

## The 'Phanariote's Plot' Issue in the Russian Diplomatic Correspondence in the Beginning of the 19th Century

Vladimir V. Astafyev and Denis R. Sharafutdinov  
Institute of International Studies, Kazan (Volga region) Federal University,  
Faculty of History and Oriental Studies, Kremlyovskaya St. 18, 420008 Kazan, Kazan, Russia

**Abstract:** The study is dedicated to analysis of activity of the Russian diplomats in the Balkans in the beginning of the 19th century with regard to the so-called 'Phanariote's plot'. The Russian diplomatic correspondence and position of the Russian representatives C.C. Rodofinikin and F.I. Nedoba with respect to this issue is characterized. The researchers place special emphasis on the issues of ethnic antagonisms that were one of the prerequisites of origination of the legend about the 'Phanariote's plot'. The study reasonably proves that the Latent opposition between the Slavic and Greek identities was represented in the diplomatic practices of the beginning of the 19th century and was expressed in establishment of complicated relations between the Russian diplomatic agents that were Greeks by origin and the leaders of the Slavic nations of the Balkan Peninsula during the first decades of the 19th century. The investigation of the task set required the use of the general scientific research methods: analysis, synthesis, logical method, descriptive method and the use of the specific historical methods among which the comparative historical method that allowed analyzing the diplomatic correspondence within the context of the history of development of the Russian epistolary heritage and depending on the common historical processes. The materials of the study may be used by the study of the Balkan region history, the history of the Foreign policy of the Russian State as well as in the contemporary public dispute concerning the ethnic antagonisms in the international relations.

**Key words:** The Balkans, diplomatic correspondence, Russian diplomats, 'Phanariote's plot', emphasis

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### INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 19th century in the Russian Foreign policy turned out to be not rich in events. Against the persisting military and diplomatic collisions with the Napoleon's France, Russia activated its activity in the Balkan region inhabited by the significant part of the Orthodox and Slavic population. Due to the advantageous peace treaties executed in the second half of the 19th century (The Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca (1774)), the Treaty of Jassy (1791), Russia won the special status of protectorship to the Orthodox nations of the Ottoman Empire. By defending its geopolitical interests, the Russian Empire represented by the MFA officials was forced to see into the intricacies of relations between the ethnic groups inhabiting the European part of the Ottoman Empire's land that represented a bright conglomerate. However, the Russian diplomats not always managed to successfully solve the conflicts arising between the Balkan citizens. The demonstrative example of these challenging issues arising before the

Russian representatives in the diplomatic practice of the Russian MFA in the beginning of the 19th century is the so-called 'Phanariote's plot' legend.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the national historiography, the subject of the 'Phanariote's plot' is widely represented in different variations (Belov, 2001, 2002). One of the first who mentioned, it was the military historian Dubrovin (1863) by description of the South-Eastern Foreign policy line of Russia during the Alexander's period; however the prerequisites, causes of origination of this legend were more comprehensively covered by the famous Russian researcher Belov (2005).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This legend originated in 1810, after the failures that came to the Serbian liberation movement in 1809. As the result of unsuccessful attack as well as without the

support of the Russian army the Serbian insurgent forces appeared close to the military disaster. As the result of this, in the Serbian camp the opposition between the competing groups among the leaders of the First Serbian revolt was sharpened since accusation of collusion with the Greeks could have resulted in elimination of one opponents and triumph of the others.

Interest in the 'Phanariote's plot' in the Russian diplomatic correspondence in the beginning of the 19th century is determined not only by opposition of the Slavic and Greek identities on the territory of the Balkan Peninsula but also by the direct participation in these events of the Russian diplomatic agents in Belgrade: C.C. Rodofinikin and the Nedoba (2007) that substituted him. In the diplomatic correspondence of C.C. Rodofinikin sent to St. Petersburg and the headquarters of the General of the Danube army these subjects were represented and evaluated. Unfortunately, the diplomatic correspondence C.C. Rodofinikin cannot be called rather objective with regard to the role he is assigned by the researchers on the 'Phanariote's plot', namely the role of one of the Serbian enemy. Afterwards, also in the reports of Nedoba the atmosphere of distrust in the Nedoba himself on the part of the Serbians due to his Greek origin was also to be felt.

The prerequisite for origination of the 'Phanariote's plot' legend shall be considered to be the year 1807 conclusion of the Treaties of Tilsit between Russia and France and the Slobodzeya truce between Russia and Turkey. At the beginning of the Russian-Turkish war of the 1806-1812, the Russian diplomatic community was involved in discussion of the 'Balkan prospects the so-called possible rearrangement of the European territories of the Ottoman Empire and foundation of the new Slavic states. It was assumed to involve the Slavic people in the large-scale military activities, primarily those from Serbia and Montenegro as well as the entire 'Christian Raiya' and to arrange the anti-Turkish and anti-French front in the Balkans. In the letter of the General of the Danube army I.I. Michelson addressed to Karadorde, the leader of the Serbian Uprising, it was said: 'finally the time has come for the warriors of the Christian name to cast down the Yoke of Muslims; to bring the afflicted Christian tribes back to their ancient heritage, honor and well-being' (Dubrovin, 1863). C.C. Rodofinikin intended to be not only the adviser of the Serbian leaders but to coordinate actions with the Russian army appeared on the pan of the Serbian criticism in the situation of the changeable strategy of the Russian government. His Greek origin made this state of affairs even worse. It can be clearly seen from the record of the conversation of Karadorde with the Russian diplomatic representative marquis F. O. Paulucci held on June 28, 1807 at the camp

at Negotin that the Serbs by soliciting for appointment of the Russian officials both the civil and military ones, made the reservation: 'except for the Greeks' (Dostyan *et al.*, 2010). Having familiarized himself with the result of the conversation with F.O. Paulucci, I.I. Michelson had to state in his report to Alexander I d/d July 7, 1807: 'it is doubtful if they [the Serbs Author] will be pleased with the acting state counsellor C. C. Rodofinikin being a pure Greek'. Rodofinikin arrived in Belgrade as soon as at the beginning of August 1807 and the Russian MFA had time to seek the one who would replace him which, however, did not happen. It shall be noted that afterwards the Russian government implicitly admitted its mistake by appointing C.C. Rodofinikin as the first diplomatic agent to Belgrade; also his activity enjoyed mixed evaluation which however, didn't hurt him achieving significant success in the professional field.

The reasons for which the representatives of the Russian MFA were involved in the unstated conflict with the South Slavs are to be seen in the stereotypes that had established in the Serbian society by that time concerning cunning of the Greek Phanariotes and the Greek phobia arising from it. The Greek Phanariotes inhabiting the privileged quarter Phanar (Fener) in Constantinople occupied by the beginning of the 19th century the dominant position in the upper and middle ranks of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire. The government of Turkey assigned to them the role of mediators between the Christian population and the administration of Turkey. The Slavic people in the Balkans took this practice negatively taking into account closing of the Pech eparchy (1766) the memory of which was still alive. Besides, the Greek-phobia among the Serbian leaders was actively fed by the representatives of the Austrian Serbs (J. Jovanovich and S. Stratimirovich) the opinions of which gained widespread currency among the Slavic people in the Balkans which more repeatedly reported by the Montenegro metropolitan Petar I Njegos in his messages to the Russian MFA. This is why, the Russian diplomatic agents had to consider these circumstances in their diplomatic practice. Coming back to the estimates by the Russian diplomatic agents of the so-called 'Phanariote's plot' it shall be noted that C.C. Rodofinikin himself in his reports to the chiefs did not dramatize the situation, on the contrary, reduced all issues to lack of expertise and weakness of the Serbian leaders. The episodes from the diplomatic practice and everyday life of the Russian diplomat added strain in relations between the Russian diplomat and leaders of the Serbian Uprising. Thus, one shall mention the arrival at Belgrade from Constantinople of the metropolitan Auxentius in November 1807 for the purpose of reconciling the Serbs with the Ottoman Empire that additionally reinforced the Serbs in their opinion that the Greeks play them and will

sell them in the nearest future. Trying not to let the situation out of the field of sight, C.C. Rodofinikin lodged the metropolitan Auxentius at the Serbian Metropolitan Leontius that shared the pro-Russian attitudes. In his report to the command d/d November 14, 1807, C.C. Rodofinikin informed: 'the metropolitan lives at the local metropolitan that is committed to us, he is accompanied by a sergeant that is also committed to us and is ordered not to let anyone from the strangers in except for the right-thinking persons known'. The rumors and opinions of the numerous Serbian 'specialists' that Serbia will be sold in the nearest future or is already betrayed caused concern among the Serbs. It was rather difficult for the Russian diplomatic representative to remedy the situation and convince the Serbs of the opposite. In his reports to Russia C.C. Rodofinikin noted the wildness of this situation and called the Serbian Council (senate) just a 'bedlam'. In the private communication with Karadorde he reproaches him and stated: 'as to the sale of Serbia I can tell you that no one will give a coin for you as without the will of the first states in Europe no one will buy you nor will anyone ask for your advice or permission as they know you cannot cause any obstacles since Serbia means the same to great states as a drop of water to the sea'. Notwithstanding, the toughness and categoricity of the statement, the Russian diplomatic agent described as such the actual state of affairs that established in the complicated geopolitical situation in Europe during the first decades of the 19th century.

The negative sometimes depreciative yet objective characteristics the Russian diplomat provided for the Serbian 'leaders' made the relationships between C.C. Rodofinikin even more acute. Thus, in the early September, 1807, C.C. Rodofinikin wrote that the Serbian leader Karadorde 'drinks daily up to two bottles vodka along with wine' (Dubrovic, 2006). Unfortunately, this fact was confirmed by the other witnesses as well that knew the Serbian leader personally. The Russian diplomat notes that he even had to introduce the so-called tea ceremonies that, in his opinion, were needed for the good of the cause whereof he reported in his letters to the command: 'Trying to get him (Karadorde, Author) to sober life, I learnt him drinking tea in the morning which cannot hurt the business in whole'.

According to the instructions, in his reports C.C. Rodofinikin provides numerous personified estimates from the surrounding of Karadorde in which he is presented as an explosive, emotional, subservient person. However, it shall be noted none report devoted to this person did without mentioning his leadership skills, love and devotion of the Serbian people to him. The Russian diplomatic agent emphasized: 'The First one (Karadorde, Author) when it is referred to the military operations is

recognized to be the 'supreme commandant'. In all other cases no leadership as such was observed in terms of military activities they are in sync, concerning the other matters, there is no much friendship between them'. Evaluating the activity of the Serbian elders, in his reports C. C. Rodofinikin did not mince his words. 'Instead of the Serbian Council I only found void shadow consisting of the four illiterate ones doing what they were told to do'. The Russian diplomat distinguishes among the elders M. Milovanovich that, in his opinion, was the antagonist of the Serbian leader. 'The Senior (Mladen Milovanovich, Author) is definitely smarter than the Black George and many others but unfortunately, admits as affordable any means leading to enrichment and to reigning' (Nedoba, 2007). However, at the same time it cannot categorically stated that all the Serbian leaders in the reports by C.C. Rodofinikin that enjoyed the power authorities among the Slavic Serbians were negatively evaluated by him. Thus by evaluating the activity of P. Cherdakli, he wrote: 'The local citizen, the retiree of the Austrian military service Peter Novakovich Cherdakli was the only one in Serbia both in terms of his intelligence and his devotion to Russia and love for his motherland who stops acting for the good of his nation'.

Appealingly, the specified aspects became the ground for formation of the legend about the 'Phanariote's plot' among the Serbs and such controversial relationships of the first Russian diplomatic representative in Belgrade with the Serbian leaders during the first decade of the 19th century. F.I. Nedoba that replaced C.C. Rodofinikin in his position also had Greek roots; although initially he appeared in the same atmosphere of suspicion, rumors and fantasies, yet he endured being among the Serbs much more quietly. In the diplomatic correspondence and reports of F.I. Nedoba, only fragmentary references to the conflicts with the Serbian leaders can be found which allows drawing the conclusion that confrontation between the Serbian leaders and the Russian diplomats if not came to naught then transformed into a hidden form. In September 1811, in one of his letters F.I. Nedoba assesses the situation as follows: 'I notice significant changes in the behavior of the leader (Karadorde, Author) and Mladen towards me; they show more respect and trust than before, I recognize it as nothing else but pretending as though I am not going to find out what is done and said by them'.

Afterwards, after conclusion of the Bucharest peace treaty in 1812 and shortly before the Serbian massacre of 1813 initiated by the Turkish troops, F.I. Nedoba that fulfilled the functions of the Russian diplomatic agents in Serbia to the last, provided the assessment of the Slavic community by the example of the Serbs. Thus, he believed that, indeed, there were differences existing between these nations, yet there was the common past that makes them

kin, in order to prove that F.I. Nedoba performs the comparative analysis of the standing of the Serbs and Greek in the Ottoman Empire. It is also interesting that in the beginning of February 1813, in his correspondence to L.I. Kiriko, the Russian consul in Bucharest F.I. Nedoba predicted that 'the Serbian concerns will not finish without heavy bloodshed'. While sharing his professional experience, the Russian diplomat emphasizes all the multi-aspect identity of the Balkan regions and people inhabiting it: 'anyone who has not stayed here for a while cannot get the right idea' of the entire intricacy of processes. Proceeding from the numerous conversations with the Serbian leaders, clergy, common citizens F.I. Nedoba concluded that 'they (the Serbs, Author) have decided with the single heart and soul are resolved to die to the last man'. This circumstance cast him down but at the same time tuned him to the belligerent-patriotic mood. As the result of such reason the Russian diplomatic agent finds some similarity in the situation established in Serbia in the 1810's and the one that took place long before that in Peloponnesus in the 1770s. He's writing: 'It may be said that without the hand of God their death would be inevitable; they would have to drain the bitter cup of the Peloponnesus citizens'. Similar opinions were also stated by the other representatives of the Russian diplomatic community in the Balkans, however, in the international situation that established in 1813-1814, the entire attention of the Russian MFA was unfortunately focused on France. This is why, the Russian Empire had to 'slacken the reins' in the Balkan region and not to pursue such an active Foreign policy in this region.

**Summary:** Thus, the unstated conflict between the Slavic and Greek identities was represented in the diplomatic practices of the beginning of the 19th century and was expressed in establishment of complicated relations between the Russian diplomatic agents that were Greeks by origin and the leaders of the Slavic nations of the Balkan Peninsula during the first decades of the 19th century.

However, during the next years the Russian MFA tried not to let such failure happen by appointment of the diplomatic representatives. The Foreign service tried to take into account all factors including the historical traditions of relations between the Balkan ethnic groups by selection of the agents to occupy the vacant positions in the Balkans.

### CONCLUSION

Thus, it may be said that the situation established in the relations between the Russian diplomats and the

Slavic people of the Balkan Peninsula after signing of the Slobodzeya truce and the Treaties of Tilsit and called the 'Phanariote's plot' in the historiography was determined by the fact that: the Russian diplomats that were Greeks by origin were involved in the unstated conflict with the Serbs as the result of the negative stereotypes concerning the Greeks that were circulating in the Serbian society. The analysis of materials of the diplomatic correspondence allows us stating that the pejorative estimates of the representatives of Serbian elite by the Russian diplomats did not promote to arrangements between the Russian diplomatic agents and the Serbs. All of this caused further aggravation of the climate of mistrust.

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