

1877: The Anti-Russian alliance that never materialised – Austro-British Diplomacy in the Great Eastern Crisis

Bertalan Bordás

E-mail: bertalan.bordas@gmail.com

University of Pécs, Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, Europe and Hungary in the 18th–20th Centuries Doctoral Programme

Assistant Lecturer, **University of Pécs**, Faculty of Humanities, History Studies Institution, Modern Age Department

Assistant Lecturer (part-time), **Eötvös Loránd University**, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political and International Studies, Department of International Relations and European Studies

Bertalan Bordás is a PhD candidate from the University of Pécs, Hungary. He has done his degrees of History BA and MA at the former institution and obtained a degree in International Relations MA at the Budapest Corvinus University. His main research interests cover the topics of international history, foreign policy decision-making in the 19th century, and media history.

Abstract:

The Great Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878, which led to a radical shift in the balance of great powers, resulted in numerous diplomatic negotiations and alliance-building efforts. The international diplomatic and informal relations between the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Great Britain from 1871 to 1879 can be understood as part of these alliance-seeking or alternative alliance strategies.

By 1877, both powers found themselves relatively isolated and therefore sought an agreement to contain their common adversary in the East. Despite launching an attack on the Ottoman Empire, Russia continued to benefit from the benevolent neutrality of its allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary. While Austria-Hungary was already bound to Russia through the dynastic agreements of Reichstadt and Budapest, Britain sought a way into the conflict—both to curb Russian expansion and to ensure that Vienna remained aligned with British and Ottoman interests.

The decision-makers in Vienna played a double game: while Emperor Franz Joseph and military circles remained committed to a dynastic policy, Foreign Minister Count Gyula Andrassy engaged in secret negotiations with the British prime minister. The decision-makers of Vienna however, were divided on the issue: while Franz Joseph and military-circles were adamant in their dynastic policy, Count Gyula Andrassy conducted secret negotiations with the British prime minister.

What are the limits of secret diplomacy? What were the levels and arenas of foreign policy decision-making? How did European powers attempt to contain Russian expansion in the Balkans, while also being dependent on Russian good will?

These are the key questions my study and presentation seek to address. While previous historiography has examined Austro-British relations at the height of the crisis, neither István Diószegi, Rainer F. Schmidt, nor other historians have sufficiently explored the role of public opinion and its restrictive effects. My presentation aims to reassess their conclusions in light of novel insights from media history and newly uncovered British archival sources.