



Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and British Strategy in Eastern Rumelia (1878–1879)*

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This article examines Sir Henry Drummond Wolff's diplomatic mission to Eastern Rumelia between 1878 and 1879 as a calculated instrument of British foreign policy in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War 1877–1878. Appointed as Britain's representative to the European Commission for the organization of Eastern Rumelia established by the Treaty of Berlin, Wolff played a central role in drafting the Organic Statute and shaping the administrative structure of the newly formed Ottoman province in Southern Bulgaria. His mission had a broader geostrategic objective: to safeguard British interests in the region and contain the growing influence of the Russian Empire in the Near East. The study argues that Wolff's involvement in the European Commission was not merely technical but deeply political, anchored in Britain's determination to preserve its imperial interests near the Straits and to prevent the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire as a buffer against Russian expansion. Eastern Rumelia thus emerges in this context as a focal point of British–Russian rivalry during a critical moment in the reordering of southeastern Europe under the Berlin settlement.

Keywords: Eastern Rumelia, Wolff, Salisbury, Anglo-Russian rivalry, Ottoman Empire, Treaty of Berlin, Near East, Eastern Question

Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by growing geopolitical rivalry between Britain and Russia, as both powers sought to expand their imperial influence in the Near East and Central Asia. For Britain, the primary concern was the defense of India and the security of the communication routes connecting it to the imperial metropole. For Russia, the strategic priority lay in consolidating control over the Black Sea region and securing access to the Mediterranean.

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Russia's steady territorial expansion in Central Asia following its defeat in the Crimean War brought it ever closer to the frontiers of Persia and Afghanistan, causing growing anxiety in Britain.¹ The authorities in London regarded both Persia and Afghanistan as essential buffer states, intended to serve as protective barriers against Russian advance toward India. Consequently, the ensuing Anglo-Russian rivalry centered on control over two strategic corridors, the Straits and their natural hinterland, the Balkans and the Khyber Pass, along with Afghanistan in Central Asia.² Both regions were vital to the defense of British India, as well as to limiting points from which Russia could project a threat to India. They were also essential to the broader projection of British and Russian imperial power across Eurasia.³

British concerns were further intensified during the Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878 and, more significantly, in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Russian military gains in the Balkans raised fears that Istanbul itself might fall under Russian control. The Treaty of San Stefano, which expanded Russian influence in the Balkans through the creation of a large Bulgarian state, made these concerns increasingly dire and seemingly imminent in the perception of British authorities and prompted a decisive diplomatic response.

In reaction to Russia's growing presence, Britain adopted a policy aimed at curbing further Russian advancement in the Balkans and establishing a barrier against its penetration toward the Straits and the Mediterranean Sea. Within this strategic framework, the southern part of the Bulgaria entity created by the Treaty of San Stefano emerged as a pivotal piece on the chessboard of British–Russian rivalry due to its proximity to the Straits and its role as a geopolitical hinterland. Britain moved swiftly to defend its interests by seeking to preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which it did by imposing the division of the Bulgarian state and the establishment of an autonomous province under Ottoman suzerainty in the region to the south of the Balkan Mountains, subsequently named Eastern Rumelia.

This arrangement was largely orchestrated by the newly appointed foreign secretary, Lord Salisbury, whose objective was to prevent the emergence of any Russian-aligned authority in the immediate vicinity of the Straits. Accordingly, Eastern Rumelia was designed to function as a strategic buffer zone, which

1 Geyer, *Russian Imperialism*, 86; Сергеев, *Большая игра*, 18.

2 LeDonne, *The Russian Empire*, 327.

3 Hauner, "The Last Great Game," 74–75; Yapp, "The Legend," 189–90.

would serve British interests by containing Russian expansion in the Balkans and preserving the geopolitical status quo in the Balkans.

In this context, the mission of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff to the European Commission for the organization of Eastern Rumelia played a significant yet underexplored role in shaping British policy in the Near East. His mission in the Balkans represents an important episode in the broader framework of British strategic objectives in the region, particularly as part of its geopolitical rivalry with the Russian Empire. While much of the existing historiography has focused on other aspects of Wolff's diplomatic career, particularly his assignment in Istanbul in 1885,⁴ his earlier involvement in the establishment of Eastern Rumelia has received comparatively little attention. This study seeks to address this gap by examining Wolff's diplomatic activities in the Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia, with particular focus on the elaboration of the Organic Statute and the establishment of the province's administrative structure as instruments of British foreign policy objectives. In doing so, the study highlights Eastern Rumelia's role as a contested space within the British–Russian imperial confrontation and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the geopolitical rivalry that shaped historical developments in the Balkans and the wider Near East.

Eastern Rumelia as a Contested Imperial Space

The establishment of Eastern Rumelia must be understood as a project spearheaded by British Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury, who assumed office in April 1878. It formed part of a carefully devised political strategy to be implemented at the 1878 Congress of Berlin. In the diplomatic lead up to the Congress, Salisbury outlined Britain's position in a letter to the British ambassador to Germany, Lord Odo Russell. He identified four primary concerns stemming from the Treaty of San Stefano and growing Russian presence in the Near East: (1) the ever larger influence of the Slavic state along the Aegean coast; (2) the proximity of this Slavic state to Istanbul, which might place Russia in a position to dominate the Ottoman Empire and, by extension, Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia; (3) Russia's territorial gains in Asia; and (4) the potential threat to Britain's maritime rights, particularly its ability to impose a blockade in the Black Sea. To address these threats, Salisbury proposed specific measures. The first of these was the division of the Slavic state (Bulgaria) into two separate entities,

4 Hornik, "The Mission of Sir Henry"; Roger, "Surviving the Drummond Wolff."

including the creation of a province with a Greek character along the southern border, which would mitigate threats posed by points (1) and (2). The second was to curtail Russian territorial gains in Asia either through the voluntary cession by Russia of territory or through diplomatic agreement concerning the boundaries of the new Slavic state.⁵

Later in May, during the negotiations preceding the Congress between Lord Salisbury and Count Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador in London, the establishment of Eastern Rumelia emerged as a key point of contention. The province's creation was formally sanctioned by the Salisbury–Shuvalov Memorandum, signed on May 30, 1878.⁶ This agreement represented a major compromise between British and Russian strategic goals, and it strongly influenced the outcome of the Congress of Berlin. With respect to the province to be established to the south of the Balkan Mountains, the Russian authorities conceded to Britain's view that this province should be granted broad administrative autonomy, comparable to that found in British colonies, with a Christian governor appointed for a term of five to ten years, subjected to the approval of the European powers.⁷ At the same time, Salisbury strongly insisted on the necessity of the political and military subordination of Eastern Rumelia to the Ottoman Empire, as he considered this an essential precondition to ensure the Empire's resilience against external invasion and diplomatic coercion.⁸ Salisbury's political vision rested on the idea that, although Eastern Rumelia had to be subordinated to the ultimate authority to the sultan, at the same time, the province was to enjoy a degree of autonomy sufficient to conduct its relations with Russia. In this way, the province would play a strong role as a strategic buffer and guardian of the Straits, while also indirectly supporting the stability of the Ottoman Empire's vast Asian territories.⁹

Salisbury's policy thus defined the framework within which Eastern Rumelia was to be organized to fulfil its intended geopolitical function. According to Article XVIII of the Treaty of Berlin, a commission composed of the representatives of the Great Powers was to be established for the purpose of drafting an Organic Statute. This law would define the rights of the governor

5 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil A27, Marquis of Salisbury to Lord Odo Russel, April 19, no. 2, 3–8.

6 Weeks, "Peter Shuvalov," D1056; Козименко, *Сборник договоров России*, 176–79.

7 TNA, F.O. 93/81/47, Memorandum communicated to the Marquis of Salisbury by Count Schouvaloff, May 23, 1878, 41–42.

8 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil, A 20, Marquis of Salisbury to the Queen, May 6, 1878, no. 22, 66–68.

9 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil A31, Marquis of Salisbury to Lord August Loftus, May 7 1878, no. 4, 9–10.

general and regulate the administrative, judicial, and financial organization of the province, as well as the regulations and functions of the local militia, all within a three-month period.¹⁰

To advance Britain's interests in the region, in July 1878, Lord Salisbury appointed Sir Henry Drummond Wolff as Britain's delegate to the European Commission for Eastern Rumelia. Wolff quickly became a key figure in shaping and executing British policy in the region. He played a central role not only in strengthening British influence in the Balkans but also in implementing Salisbury's broader Near Eastern strategy. Following the Congress of Berlin, the struggle to realize Salisbury's vision shifted from the diplomatic arena to the local political stage within the Province itself. Thus, a new phase began in the British–Russian rivalry in the form of a “chess game” over the administrative organization of Eastern Rumelia. Due to the continued Russian military occupation of the province, which was settled for nine months, Russia maintained a stronger bargaining position.¹¹ This constrained Britain's ability to implement fully its political objectives and exert control over developments on the ground. And exactly here lay the significance of Wolff's mission. As a figure on the ground, he was uniquely positioned to observe the political dynamics, assess Russian intentions, gauge the Ottoman reaction, and adjust British policy in real time to achieve its objectives.

As part of his diplomatic mission, Wolff traveled to Vienna and Budapest on his way to Istanbul. He held a meeting in the capitals with Count Nesselrode, Caratheodory Pasha¹² (an Ottoman representative at Congress of Berlin), and various Hungarian politicians. These meetings were essential, as they offered Wolff an opportunity to assess the positions of other regional actors on Eastern Rumelia. His conversation with Caratheodory Pasha revealed Ottoman anxieties about the future organization of the province, anxieties which indeed were similar to those of Britain and the rest of the Great Powers. As Wolff reported,

the rights of the province, he [Caratheodory Pasha] thought, should be first established, and then the rest should be left to the sultan. If too much liberty were given to the Slav race the result would be the reproduction of the Treaty of San Stefano: Bulgaria south of the Balkans would be united to Bulgaria north of the Balkans; Eastern Rumelia and Constantinople would be threatened by a hostile State,

10 Стателова, *Източна Румелия*, 13.

11 Икономов, *Протоколи на Берлински конгрес*, 54–55.

12 For more information: Efe, “Bir Osmanlı Bürokrati,” 83–93; Akpınar, “Bir Tanzimat Bürokrati”; Syed Wasti, “Three Ottoman Pashas,” 938–51.

compassing the Russians; Bulgarians under Russia had at first proposed to which...¹³

During his visit, Wolff also met with Benjámín Kállay, who was the Austro-Hungarian Empire's appointed representative on the commission. Their discussions proved highly productive. Kállay proposed that the Serbian constitution, with which he was familiar, could serve as a model for the constitution of Eastern Rumelia. This suggestion had a significant influence on Wolff. The collaboration with Kállay and the exposure to the Serbian constitutional framework helped shape his approach to the administrative structure of the province. Reflecting on the challenges ahead, Wolff described the complexity of the task facing the commission:

What is wanted is this. A good government adapted to the people of the province. The essentials of such government are a strong Executive in the hands of the sultan on his representation and representative institutions strong enough to protect the people from misrule and oppression but not to control the executive especially in the point necessary for the maintenance of the sultan authority.¹⁴

A crucial early challenge for the commission involved determining the nature of the authority to be established in Eastern Rumelia. Many had assumed that the province would be restored to the status of a regular Ottoman vilayet. However, Wolff strongly opposed this idea. He argued that such a step was both impracticable and politically regressive:

Such a course was evidently impracticable; for, while it was the determination of the Power at Berlin to prevent Rumelia from becoming part of a semi-independent principality like Bulgaria, it was not intended to restore abuses which certainly had previously existed.¹⁵

In this matter, Wolff found support in Kállay. At the state level, cooperation between Britain and Austria–Hungary was established early during the Congress of Berlin and proved fruitful. The Balkan policy of the Dual Monarchy largely coincided with that of Britain in seeking to limit Russian expansion in the region. Vienna pursued this objective through a strategy aimed at weakening Russian ties to the Slavic peoples of the Balkans. This was clearly demonstrated by

13 TNA, F.O. 901/1, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Vienna, August 24, 1878.

14 TNA, F.O. 901/1, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Pesth, September 1, 1878.

15 Wolff, *Rambling Recollections*, 201.

Austria–Hungary’s involvement in the European Commission.¹⁶ Before his departure, Kállay was instructed by the foreign minister, Count Gyula Andrassy, to cooperate with Britain and the Ottoman Empire to prevent the Russian authorities from obstructing the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty for Eastern Rumelia.¹⁷ When this broader state-level cooperation is considered alongside the personal relationship that developed between Wolff and Kállay, the alignment becomes even clearer. According to Wolff, Kállay expressed a clear willingness to cooperate in shaping the resolutions of the Commission. It is evident that the two statesmen influenced each other’s views regarding the organization of Eastern Rumelia.¹⁸ Kállay later recalled that during the Congress of Berlin the British authorities had considered it necessary to grant specific rights to the province to provide safeguards against the reemergence of previous abuses, but he had maintained and openly stated that any substantial divergence between the administrative organization of Eastern Rumelia and that of the other Ottoman provinces would risk fostering separatist tendencies and the eventual unification of the two Bulgarian entities.¹⁹ However, during the later work of the Commission, István Diószegi argues that not only Austria–Hungary’s strategic concept but even Kállay’s personal views were consistent with the British position, and he appeared to cooperate with British political aims in Eastern Rumelia. As a result, strategic Anglo-Austrian collaboration emerged. Both parties sought, through careful institutional design, to establish an Eastern Rumelia the liberal constitutional framework of which would serve as a safeguard against union with Bulgaria.²⁰ Kállay essentially adopted Wolff’s attitude toward the future organization of Eastern Rumelia, maintaining that a barrier against Russian influence and unionist propaganda could be created only through a government framework that would establish “truly modern institutions that promote civilization.”²¹ His position was regarded as “too liberal,” and it was not approved by Andrassy, who felt that “the greater the difference between the conditions in Turkey and Eastern Rumelia, the stronger the incentive for the union of Eastern Rumelia and Bulgaria.”²²

16 Diószegi, *Ausztria-Magyarország*, 40.

17 Каменов, *Γραφ. Ανδρасси*, 148.

18 TNA, F.O. 901/1, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Pesth, August 31, 1878.

19 Diószegi, *Ausztria-Magyarország*, 52.

20 Ibid., 49.

21 Ibid., 52.

22 Ibid., 62.

Wolff's political stance regarding the organization of Eastern Rumelia favored the establishment of an institution with a significant degree of autonomy. He felt that a carefully structured system of self-government would act as a barrier against pro-unification agitations, which would emanate from the Principality of Bulgaria and have the support of Russian influence.²³ However, on August 27, 1878, Lord Salisbury expressed opposition to this stance, describing it as unwise and particularly susceptible to risk. In a formal instruction sent to Wolff, Salisbury articulated his concerns regarding the delicate balance of power between the legislative and executive branches within the projected constitutional framework of Eastern Rumelia. His warning was particularly rooted in the region's complex ethnic nature. Salisbury feared that the Bulgarian majority in the province might seek to assert dominance through the legislature, while the executive, remaining loyal to the Ottoman Empire, could become politically isolated. The underlying fear was that excessive political autonomy, particularly in the hands of a nationalist-leaning legislature, could lead to instability and threaten the strategic balance in the region. While Salisbury acknowledged the importance of civil liberties, he advised caution in extending political freedoms, arguing that such measures risked encouraging factionalism, corruption, and a breakdown of order.²⁴ His concerns reflected a broader imperial dilemma about how to grant sufficient autonomy to satisfy local aspirations while maintaining centralized control in multiethnic regions vulnerable to nationalist movements and external interference.

Wolff and the European Commission

The European Commission officially commenced its work in Istanbul with its first formal meeting on September 18, 1878. To assist Sir H. Drummond Wolff in his duties, the Earl of Donoughmore was appointed assistant commissioner.²⁵ The other members of the commission included Le Baron de Ring (the delegate from France), Kállay (the delegate from Austria–Hungary), Colonel Schepelew

23 *Correspondence respecting the proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Rumelia*, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Vienna, August 24, 1878. Turkey No. 9 (1879), 8–9.

24 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil A34, Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, August 27, 1878, 1–4, no. 1.

25 *Correspondence respecting the proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Rumelia*, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, August 10, 1878. Turkey No. 9 (1879), 2.

and Prince Tzertelew (the delegates from Russia), Assim Pasha and Abro Effendi (the delegates from the Ottoman Empire), and Chevalier Veroni (as a representative of Italy).²⁶ Short thereafter, the commission relocated to Plovdiv, the capital of the province. The first session there took place on October 21, 1878.²⁷ Although the commission's work was initially intended to be completed within three months, the complexity of the issues necessitated an extension of its mandate. The Organic Statute was finally drafted and signed on April 26, 1879.

Despite the diplomatic investment in the issue of Eastern Rumelia, Lord Salisbury expressed early skepticism regarding the prospects of the commission's chance of success. In a letter to Wolff dated September 18, he wrote the following: "The general appearance of the prospect of commission are gloomy. It is a work which, of course, can only succeed, if undertaken by all with a wish to make it succeed." Salisbury advised Wolff to act on the assumption that opposition would come consistently from two members, those representing Russia and Germany, and therefore to build consensus among the remaining majority. However, this posed a significant procedural challenge, as the commission was structured to operate based on unanimity, requiring all decisions to be approved collectively. For the mission to succeed, Salisbury outlined four principal conditions:

It should be, if possible, combine these—somewhat—characteristics:
1. It should take Austria with you. 2. It should be on something which the Turks value highly, so that after the breach has taken place you may be able to say them, "See what I saved you from." 3. It should not be sufficiently anti-liberal to enable Gladstone to call you a second Metternich. 4. It should not urge the Greek population against you. That you should conciliate the Bulgars of course we must give up as Utopian.²⁸

It was evident that Salisbury's strategy relied heavily on Austria to counter-balance Russian influence and, ultimately, push Russia out of Eastern Rumelia, an objective that formed the central purpose of this diplomatic enterprise, as Wolff himself admitted in his memoirs.²⁹ Furthermore, the role of the Greek population as a political instrument against Bulgarian influence was once again

26 Wolff, *Rambling Collection*, 198–200.

27 Стоянов, "Изработване на Органически устав," 66.

28 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil A34, Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, September 18, 1878, no. 2, 5–7.

29 Wolff, *Rambling collection*, 197.

acknowledged. The internal political context, particularly the potential reaction of British liberal opinion, was also taken into account in shaping the course of action.

The Russian position became unequivocally clear shortly after the commission began its work. On September 21, Earl of Donoghmore reported on his first meeting with the Russian imperial commissioner, Prince Dondukov Korsakov.³⁰ In this encounter, the Russian authorities made it explicitly clear that they would oppose the implementation of the British program for Eastern Rumelia, “whatever it might be.” Prince Dondukov declared his refusal to relinquish control over the Province’s finances and raised concerns regarding the proposed organization of the militia. He warned that the local militia would not accept the officers nominated by the sultan, as stipulated in Article XV of the Treaty, and he cautioned that any attempt to impose such appointments could lead to violence. Furthermore, Dondukov urged the commission to adopt the existing constitution already introduced by the Russian administration, stating that it could be revised, if necessary, but that all government arrangements should remain in their current form until such revisions had been agreed upon.³¹

Upon its relocation to Plovdiv, the European commission soon revealed that the situation in the province was quite different from what the British authorities had anticipated. Russian influence in the region remained deeply entrenched, and there was widespread opposition among the Bulgarian population to the implementation of the Berlin Treaty’s provisions, particularly those aimed at the restoration of Ottoman authority in the region. Demonstrations, petitions, and press articles expressed the population’s readiness to defend its freedom and reject any attempt to reassert the sultan’s authority. These expressions of dissent were accompanied and reinforced by military displays, making it clear that the commission’s efforts would be met with organized resistance.³²

The task of drafting the Organic Statute was divided among the members of the European commission, with each commissioner assigned responsibilities for specific chapters. The Russian commissioners refused to participate actively

30 A Provisional Russian Administration with civil functions was established in the territories occupied by the Russian army during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Following the Treaty of San Stefano, Prince Dondukov was appointed imperial commissioner of Bulgaria. See Манолова, *Нормотворческа дейност*, 31–39; Муратов, *Документи за дейността*.

31 TNA, FO. 901/ 9, from the Marquis of Salisbury to Lord A. Loftus, Foreign Office, October 15, 1878, no. 533.

32 Манолова, *Русия и конституционното*, 68–75.

in the overall preparation of the statute. They contributed only to the sections concerning provisions for the militia and the gendarmerie.³³ Wolff was tasked with preparing the sections concerning “Public Law” and “Provincial Assembly,” arguably the most politically sensitive components of the statute.³⁴ Recognizing the importance of this assignment, Salisbury wrote to Wolff on October 1, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between civil and political liberties. He maintained that fundamental civil rights such as public order, the safety of life and property, access to fair justice, and protection against excessive taxation were essential components of governance. These, he argued, should not be sacrificed in the name of preserving the Ottoman Empire. However, he cautioned that the real threat to the sultan’s supremacy did not lie in these civil rights, but in the unchecked expansion of political rights. He insisted that the true threat to stability was posed by political liberties such as the freedom to agitate, plot, and use a parliamentary position for treason and thus bring the government to a standstill. In his view, Wolff’s task was to strike a careful balance, granting enough political liberties to safeguard civil rights but not so many so as to empower pro-Russian factions or destabilize the provincial administration. Salisbury also warned against placing excessive faith in the loyalty or gratitude of the local population, remarking pointedly that gratitude “is a chimera, whose habitat is after dinner speech” and that people are only content when they “don’t see their way of anything better by stirring.” As the Bulgarians still had national aspirations, Salisbury concluded that any institutions built on the presumed satisfaction of the local population would likely prove ephemeral.³⁵

The first draft of the Organic Statute was presented in early November by the Austro-Hungarian delegate, the aforementioned Kállay.³⁶ It was accepted “tacitly and expressly” by all the European delegates, and it became a basis for

33 *Correspondence respecting the proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Rumelia*, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, November 7, 1878. Turkey No. 9 (1879), 118–19.

34 Стателова, *Източна Румелия*, 24.

35 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil A34, from the Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, October 1, 1878, 9–12, no. 3. “I would not rely too much on the contentment or gratitude of the people. The second is a chimera, whose habitat is an after dinner speech. The first only keeps a people quiet, when they don’t see their way of anything better by stirring.”

36 *Correspondence respecting the proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Rumelia*, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, November 3, 1878. Turkey No. 9 (1879), 111.

the further work of the commission.³⁷ According to this proposal, if the European commission could successfully implement the program in Eastern Rumelia, it would guarantee the rights and freedoms of the population, establish a modern financial and judicial administration, develop an advanced educational system, and create a strong executive authority alongside a capable civil administration devoted to the province's prosperity.³⁸ Salisbury welcomed the proposal, stating, "[t]he scheme appears to afford a very clear and comprehensive sketch of the framework of such a constitution as the commission is desired to prepare, and of the principles by which they should be guided in the task."³⁹

Britain sought to reduce Russian dominance in Eastern Rumelia, and if that objective could not be achieved by the subordination of the province to strong Ottoman authority, it could be perhaps be reached by giving extensive rights of self-government to the Bulgarians, which would also mean a chance for the population to free itself from Russian influence. This was the position that Wolff defends at length in his work, endeavoring to persuade Salisbury. Despite this shift in the British strategy, however, the commission's work proved difficult. In December, Wolff reported that nearly two months after the commission had begun its work in Plovdiv, no meaningful progress had been made. He attributed the delay to Russia's persistent unwillingness to cooperate.⁴⁰

Significant disagreement emerged between the Russian and British delegates during the discussion of the chapter of the Organic Statute on "Public Law," particularly on the provisions that were crucial to the defense of the future governance of the province. The initial draft prepared by Wolff stipulated that, with the exception of the governor general and the governor general's secretary, all senior officials, officers, and judges were to be appointed by the sultan.⁴¹ Russians delegates strongly objected to this clause, viewing it as a limitation of the province's administrative autonomy. A compromise was eventually reached. The directors of departments, the judges of the High Court, and the local governments would be appointed by the governor general, but these appointments

37 TNA, F.O. 78/3034, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 3, 1879, 131–34.

38 Манолева, *Русия и конституционното*, 83.

39 TNA, F.O. 901/9, Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, November 21, 1878, no. 114.

40 TNA, F.O. 881/3910, Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, December 25, 1878, 105–6.

41 Манолева, *Русия и конституционното*, 87.

would be subject to the approval of the sultan. Additionally, the governor general was granted the authority to appoint military officers up to the rank of captain.⁴²

Another contentious issue was the Sultan's right to approve laws passed by the Provincial Assembly, a provision that effectively placed all legislative authority under the control of the Porte. To address this concern, another compromise was reached. The sultan retained the right to approve the legislation, but if no formal rejection was issued within two months, the law would automatically be considered passed.⁴³ Although this arrangement undermined Ottoman authority, Wolff considered it a necessary measure to prevent legislative deadlock and facilitate the administrative development of the province. He defended his view in front of Salisbury:

It will be seen that by our proposals the sultan's sanction is necessary for the confirmation of every law and that in this respect the governor general has no power of sanction apart from the sultan. I fear it will be unavoidable in the first instance that the Porte will look unfavorably on the legislation of the province, and it is therefore very desirable that as little opening as possible should be left for any (unreadable word) proceedings, either on one side or the other, caused either by ill will or dilatoriness. It is also desirable that any modifications to a law, desired by the sultan, should be communicated if possible during the session of the assembly, which is not likely to last more than two months.⁴⁴

Initially, Salisbury rejected the measure proposed by Wolff. He expressed concern over its political implications. “[D]o you propose,” he asked, “to deprive sultan of all veto on legislation? Is not that rather dangerous? Might is not result in event of a weak or corrupt governor in laws being passed which would practically unite Rumelia and Bulgaria.”⁴⁵ Despite Salisbury's reservations, Wolff remained acutely aware of the obstacles that could arise from the side of the Porte. Specifically, he recognized the risk that the sultan might reject provincial legislation or delay its approval for extended periods, thereby obstructing the work of the governor general and hindering the development of the province. As a result, Wolff succeeded in persuading Salisbury to accept a compromise that

42 Стателова, *Източна Румелия*, 26.

43 Ibid., 26–27, Манолова, *Русия и конституционното*, 92–108.

44 TNA, F.O. 78/3034, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 2, 1879, 25–27.

45 TNA, F.O. 901/9, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, December 16, 1878, no. 160.

introduced an institutional safeguard as a mechanism by which the government of Eastern Rumelia could continue to function even in the absence of timely imperial approval. Wolff's anxiety regarding the inefficiency and obstructionism of the sultan's administration was soon vindicated. During the seven years of the province's existence, out of twelve laws submitted to the sultan for approval, only three received sanctions. Moreover, of the five annual budgets, not a single one was approved by the sultan.⁴⁶ The record confirmed Wolff's fears that excessive dependence on the Porte would paralyze the province's legislative and financial administration.

The greatest difficulties arose during the discussions concerning the chapter on the "Provincial Assembly," which was also drafted by Wolff. According to the project, the Provincial Assembly of Eastern Rumelia was to be composed of three distinct categories of members: (1) members by right; (2) elected members; and (3) members appointed by the governor general.⁴⁷ The category of members by right was to include the religious heads of the recognized communities, the chief justices, and the financial inspector of the province. The appointed members were subject to a property qualification and were to be selected from among the hundred wealthiest factory owners and landholding farmers. As for the elected members, eligibility was limited to individuals who owned real property within the province.⁴⁸ In this form, the proposal tended to concentrate extensive powers in the hands of the governor general, while considerably restricting the population's right to participate in the governance of the province. The suffrage provisions imposed various limitations, including property and educational qualifications. Furthermore, many members of the Assembly were to be appointed by right or directly selected by the governor general. Had the assembly been established on this model, it would have functioned as a body entirely dependent on the executive authority, thereby rendering its role as a representative and supervisory organ ineffective. In addition, the participation of the Bulgarian population was significantly curtailed.⁴⁹

The Russian commissioners strongly opposed the British proposal. The sharp disagreement between British and Russian delegations over this issue threatened to derail the commission's work, as neither side was initially willing to

46 Маджаров, *Источна Румелия*, 50; Стоянов, "Изработване на Органически устав," 229.

47 TNA, F.O.78/3035 from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, February 9, 1879, 145–47.

48 Стоянов, "Изработване на Органически устав," 75.

49 Манолова, *Русия и конституционното*, 171–74; Стателова, *Источна Румелия*, 30–31.

compromise.⁵⁰ The discussions lasted 39 days. Ultimately, however, a negotiated settlement was reached. The Russian side accepted that the governor general would retain the right to appoint members to the provincial assembly, but this number was limited to ten.⁵¹ This compromise granted the population greater opportunity to participate actively in the governance of the province, giving a relatively liberal character to the regime and creating conditions for political self-development. At the same time, the considerable powers retained by the governor general ensured that the influence of the Ottoman Empire would remain limited in practice, even as formal sovereignty was preserved.

Wolff's efforts contributed to the drafting of an Organic Statute that diverged significantly from the Law of Vilayets,⁵² granting Eastern Rumelia a semi-independent status. Initially, Salisbury aimed to reinforce the authority of the Ottoman Empire and explicitly sought to prevent the emergence of any form of provincial autonomy that might resemble independence. Throughout the drafting process, he remained skeptical, and he repeatedly cautioned Wolff against adopting what he perceived as an overly liberal constitutional model. In one such warning, Salisbury wrote, "[f]or the purpose of getting a fair amount of money; in order to quell sedition or conspiracy, in order to keep the Russians out, and to protect such Mohamedans and Greeks as remain, the sultan ought to have powers such as no constitutional or parliamentary action can impede. These postulates granted, be as liberal as you please."⁵³ Nevertheless, Wolff succeeded in modifying Salisbury's view regarding Eastern Rumelia to some extent, prompting a shift in British policy, particularly as it became increasingly apparent that certain rights granted to Eastern Rumelia were gradually undermining the sultan's authority in the region. One notable provision of the Organic Statute was the formal recognition of the "indigenous" identity, which conferred a form of local nationality and granted citizenship within the Province. In Wolff's view, this provision was valuable not as a safeguard against the Ottoman government

50 TNA, F.O. 78/3035 from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, February 9, 1879, 145–47.

51 Стоянов, "Изработване на Органическия устав," 78–79.

52 A new Vilayet Law was issued in 1867. This law was based on the French administrative system for provinces and was first implemented in 1864 in the Danubian Province. The Vilayet reform aimed to centralize the provincial government and strengthen the connection between the center and the periphery of the empire. A new administrative division of Ottoman territories was established, and the number of provinces was reduced. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 136–71.

53 NRA 9226 Gascoyne-Cecil A34, Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, November 21 1878, 41–43, no. 14.

but rather as a means of preventing interference by the Principality of Bulgaria in the internal affairs of Eastern Rumelia.⁵⁴ Additionally, it was established that Bulgarian would serve as the official language of Eastern Rumelia, while Turkish and Greek could be used only in regions where at least one-third of the population spoke one of those languages. These provisions were seen by some British statesmen, most notably Sir Henry Layard, as steps towards the eventual full independence of Eastern Rumelia.⁵⁵

Wolff also defended his position regarding the administration of the province by emphasizing the economic opportunities that it could offer. According to him, “a certain sort of confidence is growing in the minds of traders and moneyed men in the future prosperity of the province.” He argued that the key to sustaining this economic optimism was the establishment of a stable and just administration, one that would leave no room for intrigue. Such governance, he maintained, would serve as the strongest guarantee for the security of the sultan’s rule. As Wolff firmly argued, “[i]f the Bulgarians of Eastern Rumelia are rendered satisfied and prosperous under the government of the sultan they will remain quiet under this rule. If they are governed as before they will intrigue with Russia, and Europe will still be kept in the state of permanent anxiety.”⁵⁶

British Policy and the Balkan “Chessboard”

On January 25, 1879, Wolff submitted a detailed report on the progress of the commission’s work and the prevailing situation in Eastern Rumelia. According to his assessment, after four months of meetings, only four chapters of the Organic Statute had been completed, while ten remained to be drafted. The financial administration of the province had not yet been brought under the authority of the European commission. Wolff expressed his view concerning the most significant obstacles stemming from Russian policy:

54 TNA, F.O. 78/3035, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, February 12, 1879, 149–51.

55 TNA, F.O. 881/3910, from Sir A.H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, January 6, 1879, 267–70.

56 TNA, F.O. 78/3034, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 9, 1879, 131–34.

I am convinced that they do not want war. But as a matter of pride, they have flourished before the Bulgarians—a flag of defiance to the Berlin Treaty. They have produced an agitation which has assumed dimensions beyond their control and which they now find themselves obliged to follow, at the risk of incurring the hostility of the *Panslavist* organisation both in Russia and abroad.

Their army is fatigued and anxious to return home, and the generals are worried by the complication of their duties. But knowing the feelings they have fostered if not created, they are determined to be able to say to the Bulgarians: “Europe has prevented us from doing all we wished in your favor; but at all events we have secured you a fairly good government, and safety from Turkish misrule. You may therefore bide your time.”⁵⁷

The Provisional Russian Administration in Bulgaria represented a significant obstacle to the implementation of British policy in Eastern Rumelia.⁵⁸ Even after the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, the provisional governments of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia were not formally separated. The general administration of the province had remained under the authority of the governor general of Bulgaria rather than having been placed under an independent provincial governor. Administrative acts and directives continued to be issued from Sofia, reinforcing the perception of a unified governance structure. These circumstances fostered among the Bulgarian population the hope and, indeed, the expectation of a future unification with the Principality of Bulgaria.⁵⁹ The continued overlap in administration not only contravened the spirit of the Treaty of Berlin but also undermined British efforts to preserve Eastern Rumelia’s autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire and to limit Russian influence in the region.

During the work of the European commission, Wolff was compelled to contend not only with persistent Russian opposition on nearly every point but also with the ongoing passivity of the Ottoman representatives. As Sir Henry Layard protested to Caratheodory Pasha, the Ottoman minister of foreign affairs, the Ottoman delegates consistently failed to take an active role in the commission’s deliberations. Layard made the following remark: “in consequence

57 TNA, FO. 78/3034, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 25, 1879, 351–53.

58 TNA, FO. 78/3035, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, February 8, 1879, 57–73.

59 TNA, FO. 78/3034, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 30, 1879, 374–75.

of proper instructions not having been given to the Turkish commissioners, who, unwilling to take upon themselves the responsibility of decision on any question of importance, accept the decisions of their colleagues almost in every case with a ‘reserve.’”⁶⁰ The failure of the sultan’s government to take active steps to fulfil their obligations and assert effective control in Eastern Rumelia was another factor that shaped Wolff’s considerations and forced changes to the British political course. Even three months before the end of the Russian occupation, the Ottoman government had taken no concrete measures to preserve order in the province. As Wolff observed, the Ottoman officials maintained that the Bulgarians would offer no resistance to the Ottoman troops, while ignoring the reality that, should Russians withdraw without appropriate precautionary arrangements, they would be leaving “the seeds of immediate disorder,” having already armed and trained the Bulgarian population.⁶¹ Furthermore, almost all administrative posts were occupied by Bulgarians, an arrangement facilitated by the Russian delegate Tzeretelew.⁶² Wolff was firmly convinced of the influence of pan-Slav agitation, which, in his view, could prompt Russian authorities to intervene in Eastern Rumelia under the pretext of defending the local population. On this issue, Wolff’s concerns were shared by Lord Salisbury, who feared that pan-Slav movements could entangle Britain in a broader conflict, reflecting a growing sense of unease within British political circles.⁶³ However, the two statesmen were divided on the appropriate measures to prevent such a development.

Another contentious issue of significant importance was the establishment of the rights and status of the various nationalities within the province, to be arranged in an appropriately balanced proportion to diminish the threat of a future union with the Principality of Bulgaria. One particularly sensitive matter concerned the authority responsible for appointing bishops in Eastern Rumelia. The Russian delegates argued that the ecclesiastical appointments should fall under the jurisdiction of the local government. However, this proposal met with strong opposition from Salisbury, as conveyed in the instructions sent to Wolff.

60 TNA, F.O. 195/1220, from Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, December 28, 1878.

61 TNA, F.O. 78/3034, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 25, 1879, 351–53.

62 TNA, F.O. 881/3910, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, December 31, 1878, 203.

63 TNA, F.O. 901/11, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, February 6, 1879.

The rationale was clearly stated: “The policy of England is to sustain the Greeks against the Slavs: and we could not support any proposal in an opposite sense.”⁶⁴ Salisbury’s concerns stemmed from his belief that, if the provincial authorities were granted independent control over clerical appointments, free from Ottoman oversight, this could lead to the dominance of the Bulgarian Exarchate at the expense of the Greek Patriarchate. In the event of a schism between the two ecclesiastical institutions, the Bulgarian population might come to dominate over the Greek community within the Province. Such an outcome could result in Eastern Rumelia acquiring an exclusively Bulgarian character, thereby enhancing Russian influence and undermining the province’s status within the Ottoman Empire. The issue remained unresolved and was deferred until the concluding sessions of the European commission. Additionally, alongside the provision for the recognition of three official languages (Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek), these measures were designed not only to reflect the multiethnic character of the province but also to limit the political and cultural dominance of the Slav (Bulgarian) population and to facilitate the creation of a real barrier against Slavism, which was Lord Salisbury’s most fundamental goal.⁶⁵ Despite Salisbury’s strong support for the Greek population, Wolff acknowledged that it was unrealistic to grant them widespread official privileges, given their relatively small numbers and concentration in only a few larger towns. As he explained, this posed a significant obstacle for the commission in justifying the extension of broader rights to them. Nevertheless, he made credible efforts and succeeded in securing “what was feasible for the Greeks.”⁶⁶

In this context, the liberal organization of Eastern Rumelia was not merely an expression of ideological commitment to representative governance. Rather, it functioned as a calculated instrument of geopolitical containment. From the outset, Salisbury pursued the establishment of a multiethnic provincial model in Eastern Rumelia as a strategic response to the Ottoman Empire’s diminishing capacity to assert effective authority over its European territories. By the implementation of a multiethnic administrative framework, he sought to preserve

64 TNA, F.O. 901/11, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, February 25, 1879; TNA, F.O.78/3033, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, February 25, 1879, 164–69.

65 *Correspondence respecting the proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Rumelia*, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, December 2, 1878. Turkey No. 9 (1979), 241–42.

66 TNA, F.O. 78/3035, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, December 16, 1878, 149–51.

Ottoman suzerainty, creating a buffer against further Russian penetration into and advancement towards the Straits. However, the unchecked predominance of the Bulgarian population, combined with the ongoing migration of the Muslim population, threatened to transform Eastern Rumelia into a political entity with a distinctly Bulgarian character, situated in threatening proximity to Istanbul. This kind of demographic and political shift posed two major threats from the British perspective: the unification of Eastern Rumelia with the Principality of Bulgaria and the extension of Russian influence into the Balkans. While the British authorities accepted the introduction of a liberal constitutional framework in the province, their underlying objective was to use that system as an instrument for the political and cultural reinforcement of the Muslim and Greek populations.⁶⁷

Although Britain's foreign policy projected firmness, it was nonetheless subject to periodic adjustments in response to shifting geopolitical realities. The Greeks were generally viewed by British policymakers as a useful counterbalance to the growing momentum of pan-Slavism across the Balkans. However, Wolff felt that a more nuanced approach towards the Bulgarians was necessary, particularly concerning their churches in Eastern Rumelia and in other Ottoman-controlled territories inhabited by Bulgarians. The Greek Patriarch sought to diminish the influence of the Bulgarian Exarch by demanding that the Exarch be confined to the Principality of Bulgaria and that Bulgarian churches in Macedonia, Thrace, and other Ottoman provinces be dissolved or placed under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch. Such a move, however, would effectively revoke the religious liberties already granted to the Bulgarian church community, and in Wolff's view, it would inevitably push the Bulgarian population to seek protection and support from Russia. Wolff argued that it would be more advantageous for the Ottoman Empire to adopt a more conciliatory stance toward the Exarchate:

The Bulgarians from Turkey should look to Constantinople for their ecclesiastical authority, and the Exarch should govern his churches under a supervision which can only be exercised by the Capital. It is impossible to do away with his authority by artificial means, or permanently to subject the Bulgarian majority to the Greek minority by some quibble of ecclesiastical law which pretends to do away with the existing schism. Excommunication has terrors only so long as it is not pronounced.⁶⁸

67 Манолева, *Русия и конституционното*, 39–40.

68 TNA, F.O. 78/3039, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, May 19, 1879, no. 221, 57–62.

Wolff's position reflects a pragmatic understanding of the religious and national dynamics in the region. Rather than attempting to suppress the Bulgarian church through coercive means (a scheme which probably would have backfired and led to an increase in Russian influence), he advocated a model of ecclesiastical oversight centered in Istanbul, thereby preserving Ottoman authority while accommodating Bulgarian religious identity.

Had this proposal been accepted, it would have preserved a degree of authority for the sultan over the Bulgarian population and would have given no further justification for or momentum to pan-Slav propaganda concerning the Bulgarian question. From Wolff's perspective, the most effective way to counter the influence of pan-Slavism among the Bulgarians was not through repressive measures, but rather by strategically dividing the movement into separate centers of influence and thus undermining its cohesion.⁶⁹

One of the principal concerns of the British authorities regarding Eastern Rumelia was the preservation of public order and stability in the province following the withdrawal of Russian troops. Britain feared that any outbreak of unrest could provide the Russian authorities with a pretext to extend their military occupation beyond the agreed period.⁷⁰ In this context, the question of establishing of Ottoman garrisons to secure the military defense of Eastern Rumelia became a matter of primary importance for Salisbury. Article XV of the Treaty of Berlin gave the Ottoman Empire the right to station troops in the province.⁷¹ From the outset, this provision was effectively ignored by the Russian authorities. However, Salisbury insisted that "Britain cannot abandon in any degree the right of Turkey to garrison the Balkans."⁷² For Britain, the presence of Ottoman military forces in Eastern Rumelia was essential, not only as a guarantee for the sultan's authority but also as a safeguard against the province's potential detachment from the empire and its transformation into a dominantly Bulgarian-administered territory. Such a development would have created favorable conditions for unification of the province with the Principality of Bulgaria, an outcome Britain sought to avoid. In the proceedings of the European commission, the issue of Ottoman garrisons was repeatedly raised. Salisbury

69 TNA, F.O. 78/3039, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, May 19, 1879, no. 221, 57–62.

70 TNA, F.O. 195/1215, from Sir Henry Elliot to the Marquis of Salisbury, Vienna, January 3, 1879.

71 Дюрастел, *Международен алманах*, 25–47.

72 TNA, F.O.195/1215, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, January 31, 1879.

consistently reaffirmed Britain's opposition to any modification of the Treaty of Berlin clause permitting an Ottoman military presence.⁷³

Indeed, once the British government became fully acquainted with the conditions in Eastern Rumelia through Wolff's reports, it recognized the threat posed by the deployment of Ottoman garrisons that might operate independently of the governor general's control. There was particular concern that such forces could mistreat the local Bulgarian population, especially in the initial phase of transferring administrative authority back to the sultan. The risk was not overlooked. In fact, it was explicitly acknowledged by Salisbury, who stressed the need for preventive measures.⁷⁴

In response to the growing complexity of the situation, British authorities began to consider alternative strategies. During a meeting between Wolff and the Bulgarian exarch, the latter insisted that the Bulgarian population expected Ottoman garrisons to be prohibited from entering the Balkans.⁷⁵ Reflecting these concerns, Wolff addressed an observation to Salisbury in which he outlined a potential compromise regarding the Porte's right to station and fortify troops in the region. Specifically, he proposed restricting Ottoman troops to the coastal frontier at Bourgas, while retaining a substantial military force at Adrianople and approximately 5,000 troops in Djuma, Mustapha Pasha (nowadays the region of Svilengrad), and the Rhodope region. Furthermore, Wolff recommended that any garrisons stationed near the frontier should, at least initially, be accompanied by British officers as well as representatives from other signatory powers willing to participate.⁷⁶ This strategic arrangement was viewed by British officials as a key advantage. It allowed the Ottoman government to retain control over the maritime entry point in Eastern Rumelia while concentrating its forces in a central location from which it could rapidly respond to threats and, if necessary, reassert control over the Balkan interior. Additionally, this disposition provided the Ottoman Empire with leverage in negotiating the construction of a strategic railway route along the Balkan mountain range, further strengthening its logistical and military position in the province.

73 TNA, F.O. 901/9, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, December 16, 1878, no. 160.

74 TNA, F.O. 901/9, from Marquis of Salisbury to Sir H. Drummond Wolff, Foreign Office, December 14, 1878, no. 161.

75 TNA, F.O.195/1215, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, January 29, 1879.

76 TNA, F.O. 78/3036, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis, March 9, 1879, no. 106, 140–43.

The negotiations failed to produce a satisfactory resolution, and by April, just one month before the expiration of the Russian occupation, an impasse had been reached on the question of the entry of Ottoman garrisons into Eastern Rumelia. The Russian authorities strenuously opposed the deployment of Ottoman military forces in Eastern Rumelia, as Wolff reported his observations:

The chief aim which the Russians have had in view when exiting and arming the Bulgarians and recently proposing the mixed occupation, has been to postpone and ultimately prevent altogether the execution of that clause of the Berlin Treaty which provides that the Balkans shall be garrisoned by Ottoman troops without the necessity of undertaking a new war for the purpose.⁷⁷

As a result, Salisbury was forced to yield on this issue. The Ottoman Empire was permanently denied the opportunity to reestablish a standing military presence in Eastern Rumelia, and this outcome effectively undermined Salisbury's project for the establishment of Eastern Rumelia as a military bulwark for the defense of Istanbul. Nevertheless, Article XVI of the Treaty of Berlin, which granted the governor general the right to summon Ottoman troops in the event of internal or external threat, remained a valuable strategic instrument with which to maintain British influence in the region. By vesting this authority in the governor general, British policymakers secured an indirect mechanism of control over the internal security of the province. The mere power potentially to invoke this right served as a strong deterrent against rebellion and a tool with which to enforce political discipline. This strategic leverage was exercised from the earliest moments of Eastern Rumelia's autonomous days. The British consul recounted having offered a warning, for instance, to a delegation of Bulgarian notables: "although the Turks might not be in occupation of the Balkans, yet their troops could certainly be brought into the province at the slightest symptom of disorder or rebellion. I impressed them with the necessity of respecting the law."⁷⁸ In this way, Britain managed to preserve a key element of leverage in Eastern Rumelia, even if the prospect of direct Ottoman military control had been foreclosed.

The outcome of the European commission's work was critically assessed by Count Andrassy, who made the following remarks:

77 TNA, F.O. 78/3037, Memorandum from Sir H. Drummond Wolff, April 11, 1879, no. 163, 284–85.

78 CDA, KMF 04, inv. no. 106/1, l. 43–54.

The European commission proceeded in a contrary direction, and the Organic Statute now about to be put in force leaves scarcely a vestige of direct authority to the sultan, who, except as regards one or two superior officers of militia, can neither appoint nor dismiss a civil or military functionary in the province, and the whole executive authority is permanently delegated to an irremovable governor general, who necessarily has to be selected less for any supposed aptitude for the post than with a view to secure the requisite unanimous sanction of the Powers.⁷⁹

In practice, the modifications introduced, primarily under the British influence, significantly deviated from the initial objective of reinforcing Ottoman sovereignty, as originally outlined in the Treaty of Berlin. Instead, they contributed to the broader strategic aim of British policy to limit Russia's influence in the Balkans, while simultaneously offering the Bulgarian population an opportunity to pursue a distinct path of political administrative development within the framework of formal suzerainty.

Although the British authorities introduced several significant modifications to the administrative framework, their fundamental policy objectives, formulated during the Eastern Crisis, remained unchanged. Chief among them was the determination to prevent Russia from gaining access to the Mediterranean.⁸⁰ Throughout the drafting of the Organic Statute and the creation of the province's governing system, Salisbury's policy was constantly shaped by the fear that the Tsarist authorities were laying the groundwork for annexation. There was persistent concern in London that, following the withdrawal of Russian troops, Britain might be confronted with a *fait accompli*, wherein Russia would proclaim control over Eastern Rumelia, rendering diplomatic resistance both difficult and potentially futile.⁸¹

In the initial phase of the diplomatic project, amid frequent clashes between the Russian and British delegates, Wolff made the following observation: "We could not expect the Russian authorities and functionaries to obey us, nor could we entirely supersede them before having formed a system to take their

79 TNA, F.O. 195/1220, from Sir H. Elliot to the Marquis of Salisbury, Vienna, June 18, 1879.

80 TNA, F.O. 78/3041, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis Salisbury, Philippopolis, February 14, 1879, 107–9.

81 TNA, F.O. 78/3041, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis Salisbury, Constantinople, April 4, 1879, no. 132, 283–84.

place.”⁸² This statement encapsulated Wolff’s central objective with regards to his mission in Eastern Rumelia to establish an Organic Statute and administrative framework capable of replacing the existing Russian provisional administration. Reflecting further on his mission, Wolff made the remark: “My anxiety has always been to maintain the Treaty, but to see how far its existing provisions could be carried out without provoking the insurrection prepared by the Russians.”⁸³

Conclusion

The Bulgarian historian Milko Palangurski argues that Eastern Rumelia occupied an inherently ambiguous position, lacking both the degree of autonomy and self-governance enjoyed by the Principality of Bulgaria and the formal status of a traditional Ottoman vilayet. Situated between two spheres of influence, it was only natural for the province to gravitate either toward Sofia, aligning with the movement to unify with the Principality of Bulgarian, or toward Istanbul, reaffirming its ties with the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁴

Ultimately, Eastern Rumelia chose the path of unification with the Principality of Bulgaria, an outcome that Lord Salisbury had explicitly sought to prevent through the commission’s work and the establishment of the administrative structure and governmental authorities of the autonomous province. However, the proclamation of unification on September 6, 1885 did not represent a sudden failure or collapse of British policy. Rather, it constituted the culmination and paradoxical fulfilment of Britain’s longer-term strategic vision for the province. Salisbury’s primary objective had been the gradual dismantling of Russian influence in the Balkans. Ironically, this objective was realized through the very act of Union that violated the legal framework of the Treaty of Berlin and contradicted Salisbury’s publicly stated views. The unification effectively terminated Russian leverage in Bulgaria by precipitating a rupture in diplomatic relations between the Russian Empire and its satellite in 1886.

Therefore, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff’s mission to Eastern Rumelia must be recognized as a lasting diplomatic success. The commission’s final product,

82 *Correspondence respecting the proceedings of the European Commission for the Organization of Eastern Rumelia*, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to Marquise of Salisbury, Therapia, October 8, 1878. Turkey No. 9 (1979), 43–44.

83 TNA, F.O. 78/3041, from Sir H. Drummond Wolff to the Marquis of Salisbury, March 12, 1879, Philippopolis, 205–26.

84 Палангурски, *Нова история на България I*, 98.

the Organic Statute, embodied a delicate balancing act. It granted sufficient local autonomy to satisfy internal demands while preserving mechanisms of external oversight, embedded safeguards for Ottoman sovereignty, and subtly reinforced British leverage within the province. Viewed in this light, Eastern Rumelia was not merely an administrative experiment, but a strategically engineered geopolitical construction designed as a buffer zone to resist further Russian encroachment and postpone Bulgarian unification until it served British interests.

Wolff's mission thus illustrates how Britain adapted liberal constitutional principles to serve imperial goals. Eastern Rumelia stands as a compelling example of how nineteenth-century Great Power's diplomacy translated legal frameworks into instruments of strategic control, blurring the lines between governance and geopolitics.

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