

## The Austria-Hungarian Ultimatum to Serbia of October 1913

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**Abstract** *The Austria-Hungarian sent an ultimatum to Serbia in October 1913. This ultimatum is the first that was sent to Serbia. The second was sent in July of 1914 that was the principal pretext of First World War. The ultimatum was sent to oblige Serbia to withdraw from Albanian territories that were decided in the Conference of Ambassadors in London that year. Serbia asked from the great powers to undertake a modification of the decision that were taken to make able to change the borders in its favour and in contrary with Great Powers decisions kept his army in Albanian state. This was not accepted by Austria-Hungarian that was the main power that contributed in the foundation of Albanian state. Serbia was decided to do not withdraw and to ignore the decision of Great Powers and Austria-Hungarian was decided to oblige it to withdraw with all the means. The conflict had all the components of a European war. For this paper I have made mostly researches in the Austria-Hungarian archives.*

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### Introduction

During the Conference of Ambassadors in London was reached a very difficult compromise between the Great Powers to determine the status and borders of the Albanian state. Austria-Hungarian fought to establish an Albanian state that was considered as its vital interest in order to stop Serbia to emerge in the Adriatic Sea through an Albanian port also in order to stoop Italy to turn the Adriatic Sea in a personal lake. The balance between powers was reached and was the formation of Albanian state as a no-negotiable request of Austrian-Hungarian and partition of the major part of the Albanian territories between small Balkan powers as a no-negotiated request of Russia. This was and the point of balance that was reached between Great Powers that were obliged to make to one another concessions for not entering in a European war. After the Conference of Ambassadors in front of the Great Powers come the problem of implementing their decisions in Balkan. The small state of Balkan that doubled their territories were not satisfied and wanted to divide between them the Albanian state that was decided in London. Serbia and Greece in contrary with Great Powers decisions did not withdraw their armies from political Albania. The small Balkan states were challenging the Great Powers and especially the power that was interested directly in this case that was Austria-Hungarian. Serbia kept occupied the strategically point in north Albanian and wanted improvements of borders in its favour despite that a large part of territory inhabited by Albanian were given to this state. Austria-Hungarian used all the diplomatic means to oblige Serbia to withdraw its forces but without a positive result. The conflict went so far as Austria-Hungarian sent an ultimatum to Serbia with a deadline of 8 days to live political Albania. How went the situation to ultimatum?

### 1. The diplomatic war of Austria-Hungarian to oblige Serbia to live Political Albania

The decisions of the conference of London were very important and they put the balance between the Great Powers. Edward Grey in its memory says about the importance of the decisions of Conference that "if the conference will not reach an agreement Austria will be able to sent a ultimatum or to take sever measures against Serbia that would have put in game not only the prestige of Austria and Russia in Balkan but all the European peace ( Grey, f. 250) The first risk of war was overcome by powers and Albanian state was created. After were decided the borders between Albanian and Serbia, Austria-Hungarian asked from the Conference of Ambassadors in 30 April of 1913 to remind Serbia insistently its obligation to empty the Albanian territory. The Foreign Minister of Monarchy Berchtold wanted that "the conference to finish its work only then when in Belgrade was repeated the demarches for evacuation of Albania"( HHStA, PA, OUA; 8055; Telegram of Berchtold for Rome, Belgrade and London, 26 July 1913, In AIH, A. 41-42; f. 183) The demand of Vienna did not find implementation during the work of the conference because of the problematic of the status of Albanian and the definition of south borders and from the other side Edward Grey wanted to finish the work of conference as soon as possible. So the conference finished its work in August without obliging Serbia to withdraw its army from political Albania.

During September Vienna made another effort in the chancelleries of the great powers to ask from Belgrade to leave the Albanian land according to decisions were taken in London. In September started an uprising of Albanian that were in Serbia and was accused Austria as has encouraged it. Vienna asked from the great powers to make a common demarche in Serbia but did not find their support. Russians opinion was that "the attitude of Serbia until now has not given us enough causes to make a demarche in Beograd...The Serbs to protect their land can occupy and strategically point beyond the borders temporarily" ( HHStA, PA; OUA nr.8763; Tel of Otto Szernin for Berchtold, Petersburg, 3.09. 1913, in AIH; A. 41-42; f.244). In 14 September the foreign minister of Serbia Spalajkovic declared to the representative of Monarchy of Danube in Beograd Storc that " Monarchy must give up from hostile attitude...Serbia will not withdraw it troops until in Albania is established the order" (HHStA, PA, A, Nr. 8618; Report of Storck for Berchtold, Belgarde 13 .09. 1913; vj. 22- 22-23). Berchtold in that day met the representative of Serbia in Vienna and declared to him that "I want... the immediate withdraw of Serbian troupes from independent Albania. Belgrade must not forget the risks that will be exposing if will not fully satisfy this request. ( Puto, f. 192).

In a rapport of the military attaché of Monarchy in Belgrade in 24 September is said that the Serbs "aimed a expedite of revenge and punishment...according to experiences of war until now for the way of fighting of Serbs and especially against Albanians it is provided a bloody war"( HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8694, Rapport of military attache of Austria-Huangria from Belgrade, 24 .09. 1913; In AIH; A. 41-42;. f, 233).

Berchtold after the information of the military attache telegraphed to all the great powers and said them that" military measures of Serbia...can be explained only for the aim of a big action against independent Albania... in this circumstances I think that through a demarche of Austria-Hungarian and Italy in Beograd the Serbian government to be obliged to respect the decision of London for the borders and the neutrality of Albania"( HHStA, PA; A, nr. 8696, Tel of Berchtold for Rome, Berlin, London, Paris, Petersburg, 24.09. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 233)

The other powers did not support Austria-Hungarian because they saw this question as in its sphere of interest. The ambassador of England in Serbia said to Storck that" if in Albania will stay bigger Serbian contingents then will be very difficult that Serbia will evacuate the positions that has occupied in Albania. For this reason after some weeks we will be before the alternatives that for the cause of the independence of Albania, to be involve in a war or to bow to Serbia...certainly to protect the decisions of the Ambassadors of London that are adopted in its agenda England will support as much as possible but in case that for the cause of Albania with explode a world war then he does not believe that Europe will go side by side with Austria.( HHStA, PA; A, nr. 8691 Tel of Storck from Beograd, 24 September 1913; AIH; A 41-42; f. 232).

"Serbia was not waiting for any protest of great powers for the cause of Albania because the Serbia action has found the total approve of Russia"( HHStA, PA, OUA nr. 8723; Tel of Storck for Berchtold, 27.09. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 238) . In 27 September Berchtold suggests to the allies of Triple that "the government of Belgrade without losing time must be warned for the consequences that will bring in itself the violation of decision of London. He made them know his initiative to charge the ambassador in Belgrade to make a friendly demarche but vigorous to the government there" (HHStA, PA, OUA, nr. 8727; Tel of Berchtold for Rome and Germany, 27 . 09.1913; In AIH; A 41-42; f. 239).

In 29 September Berchtol was in aggressive state of mind. He wanted to occupy the north city of Serbia, Sabac and then" to tell the Serbs that as long as you will stay in Albania we will stay in Sabac ( Connrad 443-444). Conrad the Chief of the General Staff argued that if Monarchy will occupy Sabac, Serbs will laugh or will fight, the first will be a serious blow for the prestige of monarchy, and the second means war. Conrad favored the second if Serbs will not answer to a ultimatum of 24 hours. So in 29 September Vienna without its allies sent a demarche to Serbia. In meeting with Spalajkovic, Storck gave him the demarch in which was said that" that imperial and royal government of Austria-Hungary draws attention to Serbian governments for the serious consequences of a militarily action against Albania, action that will be in contradict with the decision of London" ( HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8766; Tel of Storck from Beograd 1.10 1913 .AIH; A 41-42; f. 245-246)

After the demarsh the other Great Powers warn Serbia that Vienna was serious. The ambassador of Germany in Serbia warns the foreign minister Spalajkovic that " It must not be made any advancement in the borders of independet Albania... because the Great Powers are for the respect of decisions of London"( HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8745; Tel of Storck for Berchtoldit, 29 .09. 1913; In AIH; A 41-42; f. 241; ) And the vice foreign minister of Russia Neratow " had advised the Serbian government to be careful from any adventurous policy"( HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8762, Tel Otto Szernin for Berchtold; Peterburgu, 30.09.1913, In AIH; A 41-42; f. 243)

In the beggin of October, Pashic passed transit in Vienna after a official visit in France. He declared to the press that " I want to assure you that we do not have any attention to wide the borders into Albania. We will agree for this problem keeping a correct strategic border between us and the future Albanian state with negotiation between us and International Commission elected by the Great Powers"( Hall, f. 102) So Pasich indirectly refused to know the borders of

Albanian because he wanted a International Commission to replace the borders that were made once in the Conference. He hoped to gain much more territories.

In 3 October in Vienna was held an inter-ministerial conference and almost all the ministers were for vigorous action against Serbia. Berchtold presents two alternatives for conflict " to tolerate in silence the *fait accompli* that will form the first phase and certainly the last of absorption of Albania by Serbia, or to send to Beograd a ultimatum...The creation of independent Albania we have considered always a very difficult diplomatic work but and the only mean to keep the balance in Adriatic. This goal we wanted to make it with peaceful means for that we made agreement with other powers. The Albanian state with compromises was diminished in the minimum of its vitality. In these circumstances is impossible to make other concession to Serbia. This not only will damage our prestige but and the future of Albania will make it much more difficult than is today...the existence of Albanian state created from us and Italy seem menaced by Balkan sates". The prime minister of Hungary Tisza said that "we must not tolerate a modification of Albanian borders that were defined in London... and for implementation of decisions of Conference of Ambassador of London we must act and alone... in case that vigorous protest will not help then must be given and ultimatum for causing Serbia a diplomatic defeat maybe and a military defeat"( HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8779; The protocol of Council of Ministers in Vienna 3.10. 1913, In AIH; A 41-42; f.247-249). Tisza said to Berchtold "to give a categorical declaration in Beograd, Berlin and Rome that we will not allow any violation of Albanians border decided in London and we must not let ourselves to be delayed in the protection of our interests because of the cause that we are linked with the European Concert ( Hantsch, f. 498-499). Franc Ferdinand was not for war against Serbia because of interior problems and that let Berchtold without support and he saw and the possibility to resign.( Hantsch, f. 500) .

In 7 October Berchtold gives another message for Pashic through his ambassador in Beograd. Berchtold asks from Storck "to warn the prime minister to give up from crossings of these borders by Serbian troops and to point out the serious consequences that will bring in itself this crossing of borders." (HHStA, PA; OUA nr. 8796; Tel of Berchtold for Storck, Vienna 7.10 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f 250.)

In the same day Berchtold took information that Serbia troops in contrary with assurances given by the government of Belgrade continue to cross the borders of Albania. So he wrote to Berlin and Rome and said them that " this action of Serbia it seemed appropriate to bring serious consequences...it would have been good to use the mean of common demarche that each of the powers to warn Serbia for the consequences of such action and to invite it to respect the decisions of London " (HHStA, PA; OUA nr. 8816, Tel of Berchtold for Berlin, Vienna 10.10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 253). The allies' powers were not interested in this question as much as Vienna because they saw as its zone of influence and were not interested to get involved. Meantime the Serbian troupes continue the massacres in Albanian population. A Serbian soldier in a letter published in Radnicke Novine testified that "here were happening horrendous things. I am terrified from them and constantly ask myself how can the people be so barbarian as to commit such a cruelty"( Swire, f. 153).

In 14 October wanting to resolve the conflict in peaceful way Berchtold asks and one more time from Pashic " if the government is ready to cancel the military preparation for an invasion of Albania in a short time and to withdraw the troops that now are in Albanian land? From the answer of this question...the Monarchy must hung its further attitude toward Serbia, because we are decided to assure with every tool that will seem suitable the absolute respect of decisions of London."( HHStA, PA, OUA, nr. 8828; Tel of Berchtold for Storck, Vienne.14.10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 255) This was the third note that Monarchy sent to Serbia and the strongest of all. The answer of Pasich was challenging that "it is in will of every nation to express desire to improve its borders (HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8835; Tel of Storck for Berchtold, Beograd 15 tetor 1913; AIH; A 41-42; f. 256)

Storck from Beograd suggests that " Serbia will not bent so easily... for that will be necessary a *quasi ego unanime* of great powers...in case that we must act alone the realization of our will will cost us very expensive... without a physical obligation or without any menace it will not be subjected. If the work will go so far then certainly Serbia will bent and will be satisfied that has caused to Monarchy and once grave concerns and material sacrifices( HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8836; Tel of Storck for Berchtold. Belgrade 15 .10. 1913; AIH A 41-42; f. 257) .

In 15 October ,Berchtol sent a telegram to all the Great Power explaining them that the patience of Vienna was over. Berchtold said that" we are not able to tolerate any more with calm the Serbian violation that are committed in the damage of autonomous Albania but from our demarche we want to give Serbia a possibility to give up with its will....In case that will not happen such a thing, then we will be obliged that in Beograd to undertake more categorical steps"( HHStA, PA, OUA, nr. 8837; Tel of Berchtold for Rome dhe Berlin, Vienna 15. 10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f.257. The latest news spoke for a mobilization in Serbia and for an accordance with Greece that still had its troops in south Albania that caused nervousness in Vienna. In 16 October was decided to sent a ultimatum to Serbia.( Hantsch , f. 501)

## 2. The Ultimatum of 18 October 1913

A ultimatum had made work and with Montenegro to withdraw its troops from city of Shkoder so this could work and with Serbia. All the diplomatic means were ended and the other powers were not interested in this question, some of them supported Serbia open or closed and in this case were and against the decision they have taken. Berchtold asked the emperor if he authorizes him for ultimatum to Belgrade and the emperor agree with it (Hantsch, f. 502). Berchtold with its staff prepared the ultimatum all night of 16 to 17 October and after was sent to emperor. He said that if they will not give up in eight days we will certainly attack them (Hantsch, f. 502). The situation was serious because Monarchy has to enter in war if Serbia gave a negative answer and that would have been a pure case for exploding a year before the First World War. In fact Serbia wanted reason to enter in war with Austria because in that way will use Russia to defeat it and then Serbia would have free hands to make the big Serbia in Balkan. So in this way the diplomacy of Belgrade was very successful because for their interests a year after they put all the Great Powers in war.

The ultimatum to Serbia contained this note "the imperial embassy in Belgrade with the order of its government had the honor to warn more than once the foreign minister for the necessity of rigorous respect of the Conference of Ambassadors in London and for giving up from every military action in territories that with the will of Great Powers were attributed to Albania...Austria-Hungarian in no case can not give its consent that the international decision for Albanian borders to be modified in the great favor of Serbia... in the eyes of imperial and royal government is necessary that Serbian government to proceed without delay in withdraw of troops that have crossed Albanian borders according to Conference of London...The imperial government like to hope that Serbia government will not delay the integral evacuation inside a deadline of 8 days... In the contrary imperial and royal government with deep regret will see itself obliged to use the appropriate means to realize its request (HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8850; The Ultimatum Of Austria-Hungarian to Serbia, 17 .10. 1913; AIH; A 41-42; f. 260).

In 17 October was sent a telegram to all the great powers to explain the position of Austria. Berchtold wrote them that "since the beginning of the war between Balkan states and Turkey the Austria-Hungarian has taken a peaceful attitude. Absenting for any kind of military intervention and for any aspiration for territorial gains, it is limited to collaborate with Great Powers for the restoration of peace and as regarding the Adriatic in the creation of Albanian state. Considering that goal Austria-Hungarian decided to take part in the Conference of Ambassadors in London where the Albanian question was discussed with other problems that were reserved to the verdict of Great Powers. It is clear that to respond to the aims of Austria-Hungarian and other cabinets the Albanian question must be resolved in the way that the new state to be able to exist. For this reason it was an imperative need that territories that were purely Albanians to be included inside its borders. If Austria-Hungarian give consent to make in this point concessions that were very important especially accepting that essential Albanian cities as Dibra and Gaiçova to be devised from Albania that was done only to do not be separated from other great powers and to secure a peaceful solution of the problem. All these concessions in favor of Serbia did not make it withdraw its troops and so to delay with months it withdraw from Albania...Serbia has let us suspect that has not intention to draw from Albania. For this reason Serbian government pretend that Albanian borders defined at the Conference of Ambassadors in London from the strategical point are not in its favor. Meantime we must underline that to satisfy the Serbian exigencies the great powers adapted the actual borders leaving out of Albania cities that from the viewpoint of geography and ethnography must have been inside it. The Cabinet of Vienna has never stopped to give in Belgrade wisdom advices...Serbia continue to remain stubborn versus the decisions taken in London from all Europe. The imperial and royal government sees itself obliged to get into its hand the protection of the interest of peace. The imperial and royal embassy of Belgrade as consequence revived an order to deliver the Serbian government a note (HHStA, PA; OUA, nr. 8854; Tel of Berchtold for the great Powers 17 .10 1913; In AIH; A 41-42; f.261-262) This ultimatum was presented to the government of Belgrade in 18 October.

From the great power Germany supported Austria-Hungarian. Kaiser was expressed that "for him was a special pleasure to hear that we (Austria) are determined to do not bent before Serbia adding that in this question he will collaborate with us (Austria)" (HHStA, PA ; OUA, nr. 8861 ; Bulletin from the ambassador of Monarchy. Berlin, 18.10. 1913; AIH; A 41-42; f. 264)

The chancellor of Reich said that "our demarche in Belgrade has supported with heart and in vigorous way hopes that Serbia will obey to advices of Triple" (HHStA, PA ; OUA, nr. . 8873; Tel of Forgach for Berchtold; Berlin, 19.10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 268). Italy from the other side did not approve the harsh measure used against Serbia. Marquez San Giuliani declared that "the imperative method used in Serbia will produce a great despair and will damage the interest of Triple and to Monarchy" (HHStA, PA ; OUA, 8888; Tel of Ambrozy for Berchtold; Rome, 20 .10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 272)

The attitude of England was in favor of a peaceful solution. As long as they took the information for the ultimatum charged the ambassador in Belgrade“ to advice the royal Serbia government to give guaranties that the borders that were drawn in London will be respect it and the Serbian troops have crossed them in extraordinary circumstances and will withdraw as soon as possible“( HHStA, PA , OUA, nr. 8868; Tel of Storck for Berhtold; Belgrade, 19 .10. 1913; In AIH; A 41-42; f.266).The ambassador of Franc in Belgrade in a conversation with Storck said him“ if it was real that for the evasuation of Albania he has deliver a note with fixed term.. and he pretended that the time of 8 days is short. ” ( HHStA, PA , OUA, nr. 8870 Tel of Storck for Berchtold, Belgrade, 19.10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 267)

From the other side the ambassador of Serbia in Vienna in a meeting with Berchtold said that “Serbian government is stunned for the fact that...we have found necessary to undertake in Belgrad a vigorous demarch and with a lot of pressure...the Serbian government to manifest it peaceful feelings yesterday has given order the troops in Albania to withdraw from occupied position. From his part Berchtol said to him that " I have to insist that the withdraw will be complete and it has to happen before passing the term that is given from us... and the implementation of the request to be observed by testimonies” ( HHStA, PA , OUA, nr. 8878 Bulletin for the visits of Serbian ambassador. Vienna 20 .10. 1913, ; In AIH; A 41-42; f. 269) . France and Russia adviced Serbia to “accept the friendly warns of Franc and Russia than to face the Austrian menace” ( Poincare, f. 520)

In 20 October the Serbian government informed that the withdraw will be carry out inside eight days“( HHStA, PA; nr. 8880; Tel of Storck for Berchtold, 20.10. 1913, AIH; A 41-42; f. 270) . In 25 October Storck informs from Belgrade that “the withdraw of troops has ended in midday” Storck wrote fro Beograd that “let's hope that poor Albania that was torture tomorrow to have a happy Sunday after days of bloody chasing, destruction, killings, robberies that lasted for weeks. Let's hope also that the sons of sons of Albania that day of fest will remind will joy and will keep in their memory from whom they have their lives” ( HHStA, PA; nr. 8919; Storck from Belgrade; 25 .10. 1913,OUA, In AIH; A 41-42; f. 279)

The Austria-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia let a bitter taste to other powers. The ambassador of England said to Berchtold that he can not approve *modu precedentin* that was chosen by the Monarchy. According to his view Austria have to act in agreement with other powers so the severity of the request addressed to Serbia would have been in considering manner much more soft“( HHStA, PA, OUA, nr .8884, Buletin of the visite of ambassador of England in Vienna. 20 .10. 1913, In AIH; A 41-42; f.271;

The foreign Minister of Russia, Saznoff in a meeting with Zimmerman the foreign minister of Germany declared that“ in Serbia has remained a feeling of despair against Austria-Hungaria that has in itself risks for the futur (HHSStA, PA, OUA nr. 8906; Bulletin of the visit ambassador of Germany. Vienna 24.10. 1913, In AIH; A 41-42; f. 276-277)

## Conclusions

The ultimatum of October 1913 that Austria sent to Serbia would have caused a European war or a world war. If Serbia would have answered negatively to that ultimatum it was certain that Austria-Hungarian would have attacked it or in contrary would have loosened prestige that was worse than that. There are controversies if Austria would have found a better way to fulfil its demands or not but one thing is sure that they were without support from other powers in that work. The experience in Balkan has shown that the small state have been sometime arrogant and they have avoided and challenged all the demarches of Great Powers. Serbia would have withdrawn if all the Great Powers would have been in harmony but they were not because some of them supported the Serbian intervention in Albanian state. From the other part the creation of the Albanian state was un-negotiated for the foreign policy of Monarchy of Danube and the decisions of the Conference of London for Albania were *null* if they were not able to be implemented. The diplomacy of Great Powers worked almost one year with the Albanian question and very difficult compromises were reached and some time with a lot of tension because both Austria and Russia mobilized their armies. Austria-Hungarian used all the diplomatic means but it did not work and the ultimatum remained the last mean to make possible the implementation of decisions of the Conference of Ambassadors of London for Albania but this mean was with the risk of a world war. There are controversies if also the Albanian question would have value so much as to enter in world war. For Austria-Hungarian the Albanian state was the only way to keep the balance in Adriatic. If the Adriatic shores of Albania will be in hands of Italy than Otranto would have became a personal channel of Italy and the Adriatic Sea an Italian lake and from other side if Serbia emerged in Albanian port, it will not exist an Albania anymore. So for those principal reasons, Austria was ready to use any mean to keep the Albanian state, and if it had the risk and cost of European war.

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