochester Press, Rochester NY 2018.
Churchill, Winston S.: *The World Crisis 1914–1918*. Vol. 1. Oldhams Press, London 1938.
Conwell-Evans, T. P.: *Foreign Policy from a Back-Bench 1904–1918. A Study based on the Papers of Lord Noel-Buxton*. Oxford University Press, London 1932.
Crampton, R. J.: *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008. [1997]
Dakin, Douglas: Dakin, Douglas: *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia*. Thessaloniki 1993.
De Bunsen, Victoria: *Charles Roden Buxton. A Memoir.* London 1948.
Demeter Gábor: *Kisállami törekvések és nagyhatalmi érdekek a Balkán-háborúk idején (1912–1913)*. Hungarovox Kiadó, Budapest 2007.
Destani, Bejtullah – Tomes, Jason (eds.): *Albania's Greatest Friend. Aubrey Herbert and the Making of Modern Albania. Diaries and Papers 1904–1923*. I. B. Tauris – The Centre for Albanian Studies, London – New York 2011.
Dutton, David: *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War*. I. B. Tauris, London – New York 1998.
Grey, Viscount of Fallodon [Sir Edward Grey]: *Twenty-Five Years 1892–1916.* Vol. 2. Hodder and Stoughton, London 1926.
Hall, Richard C.: *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913. Prelude to the First World War*. Routledge, London – New York 2000.
Ilchev, Ivan: My Country – Right or Wrong! The International Propaganda of the Balkan States in Europe and in the United States in 1821–1923. *Bulgarian Historical Review* 3. 1995. 32–50.
Lady Grogan: *The life of J. D. Bourchier*. Hurst & Blackett, London 1926.
Livanios, Dimitris: *The Macedonian Question. Britain and the Southern Balkans 1939–1949*. Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2008.

McMeekin, Sean: *The Ottoman Endgame. War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908–1923*. Penguin Books, London 2016.
Robbins, Keith: British Diplomacy and Bulgaria 1914–1915. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 49. 117. (1971) 560–585.
Taylor, A. J. P.: *The Trouble Makers. Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792–1939*. Panther, London 1969. [1957]
Wilkinson, H. R.: *Maps and Politics. A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia*. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 1951.

Tentatives diplomatiques britanniques aux Balkans dans les premières années de la Grande guerre (1914-1915)

Les coups de feu fatals de Sarajevo ont poussé le continent européen entier en guerre à la fin de l'été 1914. Le rôle de l'Europe du Sud-Est n'était en même temps que secondaire, même pour les contemporains, vue l'ensemble de la Grande Guerre. De plus, il se trouve en position arriérée dans l'historiographie occidentale comparé aux événements qui se sont déroulés au Front de l'Ouest ou au Front de l'Est. Les nouvelles recherches lancés à propos du centenaire consacrent, heureusement, une plus grande attention aussi à l'Europe du Sud-Est. Dans ma communication, je souhaite présenter les ambitions de la mission Buxton, préalables de l'entrée en guerre bulgare, en se basant sur l'héritage composé des écritures personnelles et les sources publiées.

Les alliés opposants cherchaient, à partir de l'éclatement de la guerre, à faire entrer à la guerre des nouveaux participants de leur côté, ainsi augmentant leur chance de victoire. La direction politique britannique a confié par cette raison Noel Buxton, le leader du *Balkan Committee*, et son frère, Charles Roden Buxton qu'ils utilisent leur influence aux États balkaniques et qu'ils aplanissent les divergences bulgares, grecques et serbes en les convaincant pour l'Entente. Pour la Grande-Bretagne, il était de grande importance de créer un certain bloc balkanique afin d'empêcher la relation entre les Empires centraux et l'Empire ottoman entrant en guerre de leur côté en automne 1914. Dans ma communication, je consacre une attention particulière aux propositions britanniques pour résoudre les contraints balkaniques.