

The Annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1908

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Abstract

I gave an address at the Second Congress of the Asian Association of World Historians which was held April 28th 2012 at Ewha Womans University (Seoul, Korea). This speech is about the Annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1908.

The origin of the annexation of Bosnia(-Herzegovina) by Austria-Hungary in October 1908 is the occupation in 1878. Austria-Hungary could get the right of the occupation of Ottoman territory Bosnia at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The foreign minister of Austria-Hungary, Andr ssy, worried about a possibility; if Austria-Hungary would not get Bosnia, Bosnia would fall into the hand Serbia. So he decided the acquirement of Bosnia. The reason why he tried to get Bosnia not through “annexation” but “occupation” is that he wanted to get Bosnia on the basis of “the Concert of Europe”.

What is the main reason Austria-Hungary decided to annex Bosnia in 1908? The most important reason is the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The Young Turk government declared the allocation of the parliamentary seats for Bosnia. People thought that the Young Turk had showed the determination that they would recover Bosnia. The foreign minister of Austria-Hungary, Aehrenthal, had an idea; if it is impossible to maintain the “status quo” in the Balkan, Austria-Hungary might annex Bosnia. In September 1908 he had a conference with Russian foreign minister and could get agreement of the annexation from him. But the difference between them was whether international conference for the annexation is hold or not. Aehrenthal thought it was unnecessary. In October 5th 1908 the ottoman autonomous Bulgarian principality declared the independence. After that declaration Austria-Hungary announced the annexation of Bosnia.

Russia got angry with the announcement without consultation. She could not get the support from Britain and France. Finally 5 Great Powers(incl. Russia) approved the annexation. And Ottoman Empire recognized it. Serbia was opposed to the annexation at first. But she followed the Russian advice and finally agreed. In April 1909 the annexation of Bosnia was officially admitted through the revision of the treaty of Berlin.

1. Introduction

On October 6th 1908, Franz Josef, monarch of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, notified the rescript about the Annexation of the two provinces; Bosnia-Herzegovina (=Bosnia). Bosnia was for a long time under the suzerainty of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. But since 1878 Austria-Hungary had the right

of occupation and administrative responsibility for Bosnia.

“In order to raise Bosnia and Herzegovina to a higher level of political life, we have resolved to grant both of those lands constitutional government that are suited to the prevailing conditions and general interests, so as to create a legal basis for the representation of their wishes and needs. You shall henceforth have a voice when decisions are made concerning your domestic affairs, which, as hitherto, will have a separate administration. But the necessary premise for the introduction of this provincial constitution is the creation of a clear and unambiguous legal status for the two lands.”

“For this reason, (.....) we extend our suzerainty over Bosnia and Herzegovina, (.....). The new order of things will be a guarantee that civilization and prosperity will find a sure footing in your home.”

(from *London Weekly Times*, October 9, 1908)

This is so-called the Annexation of Bosnia in 1908. In 1908 Austria-Hungary was not at war. Why Austria-Hungary did annex Bosnia in 1908? Today I want to talk this question; concretely three points: First, character of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In short, multi-national Empire and the process of the decision of foreign policy. Second, the background of the occupation of Bosnia in 1878. Third, the reason of the Annexation in 1908.

2. The Character of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

During the Napoleonic War the domains of the House of Habsburg was called as “the Austrian Empire”. She retreated “de facto” from Italy and Germany in 1850s and 60s because of the defeats of the War of Unification. Especially the defeat of the “Austro-Prussian War” of 1866 had important meaning. In short, after this defeat the nation-system changed into “Dual Monarchy”. “Dual Monarchy” means that one monarch rules the two entities, Austria and Hungary. He rules in Austria as “Emperor of Austria” and in Hungary as “King of Hungary”. We say this system “real union”. Before 1866 the German was a ruling nation. But after 1866 not only the German but also Hungarian (we usually say Magyar) became the ruling nations under multi-national Empire. We say this change as “Ausgleich” in German. Ausgleich means “compromise”.

Both Austria and Hungary had own government and parliament. And these two promised the non-interference in the domestic affairs. Three “Common Ministers” charged the common affairs; Common foreign minister, Common war minister and Common financial minister. At the “Common Ministerial Council” people discuss the monarchy-wide affairs, for example foreign policy. The participants were three “Common ministers”, both prime ministers of Austria and Hungary and ministers of both governments. The chairman was usually the Common foreign minister.

On the territory of the House of Habsburg that had gotten the throne of the Holy Roman Empire by succession there were many the Slavs like the Czech, Serb, Croat etc. In 19th century there was a storm of nationalism. How Austro-Hungarian Monarch could deal with the nationality problem was an important subject for the existence of the Monarchy.

The international situation had also close relation to the domestic nationality problem. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had retreated from Italy and Germany and as a result she had only one diplomatic arena, in short, Balkan Peninsula. The Balkan was ruled since 14th century by the Ottoman Empire. In 19th century the Christian in Balkan began to struggle for autonomy and independence. The Greek made an independence in 1830. And the Serb had the right of autonomy in 1830s. The Serbs tried to get more right and began to fight against the Ottoman Empire in 1870s. This is one of the underlying cause of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877.

3. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877 and the Formation of the “occupied” Bosnia

In 1871 Hungarian aristocrat Andrassy took up new Austro-Hungarian foreign minister. At first he tried to maintain the territory of the Ottoman Empire in Balkan. In another words, he was against the expansion of the Austrian territory into Balkan. But when the Christian in Balkan revolted against the Ottoman ruler in 1870s, he became to change his idea little by little. Especially province Bosnia, in which Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic lived, was strategic importance for Austria-Hungary.

His opinion toward annexation was negative. What he thought were; first it should be avoided to weaken the power of the Ottoman Empire because of the Annexation of Bosnia and second man should not increase the population of the Slavs in the Monarchy. But he changed the idea. The main reason was his anxiety for a situation; in short, if Austria-Hungary would not annex Bosnia, the Slavic state like Serbia might expand the power. So he began to think not the “annexation” but “occupation” of Bosnia. In other words, occupation as “lesser evil”.

In the summer of 1875 the uprising against the Ottoman Empire happened in Bosnia. In the next year the two Principality in the Balkan, Serbia and Montenegro that were both under suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, attacked against the Ottoman in order to intervene. The war developed favorable to the Ottoman. Russia thought that she should do an armed intervention for assistance of Serbia and tried to get the support of Austria-Hungary. In the beginning of 1877 the two ministers of Austria and Russia held a conference and agreed each other; if Austria-Hungary maintain the benevolent neutrality against a Russo-Turkish War, Russia would appreciate the acquisition of Bosnia as a compensation. Russia that could get the Austrian promise of neutrality declared war against the Ottoman Empire in April 1877. And then the Russo-Turkish War occurred.

Russia won the war. And the peace conference was held at the Berlin. In short, the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The foreign minister Andrassy knew that Franz Joseph, the Monarch of Austria-Hungary,

considered the Bosnia as the substitute for the lost Italian territory and wanted to annex Bosnia. And he also knew that the military circle of the Monarchy insisted on the annexation. Moreover he knew that the public opinion was against an annexation. So he was at a loss how he could resolve the Bosnian problem. At last he decided an occupation of the Bosnia.

On the Congress Andrásy expressed his opinion that he was against the continuity of the Ottoman rule in Bosnia, because he thought that by the Ottoman governance disorder in Bosnia would be bigger and then an interwar between Christian and Muslim might happen. So finally he proposed an Austro-Hungarian occupation forces in Bosnia. He said that this forces would play an effective role and contribute to status quo in Balkan. Furthermore he added that the occupation would be temporary and suzerainty of Bosnia remained under the Ottoman Sultan. So on the Congress Austria-Hungary could get the right of occupation of Bosnia, that is to say, the right of administration. Moreover she got the right of keeping garrisons in the western Sanjak of Novi Pazar.

Andrásy emphasized on the Common Ministerial Council in September, “we shall occupy and govern that province, no more, no less”. “Europe had put Austria-Hungary there as a check on Serbia and Montenegro, to prevent the forcible slavization of the Balkan”.

The Austro-Hungarian Army encountered tough resistance when they began to advance to Bosnia. Finally Austria-Hungary mobilized two hundred fifty thousands men and five thousands men died. And it took 10 months to control. After discussion Austria-Hungary decided that the Common finance minister administered the occupied Bosnia.

4. Balkan Peninsula after occupation

After 1878 the international situation concerning Balkan changed rapidly. One of them was the relation between Austria and Serbia. In 1881 two states signed the commercial treaty and military alliance. It meant that Serbia would become a satellite country of Austria-Hungary. The main person who made such a relationship was Serbian Monarch, Milan Obrenović. But the Serbian public opinion had a tendency against Austria-Hungary. In 1903 a coup d'état occurred and a new dynasty which was against Austria-Hungary was formed. It means that in Serbia a Serbian nationalism became bigger and bigger. This development had influence on the South Slavs in Austria-Hungary and the occupied Bosnia.

In the Ottoman Macedonia in 1890s many revolts that aimed at autonomy happened and the Ottoman empire suppressed them. So the order in Macedonia became worse. Toward this situation Austria-Hungary and Russia declared that they cooperated together in order to solve this problem. But even in 1904 situation in Macedonia did not improve. Austria-Hungary and Russia made a suggestion that the Great Powers would rule Macedonia. The Ottoman empire accepted it. In such a diplomatic circumstance it was Aehrenthal, Austrian Ambassador to Russia, who became a new Common foreign minister.

5. Foreign Minister Aehrenthal and the Annexation of Bosnia

A diplomatic policy of Aehrenthal was to develop of the active one. In short, a strong foreign policy. It means that “to sharpen the patient’s self-confidence and interest in staying alive”. He thought that this policy would make an sound and stable situation in Monarchy. Dr. Arnold Suppan, a member of Austrian Academy of Sciences, described that “his immovable will to preserve the great power position of the Monarchy”.

We can see the more detailed design of Aehrenthal from the memorandum on February 1907. He expressed his anxiety that the unstable situation in Macedonia might make the status quo in Balkan difficulty and might have a bad influence to the governance of Bosnia. As a measure he proposed a shift of the state system of the Austria-Hungary; that is to say, from Dualism to Trialism. Trialism means that (first) to make a territory of South Slavs which consists of Croatia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Bosnia, and (second) to put this South Slav territory on the same political level of Austria and Hungary. Why did he think so? What was his background? What he thought was Austria-Hungary must have an attractive measure against the idea of “Greater Serbia”. In order to realize this situation it is necessary to change a status of Bosnia from Occupied Territory to formal part of the Monarchy. From the first he had an idea of Annexation as one of the choices.

When Russian foreign minister, Izvolsky, visited Vienna in Autumn 1907, he spoke the Russian diplomatic problem about the Straits “Bosporus and Dardanelles”. These two straits connects Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. By international treaties the Straits were barred to all foreign battleship. It means that Russian Black Sea fleet can not go to the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Russia which experienced the War with Japan found realized that she must solve this Straits problem favorable to her. The Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Aehrenthal, asked Isvolsky to tell in proper time and then told if he felt that Austria-Hungary must annex Bosnia, he would inform this decision. In this way, the problem of Annexation of Bosnia had connection with the Problem of the Straits.

So in order to reach the agreement in the Monarchy, Aehrenthal took up the theme of Annexation problem at the Common Ministerial Council on December 1907. In relation to this problem the Common finance minister who took charge of administration of Bosnia proposed an establishment of Bosnian provincial parliament. Aehrenthal insisted that the establishment problem should unify with the Annexation. All participant agreed it.

The Annexation problem did not develop for a while. But on July 6th 1908 Aehrenthal received a memorandum of Izvolsky that dated July 2nd. In this memorandum Izvolsky wrote not only topic of the unifying the Annexation problem with the Straits problem, but also an annexation of Sanjak of Novi Pazar in which Austria-Hungary took the right of keeping garrisons at the Treaty of Berlin. This memorandum “was taken by Aehrenthal as an invitation to force the annexation”. On the same day, July 6th the Young Turk Revolution occurred.

The Young Turks tried to reestablish the ottoman Constitution of 1876. On the end of July the Sultan declared the restoration of this Constitution and ordered the Young Turks to organize a cabinet. By restoration of the Constitution, the parliament which was divided into two parts also restored. The Young Turks were planning to summon representatives from Bosnia and Bulgaria to the new parliament. This means that Bosnia enjoyed the ottoman constitutional regime.

It was Aehrenthal's anxiety that if occupational situation by the Austria-Hungary continue, Bosnia is the only territory in Europe which exist no constitutional institution. So he came to a conclusion that man must prepare to annex without delay.

And to end the occupational situation in Bosnia for thirty years and to incorporate into sovereignty of the Monarch of Austria-Hungary might cause the dissatisfaction on the side of the Ottoman Empire. Aehrenthal announced in the private letter to the Austrian minister dated August 7th 1908 that if man annexes the Bosnia, man gives up simultaneously the right of keeping garrisons in Sanjak Novi Pazar. The reason was (1) Keeping garrisons in Sanjak is now meaningless and rather has the possibility that Austro-Hungarian garrisons might be involved into a power struggle within the Ottoman empire. (2) but if Austria-Hungary only evacuate the Sanjak, the prestige of the Austria-Hungary would damage. (3) This is why man has to act with a something measure. That was the Annexation of Bosnia. He thought that in doing so the prestige of the Monarchy would be maintained. Also on the formal foreign minister's memorandum dated August 8th he developed a same opinion. It seems me interesting that in this memorandum the problem of the Straits and annexation of Sanjak was discussed simultaneously.

Also in the Common Ministerial Council on 19th August Aehrenthal told a same opinion and looked for agreement. Some of the participants questioned the reaction of the great powers toward the annexation. Aehrenthal replied; Germany would certainly support Austria-Hungary; France and Britain which now devoted themselves to the Morocco problem would not actively participate in the annexation problem; Italy would be quiet, because she has in the first place no right to compensate for annexation. And Aehrenthal explained the content of the Izvolsky's memorandum on July and said that he is sure Russia and Austria-Hungary could discuss the annexation problem in a friendly atmosphere. He said that the important problem was only the attitude of the Ottoman Empire. We can find how he was "ultra-optimistic".

Aehrenthal could get basic understand about the annexation and withdrawal among the member of the Common Ministerial Council. Then next he tries to persuade the Ambassador to Istanbul, Paravicini, who were still against the annexation. Aehrenthal expressed his idea about the situation; (1) military circle in Austria-Hungary see the situation around the garrison forces in Sanjak as heavy dangerous. (2) By the Young Turk revolution man must resolve speedily the constitutional problem in Bosnia. (3) Man must clarify that Bosnia belongs constitutionally to Austria-Hungary. (4) It is necessary that first man gives up the right of keeping garrisons in Sanjak and then man annex Bosnia. (5) There is military and political reason to give up Sanjak.

On August 27th Aehrenthal sent a memorandum to Izvolsky. In this memorandum he insisted especially four points; (1) Bosnia is for 30 years under the possession(=Besitz) of Austria-Hungary. (2) The basic understand between Austria and Russia is to effort to maintain the Ottoman Empire. (3) But if Austria-Hungary decides to annex Bosnia because of compelling situation(=zwingen Umstände), Russia would take a benevolent and friendly attitude. After the declaration of Annexation Austria-Hungary will withdraw the garrison forces from Sanjak and give up the right in relation to Sanjak. (4) About the problem of Istanbul and the Straits which Russia proposed, Austria-Hungary is ready to exchange views.

On September 16th Izvolsky visited Austria on the way to a tour. He and Aehrenthal had a talk for six hours at Buchlau in Czech. Now we cannot know what had talked exactly, because they agreed that they made no written record. According Francis Roy Bridge, British historian, and Samuel Williamson, American historian, they agreed some points; (1) the annexation of Bosnia, (2) Austro-Hungarian sympathetic attitude in the Straits problem, (3) the withdrawal from Sanjak, (4) no compensation for Serbia, (5) there should be some sort of conference. (6) Bulgarian independence “de jure” from the Ottoman Empire. About the time for annexation Aehrenthal did not inform the concrete date, but only said “probably at the beginning of October”. Izvolsky replied that he hopes after his return home, that is to say, the middle of October. There was some unclear matter. In short, what kind of conference should be held?

Anyway Aehrenthal could get the Izvolsky’s consent on the annexation of Bosnia.

Aehrenthal informed on the telegram to the Ambassador to Istanbul on September 28th that the annexation will be held on October 7th. And he sent a private letter for Izvolsky, which dated September 30th, to the Ambassador to Paris, because Isvolsky would arrive at Paris at the beginning of October. Also in this letter he wrote the date of annexation was on October 7th.

Though Aehrenthal ordered to all diplomat that man must not give until October 7th, the Austrian Ambassador to Paris gave the letter of Austro-Hungarian Monarch to French President on October 3rd. In this letter the Monarch wrote the annexation and the withdrawal of the garrison forces in Sanjak. French newspapers published this content. The Annexation problem became the international problem.

On the next day, October 4th, Izvolsky arrived at Paris and received the letter from Aehrenthal. He was surprised! He told that he did not agree the annexation of Bosnia and would cooperate with Britain and France. And then on October 5th he told to the Austrian Ambassador that Russian government would deny to agree the annexation, but he thought it is desirable to convene an international congress at which people discuss the amendment of the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.

On October 5th 1908 Bulgaria declared the independence from the Ottoman Empire. One of the causes of this action was the Young Turkish Revolution. On the next day the Austro-Hungarian Monarch notified the rescript about the Annexation of Bosnia, the withdrawal the garrison forces in Sanjak and the give up the right of keeping garrisons.

The Great Powers were surprised at the news of the annexation and expressed the discontent, but finally they changed the policy. The Ottoman Empire strongly protested but in February 1909 accepted the

annexation in return for monetary guarantee. It was the Kingdom of Serbia that was against the annexation for a long time. A Serbian newspaper insisted the war with Austria. And Serbian government ordered partial mobilization. In February 1909 Serbian prime minister claimed that the Serbian nation included those seven million Serbs who lived “against their will” under the Austria-Hungary. Against those action the Austro-Hungarian Common Ministerial Council authorized the Army to move to partial mobilization. Finally with the persuasion of Russia, Britain, France, Germany and so on, Serbia recognized the annexation on March 31st 1909. The annexation problem resolved for the time being.

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Note

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