

THE RUSSIAN RESIDENCY IN CONSTANTINOPLE, 1700-1774:
RUSSIAN-OTTOMAN DIPLOMATIC ENCOUNTERS

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in History

By

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Washington, D.C.
March 1, 2016

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THE RUSSIAN RESIDENCY IN CONSTANTINOPLE, 1700-1774:
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ABSTRACT

Russia entered the international framework of resident diplomacy during the reign of Peter I, just as the Ottomans were beginning to reconsider their traditional approach to diplomacy after the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699). While earlier studies have emphasized military conflicts and strategic competition between St. Petersburg and Constantinople as hallmarks of their contacts in the eighteenth century, the present dissertation examines the ways in which the two empires' engagement with each other was dominated by diplomacy.

I utilize rare sources from the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI) and Turkish-language scholarship to trace the development of and contextualize the activities of the Russian diplomatic mission in Constantinople. I study the individual diplomats' educational and professional backgrounds as well as the diplomatic traditions and institutional foundations of Russian foreign policy. I see the meticulous attention paid by Russian rulers and statesmen to the quality and efficiency of their diplomatic representatives in Constantinople, as elsewhere, as one of the contributing factors to the strengthening of Russia's international positions in the eighteenth century.

The long residency of Aleksei Obreskov (1751-1768) serves as the case study for analyzing the development and application of Russian foreign policy. His ability to understand

and influence Ottoman foreign policy through direct presence in Constantinople and skillful use of the local intelligence network was indispensable to several Russian rulers in advancing their goals in the Ottoman Empire and Europe. In fact, both sides resorted to diplomacy more often than to aggression. The primacy of the diplomatic approach was evident during the Seven Years' War, when Frederick II of Prussia failed to entice the Sublime Porte to attack Austria and Russia, and during most of the 1760s, when Obreskov was fairly successful in preventing the Porte from interfering in the Polish succession crisis against Russia. However, the imperial ambitions of Catherine II and Mustafa III became the key destabilizing factors in mutual relations.

Finally, the extensive foray into Obreskov's career on the Bosphorus helps us better understand his role in negotiating the final text, including the more controversial articles, of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the process of conceptualizing, researching, and writing this dissertation several institutions and many individuals provided their support and encouragement. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Catherine Evtuhov, for her infinite patience, intellectual stimulation, and unwavering logistical support for my academic and professional development. David Goldfrank, Andrzej Kaminski, and Gabor Agoston served as dedicated readers and constructive critics of my dissertation. I am especially grateful to David for his meticulous reading of my work and engaged feedback.

The institutional and academic resources offered by Georgetown University and the Department of History have been central to this dissertation: the depth and breadth of the intellectual framework that I have gained through my studies and service in the department account for my interest in international diplomacy and comparative imperial histories. I would like to express my appreciation to all my teachers in my primary field of Russian and East European history—late Richard Stites, Catherine Evtuhov, David Goldfrank, and Andrzej Kaminski. I benefitted greatly from expanding my specialization into Ottoman (Gabor Agoston) and Central Eurasian history (James Millward, Benjamin Loring), as well as from valuable lessons in methodology that I received from John McNeill, James Collins, and Joanne Rappaport. I also thank Carol Benedict, Patricia O’Brien, Stefan Zimmers, and Susan Pinkard for being wonderful mentors when I served as the teaching assistant in their courses on the Pacific World, Australian, and European history. I want to thank Djuana Shields, Kathleen Gallagher, Lisa Chinn, Miriam Okine Davies, Jan Liverance, and Carolina Madinaveitia for their crucial

administrative support. And, last but not least, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the staff of the Lauinger Library at Georgetown University and especially to its Interlibrary Loan division.

My research required extended language training, accomplished with the support of the American Research Institute in Turkey, Institute for Turkish Studies, and the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI FLAS fellowships administered by the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies at Georgetown University. I also wish to thank my teachers of Turkish—the talented Sylvia Önder of Georgetown University and the outstanding team of Turkish language instructors at Boğaziçi University in Turkey,—as well as my energetic Ottoman instructor, Sevim Önder of Yıldız Technical University. Ekrem Başer of Georgetown University has patiently helped me during my early work with Ottoman sources.

Thanks to the support of Georgetown University, as well as a supplementary Cosmos Scholars grant, I was also able to conduct research in several archives. Most central to the present work has been the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI). I am grateful for the attentive help of the staff of the AVPRI reading room. I also thank the directors of the AVPRI and the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA) for giving me permission to access their respective archival collections. On a separate note, I would like to thank my lovely host in Russia, Inna Zinovevna.

Special thanks go to students in my first seminar class, “Tsars and Sultans,” which traced the relationship between the Russian and Ottoman empires during the modern period. The students' knowledge, curiosity, and unique contributions to the class have enriched my own understanding of the subject.

I also want to register my deep appreciation to my mentors and colleagues who helped me in meaningful ways through the years of doctoral studies, be it through intellectual inspiration, personal support, or professional example: Ilya Vinkovetsky, Shireen Hunter, Mikhail Dolbilov, Henriette de Bruyn Kops; Elçin Arabacı, Dan Scarborough, John Corcoran, Emrah Gürkan, Christina Petrides, Michael Hill, Toshihiro Higuchi, Siobhan Doucette, Onur İşçi, Glen Johnson, Kahraman Şakul, Chris Gratien, Fatih Çalışır, Erina Megowan, Aleksei Pimenov, Alan Roe, and Andrey Gornostaev.

Finally, I would like to thank my professors and peers at American University in Bulgaria, where I received my undergraduate degree, for fostering my love of learning and passion for history.

My most profound debt is to my family, whose love, help, and encouragement kept me going: Koba, Mika, Yelena, Sveta, Shota, Maiya, Malina, Liza, Liya, Irma, and Salome. I dedicate this work to my late grandmothers, Angelina Baidina and Larisa Gaiduchenia.

Mariya Amelicheva

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Introduction

Historians have long been fascinated by the history of Russian foreign policy and especially by its seeming continuity over centuries.⁵ Still, whereas the evolution of the Russian military and borderland defenses has received sufficient attention,⁶ much less has been known about the diplomatic component of Russian foreign policy in the Ottoman Empire.⁷ The present dissertation addresses this lacuna by bringing to light the development of Russia's diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire during the period following the establishment of the permanent Russian mission in Constantinople and the resounding Russian military and diplomatic victories over the Ottomans in 1774, marked by the signing of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. This particular chronological focus and emphasis on the residency itself provides us with a better understanding of how Russian diplomacy worked in practice. I see the meticulous attention paid by Russian rulers and statesmen to the quality and efficiency of their diplomatic representatives in Constantinople, as elsewhere, as one of the contributing factors to the strengthening of Russia's international positions in the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, the differences in the backgrounds, training, and personalities of the residents themselves, as well as the changing priorities at the center of Russian politics, all had substantial effects on the evolution of Russian foreign policy. The long residency of Aleksei

⁵ An excellent overview of historiography can be found in Alfred J. Rieber's two essays: "Persistent factors in Russian foreign policy: an interpretive essay" and "The historiography of Imperial Russian foreign policy: a critical survey," in Hugh Ragsdale and V. N. Ponomarev, eds., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993), pp. 315-443.

⁶ John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and *passim*, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.) Also Brian L. Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution in Eastern Europe: Russia's Turkish Wars in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Continuum, 2011) and *passim*, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768-1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

⁷ Some recent pertinent works will be discussed below.

Mikhailovich Obreskov (1718-1787) is an important case in point. A product of the new educational system for the nobility, which emphasized internalization of the ethos of serving the state and development of innate talents and predilections,⁸ Obreskov proved to be an independent-minded diplomat. His formative diplomatic experiences during the reign of Empress Elizabeth placed him in the camp of Russian statesmen, such as Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin and Nikita Panin, who advocated a cautious policy of peaceful containment and even rapprochement with the Ottoman Empire. Even though Obreskov did not always subscribe to all of their views, by the end of Catherine II's first decade of rule it was obvious that like Panin he did not share the empress' overly ambitious approach to the Ottoman Empire. These differences, however, did not prevent him from negotiating meticulously and with foresight the final text of the crucial peace treaty. In short, Obreskov's example serves to highlight both the famed continuities as well as the inherent ambivalence of Russian diplomacy.

The Establishment and Functioning of the Residency

The present work is broadly divided into two themes. In parts I and II, I trace the origins and development of Russian imperial foreign service in the eighteenth century and then focus on the Russian residency in Constantinople. I revisit earlier historiographical debates about the nature of Peter I's contributions to Russia's state-building with a particular focus on the establishment of permanent Russian diplomatic missions abroad. The early history of the Constantinople mission was marked by many difficulties and it was Peter I's persistence and a

⁸ Igor Fedyukin, "*Learning to Be Nobles: The Elite and Education in Post-Petrine Russia*," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009).

brief period of friendly rapprochement between the two empires that resulted in the reopening of the residency in 1721. I demonstrate that direct diplomatic representation afforded the Russian government closer and more effective control over sources of information. While the Muscovite foreign service had a long tradition and served as the basis for the central imperial Russian institution in charge of foreign policy—the College of Foreign Affairs (CFA),—Peter I’s decision to set up permanent missions abroad constituted a tangible and consequential reform.

For the first time, I offer an account of the evolution of the Constantinople mission over the course of more than half a century and analyze its functioning in the context of the prevalent diplomatic practices of other foreign missions in the Ottoman Empire.⁹ The residency made Russia an active and, by the 1720s, an equal player on the local diplomatic scene, especially as the Russians adopted the same strategies that other foreign powers used on the Bosphorus. These included the employment of local translators/dragomans who possessed indispensable knowledge and had been trained for generations to fill this particular niche in the service of foreign governments. Secondly, the Russian mission also promoted its native cadres in the knowledge of Ottoman Turkish language with the purpose of employing them further both in Constantinople and back in Russia. Finally, unlike before, the Russians now had direct access to the Ottoman government and the dynamic and diverse milieu of Constantinople itself. Russian residents followed the example of other foreign missions in cultivating a network of local secret informants both in the Ottoman government circles and among the local population. The more

⁹ Earlier studies have provided only short accounts of the mission’s structure and personnel during specific periods. These accounts do not draw connections between the practices of the Russian mission and those of other foreign embassies in Constantinople. Rumiana Mikhneva, *Rossiia i Osmanskaia imperiia v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh v seredine XVIII veka, 1739-1756* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985) and *passim*, *Zemiata izvyn “vremeto”* (Varna: Slavena, 2003); Maksim Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia v Evrope v seredine XVIII veka: Ot Akhenskogo mira do Semiletnei voiny* (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2012).

direct access to the sources of information contrasted favorably with the uncertain and patchy intelligence-gathering methods of the earlier centuries.

This arrangement, nevertheless, did not come without challenges. New intelligence networks and the service of local dragomans were all potentially fraught with risks. The capital of the Ottoman Empire had long been an important center of European diplomacy and the Russian residents for the first time had to confront the intense, intrigue-ridden competition from unfriendly members of the Constantinople diplomatic corps. Short on experience, several of the Russian diplomats were also prone to making mistakes in their judgements. Certain events of Ottoman politics, such as the famous 1730 rebellion, as well as appeals from Ottoman Orthodox subjects for help and support, tended to highlight to the Russian diplomats the vulnerability of the Ottoman Empire. Misguided assessments and exaggerated hopes of Russian residents in Constantinople became one of the major impulses for the Russian declaration of war against the Ottomans in 1735-1736.

The interruption of the war and more persistent challenges of the Russian residency were still felt throughout the 1740s, when financial insolvency, disobedience of employees, and an uncertain intelligence network overwhelmed the residents with a broad range of responsibilities. It was during this period that Aleksei Obreskov was attached to the mission in the capacity of an embassy officer. His decade-long service under residents Aleksei Veshniakov and Andrian Nepliev made him well-qualified to become their successor. In Part II, I analyze in detail his diplomatic apprenticeship and his measures to improve the functioning of the residency during his term in office. Obreskov's stable and lasting leadership allowed him to apply his practical insights in action. He tackled with dedication and energy the internal disorder at the mission,

seriously approached the task of balancing the mission's budget, and, more importantly, made improvements in the intelligence network and in the training of native Russian diplomatic personnel and language specialists.

I also analyze various aspects of the residency in order to demonstrate how it operated and how its members interacted with other inhabitants of Constantinople on a daily basis. Thus, I discuss the locations of the mission's buildings, the personnel structure, and the internal relationship dynamics at the mission. I particularly highlight the motivations and contributions of Russian subjects who worked at the residency, especially the students of Ottoman and other languages. There were not many volunteers in Russia, especially among the elites, who wanted to serve at a distant Oriental post known for its difficult climate, the danger of plague, fires, and a narrow range of further career prospects. However, some Russian subjects of middling noble and more modest backgrounds saw the promise of social advancement through professional and linguistic specialization in Ottoman affairs. The demanding circumstances of the mission's work ensured that the most able, talented, and hard-working employees indeed achieved recognition and successfully advanced up the service and social ladders, including Obreskov himself.

When compared to other foreign embassies in Constantinople, the Russian residency was certainly a more recent institution. As such, the Russians at the mission could not yet match the level of language expertise that several other nations possessed. Nevertheless, close integration in the local diplomatic corps and the adoption of well-established methods of maintaining relations with the Ottoman government compensated for this weakness. For example, the position of top dragomans at the Russian mission was in the hands of foreigners—the residents of the Pera suburb who were of Italian origins. In particular, two such Italians served the mission

for many decades and despite initial suspicion towards them proved to be loyal and dependable employees. General openness of Ottoman officials to bribes was another equalizing factor, which was also used by other newcomers such as the Danes and the Prussians. Unlike their colleagues from the Dutch Republic, England, France, and the Venetian Republic, however, Russian diplomats were predominantly political agents: Russia did not have sizeable commercial colonies in the Ottoman lands, as did the main Mediterranean trading powers. All the Russian attempts to advance commerce with the Ottoman Empire, therefore, were heavily subordinated to a wide range of sensitive political issues in Russo-Ottoman and Russo-European relations.

Russian Diplomacy on the Bosphorus, 1751-1774

In parts III and IV, I turn to the theme of Russian foreign policy in the Ottoman Empire during Obreskov's residency. Obreskov proved to be one of the longest serving Russian diplomats in the Ottoman Empire (and Turkey) in Russian history. He served in Constantinople during the reigns—all remarkable in their own, different ways—of three Russian rulers: Empress Elizabeth (r. 1741-1762), Emperor Peter III (r. January—July 1762), and Empress Catherine II (1762-1796). Likewise, he worked under three outstanding Russian statesmen: Chancellor Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin (1693-1766), Chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov (1714-1767), and the head of the CFA Nikita Panin (1718-1783). Indeed, Obreskov's longevity in office makes him a fascinating case study of Russian diplomacy on the Bosphorus in the eighteenth century, especially before the fateful year 1774.¹⁰

¹⁰ Obreskov's biographers have not treated the diplomatic issues of the 1750s-1760s, focusing mostly on his last years in the Ottoman Empire during the war of 1768-1774. Elena Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk Kainardzhiiskii mir 1774*

The middle decades of the eighteenth century, especially the 1750s-1760s, are particularly interesting from the point of view of Russo-Ottoman relations. The latest evidence of this is in the work of a Turkish scholar Uğur Demir, whose dissertation focuses on Ottoman diplomacy from 1755 to 1768, during which period Russia featured very prominently in Ottoman diplomacy. Demir's work has been indispensable for my understanding of the Ottoman perspective on relations with Russia and the process of decision-making in the Ottoman government.¹¹ On the Russian side, Rumiana Mikhneva, a Soviet-trained Bulgarian historian, has pioneered the study of Russo-Ottoman relations during the reign of Empress Elizabeth.¹² More recently, Russian historian Maksim Anisimov cast a broader look on Russian foreign policy from 1748 to 1762, including relations with the Ottoman Empire, on the basis of the AVPRI sources.¹³ Anisimov's works helped me place Obreskov's residency in Constantinople in the context of the work of other Russian diplomats abroad and of Russian foreign policy in general.

My work represents the first attempt to use Aleksei Obreskov's service in the Ottoman Empire to re-examine the major transition in Russian foreign policy that took place in 1762. In Part III, I concentrate on the reign of Empress Elizabeth and, in part IV, I turn to the reigns of Peter III and Catherine II. I argue that despite some fundamental changes in Russian foreign

goda: Ego podgotovka i zakliuchenie (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955) and "Russkii diplomat A. M. Obreskov," *Istoricheskie zapiski*, Vol. 40 (Moscow, 1952), pp. 267-278; and Petr Stegnii, *Posol III klassa. Khroniki "vremen Ochakovskikh i pokoren'ia Kryma"* (Moscow: Feoriia, 2009). Gavriil Kessel'brenner provides some information on Obreskov's activities during this period but mostly with a focus on the resident himself rather than on foreign policy: "Revnost', iskusstvo, i userdie," in his *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del: k 450-letiiu diplomaticheskoi sluzhby Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki i kartolitografiia, 1999), pp. 367-397.

¹¹ Uğur Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi (1755-1768)," Ph.D. Dissertation (Istanbul: Marmara University, 2012).

¹² Rumiana Mikhneva, *Rossiia i Osmanskaia imperiia v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh v seredine XVIII veka, 1739-1756* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985).

¹³ Maksim Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia v Evrope v seredine XVIII veka: Ot Akhenskogo mira do Semiletnei voiny* (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2012) and *Semiletnaia voina i rossiiskaia diplomatiia v 1756-1763 gg.* (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2014).

policy after 1762, Russian diplomacy on the Bosphorus exhibited substantial continuity. Namely, during both of these periods, Russian diplomacy in Constantinople was subordinated to more pressing issues of Russian foreign policy. As Part III demonstrates, the 1750s were dominated first by the prospect and then the reality of the Anglo-French colonial war, which sparked a fundamental shift in European alliances and brought on the Seven Years' War. The common thread of Russian diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire during this period was to keep the Porte out of the war.

At first, Obreskov's main task consisted in countering French intrigues aimed at encouraging Ottoman opposition to the passage of Russian troops through Poland-Lithuania. The threat of a French-supported bloc of Sweden, Prussia, Poland-Lithuania, and the Ottoman Empire forced Bestuzhev-Riumin to compromise with the Porte and to advocate a stop in the construction of a new southern border fortress of St. Elizabeth. As Demir shows in his work, the Ottoman government took advantage of the Austrian and English governments' willingness, as Russia's allies, to pressure St. Petersburg to halt the project. However, serious divisions within the Russian government, especially between Bestuzhev-Riumin and Vorontsov, resulted in a vacillating policy, with the fortress project being stopped and resumed several times. Obreskov found himself caught between the different programs of the two court factions. At first, he believed that capitulating to the Ottoman demands would only embolden the Porte, but Bestuzhev-Riumin's criticism and the outbreak of the Seven Years' War forced Obreskov to be more cautious. Later, during the reign of Catherine II, Obreskov advocated abandoning the project in order not to antagonize the Ottomans.

Soon after the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, the main fear of the Russian

government, as well as of its allies France and Austria, consisted in the possibility that Frederick II would succeed in drawing the Porte to enter the conflict on the side of Prussia. This danger became more probable with the accession to the throne of a new sultan, Mustafa III (October 1757-January 1774). Both the efforts of Obreskov, as well as his Austrian and French colleagues, and the pacific policies of the wise and experienced grand vizier Koca Ragıb Paşa (January 1757-April 1763) accounted for the fact that the Porte abstained from getting involved in the war. Frederick II, however, never lost hope and until the last moment encouraged Mustafa III to attack Austria.

In Part IV, I discuss the major turns of Russian diplomacy after 1762 and highlight the negative influence of Russian interference in Poland-Lithuania on Russo-Ottoman relations. I also specify Obreskov's role in these events, drawing attention to his caution and resolve to implement policies from above only after critical analysis. While he did everything to neutralize Ottoman reactions to Catherine's initiatives in Poland, Obreskov was much more cautious about the orders that forced him to upset the delicate balance of peaceful relations between the Russian and Ottoman empires. First, I turn to the abrupt reorientation of Russian foreign policy towards an alliance with Prussia under Peter III. One of the less known decisions of the ill-fated Russian ruler was his support for Prussia's calls for the Porte to attack Austria. According to new evidence, both Vorontsov and Obreskov tried to prevaricate in implementing the new orders and their actions appear to have been critical in preventing the Porte from committing itself to a military alliance with Prussia. Nevertheless, I present new evidence that once Obreskov had carried out Peter III's orders, although in an unofficial and deliberately understated manner, the Porte indeed signed an alliance agreement with Prussia in July 1762. Obreskov hoped that the

Ottomans would not take active military measures but simply use the agreement in order to pressure Austria into making some territorial concessions. Indeed, the treaty appears not to have been ratified, but the impact of the news of Catherine II's accession to the Russian throne must have played the decisive role in the Porte's refusal to ally with Prussia.

Catherine II's policies toward the Ottoman Empire during the first decade of her reign, as seen through the extensive diplomatic correspondence between St. Petersburg and Obreskov, contradict the established image of the empress as having early on directed her efforts towards making territorial and strategic gains at the expense of the Ottomans. Several authors have postulated that Catherine II from the very beginning consciously revived the grand strategy of Peter I aimed at achieving access to the Black Sea and possibly even driving the Ottomans from Europe.¹⁴ For example, Petr Stegnii writes in his book on Polish partitions that Catherine's interest in Poland-Lithuania was only "as a platform for conducting a policy, the main vector and function of which had a southwestern, Black Sea-Balkan direction, and were connected both with the strategic plans of the empress and with her striving to stimulate the commerce of Russia's southern regions." Yet, Stegnii does not offer any evidence in his book and dates the appearance of this "plan, which evolved into the Greek project in the second half of her reign," to "the beginning period of the Russo-Turkish war of 1768-1774" and "to the late 1760s."¹⁵ In a recent work on the Russian naval expedition in the Mediterranean during the war, Russian researchers provide more evidence for this theory, stressing the highly secret and conspiratorial manner in which the empress planned her project of fostering an anti-Ottoman uprising among

¹⁴ For example, see John P. LeDonne, "Geopolitics, Logistics, and Grain: Russia's Ambitions in the Black Sea Basin, 1737-1834." *The International History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), pp. 1-41.

¹⁵ Stegnii, *Razdely Pol'shi*, pp. 87, 131, 408-409.

the Greeks since the early 1760s.¹⁶ But this evidence is insufficient to prove that Catherine would have pursued an aggressive policy towards the Porte had the Ottomans not declared war in 1768. Indeed, the authors of the work stress that initial secret operations in Greece and the Balkans had the goal only of assessing the situation and gathering intelligence.

The records of the Constantinople mission and other state papers demonstrate that Catherine was highly cautious in devising her foreign policy course. She listened to many different advisors and was particularly attuned to the greatest strategic threats that her empire faced. Despite the fact that in fall 1763 the real leadership of the CFA passed from Mikhail Vorontsov into the hands of Nikita Panin, much of Catherine's understanding of how to approach the Ottomans was based on Vorontsov's early memorandums to her. Vorontsov had highlighted to the empress that the Ottomans posed several strategic threats to the Russian Empire: in Poland-Lithuania, around the Caspian, and in Crimea. Vorontsov's long-term advice was to neutralize the Crimean threat in particular by capturing Crimea, the mouth of the River Don, or some other location on the Black Sea in order to contain the Crimean and Ottoman threats by building a naval base. This would also allow Russia to spread its commerce from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.¹⁷ This policy suggestion was a long-range one and not necessarily offensive in its implication: it could have been implemented if a war broke out despite Russia's wishes. Indeed, when the Ottomans declared war in 1768 Catherine's war aims

¹⁶ Irina Smilianskaia, M. B. Velizhev, and E. B. Smilianskaia. *Rossii v Sredizemnomor'e: arhipelagskaia ekspeditsiia Ekateriny Velikoi* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), pp. 29-86. Field Marshal Count Burkhard Christoph von Münnich had suggested a similar plan during the 1735-1739 war, but in the 1760s Greek immigrants into the Russian Empire were the first to suggest their services in investigating the possibilities and laying the groundwork for this plan. Gregory Bruess, *Religion, Identity, and Empire: A Greek Archbishop in the Russia of Catherine the Great* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 35, 38-40; Brian L. Davies, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768-1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 151-152.

¹⁷ *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 300-308.

closely coincided with the strategy proposed by Vorontsov. Similarly, Catherine's investigations of the mood among the Ottoman Balkan subjects can be seen as directly following Vorontsov's suggestion that Russia's only potential leverage against the Ottomans was Russia's ability to bother the Porte by extending secret or open assistance to the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

It is obvious that Catherine kept in mind the wise counsel of Vorontsov and was not simply under the sway of the adventurism of the Orlov brothers, even though she sent Vorontsov into effective retirement in late 1763. Her actual foreign policy in the 1760s, especially after the death of the Polish king August III in fall 1763, was dominated by the Polish question and until the very outbreak of the war with the Ottomans she fought, in concert with Panin, to prevent a conflict with the Porte. Catherine was extremely concerned about having an able diplomat in Constantinople and declined Obreskov's requests for a recall because his experience and good rapport with Ottoman officials were essential for ensuring that the Porte would not oppose Russian interference in the domestic politics of Poland-Lithuania. The unprecedented sums of money that she transferred to Obreskov to placate Ottoman belligerence are one of the strongest pieces of evidence that she absolutely did not wish to engage in a conflict with the Ottomans. While she was not intent on compromising on everything with the Porte, Catherine agreed with Obreskov's suggestions to stop the development of the St. Elizabeth fortress and to delay any plans for negotiating Russia's right to send its commercial vessels to the Black Sea. In any case, attempts to achieve the right of commercial navigation on the Black Sea through diplomatic means dated back to the reign of Empress Elizabeth. Obreskov's predecessors had also felt that this objective was not very realistic. We know that Catherine tried to circumvent the problem by

sending a commercial expedition to the Mediterranean ports in 1763-1765, but she also reminded Obreskov, as late as 1765, to keep an eye for an opportunity to negotiate the navigation rights through diplomacy or bribes.

Catherine's Polish project was so important to her that for its sake she abandoned the long-standing Austrian alliance and switched to an open alliance with Prussia, in direct contradiction to Vorontsov's advice. She went as far as condoning Panin's initiative in 1765 to encourage the Porte to attack Austria. Significantly, Obreskov did not rush to implement this order and soon thereafter he was able to counter this order with new evidence that Prussia was not as faithful to its agreement with Russia as the St. Petersburg government believed. Indeed, I argue that the advantages of the Prussian alliance appear dubious in light of Frederick's intrigues in Constantinople after the election of Catherine's candidate to the Polish throne. Until recently, no one has ever questioned the reasons behind Catherine II's turn to Prussia as her primary ally in the 1760s. Some scholars have pointed out that the real beneficiary of the new Russian alliance system in the 1760s was Prussia.¹⁸ In his latest work Maksim Anisimov goes further and calls attention to the need to tackle this question more critically than before.¹⁹ While I do not agree with Anisimov's discounting of the first half of Catherine's reign as a sort of glaring gap and an aberration from the long sensible diplomacy of Empress Elizabeth, his point has merit in demonstrating the experimental, searching, and even confused nature of Catherine's early foreign policy.

Despite the predominant view of Catherine II as an aggressive imperial ruler, her foreign

¹⁸ H.M. Scott argues that it was only towards the end of the 1760s that Russia was able to become the dominant partner in the relationship: *The Emergence of The Eastern Powers, 1756-1775* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 116-124; Stegnii, *Razdely Pol'shi i diplomatiia Ekateriny II: 1772, 1793, 1795* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2002), p. 129.

¹⁹ Anisimov, *Semiletiaia voina*, pp. 501-543.

policy decisions in the 1760s, when considered apart from what transpired after 1768, add up to create a more mixed image. Her general intent, as stressed by many historians, was to assure peace in foreign relations in order to concentrate on pressing domestic imperatives. David Griffiths, in particular, has pointed out the pacifist objectives of Panin's Northern System, which he rebranded as the policy of "drift and status quo" and a "defensive," and "non-expansionist system of alliances."²⁰ However, her extremely assertive policy toward Poland-Lithuania and her choice to ally with Prussia in order to assure the success of her Polish project undermined, even if inadvertently, the peace and stability that she sought in theory. The latest scholarship has demonstrated that Catherine did not plan to make territorial gains at the expense of Poland-Lithuania and the first Polish partition in 1772 was in large measure a forced move.²¹ As early as 1763-1764, however, her decision to introduce military forces on the territory of Poland-Lithuania in order to ensure the election of her handpicked candidate, Stanislaw Poniatowski, defied the ostensible program of peace abroad. Catherine's Polish project in the 1760s eventually necessitated a heavy military and financial commitment and precipitated the war with the Ottoman Empire in 1768, which the empress did not seek herself, especially when she was facing a massive rebellion of an anti-Russian confederation of Bar in Poland-Lithuania.

Already in her lifetime, Russian critics of Catherine, in particular Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov, pointed out that her provocative actions in Poland had caused the first Turkish war.²² In making a criticism about the alleged pacifism of Panin's foreign policy program, John

²⁰ David Griffiths, "Russian Court Politics and the Question of an Expansionist Foreign Policy Under Catherine II, 1762-1783," Ph.D. Dissertation (Cornell University, 1974), pp. 153-154. Also see his article "The Rise and Fall of the Northern System: Court Politics and Foreign Policy in the First Half of Catherine's Reign," *Canadian Slavic Studies*, Vol. IV, no. 3 (1970), pp. 547-569, esp. pp. 547, 551, 554, 560.

²¹ Petr Stegnii, *Razdely Pol'shi*, pp. 131, 409.

²² A Lentin, "Prince M. M. Shcherbatov as Critic of Catherine II's Foreign Policy," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 49, No. 116 (Jul., 1971), pp. 365-381; Robert E. Jones, "Opposition to War and Expansion in Late

LeDonne also has pointed out that Russian foreign policy in the 1760s was mainly focused on the north: “The Northern Accord was not a policy of peace. It sought no less than to achieve, under the cover of an international agreement, the subjection of Sweden and Poland to Russia’s domination....”²³ Having examined the activities of the Russian residency in Constantinople in the 1760s, I also conclude that the Ottoman Empire had secondary importance for Russian diplomacy during this period. The impressive territorial expansion of the Russian Empire during Catherine II’s reign should not blind us to the possibility that in the first six years of her reign Catherine was grappling with how to structure and orient her foreign policy and her answers may not necessarily have been right for Russia. William C. Fuller rightly notes the hazardous nature of Russian imperial entanglements in the eighteenth century and discusses the 1768-1774 war as a perfect example of his point.²⁴

At the peace negotiations during the 1768-1774 war, Obreskov, similar to Nikita Panin and Petr Rumiantsev, supported a more cautious stance and did not believe that the Porte would ever accept the empress’s most ambitious demands. Nevertheless, he played an important role in negotiating the conditions of the treaty that Russia was able to impose on the Ottomans following Petr Rumiantsev’s decisive military victories in 1774. In particular, I add a new interpretation of Obreskov’s contribution to the controversial articles on religious minorities. The skill of the diplomats Catherine had inherited from her predecessors was as important as the ability of her generals in turning the large-scale and protracted war effort into Russia’s favor.

Eighteenth Century Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 32, no. 1 (1984), pp. 34-51, here p. 40.

²³ John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 40.

²⁴ William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (Simon and Schuster, 1998), pp. 86-87.

PART I. Russian Diplomatic Service in the Eighteenth Century. From Old to New

Chapter 1. From the *Posolskii Prikaz* to the College of Foreign Affairs

The discussion of the history of Russia's foreign policy institutions in this chapter demonstrates that Russian diplomacy in the eighteenth century was based on a long history of centralized decision-making and a well-developed specialized bureaucracy. Existing accounts of the history of European diplomacy gravely underestimate the strength of Russian diplomatic institutions. As a result, authors place undue emphasis on the transformation effected by Peter I. While I also underscore the crucial contributions of the reformist tsar, I stress that he built his successful diplomacy on long-established principles and foundations. His main achievement consisted in realizing the value of resident diplomacy and establishing permanent representations throughout Europe and the Middle East. The adoption of this method in relations with foreign states rendered quick results precisely because of the developed central institutions. Therefore, while resident diplomacy was an important marker of participation in international affairs, we cannot discount the long Russian diplomatic tradition, which was characterized by an effective bureaucracy, centralized decision-making, and a strong archival tradition—all features that had made the Italian states' diplomacy so successful in the early modern period.

The second chapter shows the advantages of Peter I's decision to adopt resident diplomacy as the presence of a Russian representative in Constantinople led to more direct and reliable information-gathering. Indeed, the very difficulties that attended this initiative—resistance of other governments and their diplomats in the Ottoman Empire and opposition of the

Ottoman government itself—proved the largely unspoken recognition that direct presence on the Bosphorus was an important requirement for securing Russia’s southern flank in the context of its more active engagement in European affairs and an effective tool for influencing Ottoman politics. It took time for the Russian government to cultivate personnel who could successfully fulfill these functions, but even occasional failures did not dissuade Russian rulers from their commitment to resident diplomacy. Despite being a latecomer on the Constantinople diplomatic scene, St. Petersburg reaped important benefits because its diplomats were able to approximate and even match the effectiveness of other foreign representatives while the Ottomans—unlike most European states—had no such instrument in the Russian capital.

The *Posolskii Prikaz* Tradition

In his account of the history of European diplomacy, M.S. Anderson notes that “From 1699 onwards, when A.A. Matveev was sent as minister to the United Provinces, a network of diplomatic representatives abroad comparable in its extent and efficiency to that of any European State was rapidly created.”²⁵ Although Anderson provides no explanation how such a successful change could have been accomplished so quickly, he should be credited at least for including Russia in his account and simply mentioning the tradition of the *Posolskii Prikaz*. Another study of European diplomacy in the age of Louis XIV, for example, refers to Russia’s role in seventeenth-century European diplomacy as “insignificant” and, as a result, the author confines Russia and the Ottoman Empire to the “diplomatic periphery of Europe” and gives no

²⁵ M.S. Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century, 1713-1783* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 239.

consideration to the diplomatic institutions and traditions of Muscovy, or of Russia under Peter I.²⁶ Yet, Roosen's discussion of the developing central organs and professional bureaucratic practices of diplomacy across Europe would have benefitted from the inclusion of the Russian case, because—save for its shunning of resident diplomacy—the Muscovite state was similar to the Italian city-states in its strong tradition of centralization of foreign policy decision-making and scrupulous archival practices.²⁷

Historians of Russia have treated this subject, but insufficiently. Only one author has highlighted the similarities between the early successes of Italian and Russian states in organizing central organs overlooking foreign policy, which did not happen in the rest of Europe until the late seventeenth century. For example, Zonova notes a special difficulty in Western Europe in establishing the “Italian system” of governmental remuneration of diplomats. Likewise, she writes that the “maintenance of archives was also weakly developed in Western Europe, unlike in Rome, Venice, and Russia.” Quite rightly, Zonova highlights the development of the specialized cadres of language and country specialists at the *Posolskii Prikaz*, noting that already at the turn of the seventeenth century first Russian students went abroad to learn foreign languages.²⁸

Zonova's explanation of the Petrine transformation deserves mention as it stresses the conceptual changes first and foremost. Thus, she argues that the

pre-Petrine model was based on the ‘symphony’ of secular and church authorities. This Byzantine model, in relations with foreign states, was based on the striving to Christianize barbarians. This model did not recognize the ruler's sovereignty in its secular meaning, but upheld Christian

²⁶ William James Roosen, *The Age of Louis XIV: The Rise of Modern Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 9-10.

²⁷ Roosen, pp. 33-58.

²⁸ T. V. Zonova, “Komparativnyi analiz stanovleniia rossiiskoi i evropeiskoi professional'noi diplomaticheskoi sluzhby,” in I. S. Ivanov *et al.*, eds., *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia: Istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), pp. 102-103.

universalism above everything else. As a result, Russia controlled and monitored its relations with foreign states, but was not interested in promoting or developing them. . . . Only under Peter the Russian diplomatic system recognized diplomacy as a system of relations between sovereign states based on mutual exchange of permanent diplomatic representatives, personifying the sovereignty of their rulers. This change was expressed foremost in Peter's reform of the system of government authority through secularization.²⁹

In other words, Peter I ended the Muscovite diplomatic isolation as a result of having dropped the old worldview of Russia as being superior to other states. While this is an over-simplified perspective, there is a kernel in it of the essential difference between Russian and Ottoman diplomacies in the eighteenth century.

Other historians writing on Peter's reforms in Russian diplomacy have stressed the novelty of his use of permanent embassies abroad and the important contribution of the new approach to the development of Russia's diplomatic corps. For example, Avis Bohlen, herself a daughter of a well-known American ambassador to the Soviet Union, has argued that before Peter I Russian diplomatic practices were primitive and useless, however the reformer-tsar was able to launch new diplomatic cadres, which improved continually through their experiences and training abroad.³⁰ While this is certainly true, Dan Altbauer was right in noting that Bohlen had underestimated the interest of the *Posolskii Prikaz* in intelligence-gathering: episodic Russian diplomatic missions abroad were not preoccupied solely with questions of form, protocol, and verbatim implementation of instructions; they also collected valuable intelligence for Moscow.³¹

The institutional and personnel continuity, specialized country bureaus consisting of carefully selected country- and language-experts, and meticulous record keeping had all been

²⁹ Zonova, pp. 106-108.

³⁰ Avis Bohlen, "Changes in Russian diplomacy under Peter the Great," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (1966), pp. 341-358.

³¹ Dan Altbauer, "The Diplomats of Peter the Great," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (1980), pp. 1-16.

characteristic of the *Posolskii Prikaz*. In fact, several of the foreign department's heads had channeled their efforts into making changes that were adopted later by Peter I.

Origins of Russia's Diplomatic Bureaucracy

The Department of Foreign Affairs formally appeared in 1549 when, according to historical records, Ivan IV appointed its official head and prescribed his functions. However, a government chancellery that controlled foreign relations had likely existed before that date, perhaps since the early sixteenth century. The great Moscow fire of 1547 destroyed part of the archive so what we know might be simply limited by this fact. The earlier chancelleries, staffed by *d'iaks* (clerks) and *pod'iachie* (assistant clerks), served as prototypes for the *prikazy*.³²

Kliuchevskii maintained that for a long time after diplomatic activity intensified under Ivan III, foreign policy was made by the ruler in partnership with the Boyar Duma.³³ Indeed, this royal council dating back to the fifteenth century in the beginning not only served an advisory purpose—the function to which it was limited by the seventeenth century,—but actively managed diplomacy through focus committees. These Boyar committees were formed *ad hoc* and consisted of Duma members who were given the tsar's *prikaz* (order) or powers to conduct matters on his behalf. The committees received foreign ambassadors and led negotiations, while the slowly accumulating documentation was for the time being managed by a treasury *d'iak* who

³² For the first time the term *d'iak* was mentioned in documents from the fourteenth century as a new appellation for prince's scribes. These were literate but unfree people who served the prince in his chancellery. Ia. M. Rogozhin, "Okol vsei velikoi Rossii," in E.V. Chistiakova, ed. *'Okol vsei velikoi Rossii': ob istorii russkoi diplomaticheskoi sluzhby XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1989), p. 18. Most scholarship on the *Posolskii Prikaz* relies on the seminal work about the department produced by a pre-revolutionary scholar S.A. Belokurov: *O Posol'skom prikaze* (Moscow, 1906). Recently, Nikolai Rogozhin published an updated study of the *prikaz*: Nikolai Rogozhin, *Posol'skii prikaz: kolybel' rossiiskoi diplomatii* (Moscow, 2003).

³³ Rogozhin, "Okol vsei velikoi Rossii," pp. 23, 57.

also registered ambassadorial gifts. Early embassies often aimed at trade agreements, especially from eastern countries, and therefore it was natural for the treasury to manage record keeping.³⁴ But the growing body of documents made it necessary to systematize them and opened the door to bureaucrats responsible for organizing, categorizing, and conserving them just as in other departments. On this foundation, the *Posolskii Prikaz* was created.

The DFA's structure underwent some changes during its existence and at certain times it was responsible for areas not related to foreign policy—management of monasteries, courts, customs, pubs, and select cities. In order to cover its own salaries and expenses, the DFA was burdened with collection of revenue from these sources in addition to its conventional functions, causing complaints of its heads such as A.L. Ordin-Nashchokin. The main responsibilities of the department head consisted in receiving foreign ambassadors, leading preliminary negotiations, attending official receptions, proofreading texts of response letters from the Tsar to foreign rulers, writing instructions to Russian diplomats on foreign missions, and reading their reports upon return. The *prikaz* was also charged with overseeing foreign merchants and colonists in Russia, Stroganovs' activities, as well as those of Siberian merchants and industrialists, managing the postal system, and keeping an eye on the Don Cossacks.³⁵

Russian Foreign Ministers as Chancellors

Gradually, heads of the DFA acquired leading importance in assisting Russian rulers in the implementation of foreign policy. They, in effect, became first ministers or state chancellors, who oversaw all contacts with foreign states, work of the ever-expanding personnel of the DFA,

³⁴ Rogozhin, "Okno vsei velikoi Rossii," p. 20; Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii: Ot Posolskoi izby*, p. 213.

³⁵ Rogozhin, "Okno vsei velikoi Rossii," pp. 25-28.

as well as the careful maintenance and utilization of the central archive. The first head of the DFA, or *Posolskii Prikaz*, Ivan Mikhailovich Viskovatyi, came from a landowning family and distinguished himself in diplomatic affairs before being appointed by the Tsar to this position. Early in 1549 he travelled to negotiate with the Nogay ambassadors and then with the former Astrakhan Tsar Derbysh. With the new appointment he became the main official responsible for foreign policy. Indeed, Viskovatyi and his successors were key figures in the administration of foreign affairs, and given the central role of diplomacy in the period of Russia's imperial expansion in the second half of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, heads of the DFA also often became tsars' right hands. Thus, beginning with Viskovatyi, the head of the *Posolskii Prikaz* carried the title of a *dumnyi d'iak*—the chief clerk/head of the department who was also a member of the Duma. This was a novel development that essentially brought the voice of the nascent bureaucracy and, by extension, the tsar's advocate—for noble servitors owed their position to the ruler—into the government council of the grand notables, the boyars, which meant that the interests and ethos of aristocracy was now beginning to be counterbalanced by those of the bureaucracy.³⁶ The new title and membership in the Duma was bestowed on Viskovatyi automatically when he became the keeper of the tsar's seal (*pechatnik*) in 1561—a sign of great trust and favor.³⁷

The archive was an integral part of the department and, starting with Viskovatyi, its directors used the stored material as a source for chronicles on world and Russian history commissioned by the tsar. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the DFA director A.S.

³⁶ As a rule, the Boyar Duma sessions included the *d'iaks* of the *Posolskii*, *Razriadnyi* (Military Register), and *Pomestnyi* (Service Estates). Rogozhin, "Oko vsei velikoi Rossii," p. 18.

³⁷ N.M. Rogozhin, "Ivan Mikhailovich Viskovatyi," in E.V. Chistiakova, ed. *'Oko vsei velikoi Rossii': ob istorii russkoi diplomaticheskoi sluzhby XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1989), pp. 56, 66.

Matveev launched an initiative to write the history of the Russian state and its monarch that would highlight its international prestige and affirm the tsar's sovereignty among rulers of other states. This idea resulted in the *Tituliarnik* (1672) and other historical writings, which postulated the links of the new Romanov dynasty (1613) with its Riurikid predecessors (and through them, with the Roman emperor Augustus) in order to buttress its legitimacy. The cultural role of the *Posolskii Prikaz* was also enhanced by the presence of language specialists who translated foreign literature among other things and the scores of catalogued ambassadorial reports in the department's archive.³⁸

In addition to such creative tasks of ideological nature, heads of the *prikaz* often found themselves in charge of additional departments, usually as a result of their growing power at court. For example, a later director of foreign affairs, Andrei Iakovlevich Shchelkalov headed the DFA and the *Razriadnyi Prikaz* simultaneously, only to release the latter after some time into the hands of his brother Vasilii. The brothers Shchelkalovs further concentrated their power over Russian foreign and domestic policy, taking charge of the majority of chief departments, in the three remaining decades of the sixteenth century.³⁹ Vasilii Golitsyn in the 1680s was at the helm of the *Posolskii*, *Inozemnyi*, *Reitarskii*, *Pushkarskii*, and *Malorossiiskii* departments.⁴⁰ We thus see directors of foreign affairs taking leading roles in the affairs of the government throughout the existence of the DFA. Out of all the departments, the *Posolskii Prikaz* in effect provided the first Russian chancellors, Viskovatyi arguably heading the list.⁴¹ This circumstance makes

³⁸ Rogozhin, "Okno vsei velikoi Rossii," "Artamon Sergeevich Matveev," pp. 32, 173; N.M. Rogozhin, "Ivan Mikhailovich Viskovatyi," in E.V. Chistiakova, ed. *'Okno vsei velikoi Rossii': ob istorii russkoi diplomaticheskoi sluzhby XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1989), p. 57.

³⁹ Rogozhin, "Brat'ia Shchelkalovy," pp. 71, 74-75, 89, 91-92.

⁴⁰ Andrzej Kaminski, *Republic vs. autocracy: Poland-Lithuania and Russia, 1686-1697* (Cambridge, MA: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1993), p. 48.

⁴¹ G. Kessel'brenner, *Rossiiskie diplomaty XVI-XIX vv.: Volume I. Posol'skii prikaz* (Moscow: Ianiko, 1996), p. 48.

Peter's College of Foreign Affairs appear as a mere continuation of the tradition, for as will be shown below, the CFA—despite its professed collegial nature—was basically under the control of a single person, officially called chancellor, who was likewise involved in a variety of domestic affairs in addition to diplomacy.

During the Muscovite period, the DFA directors not only were involved in the formulation of foreign policy but personally took part in numerous missions abroad. From Viskovatyi to Vasiliï Golitsyn, the last foreign minister before Peter's reign, the heads of the DFA were frequently seen, while in office, at foreign courts as ambassadors and even on battlefields. Such personal involvement resulted from the highly centralized nature of state administration, which forced the tsar to choose the most trusted people to represent his interests. The creation of permanent foreign representations by Peter—properly screened and fittingly loyal servitors who now advanced according to the more expanded system of social mobility—freed up the chancellors to deal with the streamlining of their departments and other matters of government. On the other hand, in the eighteenth century the Governing Senate—the nominal successor of the Boyar Duma—did not play an active role in foreign policy.⁴² Rulers had to convene *ad hoc* advisory committees in order, in times of crisis, to counterbalance the chancellor's vision and solicit wide-ranging advice.⁴³

⁴² This could be observed from the beginning. John P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 31. A scholar of Empress Elizabeth's reign highlights that due to Elizabeth's particular interest in foreign policy the empress made sure to keep the CFA, unlike other government colleges/departments, out of the purview of the Senate. Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan, *Elizaveta Petrovna: imperatritsa, ne pokhozhaia na drugikh* (Moscow: Astrel', 2012), p. 366.

⁴³ In fact, the Senate itself was created in response to a crisis, namely to fill in the impending administrative vacuum when Peter was leaving the capital for the Turkish campaign in early 1711. See Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 101. Peter, beginning with his first military campaigns for Azov, created temporary Campaign Chancelleries (*Pokhodnaia Kantseliariia*) that were the main organs directing foreign policy under his leadership. See Svetlana Turilova, *Istoriia vneshnepoliticheskogo vedomstva Rossii (1720-1832)* (Moscow, 2000), p. 242.

Diplomatic Staff: Ambassadors and Clerks

When the DFA directors themselves were not employed on foreign trips, the usual procedure was to send one or a few members of aristocracy from the Duma, either boyars or *okol'nichii*—the two top ranks out of the total four among 28-153 members of the council,—accompanied by *d'iaks* from the DFA.⁴⁴ In this way, the higher-status diplomatic representatives from Russia were assisted by bureaucratic experts. The noble diplomats could well be specialists themselves, either due to relevant military experience or participation in the Duma deliberations on foreign affairs. The boyars and high nobility were undoubtedly the most educated people of their day in Russia and several foreign observers are known to have remarked on the adequacy of the Russians' erudition,⁴⁵ although much criticism for ignorance has been made as well. Ever since the establishment of a postal connection with Western Europe through Riga in 1665, the Russian government eagerly consumed foreign newspapers, more than half of which came from the Dutch Republic in the 1660s and 1670s.⁴⁶ The DFA was charged with preparing daily morning reports on international affairs—known as *kuranty*—to the Duma, the tsars, and their regent sister Sophia. The evening before, assistant clerks and translators analyzed news from Europe, Asia, and by now even the Americas, preparing them in the form of succinct briefings and printed newsletters.⁴⁷ These overviews were often spiced up with funny stories, descriptions of majestic ceremonies, and trivia about other peoples, which effectively educated the boyars and rulers about the world at large, such as for example the facts that “Madrid is the capital of Spain,

⁴⁴ Sometimes even assistant clerks were appointed head of missions, but they usually kept a low profile, as discussed in Kaminski, p. 5. The number of total Duma members throughout the seventeenth century is given in Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the age of Peter the Great* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 5. Kaminski gives the number of 150 for the late seventeenth century, p. 44.

⁴⁵ See Kaminski on the educational horizons of the Russian aristocracy in the late seventeenth century, pp. 43-44, 107-108.

⁴⁶ Kees Boterbloem, *Modernizer of Russia: Andrei Vinius, 1641-1716* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 55-57.

⁴⁷ Daniel Clarke Waugh, “The Publication of Muscovite *Kuranty*,” *Kritika*, Vol. IX, no. 3 (1973), pp. 104-120.

and Alger is in Africa.” However, while information presented to the Duma by the *prikaz* officials contained the most important news, the DFA and its directors—Golitsyn, then Ukraintsev, and others—had a monopoly on intelligence and were much more widely- and deeply-versed in international developments of their day.⁴⁸

This brings us to the consideration of the real backbone of the *Posolskii Prikaz* that stood behind Russian foreign policy over more than one and a half century of its existence: the corps of clerks, assistant clerks, translators, and interpreters. The writing down of dictations and copying of numerous letters, instructions, and registers often resulted in ten-to-twelve-hour work days for the clerks, while the amount of correspondence with abroad kept translators likewise busy overnight on a regular basis. These men also engaged in non-sedentary work, such as accompanying foreign guests and spying on them. Literacy, especially handwriting,⁴⁹—except for oral interpreters—and language skills qualified potential candidates for employment at the DFA, which meant that this was a highly specialized minority within the Russian society.

In 1689 there were 53 assistant clerks, 22 translators, and 17 interpreters in the *prikaz*.⁵⁰ The department tried to attract the best talent by offering competitive wages. In fact, the DFA was one the most prestigious employers within the government: its salaries were three to five times higher than in most other *prikazy*.⁵¹ Participation in extraordinary embassies for members of the Duma and the *prikaz* brought real rewards, signifying that perhaps men had to be cajoled to undertake foreign missions. Thus, any embassy resulted in a salary increase—usually given

⁴⁸ A.P. Bogdanov, “Vasilii Vasil’evich Golitsyn,” in E.V. Chistiakova, ed. *Oko vsei velikoi Rossii’: ob istorii russkoi diplomaticheskoi sluzhby XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1989), p. 215.

⁴⁹ Kaminski, p. 94.

⁵⁰ Kaminski also gives a number of around 100 people at the end of the century, p. 93. For 1664, we have the figure of 19 translators. Boterbloem, p. 58.

⁵¹ Kessel’brenner, *Rossiiskie diplomaty XVI-XIX vv.*, p. 27.

out in kind (furs, silk, linens, silver dinnerware, etc.)—and new land grants: in the early seventeenth century, an ambassador on average received a 50% increase in salary and an 11% increase in land; assistant clerk—around 20% in each; and translator—a 25% increase in salary. Embassy participants also advanced in rank upon return, as well as received certain tax privileges. Interestingly, remuneration did not depend on the success of a mission. However, if successful, the same people could be employed again.⁵²

The growth of the department can be surmised from changes in the total amount expended in salaries over time. Under Tsar Fedor, the son of Ivan IV, assistant clerks were only 17 in number and in total earned 429 rubles and 22,275 square meters in land grants. By the early seventeenth century, under Tsar Boris Godunov, the salaries dipped slightly but were essentially the same: 412 rubles and 20,900 square meters. However, by the second half of the seventeenth century, the total payment to the *prikaz* constituted 5,000 rubles, and in 1701—around 7,000 rubles.⁵³

The backgrounds of the DFA employees varied and very often they were foreigners in Russian service, especially translators and interpreters for there was no school of foreign languages in Russia, whose bulk of the population was simply illiterate and ignorant of the world outside. Territorial conquests could bring in new talent, as is most evident in the case of Left-Bank Ukraine captured from the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in the middle of the seventeenth century. Other border areas with contesting loyalties also served as a source, as did for example Moldavia, Wallachia, as well as renegade Tatars. Kaminski notes that in 1689 translators and interpreters of the *Posolskii Prikaz* were of the following foreign origins:

⁵² Kessel'brenner, *Rossiiskie diplomaty XVI-XIX vv.*, pp. 29-31.

⁵³ Kessel'brenner, *Rossiiskie diplomaty XVI-XIX vv.*, p. 31.

Ukrainians, Poles, Dutchmen, Moldavians, Germans, Swedes, Englishmen, and Tatars.⁵⁴ All of these functionaries were of humble birth or had lost status in their lands of origin and thereby became part of the loyal class of tsar's bureaucratic servitors and a counterbalance to the court nobility.⁵⁵

Native Russian staff was not non-existent, however. For example, Artamon Sergeevich Matveev,⁵⁶ the head of the DFA in the 1670s, oversaw the writing of many chronicles and genealogical compilations using materials of the diplomatic archive, and we know that the authors of the *Istoriia o tsariakh i velikikh kniaz' iakh Zemli Russkoi* and *Rodoslovie velikikh kniazei i tsarei rossiiskikh* had been translators in the *Posolskii Prikaz*: Fedor Griboedov and Petr Dolgovo.⁵⁷ Russians who had spent time in foreign captivity usually found the department a logical place where to look for work on their return.⁵⁸ The *prikaz* reportedly had a school that tried to meet the ever growing demand for assistant clerks, among whom a tendency to go blind from overwork tended to manifest itself. Under Golitsyn, attempts were made to strengthen the school by attracting more talented applicants who were even encouraged to finish the program sooner.⁵⁹ Kaminski notes that young entrants had to go through a three-year program at the *Pechatnyi Dvor* (Printing House), where they learned Church Slavonic, Latin, and Greek.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ See Kaminski's discussion of the late seventeenth century Wallachian chief translator in the DFA Nicolae Milescu Spatarul (alternatively, Nikolai Spafarii) and a former Catholic monk from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Symeon Lawrecki, pp. 101-102. Also his assessment of the state's reliance on the newly incorporated Ukrainians, p. 62.

⁵⁵ Kaminski, p. 49.

⁵⁶ Matveev introduced Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich to his second wife, Natal'ia Naryshkina—future mother of Peter I. He is interesting for us because his career began with experience in the East, including the Ottoman Empire, where he followed his father on diplomatic missions. He is therefore another example of a “son of the DFA.” Rogozhin, “Artamon Sergeevich Matveev,” p. 146.

⁵⁷ Rogozhin, “Artamon Sergeevich Matveev,” p. 174.

⁵⁸ Kessel'brenner, *Rossiiskie diplomaty XVI-XIX vv.*, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Bogdanov, “Vasilii Vasil'evich Golitsyn,” pp. 215-216.

⁶⁰ Kaminski, p. 94.

The picture produced by the study of the *prikaz* functionaries is that of an increasingly hereditary bureaucracy, with sons following in the footsteps of their fathers.⁶¹ Promotion in this career line thus relied on a mixture of meritocratic employment and heredity. The continuity that is so apparent in the eighteenth century, therefore, is but an extension of the earlier trend. It appears that Peter I only broke up the monotony of this caste by diversifying and multiplying positions, opening this closed circle to many newcomers. However, if we look at his main advisors, we see that in the diplomatic sphere he drew on these traditional, supremely qualified cadres, as witnessed by Petr Shafirov, a son of a DFA translator—a Jew from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who converted to Orthodoxy and was ennobled in Russia—who rose to become the vice-chancellor of the new College of Foreign Affairs. Shafirov’s skill was instrumental in bribing the Ottomans to achieve a rather more favorable conclusion of the disastrous Prut campaign in 1711 than the situation merited.⁶²

Ordin-Nashchokin’s Legacy

Moreover, a survey of the history of the DFA clearly shows that, as in other areas, Peter followed in the footsteps of earlier reforming Russian statesmen. Since the nineteenth century, Russian historians were able to trace many reforms attributed to Peter, which were disproportionately praised by contemporaries and posterity alike, to the reign of his father, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645-76). Kliuchevskii, for example, claimed that no other statesman of the seventeenth century had expressed so many reform ideas and plans that would later be

⁶¹ Kaminski, p. 49.

⁶² *RBS*, Vol. 29, pp. 553-566.

carried out by Peter I as Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin.⁶³ The latter's career began with diplomatic assignments, and despite his rather short stint as the official head of the DFA in the late 1660s, he was responsible for achieving major diplomatic victories of the period, such as the Truce of Andrusovo with Poland in 1667. Having been born on the border with Lithuania and Sweden, he learned Latin, Polish, and German in his early life.⁶⁴ He represented the mainstream of the educated Muscovite court nobility in this period for whom Latin-Polish culture of their tutors opened their eyes on Europe and the world.⁶⁵ Languages and diplomatic experience in no small part helped him navigate the difficult waters of the Polish-Russian relations in the period, but also to develop ideas on ways to reorganize the state administration.

One of the overlooked early tasks given to Ordin-Nashchokin is his mission to Moldavia in 1642. In Iași, the Moldavian capital, the Russians hoped to tap into one of the most crucial networks of intelligence on the Ottomans, whose expansion in the region the Russians feared. It is highly important for the argument of this study that already under Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich Moscow recognized that it could not rely on informants from the Danubian principalities and considered it critical to have its own native agent in the region. Here in Iași intersected lines of communication between *Rzeczpospolita*, Crimea, the Ottoman Balkans and beyond, Muscovy, Ukraine, with the special contribution of Greek Orthodox monks and Russian pilgrims crossing the area on their journeys north and south. This city was in the words of scholars “a mirror of the political web of Eastern Europe.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Kliuchevskii, Vol. III, p. 315, quoted in E.V. Chistiakova and I.V. Galaktionov, “Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin,” in E.V. Chistiakova, ed. *Oko vsei velikoi Rossii': ob istorii russkoi diplomaticheskoi sluzhby XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1989), p. 108.

⁶⁴ Chistiakova and Galaktionov, “Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin,” pp. 108-109.

⁶⁵ Kaminski, p. 50.

⁶⁶ Chistiakova and Galaktionov, “Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin,” p. 110.

Ordin-Nashchokin in effect was a temporary resident ambassador, although unofficially and surreptitiously in view of the sensitive nature of his mission which essentially came down to spying. The Moldavian hospodar Vasile Lupu cooperated with Moscow in a similarly secret manner. He provided Ordin-Nashchokin with apartments, daily provisions, and even a national dress for disguise. I. Astafev, a confidant of the hospodar, served as the mutual contact. Ordin-Nashchokin collected intelligence on the Polish and Ottoman/Crimean military designs, and the situation at the borders, and intercepted information about the activities of Polish diplomats in Bahçesaray—the Crimean capital—and Constantinople. The situation of the Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks occupied a special part in his reports. The hospodar kept him under the guise of an enlisted serviceman, took him to observe border inspections, and helped set up postal communication between Moldavia and Moscow. This mission provided crucial information to be used during subsequent Russian embassies to Warsaw and Constantinople.⁶⁷

Already at this early stage in his career, Ordin-Nashchokin identified serious weaknesses in the organization of Russian foreign service and put forward his ideas to the tsar. Although on his return to Moscow in 1643 he was not promoted and went to his hometown of Pskov, he carried the lessons of his stay in Moldavia into future assignments. After his career's swift rise due to his successful suppression of the Pskov rebellion in 1650, he was employed at the border talks with Sweden and then participated in the war with the Swedes and Poles, after which he served as governor of a Livonian city until 1661. Based in Koknese, he studied the politics of the neighboring states and the economy of the Baltic trade and became interested in military and administrative reorganization, about which he presented his ideas to Tsar Aleksei.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Chistiakova and Galaktionov, "Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin," pp. 110-111.

⁶⁸ Chistiakova and Galaktionov, "Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin," pp. 111-112, 116-117.

After a specter of a joint Swedish-Ottoman attack on Muscovy arose in 1657, Ordin-Nashchokin took an anti-Swedish position and believed that a Slavic neighbor, Poland, should be an ally in such a situation. He was even prepared to offer territorial concessions to the Commonwealth. Despite the resentment of the boyars and departmental *d'iaks* towards this upstart provincial gentryman, the tsar was more favorable and appointed Ordin-Nashchokin to the Duma, as a gentleman—the third rank out of four. He sought to be appointed as ambassador to Poland for secret negotiations and he succeeded in obtaining a plenipotentiary character, after overcoming alternative scenarios of a peace proposal in the Boyar Duma. He met with the Polish King in 1663 and negotiated with the delegation appointed by the Senate, in which he offered to conclude an alliance against both Turkey and Sweden, advocating many benefits of such an accord. Although the talks backfired, this was a diplomatic stepping stone to the Andrusovo Truce of 1667, helped by the Polish rift with the Tatars.⁶⁹

On his return to Moscow after Andrusovo, Ordin-Nashchokin was promoted to the boyar rank and appointed the head of the DFA. As usual, he came to lead other government departments as well and was, therefore, effectively the head of the government. In this position, he embarked upon a reform of Russian laws and administration. Under him, the *Posolskii Prikaz* staff increased in numbers and became more open to men of talent.⁷⁰ Ordin-Nashchokin was the first to make an attempt to organize permanent diplomatic representations abroad. Previously, all embassies sent abroad were of an *ad hoc* nature: their aim was to sign a peace treaty, attend foreign elections, or establish a trade agreement.⁷¹ In 1667 Ordin-Nashchokin sent diplomats to all major European countries with the notifications about the Truce of Andrusovo and with an

⁶⁹ Chistiakova and Galaktionov, “Afanasii Lavrent’evich Ordin-Nashchokin,” pp. 119-136.

⁷⁰ Kaminski, p. 93; Kessel’brenner, *Rossiiskie diplomaty XVI-XIX vv.*, p. 71.

⁷¹ Rogozhin, “Okno vsei velikoi Rossii,” p. 27.

offer of friendship, cooperation, and trade. Ordin-Nashchokin also promoted closer relations with the countries of the East: the Central Asian khanates, Mongolia, and China. Because of the anticipated struggle with the Ottoman Empire, Russia was particularly interested in developing ties with Iran. Finally, as a result of Ordin-Nashchokin's efforts, in 1673 Vasilii Tiapkin left for Warsaw in the character of official resident.⁷²

This extensive excursion into the service of Ordin-Nashchokin serves to highlight that the tsars had sent short resident embassies abroad with express purpose of collecting intelligence. Ordin-Nashchokin was the first to build on his personal experience as a temporary resident during his time at the helm of the DFA by introducing permanent missions into the arsenal of Moscow's diplomatic relations. Tiapkin's embassy to Warsaw remained a lone episode until 1686, when, on the heels of the Eternal Peace concluded under Golitsyn's leadership of the DFA, a more protracted period of mutual exchange of permanent embassies with Poland ensued. In 1697 Poland abolished its residency in Moscow claiming that it did not find the experience beneficial. The Russians, however, retained their permanent missions under the Saxon rule in Poland.⁷³ Moreover, Peter I now made this practice dominant in foreign affairs. Ordin-Nashchokin's example, therefore, was an important precedent that, when reinstated by Golitsyn, served as an example to the young tsar, who nevertheless deserves credit as the first ruler to take such direct and comprehensive interest in the matter.

⁷² Chistiakova and Galaktionov, "Afanasii Lavrent'evich Ordin-Nashchokin," pp. 137-139. This happened during Artamon Matveev's leadership of the CFA (1672-1676). At the same time, in 1672, Tsar Aleksei's government embarked on an unprecedented project to forge a broad Christian coalition against the Ottoman Empire. Kees Boterbloem argues that this was a measure designed to announce Russia's interest in becoming a full participant in the Concert of Europe. Kees Boterbloem, *Modernizer of Russia: Andrei Vinus, 1641-1716* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 53, 77-78.

⁷³ An in-depth study of this exchange can be found in Kaminski.

Continuities between the *Posolskii Prikaz* and the College of Foreign Affairs

Despite scholars' tendency to praise all reforms as revolutionary changes,⁷⁴ administration of foreign affairs under Peter I changed little in substance and principle, only nominally in form, gradually in personnel and skill, but admittedly principally in orientation. The new form given by him to the earlier DFA was the College (*Kollegiia*) which implied that decisions would be taken by collegiate boards and not one person at its head. However, the *Posolskii Prikaz* had functioned on the same principle under Golitsyn: main decisions were made by the judge and *d'iaks* of the department.⁷⁵ In practice, of course, Peter's College as well as the earlier DFA were often directed by a single person. On paper, the CFA was led by a chancellor (sometimes referred to as president), his deputy—vice-chancellor,—and six other members. However, all drafts had to be considered collectively and signed by all eight members *if* they were addressed to the government, but only the chancellor's signature was necessary if the document was being sent abroad.⁷⁶ Furthermore, all members of the College were appointed by the Senate, but the chancellor was hand-picked by the tsar. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, sometimes the nominal head of the College was superseded by one of its junior members who was in effect the acting foreign minister. But the sense of hierarchy and the invariable existence of a dominant figure in the college—stemming from his favored position in the eyes of the ruler—precluded the CFA from becoming a truly collective decision-making body.

⁷⁴ See Cracraft's Chapter 3 "Diplomatic and Bureaucratic Revolutions" in James Cracraft, *The Petrine revolution in Russian culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁷⁵ Bogdanov, "Vasilii Vasil'evich Golitsyn," p. 216.

⁷⁶ Turilova, p. 243.

The foundation for the future CFA was laid in 1709 when Peter's Campaign Chancellery, which throughout the Azov campaigns in the 1690s had been staffed by officials of the *Posolskii* and *Malorossiiskii* departments, was *renamed* into the Foreign Affairs Chancellery (*Posol'skaia kantseliariia*). Another decade of such renamings and adjustments would pass before the governments' diplomacy arm would acquire its final name—*Kollegia inostrannykh del*, or College of Foreign Affairs. In the interim, its future name was projected on paper as the Political⁷⁷ College (1712), Foreign Affairs College (*Posol'skaia Kollegiia*, 1716), *Inostrannykh del Kollegium* (1717). In 1720 a general Regulation described the newly formed nine government organs and their functions, the list being topped by the CFA. In a year, three more colleges were added to the list. The CFA, Military College, and the Admiralty were the most important. The CFA started to function immediately, but in 1724, one year before his death, Peter charged its vice-president, Andrei Osterman, with rewriting the body's regulations and staff provisions.⁷⁸ The personnel of the colleges was also renamed. Thus, *d'iaks* became "secretaries" and the three subgroups of *pod'iachie*—senior, middle, and junior—were renamed into chancellery clerks, assistant clerks (*kantseliaristy*, *podkantseliaristy*), and copyists, respectively.

Thus, while the substance and cadres of the war and naval offices underwent major changes, dating back to the last decade of the seventeenth century,⁷⁹ the foreign office underwent only minor structural modifications, with more consequential changes stemming from other social reforms like the new Table of Ranks. It is important to stress the minimal nature of change

⁷⁷ The term "political affairs" meant "diplomacy" back then.

⁷⁸ Turilova, pp. 242-243, 248.

⁷⁹ Cracraft, "Military and Naval Revolutions," in James Cracraft, *The Petrine revolution in Russian culture* (Cambridge, MA, London, 2004).

between the DFA and CFA in order to correct the usual narrative of the creation of the CFA as something completely novel and different from the *Posolskii Prikaz*.⁸⁰

The new regulations streamlined the work of the foreign affairs department thanks to a clear delineation of its responsibilities. Unlike before, when the head of the DFA could simultaneously lead the military department, the pharmacy, the office of the tsar's seal, and so on, now each government organ was headed by a more or less narrow specialist. Peter also tried to create mechanisms for more discerning hiring standards and stricter control over personnel's quality of work. He made a firm injunction against keeping bad employees if they were to be found. While laudable in themselves, these measures could not produce fast results if only because of the dearth of potential candidates. The final structure of the Secret Chancellery of the CFA under Peter looked similar to its DFA predecessor. It consisted of four sections based on the language of documentation: Russian, "foreign," Polish, and Turkish/Eastern. The former *Posolskii Prikaz* in Moscow was disbanded and only a small office remained there as the extension of the newly-created CFA in St. Petersburg. The archive also remained in Moscow, although it became necessary to move the most important documents, maps, and books to the main office. The positions of the main archivist and of the official historian (a foreigner picked by Peter) were set up in 1720.⁸¹

But it should be emphasized that a developed archival tradition had existed before.

Therefore, it is unclear why M.S. Anderson speaks of the Russian archive as having been

⁸⁰ For an example of such a narrative, see N.A. Kudriavtsev, *Gosudarevo oko. Tainaia diplomatiia i razvedka na sluzhbe Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Neva; Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), pp. 289-292. The author of the latest Western account of Peter I's reign, by contrast, acknowledges the limited nature of his governmental reforms: "Contrary to the impression that Peter neatly replaced the *prikazy* with a new 'streamlined' administrative structure, throughout much of his reign business continued to be conducted in these old-style offices." Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the age of Peter the Great* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 105-111, here p. 106. However, Hughes does not say anything about the *Posolskii Prikaz* and the CFA.

⁸¹ Turilova, pp. 244-245.

established in 1720 while praising the Spanish Archive of Simancas, which had appeared in the middle of the sixteenth century—therefore, at the same time as the *Posolskii Prikaz*, which was from the start centered around the tsar’s archive.⁸² Other aspects of the CFA also essentially continued the principles and traditions of the *Posolskii Prikaz*. For, example, Peter issued a special “Order on Matters subject to Secrecy” in 1724, but a special oath of loyalty to the state with a promise to observe secrecy had already existed under the DFA.⁸³ A special cypher had existed as well, used to convey secret messages to the DFA or directly to the tsar through the Department of Secret Affairs.⁸⁴ The new decrees of Peter, therefore, simply restated earlier principles and are an example of great continuity in the organization of the foreign office and diplomatic service in general.

In terms of substantive changes, the shift in orientation was the most pronounced. Thus, the evolving document collection of the *Posolskii Prikaz* had been organized by year and boxes pertaining to Wallachian, German, Crimean, and other affairs. By the seventeenth century, the department expanded and divided into several sections, *povyti’ia*, led by senior *pod’iachie*: three sections dealt with Western Europe and two—with Asian states and rulers. According to one source, at the end of the seventeenth century the DFA employed fifteen translators and forty to

⁸² M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919* (London; New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 94-95. Indeed, until the late seventeenth century many European states did not preserve their diplomats’ papers in any centralized or organized manner. Frequently, diplomats and statesmen took their papers with them when they gave up office. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, p. 94; Roosen, pp. 47-49. For example, the papers of William Trumbull, English ambassador to Constantinople from 1687 to 1692, had been in the possession of Trumbull’s descendants for over three centuries. Only in the 1990s the British Library acquired his extensive collection of 300 volumes. John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 16, 44, 54-60. This would have been unthinkable in Russia.

⁸³ Rogozhin, “Okò vsei velikoi Rossii,” p. 31.

⁸⁴ Kessel’brenner, p. 71.

fifty interpreters (*tolmachi*) of Latin, Polish, Tatar, German, Swedish, Dutch, Greek, Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Wallachian, English, and Georgian.⁸⁵

Kaminski analyzed the existing archival books for the seventeenth century and came to the conclusion that the content of the department's records corresponded with the relative intensity of relations with foreign states: thus we see 256 books on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 129—on Sweden, 90—the Crimean Khanate, 80—Ukraine, 49—Austria, 28—Turkey, 24—Denmark, 20—England, 15—France, 12—Greece and the other Orthodox abroad, 12—Netherlands, 7—Prussia, 4—Moldavia and Wallachia. The most important conclusion that Kaminski arrives at is that the unchallenged leadership of Poland-Lithuania in the expertise of the department meant that Peter's reorientation to West European nations during the Northern War must have been a shock in that the DFA was unable to fulfill this demand.⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that the establishment of postal connections with Western Europe in 1665 and employment of specialists of foreign origin, such as Andrei Vinus, had already paved the way for the reorientation towards more distant geographical regions, starting with the Dutch Republic.⁸⁷

The establishment of permanent missions abroad required more personnel and better training. By the middle of 1722 there were a total of 142 employees, notwithstanding attached soldiers and watchmen, in St. Petersburg and Moscow, plus 78 employees abroad, located there on a permanent basis.⁸⁸ The number of officials in foreign capitals is substantial, being half as large as that of the home cadres. Compared to the DFA staff in the late seventeenth century, the

⁸⁵ Rogozhin, "Oko vsei velikoi Rossii," pp. 23, 25-27.

⁸⁶ Kaminski, pp. 99-101.

⁸⁷ Boterbloem, pp. 55-57, 149-153

⁸⁸ Turilova, pp. 245-246.

number of employees in the capital increased 1.5 times and, considering new foreign missions, almost 2.5 times. The foreign representations could include ambassadors, ministers of other ranks, agents, consuls with a staff of secretaries, clerks, copyists, translators, students, and priests. Essentially, however, extraordinary embassies in the Muscovite period and permanent embassies to Warsaw in the late seventeenth century had the same composition.⁸⁹

To fill the gap in qualified personnel, Peter I inevitably resorted to hiring foreigners. This practice had been observed before as well. For example, in Warsaw, Russian residents in the 1680s-1690s were allowed to hire Polish citizens as secretaries, courtiers, or servants, for example.⁹⁰ But under Peter there appeared a much greater immediate need for people with experience and knowledge of languages to fill senior diplomatic positions as well. Still, Peter emphasized recruitment of competent native Russians over foreigners. Importantly, the Russian government did not allow foreign ambassadors accredited at the Russian court to hire native Russian employees as supporting personnel.⁹¹

The earliest Russian permanent embassies were sent to Poland (even before Peter), Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire. By 1722 missions appeared also in Mecklenburg, France, England, Hamburg, and Spain. In 1723 Russian consulates appeared in Bourdeaux and Cadiz. Moreover, political agents, whose status was somewhere between consuls and diplomats (closer to the former), were placed in Amsterdam, Danzig, Braunschweig; a Russian commissar—in the duchies of Courland and Semigallia; and temporary missions sent to China, Bukhara, and the Kalmyk Khans. At the same time, the

⁸⁹ Kaminski, pp. 48, 116.

⁹⁰ Kaminski, p. 126.

⁹¹ Turilova, p. 246.

number of foreign embassies in Russia also increased, from six in 1702 in Moscow, to eleven by 1720 in St. Petersburg.

One of the main responsibilities of Russian ministers abroad was to collect systematic information about their country of placement, especially its administration, economy, and military branches. In the course of the 1700s and 1710s, apart from diplomatic objectives dictated by the exigencies of the Northern War in the Baltic, campaigns in Poland, Ukraine, and on the Ottoman borders, the embassies were also given the task of a much deeper study of other countries. For example, Vasilii Dolgorukov—sent to Denmark in 1707—was instructed to analyze the Danish government’s structure and responsibilities of each government department.⁹² This was perhaps one of the sources for Peter’s administrative reforms. Thus, it is well known that the new collegiate model of Russian government was borrowed from the Swedish model.⁹³

Peter perceived the need for further revisions of the new system but his death in 1725 at the age of fifty-two cut short his plans. This, of course, leaves the question of his legacy uncertain, for he was not given the privilege of living until old age and carrying out all his projects. However, as mentioned above, in 1724 he summoned Osterman to order a revision of the CFA. In response, the vice-chancellor wrote an assessment of the situation and suggested improvements. Significantly, he underlined that the CFA functioned in effect as the Privy Council of the emperor. But its main weakness lay in the paucity of competent personnel. European countries used a system in which diplomats came from among people of high and honest birth as well as solid fortune and who were versed in political sciences. In Russia, time would be needed to create such a cadre of people, which was not impossible in principle. The

⁹² Turilova, p. 247.

⁹³ Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 201.

main obstacle was lack of attraction to employment in the diplomatic service. Osterman hoped that soon enough Russian nobility would see that work in the CFA Chancellery could open to them a road to honor and begin studying political sciences with vigor.

When this happened the Russian government would be able to wean itself from its dependence on foreigners, such as the translators employed by the CFA. Osterman believed that these people could not be trusted with state secrets. In general, secret affairs should involve as few people as possible, who in turn should be isolated outside of their work hours from foreigners and large social companies. Russia had a great need in producing many qualified employees for the CFA because of its extensive borders and the great number of territorial neighbors, many of which were a mystery to the world. But overall the number of employees should not be enormous, most important was their quality: they had to be young—in order to be able to work day and night,—smart, and well-trained. Then it would be realistic to give them proper remuneration, in order to avoid the danger of bribes and influences from outside. High enough salaries were, moreover, necessary in order to appease them when promotion was not possible as well as to enable them to dress properly and make good impression on foreign ministers. The state should also take care of the employees' families during their absence.⁹⁴

Peter's successors and their ministers studied these suggestions throughout the century. The main trend was toward greater centralization of decision-making. Empress Elizabeth, for example, was reported to have been devoting a cumulative one week out of every month to meetings, discussions, and composition and editing of official papers relating to foreign policy.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Turilova, pp. 248-249.

⁹⁵ Turilova, p. 249-251, 252-255; Raeff, p. 201; Patricia Grimsted, *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander I: Political Attitudes and the Conduct of Russian Diplomacy, 1801-1825* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 24-25.

During her reign, in 1754-1756, the CFA asked all of its employees to submit autobiographical reports detailing their service and achievements. On the basis of this information, Soviet historian S. M. Troitskii concluded that the CFA employed a mix of hereditary nobles (43%) and non-nobles (57%), although the latter enjoyed opportunities for promotion to the noble status. However, more than 80% of the employees did not have sufficient assets and depended almost entirely on their government salaries.⁹⁶ The CFA was thus able to attract ambitious nobles, including the poorer ones, and many representatives of lower social classes whose skills were indispensable to the functioning of the Russian foreign affairs department.

The CFA Personnel

Preponderance of Native Cadres

From the beginning, the Russian government set the goal of training and promoting native cadres. Foreigners in Russian diplomatic service mostly served as consuls and commercial agents rather than political representatives, or were sent on very distant missions such as to Bukhara and China or short-term missions elsewhere.⁹⁷ The position of a permanent representative, on the other hand, almost always fell to a native Russian. For example, in 1717

⁹⁶ S.M. Troitskii, "Russkie diplomaty v seredine XVIII v.," in A.A. Guber, *et al.*, *Feodal'naia Rossiia vo vseмирno-istoricheskoi protsesse* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), pp. 398-406, here pp. 400-402.

⁹⁷ The same principle was adopted by Catherine II, when she employed foreigners—among them many Greeks—in the dense network of consulates that sprang up on the Black Sea and Mediterranean littorals after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca and especially after the annexation of Crimea in 1783. Even then, however, these Greeks were new Russian subjects who had voluntarily rebelled against and fled the Ottoman Empire. Stephen Batalden, *Catherine II's Greek Prelate: Eugenios Voulgaris in Russia, 1771- 1806* (Boulder: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 93-94.

Peter appointed Hans von Schleinitz as the Russian ambassador to France but soon replaced him with an ethnic Russian, Vasilii Dolgorukov.⁹⁸

By the middle of the century, the majority of the CFA employees were native Russians. The staff of the department had grown considerably. If the total number of employees was over 200 in 1722,⁹⁹ the data for January 1, 1762 lists 261 people only in St. Petersburg and Moscow (including watchmen), while the number of those posted to the eleven existing foreign missions is unknown unfortunately. If we assume, speculatively, that their ranks increased by the same two thirds as the number of employees at home, the total membership of the diplomatic corps could be as large as 400 people.¹⁰⁰ The breakdown within the home department was as follows: 72 employees were listed in the Secret Expedition—the diplomatic office proper; 36—in the Public Expedition, which dealt with protocol and the budget; 25—in the Moscow office and archive, the remaining numbers consisting of copyists, students, and watchmen. Results of a separate survey from the mid-1750s show a figure of 139 individuals employed both at home and abroad, but this number is limited to officials with an officer rank. 90 of them served in St. Petersburg, and 45—abroad. This likely means that the remaining four persons of officer rank were employed in Moscow, which is realistic given the purely supportive function of the CFA office and archive there.

⁹⁸ Turilova, pp. 247. Lists of Russian ambassadors abroad can be found in *Repertorium der diplomatischen Vertreter aller Lander seit dem Westfalischen Frieden*, ed. Ludwig Bittner and Lothar Gross, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1936).

⁹⁹ Anderson lists 120 employees in the first days of the CFA. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁰ Compare this to the figures given by Grimsted for foreign offices in other countries. In 1822, the British foreign office employed 28 people. There were 85 people in the French foreign ministry in 1794, but the number came down to around 55 in 1800-1825. At the same time, Viktor Kochubei, the Russian minister of foreign affairs in the early nineteenth century, estimated that the CFA employed around 300 employees, excluding those posted abroad and working in the Moscow archive. Grimsted concludes: "It is thus no wonder that Vorontsov complained that the Russian ministry 'contained more people than the offices of all the secretaries of state in Europe combined.'" Grimsted, pp. 26-27.

Extrapolating further from the admittedly confusing records, this means that between 130 and 170 out of 261 people (between 50 and 65 percent) who worked for the department at home had a lower position—outside of the Table of Ranks. This segment could contain foreign-born specialists but we have only fragmented evidence as to their proportion, for example for the Constantinople mission, where they were two or three in number. As for the more privileged members whose numbers are known, significantly, 71.2% of them were native Russians. The rest of the officials of officer rank and above were foreigners: Germans, French, Italians, Poles, Turks, Georgians, Livonians, Estonians, Kalmyks, and others. These people were of aristocratic or gentry birth from families that at some point had joined Russian service, voluntarily or as a result of Russian territorial expansion. Along with ethnic Russians, they occupied senior positions within the CFA.¹⁰¹ There might have been a greater percentage of foreigners at the lower levels of service.

These two surveys generally indicate prevalence of ethnic Russians in the highest positions, such as that of ambassador. Two foreigners, Count F.M. Santi and Count Herman von Keyserling, stand out as exceptions to the rule. The majority of bureaucrats of officer rank did not have serfs, or managed only small estates, primarily relying on their salary for income. Many diplomats had received good training, some of them via study abroad. To enter service in the CFA, everyone had to pass an exam.¹⁰² Existing records indicate that examinations emphasized translations from various languages to demonstrate proficiency.

In March 1767 the reported number of employees was 230, which might be explained by the sizing down that Catherine II had carried out, but it is not certain what this number reflects.

¹⁰¹ Turilova, pp. 252-253.

¹⁰² Turilova, p. 253.

In the late 1770s-early 1780s she undertook another reorganization which resulted in the complete disbanding of the Moscow office, with the archive remaining the only extension of the CFA there. The Public Expedition, which had managed the budget, ceremonial protocol, and postal service was also closed down, its responsibilities divided among the CFA proper and provincial administrations created by the reform of 1775, which caused problems in the 1780s-1790s precisely in matters of treasury oversight and ceremonial management.¹⁰³ In 1779 she reviewed foreign postings and downgraded the official ranks of all ministers abroad: the only full ambassador was now in Warsaw, all the others were ministers of second rank. In addition, she increased the chancellor's salary by 36%, possibly to prevent bribes.¹⁰⁴

Quite apart from other spheres of service, Russian rulers emphasized native cadres in the diplomatic service, and Catherine II herself in 1788 proscribed the use of French or any other foreign language in the diplomats' correspondence with her, the CFA, or among each other.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the eighteenth century was a true Russian century in diplomacy despite the Europeanization and westernization that are associated with this age. It was a matter of imperial honor to bring up a native Russian-speaking cadre of diplomats.

Merit versus Nepotism

Fathers and sons, brothers, nephews, and cousins from a limited number of higher-born families had for long directed Russia's course along with its monarchs. The pool of potential

¹⁰³ Turilova, p. 256, 263.

¹⁰⁴ Scott praises this aspect of her policies as indicative of the empress' anti-corruption stance, p. 154.

¹⁰⁵ This order was specifically addressed to ethnic Russians, Turilova, p. 259. From foreign ambassadors Catherine demanded to address her in French, as it meant the acknowledgement of Russia's full membership in the international system: H.M. Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern powers, 1756-1775* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 157.

candidates for positions of leadership in military, government, and court service expanded with the reforms of Peter I, just as opportunities for service increased due to the feverish creation of new administrative bodies by the reformer-Tsar.¹⁰⁶ The old practices of nepotism and patronage, of course, did not disappear as a result and were indeed a permanent fixture of every old regime and many a society today.¹⁰⁷

While such was the basic appointment and promotion principle, in the realm of diplomatic service talent, skills, knowledge, and character were not unimportant and it was one of the few areas of state service which inevitably attracted real talent, even if not consistently. The clearest evidence of competence and skill was the staff of the CFA, whose middle and lower levels of secretaries, translators, and interpreters were true language specialists and frequently real country experts.

Even if the number of truly qualified personnel was rather low for such a vast empire like Russia, the mechanism of decision-making and the shared social milieu of main actors provided the quality of continuity to the foreign policy itself and to the specialized circle of experts on various countries. The most stable and ever-improving level of expertise was preserved among

¹⁰⁶ Thus Cracraft estimates that the number of bureaucrats throughout Russia more than doubled after Peter I's reform of the government. James Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture* (Cambridge, MA, London, 2004), p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Cracraft, 57; Grimsted, pp. 14, 26-28. This was also seen throughout Europe: Derek McKay and H.M. Scott, *The Rise of the Great Powers 1648-1815* (London, New York: Longman, 1983), p. 207; Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, pp. 81-82; Kenneth Weisbrode, *Old Diplomacy Revisited: A Study in the Modern History of Diplomatic Transformations* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Pivot, 2014), p. 17; Daniela Frigo, "Prudence and Experience: Ambassadors and Political Culture in Early Modern Italy," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern History*, Vol. 38, no. 1 (2008), p. 29. The Russian situation was unique in that a complex system had defined precedence based on birth and/or custom during the Muscovite period thus preventing more meritocratic and professional promotions that had begun in the rest of Europe. This system was abolished only in the late seventeenth century, although scholarship is divided on whether this act met with active protest at the time. Crummey noted gradual opening of careers to servitors of lower position even before the final abolition of *mestnichestvo*. R. O. Crummey, *Aristocrats and servitors: the boyar elite in Russia, 1613-1689* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983). Peter I established a state-service system based on seniority and merit instead, but it was subject to abuse by the elites nevertheless.

the regular employees of the CFA who kept serving until death, unless they proved disloyal, drunkards, or otherwise clearly unsuitable. At the same time, the most obvious sign of continuity was the appointment of the same people repeatedly or continuously to matters pertaining to a specific country.

Peter I often employed his favorites on various missions in situations where he counted on their personal devotion to him, including diplomatic missions to foreign courts and negotiations. Thus, in 1724 Aleksandr Ivanovich Rumiantsev was commissioned to represent Russia at the tripartite border demarcation talks with the Ottomans and Persians, mediated by the French, where he went after formally appearing at an audience with the Sultan. Despite Peter's death in early 1725, Rumiantsev continued to receive instructions from the CFA and remained in the border area until the late 1720s. More significantly, after a three year-long exile under Empress Anna, he was brought back by the end of her reign not only as a general in the war against the Ottomans, but as an extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador dispatched in 1740 to Constantinople to exchange the ratifications of the Treaty of Belgrade. His foreign service career, albeit in northern Europe, received further support from Empress Elizabeth.¹⁰⁸

The eighteenth century therefore produced a growing cadre of aristocratic diplomatic appointees with an important minority of career diplomats who gradually climbed the service ladder by starting as simple translators, secretaries working in the CFA, or officers and “embassy nobles” attached to foreign missions.¹⁰⁹ The rotation of cadres among different foreign capitals served to widen their experience and knowledge about international affairs, bringing them into the fold of European-wide diplomatic theory and practice. Most foreign capitals saw a succession

¹⁰⁸ *RBS*, Vol. 23, p. 460.

¹⁰⁹ The slow trend of professionalization paralleled developments in Europe, where majority of diplomats were also aristocratic amateurs appointed temporarily to various posts abroad. See McKay and Scott, p. 205.

of Russian representatives every two to ten years on average, in addition to occasional short extraordinary missions. There were cases, however, of exceptionally stable missions, with Vienna being the most outstanding. Ludovic Lanczynski served in Vienna from 1720 to 1752, followed after a while by Dmitrii Golitsyn (1761-1692), whose memory is immortalized in one of Vienna's streets as well as a district. Similar long residences, including the one in Constantinople, contributed to an unbroken record of relations that facilitated country expertise on the part of the diplomats and staff involved and such people were indispensable to St. Petersburg and were sometimes kept abroad despite their own will to come back home.

The continuity of country expertise, nevertheless, was maintained despite frequent rotations stemming from abrupt coups, ministerial reshuffling, or the concomitant sudden changes in policy. The archive and the ceremony were the two anchors that provided the continuity apart from familial and patronage networks.¹¹⁰ The archive of the CFA, located in Moscow with more recent documentation being stored temporarily in St. Petersburg, was a constant reference source for newly appointed ambassadors, the CFA, and the ruler.¹¹¹ Copies of old treaties, ambassadorial instructions, correspondence with foreign courts, descriptions of ceremonies, and expense sheets for the provision of foreign missions—everything was kept in great order and increasingly systematized. Moreover, this information was constantly consulted

¹¹⁰ Dolgorukovs, Golitsyns, Golovkins, Kurakins, Bestuzhev-Riumins, Ostermans, Rumiantsevs, and others appear numerous times among the names of Russian diplomats in the eighteenth century. Many other families who contributed two-three of its members to the diplomatic service were also connected to the more established ones and thus were part of the same clan. To this trend one must also add a tradition of sons and grandsons following in the steps of their forebears who had been professional/career diplomats. Many diplomatic families of the eighteenth century kept their connection to the foreign policy establishment in the nineteenth century, including the newly-created families of diplomats closely tied to the CFA. However, on the whole, after 1800 the preponderance of several major cliques and their last names gave way to a greater variety of families. Undoubtedly, the gradual influence of the Table of Ranks of 1722 is seen here to have contributed to the professionalization of the Russian government.

¹¹¹ As was true in the earlier centuries: Rogozhin, "Oko vsei velikoi Rossii," p. 36. This point will be discussed in the next section.

as Russian diplomacy traditionally placed an enormous emphasis on precedent. Russian representatives going abroad had this material at their disposal for familiarizing themselves with the past record of mutual relations with the country of destination and any reports that could help understand the situation.¹¹²

The ceremonial anchor relates less to the scrupulous and punctilious records of ambassadorial reception and audience ceremonies and the like, observance of which was a matter of highest priority as a reflection of imperial honor. Rather, the personnel that was involved in these ceremonies tied together the court, military, and government circles with the effective core of specialists on the country in question. Some of these specialists were members of the government, especially the CFA and former administrators of border provinces, and the military, as many generals and officers became well-versed in the affairs of the southern and southeastern regions and neighbors during wars. But Russian diplomats with experience in these countries were key figures in these ceremonies and social functions that followed: dinners, balls, celebrations, mask balls, *kurtags* (social gathering without dancing but involving conversations and cards). These people served as go-betweens that could advise the Russian government on the best approach to the visiting embassy and provide feedback on its members. Long after retiring from the diplomatic post, former representatives figured on the lists of functionaries directly involved in the reception of an embassy from the specific country and were prominent at court functions.

¹¹² The old archive went as far back as the middle of the 16th century with a few original documents and treaties from earlier centuries that had been transferred from the Grand Prince's chancellery. Fires had destroyed some parts of the old archive in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but the crucial body of preserved documents were instrumental for the conduct of foreign policy and it is no surprise that the director of the archive went out of his way to send all the boxes of material outside Moscow during Napoleon's invasion.

Of course, the establishment of permanent embassies abroad was not unique to Russia, and in fact the latter was a latecomer in this respect. And surely the history of the eighteenth century diplomacy was replete with mistakes, miscalculations, and purely politically-dictated appointments and policies that resulted from clan struggles within the government, rather than from a unified and clear orientation. However, the diplomatic achievement that is the subject of this work focuses more on the underlying accumulation of information and skills that brought Russia to the fore of international diplomacy, as opposed to the grand overarching policy that would not have been realized but for the growing cadre of country experts—the most important consequence of the establishment of permanent representation.

A slow but persistent process of professionalization did begin, and successive Russian rulers certainly encouraged it by, on the one hand, sending young nobles attached at first to extraordinary and then to all permanent embassies and, on the other, by cultivating foreign language specialists at home. These students of both noble and simple birth were then sent to relevant missions abroad or left to serve at the CFA. The most talented could rise through the ranks very quickly. The amount and quality of talent that became concentrated in the foreign affairs establishment of the Russian Empire, both at home and abroad, along with the experienced military cadres fresh out of the battlefields of the Seven Years' War, did more for Catherine II and Russia than the famous empress could do without them.

In a departure from the *Posolskii Prikaz* tradition, according to which Russian temporary envoys abroad had to adhere very strictly to their instructions and were not allowed to improvise,¹¹³ in the eighteenth century Russian permanent representatives abroad were left to

¹¹³ This aspect is stressed by many scholars. For example, G.A. Sanin writes that before Peter Russian diplomats abroad not only were not allowed to make independent decisions regarding anything, but also were forbidden from

their own devices, which was inevitable due to distances involved. It is this circumstance that made the qualities and knowledge of a particular diplomat critical for the successful realization of Russia's foreign policy objectives. The latter were always specifically stated to the ambassador at his appointment and, if need be, were clarified in subsequent correspondence. Some of the goals were more immediate while the others long-standing. Thus, despite unpropitious circumstances for most of the century, Russian representatives in Constantinople were always asked to attempt to achieve at least commercial navigation rights on the Black Sea.

Peter the Great's Reorientation

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is possible to trace an evolution—rather than a revolution—in practice from the time of the *Posolskii Prikaz* well until 1832. Peter's reforms did little to overturn the high degree of centralization of decision-making, in which the leading role was played by the ruler.¹¹⁴ Instead of collective decision-making, foreign policy now depended on the ruler and his trusted effective head of foreign office, without the hindrance of the earlier Boyar Duma and their input. With the elimination of the old aristocratic council, bureaucracy and personal advisors helped solidify the autocratic nature of Russian diplomacy. As a result, the

maintaining contacts with other foreign diplomats. G.A. Sanin, "Novatsii Petra I v upravlenii vneshnepoliticheskimi delami po sravneniiu s vtoroi polovinoi XVII veka," in I. S. Ivanov *et al.*, eds., *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia: Istorii i sovremennost'* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), pp. 148-154. However, Ordin-Nashchokin was known to have been the first ambassador to veer away from Moscow's directives on foreign missions. See Kessel'brenner, p. 71.

¹¹⁴ For example, in his discussion of Catherine II's foreign policy and the so-called "Greek project" in particular, Hugh Ragsdale has remarked: "What is really astonishing, however, is the narrowness of the social base on which Russian foreign policy in this instance rested. As opposed as the Russian nobility was to the project, it did not dare to voice openly a peep of its dissent. ... The foreign policy of a great empire was the *idée fixe* of a foreign usurper." Hugh Ragsdale, "Russian projects of conquest in the eighteenth century," in Hugh Ragsdale and V. N. Ponomarev, eds., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993), p. 102. Similar observations concerning the nineteenth century can be found in Grimsted; and David Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (London: Longman, 1994).

monarchs felt the need to convene special councils to formulate their position in challenging circumstances, partly to avoid relying solely on the director of the CFA.

The everyday work of diplomacy continued to be conducted in the foreign affairs department: the geographical subsections of the *Posolskii Prikaz* continued to function in the framework of the Secret Chancellery of the College of Foreign Affairs. Peter's main contribution was to establish a permanent institution of resident embassies abroad, however it was not a completely novel idea in Russia of his day. He also did his best to ensure that a native cadre of diplomats would emerge in time to allow the empire to be more independent of foreign talent. Alexander I moved away from considering it as important, as many of his foreign ministers and representatives abroad were foreigners by background and even birth. The main achievement of the eighteenth century lay in encouraging steady professionalization among the middle diplomatic ranks, and in increasing foreign language proficiency among the native supporting personnel. This was achieved in an uneven manner, in fits and starts, but every successive monarch encouraged language instruction among noble and professional students, attached nobles to embassies sent abroad, and supported permanent diplomatic missions. It is no wonder that no Russian ruler ever ordered to close down missions abroad that had been inaugurated by Peter, because their advantages for Russia's membership in the international community of states and for intelligence-gathering were all too clear.

Peter also contributed to a sharp geographic, linguistic, and strategic reorientation of Russian foreign policy, which was expressed in his decision, starting in 1697, to fund education and training of Russian nobility abroad, in places heretofore unusual: Holland, England, and Italy. The legendary reformer's infatuation with naval power dictated these choices. The

experience of Italian apprenticeship produced first Russian diplomats fit for the diplomatic scene in Constantinople, a traditional area of specialization for the Italian states. The world of the Baltic and the Mediterranean had a special allure for Peter and this is another area in which he produced a decisive transformation. For although Ordin-Nashchokin had reportedly advised Tsar Aleksei “to choose moral and finest people to attend to the affairs of the state and to the expansion of the state in all directions, and this is the responsibility solely of the *Posolskii Prikaz*” and even suggested to create a modern Russian fleet on the Caspian,¹¹⁵ none of Peter’s predecessors had made such a single-minded attempt to develop naval and diplomatic expertise. Moreover, Peter had the power to implement his ideas and to procure support from below: he saw the opportunity in the anxieties of the native lower servitors who felt threatened by the disproportionate reliance of previous tsars on foreign specialists. Peter tapped into the desire for social mobility among this class of servitors: famously, Petr Tolstoy, the first Russian permanent ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, volunteered for the study trip to Italy at the respectable age of 52, leaving behind his wife, two grown children, and grandchildren.¹¹⁶

Peter created a firm association between expertise in foreign [technical] skills and languages and the prospects for advancement for less established servitors. Despite his generous reliance on foreign experts in his transformation, his emphasis on native personnel is clearly evident in his vision for the College of Foreign Affairs. The accepted view of Peter’s diplomatic “revolution” stresses the transformation of Russian diplomatic cadres:

The embassies were staffed not by the robed and bearded Muscovite envoys occasionally sent west by Peter’s predecessors, monolingual, ever suspicious of their hosts, and terrified of departing from their rigid instructions, but by fashionably dressed, bewigged and clean-shaven

¹¹⁵ Kessel’brenner, pp. 71, 72; Boterbloem, pp. 53, 65-66

¹¹⁶ Kessel’brenner, p. 132; On the *stol’niks*’ eagerness to advance under the threat of foreign usurpation of leading positions, see Kaminski, p. 54.

ambassadors, able to negotiate on their own in French, German, or Italian and often accompanied—truly amazing to say—by their comparably equipped spouses.¹¹⁷

This wholly negative picture of everything pre-Peter is, as I and others have shown, faulty. Thus, the case of the Russian permanent embassy in Warsaw in the late seventeenth century, which Cracraft mentions just before the above sentence, refutes his claim that Russian diplomats were monolingual: all of them knew Latin very well, and one of the later ones knew Polish.¹¹⁸ But the increasing mastery of heretofore unknown languages by native Russians contrasted sharply with the past and this was one of Peter I's achievements.

This cultural and diplomatic reorientation became the basic feature of the revamped foreign affairs department, but the principle of its functioning—as a small army of clerks and translators working day and night to process, organize, and channel information—drew on the long tradition of the *Posolskii Prikaz*. Moreover, the traditional relations with Russia's neighbors continued and now involved more active efforts at imperial expansion, thus guaranteeing the lasting importance of the well-established geographical sections.

Russian Foreign Service in Comparison

M.S. Anderson is perhaps the only Western historian who has brought to attention the achievements of Russia in developing a diplomatic apparatus and extensive personnel in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. However, even when he admitted the well-developed nature

¹¹⁷ Cracraft, p. 73. The quote from Petr Shafirov, which Cracraft uses in the same work, highlights the wide linguistic expertise of the new generation of Russian diplomats: in 1717 Shafirov wrote that thanks to Peter “several thousand of his subjects of the Russian nation, male and female, skilled in various European languages, such as Latin, Greek, French, German, Italian, English, and Dutch, and of such conduct moreover that they can be compared without shame to all other European peoples.” Cracraft, p. 72.

¹¹⁸ Kaminski.

of the *Posolskii Prikaz*, Anderson resisted making conclusions more favorable to Russia than his evidence suggested. Thus, he dismissed the “substantial organization” of the *Posolskii Prikaz* as “an administrative rather than a policy-making body.” Yet, he underscored with some awe that a relatively clear-cut organization of the foreign office, “later to become the typical form of internal structure of all foreign offices,” was present in Russia and Sweden already in the middle of the seventeenth century, despite the fact that both states were “so isolated and underdeveloped.”¹¹⁹

Likewise, Anderson admitted that with Peter I’s reorganization of the *Posolskii Prikaz* into the College of Foreign Affairs the “break with the past was in some ways more apparent than real, for the first members of the college had all served in its predecessor.” Despite being “cumbersome and slow-moving,” the CFA grew rapidly and “of all the administrative colleges created by Peter in 1718-22..., together with those of war and admiralty, was the most important and successful.”¹²⁰ Yet, once again, despite noting several times that the Russian CFA was on par with the French Foreign Ministry in many ways—they both exhibited “an increasing tendency to divide into specialized departments,” “no other Foreign Office grew with the speed of those of France and Russia”¹²¹—Anderson concludes that “it was in France, however, that during the eighteenth century a well-organized foreign ministry of a recognizably modern sort could most easily be found.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, pp. 74, 75.

¹²⁰ Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, p. 77.

¹²¹ Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 242.

¹²² Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, pp. 79-80. The primacy of France thanks to its bureaucratic centralization is highlighted in other works as well. McKay and Scott, pp. 202, 209. John-Paul A. Ghobrial brings out the contrast between the English and French state archival traditions in the late seventeenth century: Ghobrial, pp. 55-62.

Anderson's examples, however, beg the question if the accepted narrative that posits Russia as a country that was always catching up to Europe is fundamentally a result of prejudice and lack of serious attempts at comparison. The author of the latest work on Russian relations with Europe in the period from 1648 to 1725 argues that Russia was not an outsider but a full participant in the European diplomatic network and was recognized as such by other European courts.¹²³ On the basis of the foregoing discussion, it appears that despite geographical distance and a different set of challenges stemming from peculiar economic and social conditions of the Russian imperial territory, Russian central government institutions, in particular the ones dealing with foreign policy, developed on par or even earlier than in the rest of Europe, except for the Italian states. In some respects, this was a paradox, for Russia was neither Venice, nor Milan, Florence, Rome, or even Sweden, especially in terms of its geographical extent. Therefore, when we talk about the rise of modern diplomacy, the seventeenth and especially eighteenth centuries might well be conceptualized not only as the age dominated by French diplomacy, but also as the age when diplomatic prowess of such states as Russia, and even Prussia, manifested itself. Indeed, Russia had such a strong indigenous tradition of its own diplomatic bureaucracy that it easily persisted in the use of its native language throughout the eighteenth century, unlike for example Prussia, which switched to French from 1740 onwards.¹²⁴ Consequently, historians need to continue the conversation on European and international relations and diplomacy in the eighteenth century that includes Russia, along the lines of works of M.S. Anderson and H.M. Scott.

¹²³ Jan Hennings, *Russia and Courtly Europe: Ritual and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1648-1725* (New Studies in European History Series. Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

¹²⁴ McKay and Scott, p. 202.

For example, we need to qualify Anderson's argument that the eighteenth century diplomacy was characterized by the extension of the scope of the diplomatic system/network to Russia, as well as the Ottomans Balkans and the Levant.¹²⁵ Thus, Anderson notes that while "few governments made any systematic or sustained provision for helping young men to travel abroad and gain a knowledge of foreign language and countries," "Russia, from the first years of the eighteenth century onwards, was the most important exception of this generalization," and "no other state went so far, ...for none started from the same position of isolation and estrangement from the outside world."¹²⁶ However, when we consider that unlike most states of Europe Russia had already had a long-standing diplomatic relationship with the Ottoman Empire, it is easy to see how Peter I's introduction of a permanent mission in Constantinople led to an important comparative advantage over the Ottomans. In addition to the accumulated expertise on Turkey of the *Posolskii Prikaz*, St. Petersburg now had a tool for direct information-gathering and influence on Ottoman politics. In other words, in areas in which the Russian foreign policy had traditionally specialized before 1700, Russian diplomacy must have doubly benefitted from the introduction of permanent embassies.

Indeed, the main advantage for Russia consisted in overcoming the limits of reliance on the long-established extensive intermediary intelligence channels such as secret agents in Crimea, hospodars of the Danubian principalities, border military commanders, and the Ottoman Greek clergy and Greek merchants. These channels remained the main sources of information on Russia and other states for the Ottomans. But the Russian government now also became as close to direct sources of information about the Ottomans as any other foreign government: through

¹²⁵ Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 238-240.

¹²⁶ Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, pp. 89-90.

the mediation of the Constantinople dragomans the Russian residents built relations with Ottoman officials, collected valuable intelligence, and carried out contacts with the Ottoman court and the government on par with other foreign diplomats.

To be sure, the remaining intervening layer of mediation by the dragomans was an important consideration. Unlike the Ottomans, who preferred to rely completely on the Greek Phanariot dragomanate well into the first half of the nineteenth century, the Russian government realized some of the disadvantages of such reliance on the local intermediaries—primarily with Italian origins—and made active efforts to train native linguistic cadres. While during the days of the *Posolskii Prikaz*, Turkish or Tatar converts frequently were the main translators of diplomatic correspondence from the Crimean Khanate, the Ottoman Empire, and other Turkish-speaking foreign lands—and, indeed, Muslim converts, former Ottoman Greeks, and sometimes foreign academic and amateur specialists of Turkish language remained important for translation tasks at the CFA—in the eighteenth century the Russian government used its mission in Constantinople to train native Russian specialists in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Persian, as well as necessary diplomatic languages of the day, such as Italian and French.

Anderson seems to be aware of these efforts, but not completely. He only notes the efforts of the Russian government periodically to attach language students to the Constantinople mission, such as in 1724 and 1779.¹²⁷ However, the training of Russian students at the mission and attachment of embassy nobles to extraordinary Russian diplomatic missions to the Ottoman Empire was extremely consistent throughout the eighteenth century. Graduates of such training increasingly played leading roles in Russia's foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire. To be sure, the Russian residents in Constantinople for a long time could not rival the foreign language

¹²⁷ Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, pp. 91-92. Similar claim is made in McKay and Scott, pp. 206-207.

expertise of Austrian diplomatic representatives. For example, Heinrich Christoph Baron von Penkler served as resident from 1741 to 1755 and then again in the 1760s after rigorous language training and work as the embassy translator between 1719 and 1730. His successor between 1755 and 1763 was Josef Peter Baron von Schwachheim, who was famous in Vienna for his knowledge of Middle Eastern languages. Franz Maria Baron von Thugut, the Austrian representative in 1769-1775, had studied Oriental languages in Vienna since 1753 (when he was eighteen years old) and twice served as a translator at the Constantinople mission, in the 1750s and 1760s.¹²⁸

Anderson correctly underscores the early Venetian and then Habsburg successes in training native specialists of Ottoman Turkish. He notes, for example, that Vienna had developed a tradition of sending language students—*Sprachknaben*— with each internuncio to Constantinople from the late sixteenth century onward.¹²⁹ The Oriental Academy in Vienna mentioned above was, in fact, the successor of a language school that had been created at the Habsburg diplomatic mission in Constantinople as early as the 1630s. By the late seventeenth century, almost all heads of the Habsburg mission were chosen from the school's alumni. In 1753 the Austrian government decided that it would be more effective and cheaper to set up a school of Oriental languages in Vienna.¹³⁰ Anderson notes that the Vienna *Orientalische Akademie* “was the first effort by any European power to provide systematic training at a relatively high academic level for the conduct of relations with any part of the non-European

¹²⁸ Karl A. Roeder, *Baron Thugut and Austria's Response to the French Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 92, 104.

¹²⁹ Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, p. 91.

¹³⁰ Roeder, *Baron Thugut*, pp. 8, 10-12, 17-20.

world.”¹³¹ However, it should not be forgotten that the Russian government had also tried to set up an Oriental language school as early as the 1730s, when Chancellor Osterman invited a German Orientalist Georg Iakovlevich Ker to teach native Russian students Oriental languages at the CFA.¹³² This attempt was not very successful, but several of Ker’s students continued their training at the Constantinople mission.

To sum up, Russia’s reputation as a latecomer to the European diplomatic scene needs to be revised. Despite the fact that Peter I established permanent missions abroad only around 1700, Muscovy had engaged diplomatically with other states before and made great advances in the creation of a foreign affairs department, where specialized cadres and meticulous archive-keeping provided continuity and accumulated expertise on foreign states. Thus, it would be wrong to attribute the rise of Russian diplomacy solely to Peter I, or Catherine II.¹³³

The Russian diplomacy, like the French, became quite effective in the eighteenth century due to the tradition of centralized decision-making,¹³⁴ cultivation of native diplomatic and language specialists, and a high emphasis on secrecy and loyalty.¹³⁵ In many ways, these features strengthened the position of states such as France, Russia, as well as Austria and Prussia, against

¹³¹ The academy produced Habsburg chancellors: Thugut in the eighteenth century and Haymerle, Burian, and Czernin in the nineteenth centuries. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, p. 91.

¹³² Professor Ker proposed to set up an official academy, but nothing came of this project at the time. Mikhail Lomonosov later tried to revive the idea, but also not very successfully. D. E. Bertel’s, “Vvedenie,” in *Aziatskii muzei—Leningradskoi otdelenie Instituta Vostokovedeniia AN SSSR* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), pp. 8-10; Gusterin, pp. 9-10.

¹³³ The latter tendency is seen in Scott’s work, pp. 153-157, 160-161.

¹³⁴ Roosen, pp. 34-38.

¹³⁵ For Russia, see Grimsted’s remarks on unusual secrecy and autocratic license. For the discussion of extreme closedness of Frederick II to any contacts with foreign diplomats accredited at his court and of other secrecy measures he undertook—often against his own foreign ministers, see Scott, pp. 143-151. Scott notes that the situation was much more normal in Vienna and St. Petersburg than in Berlin/Potsdam, pp. 150-151. The Ottoman envoy to Berlin in 1763-1764, Ahmed Resmi Efendi, likewise noted: “The king was said to spend most of his time in Potsdam, a city seven hours distance from Berlin, because he feared the spread of information concerning his affairs by the large number of ambassadors and officials in Berlin.” Virginia Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700-1783* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E. J. Brill, 1995), p. 83; p. 87, fn. 133.

countries with less effective foreign offices. The latter included the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire.

For example, after a short experiment in the late seventeenth century Poland neglected the practice of permanent embassies to Russia in the eighteenth century and its foreign service had a long tradition of decentralization. The Saxon kings used their own Saxon diplomatic service, while, in parallel, the republic's chancellor's office along with the Senate—under loose authority of the Sejm—ran its own diplomatic activities. According to Polish historian Gierowski, Polish diplomacy was underdeveloped and decentralized, with grand hetmans of the crown carrying out their own diplomacy with southwestern neighbors. “On the other hand, the lack of regularly scheduled dates for debates and a lack of executive bodies made it difficult for the Senate to manage the diplomatic service.” State expenditures on foreign policy also decreased exponentially, from about 5.3 million Polish zlotys under Augustus II to only 1.4 million zlotys under Augustus III. Moreover, provincial confederations and certain magnates ended up conducting their own foreign policies as well. And, finally, Polish diplomacy was based on *ad hoc* missions led by randomly-selected and not always properly trained envoys. In essence, Polish diplomacy, similarly to the Ottoman case, was strongest in carrying out diplomacy with the help of foreign representatives stationed in the republic.¹³⁶

Overall, Polish diplomacy under the Saxons was most active in relation to Russia and the Ottoman Empire, but even the temporary diplomatic missions greatly subsided in frequency after

¹³⁶ The Saxon diplomatic institutions were, by contrast, much more uniform and centralized, following a path of development similar to centralizing monarchies across Europe. Thus, Gierowski notes that “Saxony had permanent representative offices almost all over Europe, and could equal the most developed diplomatic services in this respect.” In addition, the Saxon foreign policy expenditures grew tenfold from 1699 to 1763. See Jozef Andrzej Gierowski, “Polish diplomatic service during the country's personal union with Saxony,” in Gerald Labuda and Waldemar Michowicz, eds., *The History of Polish Diplomacy* (Warsaw: Sejm Publishing Office, 2005), pp. 248-264. However, the well-developed Saxon diplomatic service essentially only complicated Polish foreign policy, which was characterized by internal divisions due to the multitude of competing interests.

the 1730s.¹³⁷ Tellingly, in the 1760s the new Piast king, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, had plans to reform the diplomatic establishment of the republic by centralizing it in his hands and essentially making it run similarly to the Russian CFA, with which he had close experience. Poniatowski employed Karol Boscamp, formerly in Prussian diplomatic service in the Ottoman Empire, as his counselor for the planned “collegium of foreign affairs.”¹³⁸

While it will take more studies to address the comparative aspect of diplomatic institutions in Russia and other countries, in the present work I examine in detail both the practical questions of Russian foreign policy in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century and the diplomacy itself. It is to the initial period of the mission’s functioning that we turn now.

¹³⁷ “The Commonwealth supplemented the Wettins’ diplomatic network to a limited extent only. It enjoyed an important right to have a representative in Istanbul.... The hetmans’ permanent residents appeared (although irregularly) in Bender and Crimea, where the Saxons did not go at all. It was also up to Polish envoys to maintain diplomatic contacts with Moldavia and Wallachia. They were also predominant in relations with Hungary under Ferenc Rakoczi. The Commonwealth used to have its permanent representatives in Rome, Vienna and Moscow. However, short-term missions prevailed. The largest number of them was sent to Russia (approximately 70), to the Porte and to Crimea (approximately 50). ...To the most part, those missions took place under Augustus II or during interregna. It was very seldom under Augustus III that Polish diplomats were present at foreign courts.” Gierowski, p. 238.

¹³⁸ Gierowski, pp. 278-279.

Chapter 2. Setting Foot on the Bosphorus: Peter Tolstoy's Network

In 1702, Russia's first resident ambassador Petr Tolstoy (1645-1729) arrived in Constantinople, heralding a new age of more active engagement on the part of Russia in the diplomatic scene on the Bosphorus. Admittedly, the first four decades of the century were characterized by trials and errors. After Peter I's ignominious defeat on the River Prut in 1711 and abolition by the Ottomans of Russia's right to send permanent representatives, it took St. Petersburg almost a decade to achieve the reinstatement of its mission in Constantinople. The ousting of Russian ambassadors in itself signaled the weight which the Ottoman Porte put on the resident diplomats' ability to be dangerous and resourceful spies for their government. After the first and only hiatus, however, the Russian permanent diplomatic mission was revived in 1721 and became a permanent feature of Russo-Ottoman relations. As a whole, the period between the Treaty of Constantinople (1700)—the last diplomatic victory of the Holy League—and the Treaty of Belgrade (1739), proved to be a time of adjustment, sorting through existing connections, and building new partnerships. While the Russian government was able to set up more direct sources of information-gathering and gathered critical information about the Ottoman Empire, the trauma of the Prut proved to be significant, and the war of 1735-1739 was in important respects the result of the eagerness of the Russian diplomats, statesmen, and generals, to avenge the defeat of their favorite tsar.

Ivan Nepliev (1691/3-1773), the second Russian permanent ambassador to the Ottomans from 1721 to 1735, was also one of Peter's "fledglings," a notion denoting men who were loyal to Peter and his reform projects for being chosen and promoted by him during his life. In fact,

Tolstoy, Nepliev, and even the next permanent resident, Aleksei Veshniakov (1735, 1740-45, but shadowing Nepliev since 1729), came to their diplomatic posts after marine training abroad—an area of special emphasis for Peter. They reported and presented evidence to the tsar of their accomplishments in Italian or Dutch navies, but it was their international exposure and, in particular, newly-acquired linguistic abilities that made them good candidates for protecting Russian interests at the Porte. These three ambassadors can be grouped together as pioneers of the Russian permanent mission in Constantinople, united by their service to Peter I and, in the case of the latter two, by their commitment to reversing the tragedy of the Prut.

Nepliev and Veshniakov, moreover, served in a different era of Peter's Russia—the imperial period inaugurated by the Treaty of Nystad of 1721, which marked Russia's conclusive military and diplomatic victory over Sweden. Having achieved the status of a northern European great power for Russia, Peter immediately turned his gaze eastward, where the deteriorating Safavid grip on Persia opened a new vulnerable area on the borders of the Russian Empire. Imbued with pride in Russian achievements and seeing the enormous military and financial toll that an unending series of wars with Persia through the 1720s and 1730s was taking on the Ottomans, who could not remain indifferent to the fate of their eastern neighbor, by 1730 Nepliev, Veshniakov, and some Russian statesmen and generals began to dream of dismembering the Ottoman Empire itself and thus avenging the Russian defeat on the Moldavian river. This mirage of an ever-weakening Ottoman Empire, perhaps only months away from complete disintegration, tempted many a European ruler and pope over the centuries, and now it came to infect Russian minds as well. Of course, the bloodshed of the 1730 rebellion, which dethroned the grand vizier Ibrahim Paşa and the Ottoman sultan Ahmed III himself—to say

nothing of the reversals of Ottoman expansionism with the treaties of Karlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718)—only served to solidify the picture of a state rotten and weakened to the core.

As a result, Nepliuev's and Veshniakov's terms as Russian residents in Constantinople became premised not on the idea of building or at least maintaining a relationship with the southern neighbor, but on helping bring about the final solution to the perennial threat of the Turks and Tatars and an end to their presence in Europe. Able Ottoman commanders and diplomats proved the erroneousness of these hopes in the late 1730s, although traditional disunity among Christian allies—this time, the Russians and the Austrians, the latter having been weakened by a war with France—played a more determining role. This particular outlook of the Russian diplomats, therefore, undermined opportunities for a more pragmatic engagement with the Porte.

Indeed, there existed signs that the Russian and Ottoman empires were not doomed to perennial confrontation. Many Ottomans realized that they needed a period of peace, if only to regroup before another attempt at expansionism. The fruitful Russo-Ottoman negotiations in 1719-1720, which resulted in the Treaty of Eternal Peace, proved that the two sides needed each other and could find common language.¹³⁹ However, important differences and disputes between the two empires also had their place. The Russo-Ottoman relations were especially negatively affected by the conclusion of a Russo-Austrian alliance in 1726.

¹³⁹ Leonid A. Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii v poslednie gody severnoi voiny: Nishtadtskii mir* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), pp. 251-333.

Inadequacy of Ad Hoc Intelligence-Gathering

Peter I's initial attempt to establish a permanent embassy in Constantinople met with resistance of both the Ottoman government and other foreign diplomats in Constantinople. The emphasis Peter I placed on the maintenance of continuous diplomatic mission there, as elsewhere, was not only a matter of prestige, but, more practically, a means to keep apace with the local diplomatic scene and gather more reliable and more systematic intelligence about the host country. This expertise was not a purely academic endeavor. Instructions that the tsar gave to Petr Tolstoy contained questions about all aspects of the Ottoman Empire's domestic situation and relations with other states. This information was necessary because for most of Peter's reign Russia tried to avoid a war on several fronts, which meant that the Porte had to be placated in order for Russia to be free to wage the war in the north. Tolstoy did his best to keep Ottoman belligerence at bay until 1710, although the latter's focus on domestic reform also played an important role in the pacific nature of its foreign policy.¹⁴⁰

However, this early experience of the Russian mission was characterized by Russia's failure to prevent a war and its betrayal by the traditional secret channels. As a result, Peter I remained even more determined to maintain a permanent representative in Constantinople and in the following decades the Russian government reexamined its information channels and invested in making the residency more effective in this respect. Almost at the price of his own life and freedom Peter I learned that the traditional methods of gathering intelligence about the Ottomans were inadequate. These included recording oral testimonies of travelers, merchants, Russian

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Naff, "Ottoman Diplomatic Relations with Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Patterns and Trends," in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), pp. 88-107, here p. 88.

captives released from Turkish captivity,¹⁴¹ itinerant Orthodox clerics, and especially Ottoman subjects such as Greeks; procuring secret information from the Moldavian and Wallachian hospodars; and all types of intelligence gleaned through Crimea, with which Russia had maintained close relations for centuries.¹⁴²

Useful but Uncertain Help of Jerusalem Patriarchs

Traditionally, border officials and the *Posolskii Prikaz* in Moscow questioned every traveler, visitor, merchant, or religious alms-seeker about the lands he traveled through, things and people he saw, and rumors heard. Nikolai Kapterev noted that as early as the late sixteenth century the Muscovite government realized the value of alms-seekers—particularly Greeks whose homelands and churches became the domain of Muslim Ottomans in the fifteenth century and who thereupon began to appeal to Russian tsars as their patrons—in furnishing critically-useful intelligence about the circumstances and intentions of the Ottomans. Moscow even made the amount of alms to be dispensed to each individual petitioner dependent on whether they could report anything of value. When first stopped at the border in Putivl these Orthodox Greek clerics were allowed to proceed further on to Moscow if they were carrying some important news, in return for which they received more generous alms. The most adroit informers were then hired by Russia as more permanent secret agents in Constantinople who had to keep up

¹⁴¹ In fact, according to one document, even the Turks and Tatars who came to Moscow for an official exchange in captives in 1702 shared information about Crimean developments. RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1702, D. 7. Vopros vyekhavshikh iz Krymu dvum Turkam Seimu i Malysu o Turetskikh povedeniakh, ll.1-4.

¹⁴² After the Karlowitz Congress and the Treaty of Constantinople of 1700, which proscribed the practice of tribute-giving to the khans, the Russian government refused to treat Crimean khans as sovereign rulers and therefore stopped sending ambassadors there. The Ukrainian Hetman and the governor of Azov became officially responsible for relations with the Tatars. T.K.Krylova, “Stateinye spiski petrovskikh diplomatov (1700-1714),” in *Problemy istochnikovedeniia*, Vol. IX (Moscow: Izdatelstvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1961), p. 165. It was not until the 1740s that the Russian government attempted to send a resident consul to Bahçesaray, and not until 1763 that the Crimean government approved a Russian consul at the khan’s court, albeit the consulate lasted a little over a year.

correspondence with Moscow on all matters of importance concerning the Ottoman Empire and other countries.¹⁴³

Eventually, eastern patriarchs became the most dedicated and capable of these informers. In particular, the Constantinople and Jerusalem patriarchs, many of whom personally visited Muscovy and wielded influence on the development of the Russian Church and tried to revive the erstwhile Greek influence on Russian culture, in the seventeenth century became Russia's most eager political agents in the Ottoman Empire. Jerusalem patriarchs, in particular, were useful because they traveled widely to collect money for the benefit of their diocese, which was coming under greater pressure from both Armenian and Latin religious communities. In fact, by the seventeenth century the Constantinople patriarchs proved to be less useful and cooperative because of the high turnover at this post as a result of competition and greater dependency on Ottoman authorities, which did not hesitate to change patriarchs in return for bribes or because of perceived untrustworthiness.

The Jerusalem patriarchs alone proved to be extremely valuable sources of information. At least four of them visited Moscow in the seventeenth century, sometimes more than once. However, these agents had specific motivations for providing the Muscovite government with information. Thus, by the 1630s their ties with the Russian court superseded the initial purpose of alms-seeking. They began to seek Russian protection of the Orthodox in the Holy Land. With this in mind, they became invested in drawing Russia closer to the Greek and Orthodox causes outside of Russia and, concomitantly, in helping Russia strengthen its position vis-à-vis "its enemies, the Turks and Latins." Their assistance consisted in personal advising to the Muscovite

¹⁴³ Nikolai Kaptelev, *Kharakter otnoshenii Rossii k pravoslavnomu Vostoku v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh* (Sergiev Posad, 1914), pp. 276-278.

tsar and his family, as well as the Russian Patriarch. Since they frequently traveled and resided for long periods of time in Constantinople, they also helped by instructing occasional Russian embassies to the city on the Bosphorus in local political mores, alliances at the Ottoman palace, and developments all across the Ottoman empire. Moreover, their intermediary role was enhanced by their close ties to the Danubian principalities, where many church lands exclusively financed the Jerusalem patriarchate.¹⁴⁴

In the person of Dositheos II, a doting patriarch who was elected in 1669 when he was not yet thirty years old, Russia found a devoted ally until his death in 1707, the likes of which came neither before nor after. Dositheos all but abandoned in fact his Jerusalem residence after the Latins achieved the Ottoman government's recognition of their dominant position at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1689. Dositheos moved to Constantinople, from where he frequently traveled all over the ecumene and waged his struggle for the rights of the Orthodox. He was very close to Muscovite rulers and became a trusted advisor of Peter I himself. He kept up regular correspondence with the Russian government from Jerusalem, Constantinople, and elsewhere, including Iași and Bucharest. Dositheos personally helped many Russian ambassadors at the Porte and, when it was necessary to conceal his actions from the Ottomans, sent his trusted people in secret to communicate his advice. Petr Tolstoy praised Dositheos' assistance to the first Russian permanent mission in Constantinople—for being “fearless of deathly dangers, working diligently for the benefit of the great ruler (tsar).” Indeed, every year until the patriarch's death Tolstoy sang praises to Dositheos and wrote to the Russian government requesting to reward this selfless ally. The patriarch's connections helped Tolstoy procure information such as Ottoman letters to foreign governments and fortress plans; and the patriarch's ties to the Danubian

¹⁴⁴ Nikolai Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov s russkim pravitel'stvom*, Vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1895).

principalities were invaluable as they provided a trusted route for Tolstoy's letters to his government, and vice versa—all at the time when postal connection from Constantinople to Russia was still very uncertain.¹⁴⁵

Despite Dositheos' genuine cooperation, this source of intelligence was too unstable in the long run. First of all, the degree to which patriarchs from Jerusalem busied themselves with advancing Russian interests at the expense of the Ottoman Empire depended on the personality of each patriarch. Several patriarchs before Dositheos were very helpful but not to the same extent; the latter was the most enthusiastic secret political agent of the Russian tsars in Constantinople. However, it was pure luck that he happened to be young at the time of his appointment and therefore served in this position for almost forty years. His nephew, Chrysanthos—notwithstanding his close association with Dositheos, whose right hand he was for a long time, including twice serving as Dositheos' ambassador to Russia,—almost inexplicably ceased to abet Peter I in the latter's Ottoman policy. Although Chrysanthos seemed to have continued in his uncle's footsteps in 1707 and 1708, writing about Ottoman developments and designs in secret script, already in fall 1707 he announced that he was planning to move to Jerusalem.¹⁴⁶

Initially, Tolstoy praised Chrysanthos' services and, in order to strengthen their relationship, on his own initiative in 1709 Tolstoy appealed to the grand vizier to restore Orthodox rights to the holy sites. Unfortunately, the negotiations were interrupted by the Battle of Poltava, after which the Swedish King Charles XII and Ukrainian Hetman Ivan Mazepa sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire. However, as early as summer 1708 Tolstoy noticed

¹⁴⁵ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 336-337.

¹⁴⁶ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 382-390.

Chrysanthos' tendency to evade direct contact. Tolstoy attributed this behavior to Chrysanthos' possible fear of the grand vizier, who was known to dislike Christians.¹⁴⁷ In fall 1708 Chrysanthos finally left the Danubian principalities, where he had collected much-needed funds from the Moldavian hospodar, for Jerusalem and personally wrote to Russia that he did not foresee that his services would be much needed, for he knew that both the Moldavian hospodar and the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, Petr Tolstoy, were tasked with intelligence-gathering. He did leave someone behind him in Constantinople to help the ambassador keep in touch with old contacts in the Ottoman government, but obviously he lacked commitment to continue his uncle's faithful service to the tsar. Chrysanthos resumed contact only for a short time in 1711, after a war broke out between the two empires.¹⁴⁸

To all appearances, Chrysanthos sided with the Ottoman government in the course of the war. The Russian government received intelligence to this effect from Greek secret agents in late 1711 and early 1712. Wallachian Hospodar Konstantin Brancovanu was also implicated by these agents in choosing the Ottoman side, which was not a surprise for Russia, since his misinformation and treason was one of the main reasons for Peter I's defeat on the Prut. One of the reports even claimed that Brancovanu sent two Greeks with a secret mission to kill the Russian tsar, which the sultan had supposedly ordered on the Swedish king's advice. The two Greeks were found but the investigation was inconclusive. However, it was a surprise to hear the name of Patriarch Chrysanthos along with that of Brancovanu. One of the secret reports alleged that Brancovanu had passed information to the grand vizier through the patriarch. With great flourish, the secret agent also accused the patriarch of not even being a Christian but an atheist.

¹⁴⁷ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 392-398.

¹⁴⁸ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 390-391, 399.

Following this episode and Chrysanthos' secret message to Chancellor Golovkin from 1711, Chrysanthos did not write directly to the Russian government until 1728, although he tried to acquit himself in letters to Russian ambassadors immediately following the events.¹⁴⁹

The obvious lesson of the Prut campaign was the unreliability of the earlier allies such as the Greek patriarchs and Danubian hospodars. But even if the Jerusalem patriarchs after Dositheos had continued to serve Russian interests unswervingly, their help, just as the help of Dositheos, came with strings attached. Thus, they took an active interest in Russian church life and domestic politics. Also, they were not in the least shy about meddling in Russian foreign policy by way of advice. It is not completely unexpected that they advocated for Russia's status as protector of Orthodox rights in the Holy Land. One also understands that they felt eager to rid themselves of Muslim rulers and in fact the idea of Russian protectorate over Ottoman Orthodox Christian subjects was suggested by none other than a Jerusalem Patriarch in the 1630s, to be repeated by his successors. All these objectives underpinned their service in the interests of Russia as secret agents. But some of them, especially Dositheos, also went as far as dispensing advice on what to do with Ukraine, Cossacks, Tatars, and Poland. Much of this advice was unsolicited and did not necessarily coincide with the Russian government's vision of its interests.

¹⁴⁹ Vice-chancellor Shafirov, however, was unimpressed. During his stay in Constantinople as hostage, he advised his government not to trust Brancovanu and Chrysanthos for they were friends of the Ottoman government, although he continued to correspond with the patriarch for the sake of appearances. He claimed that Chrystanthos expected to be appointed by the Porte a "Cossack Patriarch." Chrysanthos appeared perplexed by and upset about accusations against him and also sought the release of the two Greeks, to which the Russian government agreed in order not to upset him further, although the Greeks fled imprisonment before they could be released. In return for the Russian government's friendly gesture, in 1713 Chrysanthos applied himself to convincing the runaway Cossacks to return to Ukraine, but asked the Russian government to forgive the Cossacks' transgressions first. The same year, he also wrote to Prince Golitsyn, the Russian governor of Kiev, lamenting his defamation and offering some advice concerning the Ottomans. At the same time he implored Golitsyn not to reveal their correspondence to any Ottoman subject who happened to be in Ukraine or Russia. Lastly, he suggested that during his upcoming trip to Wallachia, he was open to talks with an agent of the tsar who knew Greek and Latin. But the Russian government did not send anyone to make this contact. Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 399-409.

Indeed, at the turn of the eighteenth century Peter I's views began to diverge markedly from Dositheos' preferences. Thus, while he was not very worried about Peter's obstruction of the election of a new Russian patriarch in 1700, Dositheos had a strong opinion about who should become the future Russian patriarch. A Ukrainian, Greek, or Serb, or any non-Russian, would be all "tainted by schisms and heresies," argued Dositheos.¹⁵⁰ But Dositheos failed to acknowledge and accept that Russia under Peter the Great was seeking contact with and inspiration from the West. Just as he advised to physically eradicate Russian schismatics, Dositheos called for a ban on Latin books and execution of those who owned them. He was unpleasantly surprised to hear about Peter's trip abroad and openly came out against the tsar's decision to send his son to study in Vienna. Therefore, slowly but surely an orientational/cultural rift began to grow between Peter I and Dositheos, a rift that caused the final loss of influence of the Jerusalem and other eastern patriarchs in Russia in the early eighteenth century. No longer did the two sides engage in ecclesiastic dialogue, and the patriarchs' position as secret informants became obsolete due to the more dependable performance of Russian permanent residents in Constantinople in this regard.¹⁵¹

Russian Temporary Missions to the Ottoman Empire before 1700

The other traditional mode of information-gathering—dispatch of extraordinary embassies—while also useful in itself, paled in terms of effectiveness in comparison with the permanent basis of resident diplomacy. Muscovy had maintained regular diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire since the late fifteenth century, when mutual interests focused on trade

¹⁵⁰ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 349-354.

¹⁵¹ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, pp. 364-373.

and potential alliance against regional enemies brought them together. For the next two centuries Russian and Ottoman ambassadors, accompanied by supporting staff and merchants, visited the respective capitals with some regularity. However, for the longest time the two sides could not agree on shared ceremonial. On the Bosphorus, the Russians claimed complete parity between the Muscovite and Ottoman courts and as a result they not only refused to bow down to the sultan but even declined first meetings with the grand viziers because as tsar's ambassadors they expected to deal directly with the sultan.¹⁵² In 1681, for example, a Russian ambassador refused to meet with the grand vizier on these grounds. In the end, however, it was impossible to dictate rules in a foreign country and after prolonged haggling, Russians had to accept Turkish terms.¹⁵³

Similarly, a lower-level diplomatic representative in 1701 refused for a long time to submit the tsar's letters to the grand vizier. His actions were all the more striking since he was a simple messenger. Mikhail Larionov behaved as if he were an ambassador of the highest rank—a position that was made possible by the vulnerable condition of the Ottoman court after the devastation of almost two decades of war. Upon his arrival, for example, Larionov learned that the city was full of rumors that Russian ships had sailed the previous summer from Azov to Kerch and Kafa, and across the Black Sea to Sinop and Trabzon—all with the purpose of exploring the sea. As a result, Larionov received an unprecedented token of attention when during his audience at the palace the customary disbursement of pay to the janissaries was carried out, which was usually done only for official envoys and ambassadors. The shaky

¹⁵² Vladimir Teplov, *Russkie predstaviteli v Tsar'grade, 1496-1891. Istoricheskii ocherk V. Teplova* (St. Peterburg: Tipografiia A.S. Suvorina, 1891), pp. 1-4.

¹⁵³ I.E. Zabelin, "Posol'skie puteshestviia v Turtsiiu v XVII stoletii," in *Russkaia Starina* 1877 (September), pp. 19-20. Starting with the first Russian embassy to the Ottoman Empire in 1497, Russian diplomats were instructed not to fall on their knees in front of Ottoman sultans or their heirs, but instead simply to make a bow. Türkan Polatçı, *Rusya Sefâretnâmesi 1757-1758, Şehdi Osman Efendi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2011), p. 5.

position of the sultan due to popular wrath also explained this extraordinary gesture. In the end, after surprisingly polite explanations of why the messenger had to meet with the grand vizier first, Larionov found a clever way to honor Muscovite traditions during the following visit to the palace: when allowed into the divan (council) room, he raised his head up and delivered an official speech not to the grand vizier and other officials who gathered there but to the sultan, who was sitting behind a gold-latticed window above.¹⁵⁴

The early extraordinary embassies, while often successful, were very dangerous and information gained through them all the more precious. Russian ambassadors travelled in various ways, but frequently by sea on ships provided by the other side. It was in Azov and Crimea that they endured the most humiliation, at the point of transferring from the Don River to the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. Both the Tatars and especially the Ottoman governor of Azov tried to extort presents, postpone the Russians' trip by delaying provision of carts and most importantly ships, and in some way retaliate for Cossack offences, which were all too frequent in this unstable borderland. In addition to the dangerous epidemic conditions of the Don-Azov area, Russian ambassadors and their supporting staff were also apt to suffer physically from attacks by Tatars and Ottoman officials, either on the way toward Turkey or on the way back. Often mistreatment, whether purposeful or not, resulted in late departure from Azov or Kerch, which meant a prospect of extremely dangerous sailing in the worst season on the Black Sea—late fall and winter. At least on one occasion, in late 1681, *d'iak* Prokofii Voznitsyn's ship suffered a wreck and was washed ashore in the north Anatolian town of Amasra, from where the ambassadorial suite was kindly transported all the way to the Ottoman capital. This perhaps

¹⁵⁴ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 4, 1700, D. 2, LL. 10, 12ob.-21. Bytnost' v Tsare Grade Perevodchika Semena Lavretskogo, i Pod'iachego Iudina, ostavlennykh poslom Ukraintsovym dlia zamechanii proiskhodiashchikh pri Porte del. August 2, 1700-May 1701.

comprised the first time Russian ambassadors entered Constantinople across the Bosphorus Strait, from Üsküdar on the Asian side.¹⁵⁵

After Peter I captured Azov in 1696 and built a nascent Russian fleet, it became possible for the Russians to travel to Constantinople using their own ships, as was done during the important embassy led by Emelian Ukraintsev in 1699-1700, when he traversed the Black Sea in two days. The ship on which this embassy travelled, called *Fortress*, caused a nervous commotion in the Ottoman capital when its captain dropped anchor by the Topkapı Palace and fired a gun salute. Such a blunt reminder of the recent Russian victory at the strategic Ottoman fortress of Azov and the resulting security threat to Constantinople itself was unwelcome, although the main problem seems to have lain in the drunkenness of the *Fortress*' Dutch captain Peter Pamburg, who ceaselessly fired cannons for days despite warnings from Ukraintsev himself.¹⁵⁶

According to the intelligence that the Russian border patrol in Taganrog¹⁵⁷ gathered from runaway captives in 1700, Ukraintsev met with adverse resistance while trying to sail into the Black Sea. According to the oral report of a former captive, Efimka Afanasiev, who fled from his Tatar owner in the Ottoman province of Kefe in Crimea, the Ottomans attempted to sink Ukraintsev's ship before it reached Constantinople, staging it as an accident. Reportedly, the Russian ambassador prevailed over galleys sent against him with the help of many guns on board the *Fortress*. The story that likely then spread among the Tatars told of the sultan's wrath with Ukraintsev, whom the sultan accused of not being an ambassador because ambassadors did not

¹⁵⁵ Zabelin, pp. 7-19.

¹⁵⁶ Mikhail Bogoslovskii, *Petr I: Materialy dlia biografii*, Vol. 5 (Moscow: Ogiz, Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1948), pp. 14-23.

¹⁵⁷ It was the first Russian naval base founded in 1698 just west of Azov. At the time, it was called Troitskii.

come in such warlike manner. Ukraintsev responded that he came with letters from Muscovy with a diplomatic purpose and that he had to fire his guns to repel attacking galleys.¹⁵⁸ This story does not find confirmation in Ukraintsev's embassy report,¹⁵⁹ once again highlighting the dubious advantages of relying on second-hand intelligence.

The Tradition of Diplomatic Diaries versus Regular Postal Correspondence

Traditionally and well into the second decade of the eighteenth century, Russian ambassadors had to maintain daily journals, thereby furnishing the Muscovite government with the most detailed accounts of their trips, negotiations, and information glimpsed in the process. These journals, called *stateinye spiski*, were extremely valuable and were carefully examined, copied down, and preserved in the *Posolskii Prikaz* by experts of each department and, if necessary, consulted by the tsar and other government officials.¹⁶⁰ As most embassies were of temporary nature and since universal postal connections were not yet in place, *stateinye spiski* effectively were a record of how a particular ambassador worked to fulfill the tsar's instructions. In the absence of opportunities for regular correspondence, these instructions—*nakazy*—formed the only basis for a diplomat's behavior for as long as an embassy lasted, usually a year or two. Some destinations provided chances to receive updated instructions, and in the case of Crimea

¹⁵⁸ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1700, D. 1. Otpiski pograniichnykh gorodov ot voevod o turetskikh i tatarskikh vedomostiakh, i skaski vykhodtsov iz polonu, ll. 11-14.

¹⁵⁹ Bogoslovskii, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁰ Svetlana Oreshkova, "Osmanskaia imperiia glazami russkikh diplomatov (K voprosu o posol'skikh otnosheniakh mezhdru Rossiei i Turtsiei i posol'skoi dokumentatsiei)," in Mikhail S. Meier, Iu. A. Petrosian, and S. F. Oreshkova, eds., *Osmanskaia imperiia: Sobytiia i liudi. Sbornik statei k 70-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Iu. A. Petrosiana* (Moscow: Gumanitarii, 2000), pp. 11-15.

where ambassadors sometimes resided for as long as a decade, *stateinye spiski* were sent to Moscow in installments.¹⁶¹

But with the advent of permanent resident diplomacy under Peter, diplomatic correspondence took on a nature of regular dispatches between the home capital and the ambassador in question. At times, such as for example in 1712, Peter requested retrospective composition of *stateinye spiski* from his ambassadors in Western Europe. But on the whole this mode of record-keeping was on its way out.¹⁶² The new practice was being established on more solid foundations in application to the countries of Western Europe, with which Muscovy maintained a regular postal connection since 1665. In fact, the chief director of the Russian postal service in the last quarter of the seventeenth century—and Peter I's Dutch tutor,—Andrei Vinus, had himself dispatched regular letters to Moscow from his diplomatic mission to England, France, and Spain in 1673.¹⁶³

In other geographical areas, the Russian government had to work harder to remove existing obstacles to regular communications. As one example of the difficulties created by long distances and lack of dependable channels, the tsar was able to send only about two letters to Ukraintsev during the latter's critical mission and Ukraintsev sent the same number back.¹⁶⁴ In each of them, Peter could not provide extensive updates on initial instructions but simply authorized Ukraintsev to make further concessions in order to secure peace in the south for the

¹⁶¹ A. Novosel'skii, "Raznovidnosti krymskikh stateinykh spiskov XVII v. i priiomy ikh sostavleniia," *Problemy istochnikovedeniia*, Vol. IX (Moscow, 1961).

¹⁶² Krylova, p. 180.

¹⁶³ Kees Boterbloem, *Modernizer of Russia: Andrei Vinus, 1641-1716* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 54-57, 66-68, 82-83, 149-153.

¹⁶⁴ *Pis'ma i bumagi imperatora Petra velikago*, Vol. I (St. Petersburg, 1887).

upcoming campaign against Sweden.¹⁶⁵ As mentioned above, at first the Russian government was quite limited in its opportunities to communicate with its representatives and secret agents in the Ottoman Empire. For the most part, the Jerusalem Patriarch Dositheos and his Danubian connections provided this crucial communication link.

After the conclusion of the Treaty of Constantinople, Peter I was interested in continuously maintaining his agents in the Ottoman Empire. Even before the arrival of the first permanent resident, as agreed upon in the treaty, two employees of ambassador Emelian Ukraintsev remained behind in Constantinople. Their goal was to protect Russian interests in the absence of a resident and especially in expectation of exchange of the ratifications of the treaty, which was completed on the Russian side with the embassy of Dmitrii Golitsyn in 1701. Translator Senka Lavretskoi and *pod'iachii* Grigorei Iudin faithfully gathered intelligence and passed it on to Moscow. They also actively advocated on behalf of Russian interests when they visited the Chief Dragoman Aleksander Mavrocordato to inquire if the announcements of the peace treaty had been sent to border regions. Translator Simeon Lavretskii utilized his local contacts, especially the Greeks. The two had their fair share of difficulties: Iudin got sick and died in December 1700 and Lavretskii had trouble sending missives back home. In early 1701, courier Mikhail Larionov arrived in Constantinople with letters from the tsar to the sultan and grand vizier. Larionov reported on his journey and all the intelligence that he collected along the way from his Ottoman guide Ismail Ağa. These included relations of the Budjak, Akkerman, and Crimean Tatars, and Ottoman relations with neighboring states and subject Arabs. Together with Lavretskii, Larionov proceeded to describe news from the Ottoman capital: the location of the

¹⁶⁵ The concessions consisted of giving up pretensions to Kerch and appeals for opening up Black Sea to Russian commercial navigation.

sultan, his unpopularity among the janissaries and common people due to high taxes that resulted from his lavish lifestyle, as well as the details of Larionov's reception at the Ottoman court. But, once again, all this information had to be passed through Dositheos, who managed to deliver it to the Ukrainian Hetman Mazepa, who in turn sent the intelligence to Chancellor Golovin.¹⁶⁶

Regular communications were so important that one of the articles of Peter's instructions tasked Tolstoy with negotiating a postal link between Constantinople and Kiev.¹⁶⁷ An archival document from late 1705 illustrates the extreme difficulty with which, despite this early instruction, messages continued to pass between the Russian government and Tolstoy. A courier of Wallachian origin, Dmitriev, had been dispatched from Moscow with letters for Tolstoy. First of all, he had to see Patriarch Dositheos, but Tolstoy warned him not to visit the patriarch more than once in order to avoid suspicions from the Ottomans and other Greeks. Dmitriev was also warned against wandering around Constantinople lest he attract attention. Most importantly, Tolstoy asked Dmitriev not to visit him, but pass all the letters to the patriarch who would then find someone to relay them to Tolstoy. As a result, Dmitriev stayed in Constantinople only one night and then, according to Tolstoy's orders, left immediately for Bucharest where he was to expect answers. On this particular occasion, it took twenty four days to receive them, after which Dmitriev departed for Moscow with additional letters from the Wallachian hospodar and Davud Çavuş, the Ottoman representative in Wallachia.¹⁶⁸ As if all the above precautions were not enough, Dositheos warned Moscow not to send couriers to Constantinople anymore, but only to

¹⁶⁶ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 4, 1700, D. 2. Bytnost' v Tsare Grade Perevodchika Semena Lavretskogo, i Pod'iachego Iudina, ostavlennykh poslom Ukrainsovym dlia zamechanii proiskhodiashchikh pri Porte del. August 2, 1700-May 1701.

¹⁶⁷ Sergei Soloviev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, Book XVII, Vol. XV. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959-1966), p. 61.

¹⁶⁸ Curiously, Davud Çavuş passed an envelope to the long-serving translator of the *Posolkii Prikaz* of Moldavian origin, Nikolai Spafarii.

Bucharest, where the Wallachian hospodar would act as a postal intermediary. Dositheos explained that the Ottomans were very guarded against and had extreme suspicion towards Russian couriers.¹⁶⁹

Since postal connections remained irregular and uncertain, throughout his entire stay in Constantinople Tolstoy continued to keep *stateinye spiski*. He was one of the last Russian ambassadors in general and the only resident to the Ottoman Empire to do so.¹⁷⁰ Tolstoy recorded events of every year on a paper roll, which were then copied down into books of 500-700 pages each at the *Posolskii Prikaz*.¹⁷¹ According to custom, these diplomatic registers or journals contained everything that passed through ambassador's hands or was heard by him. Everything that was related to and important for relations with Turkey—such as copies of the Karlowitz Treaty, for example—was noted down, thus making these journals rather eclectic, albeit items were recorded in chronological order. Sources of information were also dutifully noted next to each item.¹⁷²

However, starting with Tolstoy, the nature of *stateinye spiski* changed in two ways: these journals began to include correspondence with the home government, which was part and parcel of permanent resident diplomacy. And, according to Peter's instructions, Tolstoy not only

¹⁶⁹ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1705. D. 13. Skaska priekhavshago iz Tsaria Grada kur'era Voloshanina Konstantina Dmitrieva o Turetskikh vedomostiakh. November 7.

¹⁷⁰ Krylova points out that none of the other important ambassadors of the first decade of the eighteenth century kept substantive *stateinye spiski*, p. 180.

¹⁷¹ Records for the last year before the war, however, are lost; Krylova, p. 166. Most likely Tolstoy burned them before he was incarcerated in the Yedikule Fortress. N. I. Pavlenko, *Ptentsy gnezda Petrova* (Moscow: Mysl', 1984), p. 67; Svetlana Oreshkova, *Russko-turetskie otnosheniia v nachale XVIII veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p. 16. Krylova, however, argues that *stateinye spiski* as a form of diplomatic record-keeping were becoming so obsolete and cumbersome to keep that Tolstoy did not keep them after late 1709, p. 180.

¹⁷² Krylova, pp. 163-181.

recorded everyday events and diplomatic proceedings, but also wrote a synthetic analysis of the state of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷³

Petr Tolstoy: From Muscovite Courtier to Foreign Resident

Tolstoy's diplomatic journals, therefore, represented a mix between traditional and novel methods of diplomatic record-keeping, and thus a transition from old to new, from the era of ad hoc diplomacy to that of permanent diplomacy. Tolstoy himself personified this transition. Fifty-seven years old at the time of his arrival in Constantinople, he was a member of the old guard of the Muscovite court service elite, attached to the powerful Miloslavskii clan, which had married into the tsar's family. When the tide was turning in favor of the rival Naryshkin clan, he along with his brother managed, through another family relation of theirs, Fedor Apraksin, to attach themselves to the Naryshkin progeny—young Peter, destined to be named the great. The Tolstoys achieved this feat only due to the bridge provided by Apraksin, helped by their innate intelligence and long-cultivated courtier talents of intrigue and deception, for it was extraordinarily difficult to preserve their lives, much less positions, after having played a leading role in the *streltsy* uprising of 1682, of which their uncle Ivan Mikhailovich Miloslavskii was the mastermind.¹⁷⁴ Peter Tolstoy succeeded in making himself relevant during one of the most transformative periods of Russian history and even outlived Peter I himself.

Petr Tolstoy rendered himself useful by an unusually daring attempt to win back Peter's trust after implicating himself in the Miloslavskii machinations. Namely, he volunteered in 1697

¹⁷³ Krylova, pp. 170-171, 173.

¹⁷⁴ Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Tolstoys: Twenty-Four Generations of Russian History, 1353-1983* (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1983), pp. 48-49.

to go to Italy for navigation studies with the very first group of Russians chosen by Peter to train abroad.¹⁷⁵ He was the oldest member of this cohort at fifty two years old and left behind his wife and two children. According to Nikolai Tolstoy, a descendant of Petr's brother Ivan, a more plausible explanation of such a daring endeavor at an advanced age was the tsar's own suspicion towards Tolstoy and the resulting unease about leaving him behind while Peter I set out on his journey around Europe in March 1697.¹⁷⁶

Tolstoy's travel journal makes it clear that he sought relevancy through exposure to what Peter favored in his entourage—familiarity with the West, its institutions, achievements, social norms, science, languages. In fact, Pavlenko rightly underscores that Tolstoy's travelogue paints him as virtually alone on his journey, even though he was part of a group of thirty eight people.¹⁷⁷ This approach allowed him to bring into focus his own inquisitiveness, thirst for knowledge, and understanding of other societies, thereby recommending himself to the tsar and reading public back in Russia as a man of his times, versed in ways of the world, observant, and eager to learn. Pavlenko is also right when he remarks on rather superficial descriptions of what Tolstoy saw, except for his thoughts and musings on Catholic churches, dogma, and rites. On this particular subject, Tolstoy was also open to learning new things but on the whole always took an opportunity to vindicate his own Orthodox faith and its superiority. Ironically, in this respect he proved to be a veritable man of the seventeenth-century with its church-informed education and reading culture.¹⁷⁸ Be that as it may, upon return to Russia Tolstoy could not stop talking about Italy and he was lucky to fit in with the new cultural transformation initiated by the

¹⁷⁵ Pavlov-Sil'vanskii notes that Peter sent all court *stol'niki* to study abroad and that Tolstoy's supposed decision to volunteer is exaggerated: Nikolai Pavlov-Sil'vanskii, "Petr Andreevich Tolstoy," in *RBS*, Vol. 27, p. 78.

¹⁷⁶ Tolstoy, p. 49.

¹⁷⁷ Pavlenko, p. 52.

¹⁷⁸ Pavlenko, p. 55.

tsar who was himself enamored by the West. Tolstoy also must have felt blessed that he was away when another *streltsy* uprising flared up in 1698, forcing Peter I to interrupt his European tour,¹⁷⁹ incidentally preventing the tsar from ever visiting Italy.

During the two years of travel, Tolstoy served in the Venetian navy only for about two months and a half. One time he almost became a participant of an engagement with several Ottoman men of war off of Malta. He spent most of the time, however, examining his surroundings, meeting new people, and learning Italian. It is the latter pastime that eventually recommended him for the post of resident in Constantinople, for Italian was the diplomatic *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean. Foreign biographers of Tolstoy, primarily the French consul in St. Petersburg de Villardeau, were responsible for painting a rather disagreeable portrait of the old courtier,¹⁸⁰ according to which Tolstoy paid the Russian chancellor Golovin a bribe to be chosen as resident in Constantinople.¹⁸¹ But according to Pavlenko, there was no point in paying a bribe: service in the Ottoman capital was not a prestigious, coveted post and Peter already personally knew Tolstoy.¹⁸² However, perhaps De Villardeau was onto something when he explained that the appointment helped Tolstoy achieve his goal of transferring from the military to the diplomatic service, where he hoped to accomplish more and therefore achieve promotion.¹⁸³ It is possible that Tolstoy's age could have been, indeed, behind his desire to become a diplomat.

¹⁷⁹ Tolstoy, pp. 49-53.

¹⁸⁰ Pavlov-Sil'vanskii, p. 77.

¹⁸¹ De Villardeau served as consul under French ambassador Magnan (1727-1733) and briefly as *chargé d'affaires* in 1733; Pirling, P. and Villardeau, "Depesha Villardo kardinalu Fleri ot 20-go ianvaria 1730," in *Russkaia Starina*, Vol. 80, No. 11 (1893), fn. on p. 282; "Kratkoe opisanie zhizni grafa Petra Andreevicha Tolstogo. Sochinenie frantsuzskogo konsula Villardo," *Russkii arkhiv*, No. 1 (1896).

¹⁸² Pavlenko, p. 61. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii also notes that most likely Peter chose Tolstoy for his skills and knowledge of Italian, p. 81.

¹⁸³ Villardeau, "Kratkoe opisanie," p. 23.

Regardless of the exact reasons behind the choice of Tolstoy for this post, he did fit the job because he knew Italian and because, by all accounts, he was quite guileful. He faced the task of not only establishing himself as part of the diplomatic corps in Constantinople but, in large measure, of vindicating Russia's right to have a permanent representative at all. Despite the clear provision for such a right in the Treaty of Constantinople of 1700, Ottoman authorities persistently tried to ignore it and called on Tolstoy to depart after a couple of months. The Porte and in particular the chief dragoman Alexander Mavrocordato, an accomplished negotiator at the Karlowitz Congress, mocked Tolstoy as an ambassador without a portfolio, because seemingly Tolstoy had no matters to discuss, save for conveying a reassurance about friendly intentions of the Russian government. Both in Edirne, where the Ottoman government was based before the overthrow of Sultan Mustafa II in the fall of 1703, and in Constantinople Tolstoy's hosts treated him in the best traditions of Muscovite diplomatic hospitality: he was isolated and guarded to the extent that he had no hope of establishing any contacts with the world outside of his modest apartments; his servants were not even allowed to leave the premises to go grocery-shopping. The Ottomans also added a touch of barbarity to their actions when at first they placed Tolstoy in a dilapidated building in Constantinople that later collapsed.¹⁸⁴ For a long time, Tolstoy was kept in Constantinople itself, away from other ambassadors and local Christians who resided across the Golden Horn in Pera and Galata.

What eventually vindicated Tolstoy's presence was the opening of negotiations regarding the ever-present border issues involving Crimean Tatars and groups of Cossacks along the northern Black Sea area.¹⁸⁵ Incidentally, in October 1702 Peter I appointed Tolstoy's brother,

¹⁸⁴ Pavlenko, p. 59; Krylova, p. 170; Soloviev, Vol. XV, pp. 62-63, 65.

¹⁸⁵ Krylova, pp. 166-167.

Ivan, to the governorship of Azov.¹⁸⁶ Ivan Andreevich Tolstoy continued to govern Azov until the Prut Treaty forced Russia to raze the fortress. The appointment of the brothers to the highly sensitive positions at the same time could have been done to distance them from the center,. Effectively, however, they combined their efforts to prove their loyalty to Peter which, in turn, lent greater cohesion to Russia's Ottoman policy. After all, the Ottomans had to pay more attention to Petr Tolstoy in Constantinople knowing that he maintained regular correspondence with his brother at Azov,¹⁸⁷ a fortress which the Ottomans dreamt of re-capturing.

Pursuit of Commercial Navigation of the Black Sea

Petr Tolstoy's cheeriness after receiving the books of complaints also indicated that border conflicts served more as a pretext for staying to tackle more important goals of Russia in relation to the Ottoman Empire, such as the opening of the Black Sea to Russian navigation. As Mavrocordato noted in a mocking fashion, Tolstoy had no business as an ambassador because there were no trade relations between the two empires to speak of. This criticism was partially valid since most of the states with permanent representatives at Constantinople had strong commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Although high politics was also part of the equation, Venice, France, Britain, and the Dutch Republic maintained merchant colonies in the region and in the case of Britain, for example, it was not the government but the Levant Company that was financially responsible for the embassy.¹⁸⁸ Even an Ottoman tribute state—

¹⁸⁶ Pavlov-Silvanskii, p. 64.

¹⁸⁷ Part of this correspondence was published in *Russkii Arkhiv*.

¹⁸⁸ Not until 1804 did the British government take over sponsorship of the embassy from the Company. Geoff Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the Present A Study in the Evolution of the Resident Embassy* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009). The English crown began to take the Constantinople embassy under its increasing political control since the late seventeenth century, with the result that the power of the Levant Company to influence the diplomatic appointments to the Ottoman Empire was reduced to a formal approval of the king's

Republic of Ragusa—had a resident at the Ottoman court to manage all trade issues of this heavily commercial republic, although since the Holy League wars Ragusa maintained only a consul there. The only exception to this dominant interest in trade was the Habsburg mission with an Imperial internuncio at its head. Mavrocordato certainly overlooked this fact. But it was true that Russo-Ottoman trade was relatively negligible. Although articles of trade had certainly been passing between Muscovy and the Ottoman Empire for centuries, Russia was disadvantaged through lack of navigation rights on the Black Sea. Most of the trading was done by land and whatever commerce existed across the Black Sea was halted by the Ottomans in the early 1700s, precisely to prevent Russia from claiming a need to have a permanent representative and especially to avoid Russian requests for commercial navigation rights from their new base at Azov. After all, the Ottoman sultan viewed the Black Sea as his domain and even likened it to “a virgin and pure maiden,” to which access by strangers was categorically prohibited.¹⁸⁹

Peter I, however, was resolute in his pursuit of opening up the Black Sea to Russian commerce and navigation.¹⁹⁰ The issue had been first raised to the status of strategic objective

candidates. Still, the king avoided taking financial responsibility for the embassy, which began to hurt English ambassadors in Constantinople when the profits of the Levant Company began to suffer from French competition. A. C. Wood, “The English Embassy at Constantinople, 1660-1762,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 40, no. 160 (1925), pp. 533-538.

¹⁸⁹ Pavlenko, p. 111; Soloviev, Vol. XV, pp. 60-62. According to Russian documents, the dragoman mentioned both the Black and Red seas as being the sole property of the sultan. Mavrocordato offered alternatives to Russia: the sultan could allow Russian ships to sail from Arkhangelsk into the Mediterranean Sea to trade there, and the sultan also could grant Russian merchants the right to trade on the Black Sea using Turkish ships. Discussion of the latter suggestion was postponed until the arrival of Golitsyn. The latter, however, asked for a full right of commercial navigation and failed to achieve it, even though Peter moderated his demand: instead of asking for the right of passage as far as Syria and Egypt, he simply asked for the right of navigation from the Sea of Azov into the Black Sea and to Constantinople. As an additional step in this direction, Peter also wanted to receive a right to send his envoys to Constantinople by sea on military ships—a right that at the time was enjoyed only by the French. As before, the chief dragoman Mavrocordato responded on behalf of the grand vizier that the Porte could not satisfy these demands. In vain, too, was Golitsyn’s appeal to the reis effendi, who repeated the usual answers. Vladimir Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more v XVIII veke* (Moscow: Tipografiia A. Gatsuli, 1883), pp. 23-34.

¹⁹⁰ Robert E. Jones, “Opening a Window on the South: Russia and the Black Sea 1695-1792,” in Maria Di Salvo and Lindsey Hughes, eds., *A Window on Russia. Papers from the V International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia. Gargnano, 1994* (Rome: La Fenice Edizioni, 1996), pp. 123-124.

during Peter's trip to Europe in 1697 that came on the heels of the Russian capture of Azov in 1696. He wanted to see ships from within the Ottoman Empire and the rest of Europe come to Azov for Russian goods. At the Karlowitz Congress, Russian ambassadors were instructed to seek freedom of commercial navigation for Russian ships and the right of entry into all Ottoman ports. Ukraintsev, Golitsyn, and Tolstoy—one after another—took up this matter in Constantinople. In this task they met with overwhelming opposition,¹⁹¹ which would continue beyond Peter's reign until 1774, when Russian commercial navigation rights were first achieved through force of arms.

Early on, Tolstoy tried to circumvent the problem and set a precedent by sending goods on ships presumably carrying the ambassador's items from Constantinople to his brother Ivan in Azov.¹⁹² The intermediary in this surreptitious trade was Sava Vladislavic, a Herzegovina Serb whose rich family had fled persecution to the Republic of Ragusa. Sava carved out a special place for himself in Russian history, where he is known as Count Sava Lukich Vladislavich-Raguzinskii. He wore many hats: he was the first secular South Slav to reach out to Russia in hopes of achieving liberation from the Ottomans;¹⁹³ a wildly successful merchant, who benefitted from government monopolies and provisioning contracts; an indispensable secret

¹⁹¹ According to the Jerusalem Patriarch, the Ottomans even seriously considered damming the Kerch Strait. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 36. This enterprise was not fulfilled only for lack of sufficient resources. Instead, they committed to the construction of another fortress close to Kerch, known as Yenikale. In order to confine Russian merchants to the land route, the Ottoman government was even prepared to fully fund the passage of thirty carts to the border with Moldavia and subsidize half of the travel costs from thereon, plus provide eighty janissaries for protection. Tolstoy was more successful at drafting a mutual trade agreement between 1704 and 1706 but the death of the agreeable grand vizier put an end to it as well. Pavlenko, pp. 67-68; I.I. Leshchilovskaia, "Serb—spodvizhnik Petra I. Graf Raguzinskii," in *Slavianskii al'manakh 2002* (Moscow, Indrik, 2003), pp. 74-75.

¹⁹² Pavlenko, p. 68.

¹⁹³ Otherwise, Serbs visiting Russia in the seventeenth century were ecclesiastics seeking financial support, B.H. Sumner, *Peter the Great and the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1949), p. 33; I. I. Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 2 (2001), p. 47. Their appeals for Russian protection intensified during the war of the Holy League, and even Austrian Serbs complained about oppression by Austrian authorities and the Catholic Church: I. I. Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," pp. 46-48.

agent, in return for which service he earned the afore-mentioned commercial privileges; and as a skillful diplomat responsible for the Kiakhta Treaty with the Qing Empire in 1727.¹⁹⁴ Scholars unequivocally identify him as a Serb, but a contemporary French account stated that his mother, who followed him to Russia in the 1720s, was Greek.¹⁹⁵ In any case, whether Greek or Serbian, he served with loyalty to the nascent Russian Empire of Peter the Great. His commitment was widely recognized as sincere, for he came from a wealthy background and had studied in Italy, Spain, and France before coming to Constantinople and opening a trading house under French protection. He chose to serve Russia with what some even laud as a sense of patriotism that is generally seen as informed by closeness of political aims. However, it should be noted that his family's business in Ragusa must have been damaged by the tumult of the Holy League's wars with the Ottomans and the prospect of lucrative trade in Russian furs had to have been a major motivation for him in establishing personal contact first with Russian diplomats in Constantinople and then with Peter himself.

Tolstoy's Secret Information Network

Sava's commercial interests received unprecedented personal support of Peter I, who allowed Raguzinskii to trade in items that were traditionally a monopoly of the state. But his services as a political informer and expert in Ottoman affairs and the Mediterranean region was what gave him a path to influence and prosperity in Russia. Almost single-handedly Sava broke the monopoly that Jerusalem patriarchs held as secret agents, informers, and couriers of the tsar in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, we know that Petr Tolstoy gathered local intelligence through four

¹⁹⁴ I.I. Leshchilovskaia, "Serb—spodvizhnik Petra I. Graf Raguzinskii," in *Slavianskii al'manakh 2002* (Moscow, Indrik, 2003), pp. 70-94.

¹⁹⁵ Pavlenko, p. 119.

main persons, whom he called his “workers” (*robotniki*) or employees: Jerusalem Patriarch Dositheos, his nephew Spiliot, Sava Raguzinskii, and another uncle-nephew team of Luka Barka and Luka Barka Junior who were, in succession, Ragusan consuls in Constantinople. In 1709, after the death of his uncle, Luka Barka Junior replaced him as consul but he also served simultaneously as a dragoman for the British embassy, while his brother Nikolai reportedly served the Russian Chancellor Golovkin, that is in the *Posolskii Prikaz*.¹⁹⁶ Barka Junior’s full name is listed in the Russian archives as Luka Kirikov de Barka, with an alias of Makar Stepanov.¹⁹⁷

Tolstoy had heard of Raguzinskii’s help to the previous Russian ambassadors, Emelian Ukraintsev and Dmitrii Golitsyn,¹⁹⁸ and felt confident in recommending Sava to Peter I without even meeting him in person.¹⁹⁹ About a month after Tolstoy arrived in Edirne, Raguzinskii left Constantinople for Azov with the recommendation letter in hand and goods such as olive oil and cotton cloth on board the ship.²⁰⁰ His efforts to help Russia establish trade across the Black Sea were not very successful: another attempt to send goods under diplomatic cover in 1707 did not

¹⁹⁶ Pavlenko, pp. 57-58; Leshchilovskaia, “Serb—spodvizhnik Petra I,” p. 82.

¹⁹⁷ He is, therefore, the same Luka Kirikov that Kapterev identified as a Greek secret agent of Russia in Constantinople who alerted the Russian government to the treachery of Patriarch Chrysanthos in 1711-1712. Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, p. 399. Soloviev also refers to him as a Greek, Luka Kirikov, Vol. XVI, p. 399. He easily could have been of mixed-Serbian and mixed-Greek origin, just as Sava Raguzinskii himself. RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1711, D. 13. Pisma (v tsifrah s perevodom) k kantsleru Grafu Golovkinu, i k Save Raguzinskomu ot nakhodivshikh v Konstantinopole Luki Kirikova de Barka pod imenem Makara Stepanova i Papskago Nuntsiusa Galani o togdashnikh Turetskago dvora i byvshikh pri onom rossiiskikh poslov obstoiatel’stvakh.

¹⁹⁸ In 1701, translator Lavretskoi and messenger Larionov referred to Raguzinskii and Barka as ‘the Venetians.’ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 4, 1700, D. 2, L. 25. Bytnost’ v Tsare Grade Perevodchika Semena Lavretskogo, i Pod’iachego Iudina, ostavlennykh poslom Ukraintsovym dlia zamechanii proiskhodiashchikh pri Porte del. August 2, 1700-May 1701

¹⁹⁹ It also should be noted that during his naval training in the Adriatic Sea Tolstoy actually served under a Venetian naval officer Captain Marko Martinovic, in the Bay of Kotor, where he must have acquired close Croatian/South Slav connections as well. Tolstoy, pp. 49-50. In the Ottoman capital, in fact, Tolstoy set about recruiting Slavs, Italians, and Greeks for the Azov fleet. Sumner, pp. 18-19, 63.

²⁰⁰ Leshchilovskaia, “Serb—spodvizhnik Petra I,” p. 71. In a couple of years he would bring to Russia several slaves, including the famous ancestor of Alexander Pushkin, Ibragim Petrov: Leshchilovskaia, “Serb—spodvizhnik Petra I,” p. 76.

have more lasting consequences. However, Tolstoy praised Raguzinskii's continuing intelligence support, which in his absence Sava devolved onto the consul of the Ragusan Republic, Luka Barka.

These two-three South Slavs stood at the forefront of Russo-Serbian relations and lent substance to the Greek patriarchs' long-standing appeal to the Russian tsars to come out in support of the Ottoman Orthodox minorities, to be "their liberator, new Moses." In fact, the Slavic, along with Romanian, portions of these minorities now actively sought Russian protection and spearheaded first Russian efforts to undermine Ottoman control over the Balkans and the Danubian principalities. In addition to Wallachian and Moldavian hospodars' appeals to Moscow in 1698 to accept them as subjects,²⁰¹ it is reported that "between 1704 and 1740 at least four Serbian fighting leaders had made their way to Moscow to knit connections, beg funds, and, in at least one case to offer the services of the Serbs 'on behalf of their Orthodox tsar.... For in faith and tongue we have no other tsar than God in heaven and on earth the most Orthodox tsar Peter.'"²⁰²

Sava Raguzinskii was instrumental to Tolstoy in setting up a viable permanent mission in Constantinople. He helped the Russian resident establish local contacts and arranged for a Russian embassy employee to study Ottoman, Arabic, French, Greek, and Italian. This was valuable assistance because the few translators of the earliest Russian mission at the Ottoman capital knew only European languages, such as Latin, Greek, and Italian.²⁰³ Raguzinskii also helped supply critical information about the Ottomans that Tolstoy then submitted to his

²⁰¹ Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," pp. 48, 50.

²⁰² Sumner, p. 45. Many of these early appeals came from the Habsburg Serbs, whom Russia was hesitant to help in order not to spoil relations with Austria. At the time, the Serbs offered to supply a force of 10,000 in case a war broke out between Russia and Turkey: Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," p. 50.

²⁰³ Krylova, p. 169.

government.²⁰⁴ Indeed, it would have been impossible otherwise for Tolstoy to compile data for his extensive *Sostoianie naroda turetskogo/State of the Turkish People*, which he finished only in about half a year since his arrival in Edirne. Peter I's instructions to Tolstoy, for the first time in Russian diplomatic practice, asked for a systematic description of the Ottoman state, government, society, army, navy, economy, and foreign relations. The resulting description has been widely acknowledged by scholars as very perceptive.²⁰⁵ Tolstoy certainly possessed keen observation skills, but it would have been impossible for anyone to arrive at such poignant conclusions as are part of the *Sostoianie* in a matter of a couple of months. Instead, scholarship has identified Luka Barka as Tolstoy's main source.²⁰⁶

It should be noted, however, that managing even the limited secret network that Tolstoy had assembled was not always easy. Thus, by 1704 Tolstoy had to respond to Dositheos' attempts to discredit fellow spies, possibly out of jealousy. In fact, Dositheos implicated his own nephew, Spiliot, in lies and avarice and warned Tolstoy in 1704 and 1706 that Sava Raguzinskii was a French agent. Tolstoy did not believe these smear attempts, but they certainly must have highlighted for him the need to be careful about his informers.²⁰⁷ The Greeks, on the whole, gradually appeared to be less helpful than the Serbs.

²⁰⁴ Leshchilovskaia, "Serb—spodvizhnik Petra I," pp. 72-74.

²⁰⁵ Soloviev, Vol. XV, p. 61. Svetlana Oreshkova, Marianna Arunova, *Russkii posol v Stambule: Petr Andreevich Tolstoy i ego opisaniie Osmanskoi imperii nachala XVIII v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985).

²⁰⁶ Although Tolstoy was kept in extreme isolation, he was able to write to his informants asking for intelligence. Sava Raguzinskii had left for Russia very early in Tolstoy's residency. On the other hand, the nephew of Patriarch Dositheos, Spiliot, evaded answering Tolstoy's inquiries. Therefore, it was Luka Barka who provided extensive insights on the internal workings of the Ottoman Empire to Tolstoy. In a matter of a few months Tolstoy had in his hands insider information of greatest value. According to Krylova's examination of Tolstoy's correspondence as recorded in his diplomatic journal, Tolstoy included Barka's letters in his report in whole. Krylova, pp. 171-172.

²⁰⁷ Pavlenko, p. 58.

Tolstoy's Attempts to Leave Constantinople

On the other hand, Tolstoy quickly lost his enthusiasm for serving at this challenging post. As soon as a year and a half after his arrival, he asked Peter I to recall him from his “confinement” in Constantinople.²⁰⁸ Border conflicts, trade talks, and other consular responsibilities were secondary, under the circumstances of the war in the north, to his main goal of keeping the Ottomans faithful to the 1700 Constantinople Treaty, which obligated the two sides to keep peace for thirty years. Tolstoy felt doubts regarding this part of his mission, starting from the very beginning. Despite finding artful ways to bribe Ottoman ministers through secret contacts, including the mother of the sultan, Tolstoy felt despair many times. Frequent changes of grand viziers—the seventh grand vizier since Tolstoy's arrival was appointed in late 1704—rendered the resident's efforts to achieve lasting results futile.

Tolstoy also complained about difficulties with his own staff. In particular, he expressed worries about their steadfastness in faith, claiming they could easily turn into Muslims, especially if any of his secret agents became a renegade. He did not absolve even Patriarch Dositheos from the latter doubt! According to de Villardeau, however, these complaints stemmed from Tolstoy's machinations with embassy funds: his secretary Timofei had noticed that Tolstoy was pocketing part of the amount intended for gifts and bribes, and the ambassador decided to accuse the secretary of intending to convert to Islam in order to poison him. Whether this story is true or not, Tolstoy did complain about shortness of money for gifts, which, according to him, doomed his negotiations with the Ottoman government.²⁰⁹ The only person in his surrounding he could trust was his son, Ivan. The latter learned Ottoman to the point that he could “read and

²⁰⁸ Pavlenko, p. 61.

²⁰⁹ Soloviev, Vol. XV, pp. 62-65; Pavlenko, pp. 60-61.

write, except for the [official] letters of the Divan, with which there is great difficulty.” But Ivan left for Russia in early 1706. Coincidentally, Tolstoy asked for recall once again at the same time, and one can speculate that he sent his son back in order to make a better case for his own recall.²¹⁰ In March 1706 Peter promised to fulfill Tolstoy’s request but asked the resident to stay at the post for the time being because his services were direly needed.²¹¹ Tolstoy lodged another request in late 1707, but unfortunately it was not until 1714, after more service and four years of confinement in pitiless conditions, that Tolstoy was able to return home.

The Prut Treaty Setback

On the whole, despite the declaration of war in November 1710 by the Ottomans, Tolstoy had been successful in warding off earlier possibilities of a military confrontation. After all, the forces behind the Ottoman decision to go to war in 1710—namely, the Tatar khan, the Swedish king, the Polish supporters of Stanislaw Leszczynski, and the rebellious Cossacks, all helped by the French ambassador in Constantinople, as well as those of England and Austria—had been trying to upset the peace since early in the decade. Tolstoy was so skilled in manipulating local circumstances that he even cautioned his government to abstain from excessive appeasement, lest the Ottomans take it for a sign of weakness, which was just as dangerous as giving them cause to feel threatened. Tolstoy himself, however, felt an irreversible change in mood after the

²¹⁰ Tolstoy, pp. 57-58.

²¹¹ Teplov, p. 12.

battle of Poltava: he sensed that the Ottomans feared a potential Russian attack after Peter I overpowered Charles XII—his strongest opponent—and soon Poland as well.²¹²

The war of 1710-1713, which after the battle of the Prut was fought mostly on the diplomatic level, has generated quite a few controversies, but its main effect was a lasting settlement between the Russian and Ottoman empires, which allowed them to redirect their energies—back to the north for Russia and against Austria and Venice for the Ottomans.²¹³ Peter I was extremely upset about being outnumbered by the grand vizier Baltacı Mehmed Paşa's forces with a four-to-one ratio and almost losing his freedom in July 1711. In fact, the tsar concealed the real terms of the Prut Treaty in the version of the agreement that he publicized to other European governments. He simply published his amendments, while recognizing that many of them could not be achieved: his instructions to his representatives at the peace talks contained more limited suggestions. This fake treaty was actually included in the 1830 collection of Russian laws and the 1869 publication of Russian treaties with the East, a mistake that was not corrected until 1898. It is interesting for the present discussion that in the amended version Peter I completely crossed out the article that prohibited Russia's right to maintain permanent representatives in Constantinople.²¹⁴

²¹² Soloviev, Vol. XV, pp. 258-260; Vol. XVI, pp. 356-360.

²¹³ Sumner, pp. 57, 69. Soviet historian Svetlana Oreshkova also argues that the terms of the Prut Treaty were satisfactory to both sides, contrary to opposing assessments. In the circumstances given, the Ottomans did not believe they could or should have taken the war further—despite encouragement from the Swedes, the Poles, and the French. Moreover, the humiliation of Peter I and recapture of Azov were spectacular successes in themselves. For Russia, the Prut Treaty represented a diplomatic victory because it allowed its army to escape the encirclement and settle the conflict on the southern border. Oreshkova, *Russko-turetskie otnosheniia*, p. 192.

²¹⁴ Oreshkova, *Russko-turetskie otnosheniia*, pp. 138-140.

Archival evidence indeed shows that the treaty was not simply a result of a Russian bribe accepted by an avaricious Ottoman grand vizier, but a calculated step on both sides.²¹⁵ However, Peter's willful revision of the article on permanent representatives, among others, in the publicized version of the treaty suggests that in many ways the Prut Treaty was ignominious in its outcomes for Russia. It imposed one-sided obligations such as retreat of the army from the front, surrender of Azov and razing of Taganrog—and therefore loss of the Azov fleet,—surrender of important Dnieper forts, forced presence of Russian emissaries in Constantinople as hostages of the fulfillment of the treaty by Russia, confinement of mutual trade to the land route, ban on interfering with the Cossacks, and, importantly, prohibition of Russian interference in Polish internal affairs, which played an important role in Russo-Ottoman relations during the eighteenth century.

In fact, in the worst minutes of danger Peter was prepared to concede all the achievements of the last decade and a half. Namely, he was ready to return to Sweden the conquests of the Northern War, such as—in the order of increasing pressure—Livonia, everything else except Ingria, for which Pskov could be offered as replacement, and allow Leszczyński to occupy the Polish throne. If the Turks hesitated, Peter entrusted the vice-chancellor Petr Shafirov with credentials to surrender everything that would be demanded of Russia, except for the tsar's personal slavery. The presence of Leszczyński's envoy Stanislaw Poniatowski in the grand vizier's camp indeed created the danger of captivity for Peter and his field army. Charles XII himself was reported to have arrived at the Ottoman camp and shamed Baltacı Mehmed Paşa for failing to make Peter I a captive of the sultan. But when the Swedish

²¹⁵ Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*; A. Tereshchenko, *Opyt obozreniia zhizni sanovnikov, upravliavshikh inostrannymi delami v Rosii. Chast' III: Vitse-Kantslery* (St. Petersburg, 1837), pp. 11-15; Sumner, pp. 40-41.

king offered to capture the tsar if the grand vizier gave him 20,000 janissaries, Baltacı Mehmed Paşa allegedly exclaimed: “God forbid!... God has divided the earth among monarchs so that each owns his piece. Who would rule the Muscovite state if I take away Peter from it? The peace has been concluded and has to be respected.”²¹⁶

In this way major concessions on the part of Russia were prevented and, according to a contemporary eyewitness, the Russian army found the forgiving terms of the Prut Treaty hard to believe.²¹⁷ In the next two years, the Ottomans declared war on Russia twice more, but the terms of the Treaty of Constantinople (1712) and the Treaty of Edirne (1713) did not differ substantially from those of the Prut. There was a measure of achievement in this, because the Ottomans had been encouraged also by the rebellious Cossacks, supported alternately by the Swedes and the Poles, to demand even more from Russia: namely, the passing of entire Ukraine into Ottoman protection.²¹⁸

Loss of Information Sources after the War

The loss of the right to permanent representation was a considerable blow to Russian diplomacy. It was all the more palpable since after the war Russia lost support of its traditional political informants: the Greeks were frightened into submission, the Moldavian and Wallachian hospodars were replaced by Phanariot Greeks, faithful servants of the Ottoman government, and

²¹⁶ Tereshchenko, *Opyt obozreniia*, pp. 11, 15-16.

²¹⁷ Soloviev, Vol. XVI, pp. 388-389.

²¹⁸ Sumner, pp. 55-59.

the Ragusan friends were thwarted in communicating with the Russian government.²¹⁹ The assault on Russian spies and supporters was not surprising. The Ottomans were aware of the role of the Moldavian and Wallachian hospodars and their boyars in inviting the Russian invasion of the principalities during the war. Moreover, they were aware that Peter's advisor Sava Raguzinskii initiated this scheme, and in fact several historians attribute the entire plan of the military campaign to Sava's authorship. Not only did Sava establish contacts with the Danubian principalities and attracted them to the Russian side but he also fomented revolt of the Serbs in the Balkans. In fact, his project envisioned anti-Ottoman uprisings in Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Herzegovina, and even as far as Ragusa and among Austrian Serbs. Raguzinskii's agent Mikhail Miloradovich, a fighting chieftain from Herzegovina, raised a rebellion among Serbs and Montenegrins, the latter under the energetic prince-bishop Daniel Petrovich. After the Prut victory, Ottoman authorities demanded Sava's extradition, along with the Moldavian traitor Dmitrii Kantemir, but Peter I protected both of them.²²⁰ As a result, the Ottomans cracked down on Russian spies in Constantinople and the principalities. Already in 1711 and 1712, the Wallachian Hospodar Brancovanu—soon to be executed by the Ottomans despite his last-minute

²¹⁹ It should be highlighted, however, that early contacts with these Slavs served as a bridge to other Slavic peoples of the Balkans. Indeed, after the failed uprisings of 1711 Montenegro sought Russian protection and alms on a regular basis and many Serbs and Montenegrins were invited into the Russian service. From this war dates the cult of Peter I in the folklore tradition and literature of Serbs and Montenegrins. See Soloviev, Vol. XVI, pp. 413-415; Sumner, p. 47; Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," pp.53-54. The trickle of Serbs from the Ottoman and Habsburg empires into Russia, which had begun at the end of the war of the Holy League, continued for more than half a century and, in fact, hundreds of Serbs as well as Wallachians served in the Russian army during the Prut campaign. In 1715 Peter I allocated lands in the Kiev and Azov provinces for settling Moldavian, Wallachian, and Serbian officers and soldiers. In 1723 he invited whole families to secretly come over from Austria and the Balkans to join the Serbian Hussar Regiments in Ukraine. Sumner, pp. 34, 47-49; Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," pp. 49, 55.
²²⁰ Pavlenko, pp. 114-115; Leshchilovskaia, pp. 83-86; Leshchilovskaia, "Petr I i Balkany," pp. 50-53; Sumner, pp. 47, 81.

refusal to join the Russians—simply confiscated sensitive letters sent by Russian negotiators from Constantinople.²²¹

A particularly galling insinuation of treason concerned a Greek who had entered Russian service during the early years of Tolstoy's residency but a decade later was reported aiding the Turks during the border delimitation talks after the war. A translator of the Russian Ambassadorial Chancellery, Ivan Suda, was accused by the Russian border commissioner, Stepan Kolychev, of sabotaging the work of the commission by refusing to interpret orally for the Russians during talks with the Turks, claiming that he was sent from Constantinople in order to translate written materials only. Indeed, this claim was outlandish and, as Kolychev wrote on December 30, 1714/January 10, 1715 to Shafirov himself, it confirmed Suda's track record of disruptions and defiance which Shafirov had personally witnessed during his captivity. Suda even resisted using the proper title for the tsar: instead of using "His Majesty" on paper, Suda insisted that during his work for the Russian ambassadors the letters he had translated only referred to "the Tsar of Muscovy." When it was demanded of him to put this statement into writing, he simply refused. It turned out that when commissioners were traveling on carts and discussing the issue about titles, Suda was found in the cart with the Ottomans, for reasons unknown. He kept up his communication with the Turks, visiting them in their camp independently, and they came to visit him in return, causing great suspicion of the Russians. Essentially, the Russians felt that he was serving Ottoman interests, especially since he had a house in Constantinople, where his mother and sister also lived.

Kolychev was so distraught with Suda's behavior that he pressured him and the other translator who had been sent from Constantinople, Murtaza Tevkelev,²²² to do a better job at

²²¹ Kapterev, *Snosheniia ierusalimskikh patriarkhov*, p. 403.

translating. In the process, Suda found out that Kolychev knew Turkish, which suddenly led Ottoman commissioners to evade being in Kolychev's presence during their conversations, which he earlier had the benefit of listening on. Suda denied all of the accusations, justifying his refusal to interpret by insufficiency of his Turkish language skills. Instead, he implicated Tevkelev in communicating with the Tatars and Turks. He admitted having told the Ottoman commissioners that Kolychev could speak Tatar, but not Turkish. During this interrogation, Kolychev raised his voice at Suda, accusing the latter of serving the Ottomans, either because he had converted to Islam or simply because he feared them. Golovkin and Shafirov ruled that Suda was to be removed from his position in the Ambassadorial Chancellery and sent to Kazan where his behavior would be observed. He was precluded from receiving a passport and travelling to his home country, the Ottoman Empire. Suda stayed in Kazan for about five years, until in 1720 the College of Foreign Affairs brought him back to St. Petersburg. It is not clear if he continued to serve the Russians, but there is a mention of one translator Suda at the CFA in 1723.²²³

The immediate war years, 1710-1713, still proved the value of many previously-cultivated contacts, such as Turkish officials themselves—the mufti, janissary agha, reis-efendi, and Valide Sultan's kahya—who had been bribed by the Russians but at the same time carried out their own anti-war agenda, and co-religionist sympathizers such as Luka Barka Junior, whose

²²² Tevkelev would later translate at the Nemirov peace talks in 1737. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. V of Appendixes.

²²³ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1704, D. 6. Pismo (na Latinskome iazyke) k Boiarinu Golovinu byvshago pri Posle v Konstantinopole uchenika Ivana Sudy, blagodaritelnoe za sodержanie ego v milosti, i obeshchatelnoe prodolzhat' revnostno sluzhbu, i učit'sia prilozhno. July 24; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1714, D. 19. Delo o doprose byvshago na Turetskoi Komissii perevodchika Ivana Sudy, v protivnykh ego tamо postupkakh, otsylka ego v Kazan' pod arestom, i obratnoi ego ottuda priezd v Sankt-Peterburg. August 28, 1714-May 6, 1720; Translator Suda is mentioned in a 1723 document as one of the authors of the translation of the grand vizier's letter to the Russian chancellor, although no first name is given: RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1723, D. 1, L. 23. Protokoly i otpuski gramot Imperatora Metra I k Turetskomu Sultanu i veziriu.

efforts, according to Shafirov, “could not be exceeded even by a natural subject of the tsar.”²²⁴

There was even an attempt to officially accept Barka into service as Russian resident in Constantinople in fall of 1712, which likely failed because of another—third—declaration of war by the Ottomans. Thus, the draft of Peter I’s personal patent to Luka Barka read: “We, Peter I, through this announce, that we have accepted foreigner Luka Barka (who had been translator of Count Robert Suttin, ambassador of His Royal Majesty—these words were crossed out) into our service, so that he will be our resident at the sultan’s court. Nissvald, September 18, 1712.”²²⁵

At the same time, Greek patriarchs and Danubian hospodars fell under suspicion since they were caught between two fires and had to choose a side on the spot. Even after Dmitrii Kantemir entered Russian service, he was distrusted and historians still disagree on whether Kantemir made a choice in favor of Russia under pressure of circumstances or because of a great desire to do so.²²⁶ In general, all the long-standing non-Turkish informants fell upon each other with accusations of disloyalty. Just as Patriarch Dositheos had warned about the dishonesty of his own nephew Spiliot, Sava Raguzinskii, and Luka Barka before the war, now Luka Barka Junior implicated Patriarch Chrysanthos in pro-Ottoman tendencies, and Dmitri Kantemir, according to Shafirov, cautioned against the patriarch, as well as Kantemir’s own brother and the Wallachian hospodar. The significant political flexibility of the Danubian hospodars was highlighted by Kantemir’s ploy to convince the Ottoman government that he would enter into contact with the Russians in order to find out their secrets, while in reality he was negotiating the

²²⁴ Soloviev, Vol. XVI, p. 399.

²²⁵ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1712, D. 13. Delo o priniatii v Rossiiskuiu sluzhbu i o bytii emu Rezidentom v Konstantinopole—Tut zhe otpusk veriushchei ob nem Gramoty k Sultanu. September 18.

²²⁶ Pavel Gusterin, *Pervyi rossiiskii vostokoved Dmitrii Kantemir. First Russian orientalist Dmitry Kantemir* (Moscow: Vostochnaia kniga, 2008), pp. 18-21.

terms of his future service to Peter. This short-lived lie even allowed him to send his agent to meet with Tolstoy in the Yedikule Fortress and pass Tolstoy's letters to his government.²²⁷

The war, therefore, put the already-problematic network of informants under further pressure and pushed the Russians to seek additional sources of intelligence and advice. Thus, along with Luka Barka Junior they received information, rather surprisingly, from the papal nuncio archbishop Cyril Galani.²²⁸ Apparently, the Dominican Galani was also from the Illyrian lands.²²⁹ Galani seems to have been recruited by Barka Junior himself because they usually composed reports together. For example, in spring 1713 the two of them updated the Russian government about changes in the Ottoman higher circles that were unfavorable to Russia. Namely, a general council of Ottoman ministers and officials ruled to capture Charles XII on his way to Edirne and free Russian ambassadors from Yedikule. But the sultan's ego was injured because the council did not ask for his opinion. As a result, Ahmed III replaced the old mufti, who had been friendly to the Russian side, with a Swedish sympathizer. The ministers were angry with the sultan, and the mob was against the continuation of the war, for the price of bread skyrocketed and the army could not gather sufficient provisions. Eventually, however, the sultan had to capitulate to popular opinion, freed the ambassadors, exiled the Crimean Khan, and executed the Bender Pasha. "And there is such malleability and inconsistency at the Turkish court, that a human mind cannot grasp it. ... Verily, I feel that God is assisting His Tsar Majesty's

²²⁷ Soloviev, Vol. XVI, pp. 375-377, 402.

²²⁸ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1711, D. 13. Pisma (v tsyfrakh s perevodom) k kantsleru Grafu Golovkinu, i k Save Raguzinskomu ot nakhodivshikhsia v Konstantinopole Luki Kirikova de Barka pod imenem Makara Stepanova i Papskago Nuntsiusa Galani o togdashnikh Turetskago dvora i byvshikh pri onom rossiiskikh poslov obstoiatel'stvakh; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1712, D. 8. Pisma (v tsyfrakh s perevodami) k kantsleru Grafu Golovkinu iz Konstantinopolia ot Dobrozhelatelnykh Rossiiskomu Dvoru 1) Luki Kirikova Barki (pod imenem Makariia Stefana) i 2) Papskago nuntsiusa Biskupa Galani, uvedomliaiushchiia o togdashnikh Turetskago Dvora obrashcheniiakh, a naibol'she po zakliuchenii v Edikul Rossiiskikh Poslov—Tut zhe i otpuski pisem k nim ot pomianutago Kantslera; Kochubinskii, pp. 251-252, Appendix I, pp. V-VII.

²²⁹ Sumner, p. 63.

interests for their inconsistency does not allow them to prepare for war and I can assert that they themselves do not know what they are doing. Well-wishing servant Makari.” Barka Junior mentioned that the Dutch ambassador had dinner with the Russian ambassadors in Yedikule, which might have somehow aided their cause.²³⁰

He also noted that he had written many times to Golovkin through Vienna, but never received any reply. Therefore, he decided to send an especially trustworthy courier. Golovkin wrote back, through Vienna, thanking Barka for his incessant efforts and promised to reward him and his family. He also promised to grant him a title which Barka had earlier requested from the tsar. Golovkin instructed him to carry out his residential responsibilities surreptitiously, for the time being, until peace treaty was signed, at which point he could present his credentials to the sultan. Barka was tasked with convincing the mufti—or someone even more powerful than mufti—to help Russia achieve peace in six months, in return for 10,000 chervonnye in the first year and a 5,000-chervonnye annual pension after that. He also asked Barka to extend an offer of 3,000 chervonnye to the Dutch ambassador Jacobus Coljer if he would agree to work for Russia, but only if Barka deemed him useful.²³¹ From 1714 on, Galani’s name continued to appear on the list of Russian informers while Luka Barka Junior disappeared from records. Sava lost his contacts with Constantinople after the war but wrote rather mysteriously to Golovkin: “Correspondence with the Turkish lands has been disrupted, and I can report to you orally about ways to resume it.”²³² It is possible that Sava and Barka Junior passed the torch to archbishop

²³⁰ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1713, D. 12. Peregiska Kantslera Grafa Golovkina s Dobrozhelaiushchim Rossiiskomu Dvoru Konstantinopol’skim zhitelem Lukoiu Barki pod imenem Makarii—O povedeniikh Turetskago Dvora.

²³¹ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1713, D. 12.

²³² Pavlenko, p. 116.

Galani. However, as late as 1719 the Russian government did not trust Galani and simply used him to collect information.²³³

On the other hand, because the Ottomans refused to deal with the Russian ambassadors directly, Petr Shafirov, Mikhail Sheremetiev, Dmitrii Bestuzhev, and Petr Tolstoy had to accept mediation of English and Dutch ambassadors, who pursued anti-French policies. In particular, Russia benefited from the services of the Dutch ambassador. Jacobus Coljer was perhaps the most experienced ambassador in Constantinople of all times. He served in this capacity for more than forty years, from 1684 to 1725, following in the footsteps of his father as resident,²³⁴ and was reported to be fluent in Ottoman, which gave him an unprecedented advantage during personal encounters with Ottoman ministers.²³⁵ Despite this fact, he had an official translator at his embassy, Willem Theyls, who also served the Russian government during the war and later. In fact, the Dutch embassy took upon itself to represent, unofficially, Russian interests during the 1714-1721 interlude when Russian diplomats could not reside in the Ottoman capital. Archival evidence shows that Coljer was in Russian pay from 1711 until 1723.²³⁶ Another document describes Theyls as having been officially in Russian service from 1714 to 1729.²³⁷

²³³ Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, p. 263.

²³⁴ Sumner, p. 63.

²³⁵ Soloviev, Vol. XVI, pp. 397, 399.

²³⁶ Sumner, pp. 67, 70; Soloviev, Vol. XVI, p. 410; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1711, D. 16. Vypiska iz reliatsii byvshikh v Tsare-Grade Rossiiskikh Ministrov o uslugakh okazannykh tam Rossiiskomu Dvoru or Gollandskago Posla Kolliersa, i naznachenoj emu po 1000 chervonnykh pensii, 1711-1723; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1712, D. 21. Vypiska, s kotorago vremeni posylat' nachali pensiiu ot Rossiiskago Dvora Gollanskim v Konstantinopole Perevodchikam. 1712-1716.

²³⁷ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1714, D. 17. Vypiska o priniatii Shafirovym v Konstantinopole v Rossiiskuiu sluzhbu doktora Tel'sa s det'mi i o opredelenii im zhalovan'ia. 1714-1729.

Chapter 3. Ivan Nepluev and Aleksei Veshniakov: Peter's Fledglings

Short Interlude in Permanent Representation: 1710-1721

Outwardly, the Russian permanent mission had been handicapped by the start of the war in late 1710 and was not revived until Ivan Nepluev arrived in 1721, according to the regained right to permanent representation as spelled out in the peace treaty of 1720. However, if we look at continuity of actual Russian presence in Constantinople during the intervening decade, presence that allowed Peter I to maintain contacts with Ottoman officials and political informants of various origins, the effective lapse was relatively short and not entirely complete. Thus, after the departure of Russian ambassadors in 1714, the next diplomatic visit occurred already in early 1719, when Aleksei Dashkov was dispatched to negotiate a new peace agreement in light of contemporary circumstances.²³⁸ In the four and a half years that passed in-between, Russia continued to benefit from the assistance of some of the old informants, both Ottoman and foreign subjects: namely, Ottoman dragomans, Jacobus Coljer, Willem Theyls, and archbishop Galani, who had been serving the Russian court since the war.²³⁹ Even the Dutch consul in Smyrna had been reporting to the Russian foreign ministry about Turkish developments.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ The best study of this mission is by Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, pp. 251-333.

²³⁹ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1713, D. 11. Perepiska Kantslera Grafa Golovkina s Golanskim v Konstantinopole Poslom Kolierom, i sekretarem ego Teylsom; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1714, D. 9; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1715, DD. 2-5; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1716, DD. 4-7; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1717, DD. 1-3, 6; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1718, D. 2. Perepiska Podkantslera Barona Shafirova s Papskim v Konstantinopole Nuntsiusom Biskupom Galani o obrashcheniiakh Turetskago dvora; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1718, D. 3. Perepiska Podkantslera Barona Shafirova s Gollandskim v Konstantinopole Poslom Koliersom i s Perevodchikom ego Vilimom Tel'som po delam Turetskago Dvora; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1718, D. 10. Delo o perevode v Konstantinopol' pensionnykh deneg. 1) Golanskomu Poslu Grafu Korliersu, 2) Perevodchiku ego Teil'su, 3) Biskupu Galani Papskomu Nuntsiusu, 4) Perevodchikam Porty Mavrokordatu i Dimitriiu; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1719, D. 4. Dela k bytnosti v Konstantinopole Poslannika Dashkova prinadlezhashchie, a imenno: 1) Peresyłka k nemu, ego svite, i pensioneram Biskupu Galani i Tel'su

Nevertheless, Peter I preferred to keep native Russian people on the spot as well. Select employees of the Russian foreign ministry stayed on in the Ottoman capital to keep an eye on local developments. For example, in late 1713 the Kiev governor Dmitrii Golitsyn dispatched *d'iak* Lavrentii Protopopov to join immediately Russian ambassadors in Edirne as a secretary. Objectively, this was a surprising order since the last treaty of the war had recently been signed and the Russian diplomatic suite was scheduled to leave for home. Protopopov's instructions, however, make it clear that he was tasked with staying at the sultan's court in the capacity of "secretary." This was apparently Peter's way of circumventing the Ottoman ban on Russian "residents." Thus, Protopopov was instructed to conceal from border authorities that he was appointed as "a secretary in-residence," but only to say that he was carrying letters to Russian ambassadors. The latter then had to provide him with advice on how to behave during an audience with the sultan and in general. They also possibly could let Protopopov retain some of their *pod'iachie* and translators.

Protopopov had difficulty in getting access to the ambassadors and was not allowed to have an audience with the sultan, but it is clear that the tsar put a priority on having a native Russian spy in-residence in Constantinople. This particular case also highlights the shortage of personnel in Russia who knew Turkish: besides his native Russian and perhaps Ukrainian and Polish, Protopopov was not versed in foreign languages. He was also not familiar with diplomatic practice and with the particular conditions of the Constantinople diplomatic scene: he

opredelennago zhalovan'ia; i 2) Priezdy kurierov, i otpravelnie onykh chrez Kiev v Konstantinopol'; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1719, D. 7. Pis'ma k Kantsleru Grafu Golovkinu ot Papskago v Konstantinopole Nuntsiusa Galani o obrashcheniiakh Turetskago Dvora; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1719, D. 8. Perepiska Perevodchika pri Golanskom v Konstantinopole posle Vilima Tel'sa s Kantslerom i vitsekantslerom Rossiiskimi o obrashcheniiakh Turetskago Dvora.

²⁴⁰ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1718, D. 4. Pisma k Kantsleru i vitsekantsleru ot Gollandskago v Smirne Konsula Goshepieda o obrashcheniiakh Turetskago dvora; RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1719, D. 9. Pis'ma k vitsekantsleru Baronu Shafirovu ot Golanskago v Smirne Konsula Geshepieda o turetskikh vedomostiakh.

asked for guidelines for such basic needs as dealing with other foreign ambassadors and for ways to keep up correspondence with Russian ambassadors in other countries. Protopopov quickly realized the anti-Christian sentiments of the grand vizier and in advance excused himself from responsibility for failed negotiations. He also was not interested in politics as much as he was in exploring the Christian attractions of the former Byzantine capital. He submitted to the attention of the tsar a compilation of extracts from Greek chronicles about the history of Turkish invasions of Byzantium and Constantinople, as well as prophesies of future Ottoman demise. In addition, he attached a note containing rumors and news that coursed through Constantinople streets and squares, “and time will show, if they contain truth.” Finally, Protopopov admitted, writing about himself in third person: “the secretary reports what he hears from others, and he is extremely disadvantaged by the fact that he has not had a chance, as an orphan, to learn foreign languages in childhood; and although he would be happy to catch up now, but his frailty would not permit him to do so.” All in all, Protopopov had to return home and the mission failed.²⁴¹

Peter I, however, did not want to give up. In 1715 he again tried to revive permanent residency in Constantinople through personal correspondence with the Ottoman government. He wrote to the grand vizier Ali Paşa about the necessity for a Russian resident to be present in Turkey in view of unceasing attacks of Ottoman subject peoples—primarily the Tatars—on Russian territory.²⁴² This appeal was clearly also unsuccessful, even though Peter managed to send two short missions led by Ieronim Natali in 1715 and 1718 in order to resolve the border

²⁴¹ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1714, D. 8. Stateinoi spisok Sekretaria Lavrent’ia Protopopova bytnosti ego v Konstantinopole po den’ ot’ ezda ego ottuda.

²⁴² RGADA, F. 89, Op. 4, 1715, D. 8. Gramota Petra I turetskomu viziriu Ali Pashe s obiasnieniami neobkhdimosti naznacheniiia russkago rezidenta v Turtsiiu, vvidu mnogochislennykh nabegov poddannyykh Turtsii narodnostei na russkie vladeniia. 1715.

issues.²⁴³ But the efforts speak for themselves. Just as in 1700-1701, when lower-level employees of the *Posolskii Prikaz* had stayed in Constantinople between Ukraintsev's departure and Golitsyn's arrival, continuing presence of Russian agents in the Ottoman Empire was critical to the success of Peter's policy. He realized that Ottoman officials, other foreign diplomats, and even the mood in the streets had to be monitored closely in order to maintain peace, which he needed so desperately. Lieutenant Natali, for example, recruited the dragoman of the Porte Gregorios Ghika II (1717-1727), who was given the alias "Dmitrashka," to assist Russian interests by supplying information in return for a pension of 500 chervonnye a year.²⁴⁴

The late 1710s in Russo-Ottoman relations were a period of particular mutual interest in cooperation. The Ottomans even offered Russia to be a mediator in the Ottoman-Habsburg peace talks. For this purpose, the Porte sent envoy Aga Mustafa in 1718. Peter I seized this opportunity and immediately sent an extraordinary envoy Captain of the Guards Ivan Gorokhov, whom he introduced not only as a Russian mediator but a resident who would reside at the Ottoman Porte. However, Gorokhov became very sick during the journey and at the same time news arrived that the Ottoman Empire had concluded the Treaty of Passarowitz. Already in fall 1718 St. Petersburg dispatched an experienced diplomat Aleksei Dashkov as an extraordinary envoy, although his instructions specifically prescribed that he achieve the Ottoman permission to stay permanently. The tsar could not wait any longer for the Habsburgs, Poles, and England were known to have been inciting the sultan to declare a war on Russia, while the Northern War had

²⁴³ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1718, D. 6. Posylka v Konstantinopol' Podpolkovnika Natali s Gosudarevymi k Sultanu i Viziriu Gramotami o nanesennykh vnov' Kubantsami i Azovtsami Rossiianam obidakh i grabitel'stvakh i o razobranii sego dela Komisarami. Tut zhe perepiska ego s Kantslerom i s prochimi. May 7; Also in Nikiforov, pp. 257-259.

²⁴⁴ Still, the Russian government instructed its diplomats not to trust the dragoman and not to reveal any secrets to him. Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, pp. 263-264; Rumiana Mikhneva, *Zemiata izvyn "vremeto"* (Varna: Slavena, 2003), p. 208.

not yet come to a conclusion. Overall, despite English resistance, Aleksei Dashkov received good treatment and given a seaside house in Büyükdere.²⁴⁵ The Ottomans were not interested in another war after a devastating loss to the Habsburgs in 1716-1718.²⁴⁶ However, the Russians were continuously on guard. In fact, in February 1719 Dashkov sent a letter with worrisome news that the Dutch and Venetian ambassadors had joined the English and Austrian ones in inciting the Ottomans to a war with Russia.²⁴⁷

According to the list of secret pensions, by 1719 the Russian government maintained about six people as secret agents. They were the Dutch ambassador Coljer (1,000 chervonnye, or about 2,000 rubles), Bishop Galani (500 chervonnye, or 1,000 rubles), the Dutch dragoman Willem Theyls (1,000 levki, or 600 rubles), Theyls' elder son Nikolai (600 levki, or 360 rubles), Theyls' other son (250 levki, or 150 rubles), and the dragoman of the Porte (500 chervonnye, or 1,000 rubles). However, Willem Theyls was already old and Dashkov found other informants unsatisfactory as well.²⁴⁸ Thus, in the new political circumstances after the Treaty of Passarowitz the Dutch and the local Greeks, openly or secretly, all took the side of the Habsburgs. Unlike St. Petersburg, Vienna kept its ambassador in Constantinople, who developed a friendship with Coljer, with whom they often drank together. Theyls' son Nikola served as a translator for the Austrian ambassador²⁴⁹ and, therefore, according to Dashkov, Theyls was not proactive in working in Russian interests, but only sought financial remuneration for he was poor, deaf, and

²⁴⁵ Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, pp. 259-262, 266-267; Soloviev, Vol. XVII, p. 286.

²⁴⁶ Sumner, p. 70.

²⁴⁷ 89.1.1720.3, LL. 4-4ob, 16. Otpuski reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku Alekseiu Dashkovu. Also see detailed discussion in Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*.

²⁴⁸ Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, pp. 263-264.

²⁴⁹ 89.1.1720.3, L. 17ob. Otpuski reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku Alekseiu Dashkovu.

even lost sharpness of mind. Dashkov complained that all his communication with Theyls immediately became known to his wife and son, and therefore to the Austrian ambassador.²⁵⁰

The CFA was surprised to hear from Dashkov that the Dutch ambassador Coljer had been working at cross-purposes with the Russian court: before Dashkov's mission Coljer used to help and do favors for the Russians in return for a pension. Dashkov, however, claimed that Coljer was friendly with the Imperial and English ambassadors and together they tried to harm Russia's position. Dashkov insisted that Coljer was fully loyal to the Austrians and even cooperated with the English ambassador, and, moreover, had lost all credit with the Porte. The CFA decided to inform the government of the Estates General about the contrary actions of their ambassador, but the Dutch government responded with disbelief and surprise, denying the allegations. As a result, the CFA asked Dashkov to specify how Coljer was harming Russian interests.²⁵¹ In the meantime, Russian foreign ministry advised Dashkov to organize the everyday life of the embassy in the best way possible. One of the suggestions seems to have been designed at attracting the Greeks again: Dashkov was tasked with finding a Greek cook who would cook everyday meals but also be able to offer customary Lent dishes for visiting patriarchs and metropolitans.²⁵² It should be noted, however, that Coljer's behavior could not have been a complete surprise, for in 1718 Peter I had arrested the Dutch ambassador Debis for making unfavorable reports about Russia to his government and maintaining suspicious relations with Russian subjects. Having subjected him to an interrogation, the tsar demanded his recall by the

²⁵⁰ Soloviev, Vol. XVII, pp. 286-292.

²⁵¹ 89.1.1720.3, LL. 73-77.

²⁵² 89.1.1720.3, L. 78. Otpuski reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku Alekseiu Dashkovu.

Estates General.²⁵³ Almost all foreign states began to incite the Porte towards war with Russia after the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718), as the grand vizier himself admitted candidly to Dashkov.²⁵⁴ Bishop Galani also caused suspicion: he was reportedly “in and out on all sides, in the pay now of the Russians, now of the French, now of the Austrians; in the end Russia did not pay well enough and he withdrew to Ragusa as bishop.”²⁵⁵ It was clear that reliance, however forced, on foreign diplomats in Constantinople had to come to an end.

As a result of the disappointing situation with secret informants, Dashkov began to cultivate other sources of information: he recruited his guard to visit the Porte regularly and report on what he heard there. He also found support in the French ambassador, whose secretary became a Russian informant in return for a generous pension. Dashkov even suggested to his government to cut payments to Coljer and employ the French ambassador de Bonnac as Russia’s agent instead. He investigated de Bonnac’s intentions and came to the conclusion that he kept his help to Russia secret from the French government and was sincere in his offers since he was motivated by money; even his wife asked for rich presents.²⁵⁶ Initially, the CFA warned Dashkov not to trust the French ambassador, for his government was allied with the English King and therefore would not approve of de Bonnac’s becoming Russia’s representative at the Porte.²⁵⁷ But with time Bonnac proved helpful to Dashkov and assisted in the negotiations with the Porte that led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Eternal Peace in 1720, which was extremely beneficial

²⁵³ V.P. Potemkin, ed., *Istoriia diplomatii*, Vol. I (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel’stvo, 1941), p. 272.

²⁵⁴ 89.1.1720.3, L. 16.

²⁵⁵ Sumner, p. 63.

²⁵⁶ Soloviev, Vol. XVII, pp. 286-292.

²⁵⁷ 89.1.1720.3, L. 8. Otpuski reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku Alekseiu Dashkovu.

for Russia. Soviet historian Nikiforov concluded that de Bonnac could not have acted in opposition to official instructions from France.²⁵⁸

In December 1719 the situation became critical when the Habsburgs approached the grand vizier with an offer of a defensive and offensive treaty against Russia. Ibrahim Paşa could hardly believe it, but the Imperial resident assured him that such a treaty between Christians and Muslims was possible. The first condition, however, was to remove the Russian envoy from Constantinople. Thanks to generous gifts to the vizier's kahya and reis efendi, Dashkov was able to stay, albeit at his own expense, but the Ottomans now wanted to assure a treaty of eternal peace with Russia, and even offered a defensive and offensive alliance with Peter I. Only with French assistance Dashkov was able to ward off Austrian provocations of war between the Ottomans and Russia. In November 1720 a treaty of eternal peace replaced the Edirne Treaty of 1713.²⁵⁹

It is significant that the Dashkov mission revealed the unreliability of existing secret informants. In addition, the fact that a French ambassador was instrumental in helping Russia negotiate with the Porte was not promising in the long-term. The CFA, therefore, consistently aimed at receiving the right for Russia to maintain a resident in Constantinople. Thus, it ruled that it was “appropriate to include an article [into the treaty] about residence of the Tsar's envoy or resident at the Porte, and for him to be treated without any suspicion, equal to ministers of other crowned heads of state who freely reside at the sultan's capital.”²⁶⁰ Before this article was

²⁵⁸ Discussion in Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, pp. 286-333, esp. 328-331.

²⁵⁹ Nikiforov; Soloviev, Vol. XVII, pp. 286-292; Sumner, p. 63; 89.1.1720.3, L. 16ob.-17ob. Otpuski reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku Alekseiu Dashkovu; For diplomatic opposition at Constantinople, also Sumner, pp. 71-73.

²⁶⁰ The Russian government continued to pay attention to this matter throughout the negotiations. Dashkov was instructed to include verbatim Russia's right to have a resident in Constantinople and to make a case for the necessity of such a person in order to facilitate communication between the two courts in case of border conflicts.

introduced into the formal negotiations, the Russian government already had instructed Dashkov that he had to achieve permission for a lower-rank employee to stay on as “resident in order to protect the mutual friendship between the states.” Thus, Dashkov could choose one of the chancellery employees from his team, who would stay and report to St. Petersburg in writing through a friendly intermediary. Eventually, another secretary—most likely, chosen by the government—would arrive to fill this position.²⁶¹ St. Petersburg achieved its goal in 1720 without much opposition from the Porte: article 12 of the treaty of eternal peace guaranteed Russia’s right to maintain a permanent “minister resident” in the Ottoman capital.²⁶² From this moment on, Russia consistently utilized this right.

Ivan Nepluev: The Italian Training

The second resident at Constantinople, Ivan Nepluev (1693-1773), was chosen by Peter the Great, as before with Tolstoy, for his knowledge of Italian. Nepluev was one of the few Russian diplomats in the Ottoman Empire who wrote memoirs about his life, although admittedly he described his diplomatic career in very general terms. According to his account, proficiency in Italian was the only requirement that Peter the Great had for this post. Naturally,

After the signing of the new agreement, the CFA argued, the Ottomans should not harbor any suspicions of Russia; indeed, other foreign residents were much more dangerous to the Porte. In case of refusal, the CFA wanted Dashkov to assure the Porte that a Russian resident would not require Ottoman financial assistance, being sponsored entirely by the Russian government. If this offer was likewise refused, then Dashkov had to insist that the Porte allow at least a secretary or a consul to represent Russia for better communication about trade and political issues. As a last resort, Peter I was ready to put this demand on hold, but warned Dashkov that at the very least the text of the treaty should omit any mention of this matter so as not to create a precedent for the official prohibition against Russian ambassadors. 89.1.1720.2. *Protokoly reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku nadvornomu sovetniku Alekseiu Dashkovu*, LL. 4, 8-23.

²⁶¹ 89.1.1720.3, L. 8. *Otpuski reskriptov k chrezvychainomu v Konstantinopole poslanniku Alekseiu Dashkovu*.

²⁶² Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, p. 326.

the tsar was also looking for a smart and dedicated man to fill the position. In fact, he was not willing to let go of Nepliev right away, noting—as Nepliev himself proudly wrote—that Peter wanted to keep him in Russia. After returning from Italy Nepliev was promoted for his merits very quickly and at the time served as a naval officer and an overseer of shipbuilding in St. Petersburg, a position that brought him into frequent contact with the tsar. It is curious that his candidacy was suggested to Peter by no other than Fedor Apraksin, the president of the Russian Admiralty and a relative and close ally of the first permanent ambassador, Petr Tolstoy. Apraksin pointed out that the only shortcoming of Nepliev was his penury, to which remark the hard-working and merit-loving tsar replied with characteristic nonchalance.²⁶³

Nepliev differed from his predecessor in that he was more fully a product of Petrine Russia, having been one of the very first students to matriculate at the Novgorod mathematical school, Narva navigational school, and the Naval Academy in St. Petersburg.²⁶⁴ To be sure, for the first more than twenty two years of his life he did not have access to education outside of his home. The only child of a Novgorod gentryman, after likely being home-schooled in the seventeenth-century tradition, he lost his father, a veteran of the Northern War, in 1709 and was married off by his mother into the local branch of the Tatishchev family. Admittedly, his education in Petrine schools was short-lived as after a year and a half since entering the mathematical school, he was drafted from the Naval Academy into the Baltic fleet as a marine. By the time he became an official student at the age of twenty-one in 1715, Nepliev already had two little children, one of whom, Andrian Nepliev, would become Russian resident in Constantinople in the 1740s. A year and one more son later, Peter I personally picked him as one

²⁶³ Ivan Nepliev, *Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Neplieva: Zapiski, 1693-1773* (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1974), pp. 104-109.

²⁶⁴ Nepliev, pp. 3-4.

of fifty four Baltic fleet marines to be dispatched for training abroad: thirty men were sent to Venice to study galley navigation, twenty marines—to France to study ship navigation, and four marines were chosen for architecture studies in France as well.²⁶⁵

The trip around Europe from 1716 to 1720 exposed Nepliev to northern, central, and southern parts of Europe, as well as the northern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and Europe's Atlantic shore. Along with other students from Russia, he travelled through Denmark to Hamburg and then to Holland, where they met again with Peter I, who was there on his second European trip. In Amsterdam, Peter separated several people from the group of students going to Venice to stay in the Dutch capital. A member of this group, Aleksei Veshniakov, who would become Nepliev's assistant and successor as resident in Constantinople, studied ship-rigging and mechanics in Amsterdam at least until 1720.²⁶⁶ After a fourteen-month long training in Italy, the group of Russian students with whom Nepliev was traveling sailed by way of Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Pisa, Livorno, Genoa, Nice, Toulon, Marseille, Alicane, Cartagena, Malaga, to Cadiz, where they spent six more months trying to acquire marine training. The latter studies were not successful due to the language barrier and absence of all galleys, which were engaged in Sicily. The Russian students wrote to the Russian ambassador in Holland Boris Kurakin that they saw no use in taking classes in standard soldiery, dancing, and fencing. As a result, they were ordered to return to Russia, travelling to St. Petersburg via Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, Danzig, Konigsberg, Memel, Mitava, Riga, Dorpat, and Narva.²⁶⁷

Whether intentionally or not, Peter I sent the majority of Russian students to study navigation in Venice at a time when Venice and the Ottoman Empire were fighting for Morea

²⁶⁵ Nepliev, pp. 1-10.

²⁶⁶ Nepliev, pp. 14, 88.

²⁶⁷ Nepliev, pp. 45-94.

and the Ionian Islands (1714-1718), with Austria joining on the side of Venice in 1716. As a result, Nepliev and his comrades directly experienced this last outburst of the centuries-old rivalry between the two great powers of the eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, their presence in Venice was guided by the Russian trade agent Petr Beklemishev and secret counselor Sava Raguzinskii, who came also in 1716 to see his family and to fulfill several personal requests of the tsar, staying into the early 1720s. Peter I asked Sava to help young Russian nobles settle down in the new place and studies. In particular, Peter wanted the marines to be placed separately on Venetian ships, in order to facilitate language learning and navigation practice.²⁶⁸

After three months, Russian students were placed in pairs on galleys on the island of Corfu. Nepliev described this galley in detail: *Zhentela* had 21 guns and 50 oars and, among other things, was manned by 64 Italians and 18 Slavs. Altogether, Nepliev participated in two campaigns and procured two certificates from his Venetian captains, who attested to the abilities and skills of Nepliev in the galley navigation science and highlighted his courage during a naval engagement with the Ottomans on July 19, 1717 in the port of Pagani in the gulf of Eleus, as well as during the successful siege of Preveza and Vonnitsa on the eastern Ionian coast and a strong but unproductive siege of Dulcin (Ulcinj) in 1718 in the Adriatic.²⁶⁹

Thus, the second Russian resident in Constantinople had personally fought against the Ottomans on the side of Venice. It is unclear whether this part of his biography was known to the Ottoman government, but even if it was the Porte could find great satisfaction in the knowledge that its army and navy had devastated Venice in that war, taking back the coveted Morea, a rich source of revenue. Indeed, Preveza and Vonnitsa were the only victories of the Venetian

²⁶⁸ Nepliev, pp. 14-15; Pavlenko, pp. 116-119.

²⁶⁹ Nepliev, pp. 15-17, 37-41.

Republic, which henceforth lost all its erstwhile power and influence. As a result, Venetian ambassadors in Constantinople, not unlike those of the Dutch, began to play secondary roles as more neutral observers. They struggled, unsuccessfully, to revive Venetian commerce in the Ottoman Empire against the stiff competition of the French and the British, but for the most part busied themselves with preventing future Ottoman aggression against Venice.²⁷⁰

Nepliev, for his part, not only learned Italian, mastered galley-sailing, and gained naval military experience, but also became familiar with the power politics in the Mediterranean. In fact, during the Russian team's stay in Genoa on the way back, the marines became friends with Angelo Giova, a Genovese nobleman who had served as the Genovese ambassador to Constantinople and personally knew quite well both Petr Tolstoy and Petr Shafirov.²⁷¹ During his residency in Constantinople Nepliev, whom Venetian ambassadors usually called Neplineff in their reports, even took advantage of his past experience in a move that certainly betrayed his former Venetian hosts. In an attempt to curry favor with the Porte, he supported the Venetian ambassador Angelo Emo's efforts to renew the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1733, thus guaranteeing further peace after the deposition of Ahmet III, but "suggest[ed] to some Turks that in exchange Venice might be made to cede Vonitsa and Prevesa to the Porte." Emo, luckily, managed to conclude the renewal without such insulting interference. Later, German historian Johann Zinkeisen would call this achievement "the last renowned act, with which Venice left the stage... in oriental affairs."²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Mary Lucille Shay, *The Ottoman Empire from 1720 to 1734, as Revealed in Despatches of the Venetian Baili* (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 1944), p. 85.

²⁷¹ Nepliev, p. 51.

²⁷² Shay, p. 73.

Dominance of the Persian Issue

Venetians were content to witness a storm brewing on the Ottoman eastern borders because it guaranteed them peace in Europe. For this reason and, indeed, because relations with Russia and Persia were central to Ottoman foreign policy in the 1720s-1730s, we find Venetian ambassadors in this period, who were mature in years and very experienced in their profession, commenting on Russo-Ottoman relations with great interest. Mary Shay demonstrated through the study of dispatches of the Venetian *baili* that, contrary to many scholars of Persian history, the Porte was very reluctant to meddle into Persian affairs and it was Russia's interference in the Caspian region that forced the Ottomans to engage both in Persia and in the Caucasus.²⁷³

Venetian reports confirm the aura of friendship and reconciliation that permeated Russo-Ottoman relations in 1720, resulting in the treaty of eternal peace. After the Treaty of Passarowitz, the Porte was willing to overlook the past and sought Russia's friendship and alliance against Austria, going as far as to insist on an offer of a defensive and offensive treaty with Russia. The Porte even waited patiently to receive ratification of the treaty as late as summer 1721.²⁷⁴ In the meantime, the Peace of Nystad encouraged the grand vizier Ibrahim Paşa to reassert his offer of an anti-Austrian alliance to Russia. Nepliuev, who arrived in Constantinople in September 1721, was given permission to celebrate the peace of the north by illuminating the interior and exterior of the embassy, a practice which, according to Giovanni

²⁷³ Shay, pp. 11, 85-152.

²⁷⁴ Nikiforov describes the delay by the fact that Dashkov lacked necessary gifts. Having grown tired of waiting to receive gifts from St. Petersburg, upon the grand vizier's advice Dashkov borrowed money and bought necessary gifts in Constantinople himself. Dashkov appeared before the sultan on June 27/July 8, 1721, thereby completing the ratification process. Nikiforov, p. 332.

Emo, was not tolerated at other times.²⁷⁵ It seems that 1720-1721 constituted a rare moment when the two empires were very close to becoming allies for the first time in history. Giovanni Emo wrote the Venetian Senate his analysis of the situation: “there was no doubt that the Turks had much respect for Russia. Although the friendship was mixed with jealousy, the Porte strongly desired to fortify itself against Austria either for defensive or offensive purposes.”²⁷⁶

However, the rapprochement was short-lived. Since the end of 1720, Persian affairs drew both powers into another round of competition. Even though the Porte did not desire to become embroiled in the Persian state crisis, Peter I made a bold move to claim the eastern and southern Caspian coasts for Russia, arguing that this was an essential step for protection of the empire, for vulnerability of the Caspian area put the Volga River and therefore internal Russian provinces at risk. To buttress this buffer zone, he was also interested in forging ties with the Christian peoples of the Caucasus such as Armenians and Georgians.²⁷⁷ The rivalry lasted for more than a decade and in some ways precipitated the war of 1736-1739, despite the fact that Russia surrendered territories along the shores of the Caspian Sea back to Persia in the first half of the 1730s. As Francesco Gritti assessed in late 1725, “Only the war with Persia prevented or postponed one with Russia; ill-feeling and memories of the last war remained.”²⁷⁸ His predecessor, Giovanni Emo, had his suspicions in early 1722: “Emo wondered if true hatred were not the real state between Russia and the Porte rather than friendship.”²⁷⁹

Since early in his reign, Peter I realized that the Caucasus was a highly contested space, where nominal Safavid rule was challenged by the Porte. Northern Caucasus was, likewise, a

²⁷⁵ Illumination refers to setting fireworks and lighting candles.

²⁷⁶ Shay, pp. 85-89.

²⁷⁷ Soloviev describes the Persian campaign in detail in Vol. XVIII, Chapter I.

²⁷⁸ Shay, p. 123.

²⁷⁹ Shay, p. 90.

ground of imperial rivalries, as well as a source of a security threat to the southern borders of the Russian empire. Several peoples of the Caucasus had already expressed their desire to accept Russian protection at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Another important consideration concerned trade with Persia and, through it, India, which had developed since the seventeenth century through the entrepot of Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga. Accordingly, a potential war against Persia in the Caucasus and the Caspian area had been in the works long before the Northern War came to an end. When in summer of 1721 several small Caucasian potentates took advantage of the power vacuum and attacked and looted the trade city of Shemakha, harming a large group of Russian merchants in the process, Peter I gained a perfect excuse for marching south.²⁸⁰

Peter officially declared to the Ottoman government that he could not allow it to come near the Caspian by extending its protection over peoples that lived along its littoral, “because those places are close to our borders and for reasons of commerce with Persia, as well as for many other most important reasons.” Peter equated Russia’s desire to prevent Ottoman or any other power’s presence on the Caspian with the Porte’s commitment to keeping Russia and others away from the Black Sea. In his instructions to Nepliuev, Peter was adamant about this point and stressed that in case of Ottoman persistent claims of protection over its co-religionists, the Lezgins who lived on the Caspian should be resettled further away, so that Russia could control the strip of coastal territory equal to at least twelve hours of travel on horseback.²⁸¹

Thus, despite coming in September 1721 on the heels of the proclamation of eternal peace, Ivan Nepliuev found himself embroiled in a growing diplomatic conflict over Peter’s

²⁸⁰ See Soloviev, Vol. XVIII, Chapter I for details.

²⁸¹ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1723, D. 3, L. 12, 13ob, 14. Protokoly reskriptov k Rezidentu v Konstantinopole Ivanu Nepliuevu (iz KID).

1722 campaign in the Caucasus and the Russian army's subsequent capture of the eastern and southern shores of the Caspian. By fall 1722, Nepliev was already in panic mode, burning and coding his papers. He even entrusted his 10-year old son Andrian to the French ambassador who, on October 31/November 11, sent him to Holland for studies. Nepliev wrote to the CFA warning that due to extreme changeability of the Porte's actions and words the Russian government and border regions had to be vigilant and ready for war. He asked the tsar to extend financial support to his son—a potentially useful servant of Russia—in Holland and help him enter an academy where he could learn “foreign languages, philosophy, geography, mathematics, and other readings of historical books.”²⁸² It is significant, however, that as late as November 1722, the grand vizier proposed to Nepliev to sign a defensive and offensive alliance with Russia.²⁸³

In the meantime, another father-son team was assisting Peter I in the Caucasus. Namely, Petr Tolstoy, the doyen of eastern foreign policy, personally accompanied the tsar into the region and was in charge of the campaign chancellery, staying in Astrakhan throughout the duration of the short war. His son, lieutenant Ivan Tolstoy, travelled with the tsar down the Caspian for the capture of Derbent. When the tsar returned to Astrakhan, he tasked Ivan Tolstoy with proceeding further south to meet with the Georgian Prince Vakhtang and asking for the latter's help as Vakhtang served as commander of Persian forces at the time. However, Tolstoy did not find Vakhtang and his mission failed due to extreme agitation among the Georgians after they heard

²⁸² Soloviev, Vol. XVIII, pp. 394-395; Nepliev, pp. 116, 121.

²⁸³ Mikhneva, *Zemiata*, pp. 172-174.

about Peter's departure from the Caucasus and the arrival of an Ottoman pasha at their borders.²⁸⁴

Despite this fact,²⁸⁵ the leading role of Petr and Ivan Tolstoy more than a decade after their active involvement in Ottoman affairs shows both the hereditary element of foreign country expertise. We will see the same in the case of Ivan and Andrian Nepliev. The latter spent nine years studying in Holland and a year in Paris, after which he returned to Constantinople.²⁸⁶ He served as Russian resident to the Ottoman Empire between 1745 and 1750, when he died, being outlived by his father. Ivan Nepliev continued to serve the state in the sensitive task of border government—first in Ukraine and then in Orenburg—and in advising on eastern affairs upon his return to St. Petersburg. Two of Nepliev Senior's other children were born in Constantinople—Anna in 1730 and Nikolai in 1731—after Catherine I granted his request in 1727 for his wife to join him at his post. Nikolai later served as translator for the CFA. Importantly, Ivan Nepliev's second wife was a sister of Nikita Panin, who would become the effective foreign minister under Catherine II.

Ivan Nepliev's service in the 1720s can be broken down into two periods. Until the death of Peter I, which Nepliev mourned deeply, he worked with the French ambassadors in Constantinople, Marquis de Bonnac and Vicomte d'Andrezel, to help settle the conflict over the

²⁸⁴ Tolstoy, p. 81; Soloviev, Vol. XVIII, pp. 376, 405-406.

²⁸⁵ The Saxon legation counselor in Russia, Le-Fort, wrote to Count von Fleming in late 1722 that Peter I was very displeased with Volynskii, the Astrakhan governor, for triggering the campaign in Persia in the first place and it was rumored that Volynskii was about to be hanged. The results of the summer trip to the Caucasus were disappointing in that several ships were destroyed by sea storms and the cavalry lost almost all its horses. Displeased with both Volynskii and Tolstoy, Peter I was said to have been contemplating abandoning the Caucasus campaign entirely. SIRIO, Vol. 3, pp. 352-353. The Caucasus campaign continued into 1723, however, and was overall successful, despite great difficulty in subsequent maintenance of Russian military presence in eastern Caucasus and northern Iran, primarily due to difficult climate. SIRIO, Vol. 3, pp. 410-411, 421-422, 485-486. Hence Russia preferred to return the captured territories back to Persia by the treaties of 1732 and 1735.

²⁸⁶ Kochubinskii, p. 118. Rumiana Mikhneva describes the careers and education of Ivan and Andrian Nepliev in detail in her "II.1. Khorata na imperiata. Rezidentite—ruskiiat primer (Ivan i Adrean Neplievi)," in *Zemiata izvyn "vremeto"* (Varna: Slavena, 2003), pp. 170-241.

opposing and overlapping objectives of the Russian and Ottoman empires in the Caucasus, as well as working to resolve constant border clashes between the Cossacks and Ottoman subjects. In the second half of the decade, he remained preoccupied with the Persian affairs, but faced greater challenges due to the loss of Russian prestige in Ottoman eyes after the death of its visionary leader, secondly due to frequent and confusing changes on the throne in general, and, lastly, due to wavering support at the top—not least because of decreasing possibilities—for the late tsar’s ambitions in Persia. Vice-chancellor Osterman’s project of alliance with Austria, which was realized in 1726, also made matters more complicated because France and its ambassadors naturally had to suspend their friendly offices to Nepliev.

Aleksei Veshniakov: Assistant, 1729-1735, and Resident, 1735, 1740-45

Nepliev was not fond of his host country, where he resided in the house of a poor Greek in Pera, the diplomatic quarter across the Golden Horn from Constantinople. He called his place of appointment “a hellish land.” By 1728, the Porte started to complain about his intransigence and threatened to send him back to Russia. At this point Nepliev began to complain of ill-health and requested to be replaced by another diplomat. Later, he claimed that he was poisoned by his cooks. The Russian government needed a skillful person like Nepliev to remain to guard its interests, but Osterman agreed to send a person who would help and study under Nepliev in Constantinople. Naval sub-lieutenant Ushakov was meant to be a temporary placement; his appointment was seen as unsuccessful due to lack of foreign language skills. Nepliev reported to the CFA in March 1729 that his health was deteriorating and therefore he requested that, if no

replacement was forthcoming, he at least required an able assistant with relevant skills, namely knowledge of either Latin or Italian, who could continue the work of the mission if Nepliev's health faltered. Ushakov, he wrote, was not fit for the position because he did not know foreign languages. Nepliev sent him back.²⁸⁷

Starting in the late 1720s, the Russian resident indeed required help, if only because his challenges were multiplying. In late 1728 the new French ambassador, Marquis de Villeneuve, entered the scene and politely but steadily started on a course of anti-Russian propaganda, encouraging the Porte to start a war with St. Petersburg, if not with Vienna. As a result, Nepliev became even more strained for finances: apart from the ever-tight everyday budget, he needed large amounts of money for secret correspondence with informers. Moreover, for a period he complained that the Ottoman government did not take him seriously: it did not listen to his suggestions, did not inform him about new developments, and even forbade the dispatch of couriers to Russia. In 1729, the French side became even more influential at the Porte with the arrival in fall of Count Bonneval from Austria, a French officer of great ambition, skill, and pride, who vowed to avenge his mistreatment by the Habsburgs. There was indeed no better way to do it than to turn Muslim and start training the Ottoman military in European warfare.²⁸⁸

Although Nepliev was able to deflect initial attacks in 1729, he quickly realized that the situation was becoming serious. In spring 1729 he wrote to St. Peterburg that he no longer dared to ask for recall. Nepliev was resolved to serve as best as his health allowed, but still asked for an assistant. He promised to train this person with the intention of grooming him as the next resident, so that Nepliev himself could leave once the circumstances improved, unless things

²⁸⁷ Kochubinskii, pp. 13, 14, 18-19, 26, 45-46.

²⁸⁸ Kochubinskii, pp. 19-25.

deteriorated to the point of war. Nepluev required that his future assistant know foreign languages and for the first time mentioned French as an important asset in Constantinople.²⁸⁹

The assistant, Aleksei Veshniakov, arrived in December 1729. Veshniakov's biography appears a mystery. We know only that he belonged to a middling noble family and had served as Russian consul in Spain since Peter I's reign.²⁹⁰ It was the same Aleksei Veshniakov whom Nepluev met in Amsterdam a decade earlier, another one of Peter I's "fledglings" who studied abroad. Records indicate that Aleksei Veshniakov/Vishniakov, together with Iakov Evreinov of a prominent Russian merchant family, was indeed appointed to "Cadiz and other Spanish territories" in 1723, where he served as assistant to consul Evreinov until 1726, when the latter had to leave because of family issues. Several months after that Veshniakov assumed the position of consul. However, the College of Commerce in St. Petersburg raised the question of the viability of the Cadiz consulate. Due to lack of profit from trade in Russian goods, the consulate was indeed suspended in fall of 1727, along with the one in Bourdeaux, France. Therefore, Veshniakov's appointment in Cadiz from 1723 (he arrived most likely in 1724) to 1728 was not very important, lengthy, or effective. Indeed, consulates at the time frequently were outside of the purview of the CFA, falling under the responsibility of the College of Commerce.²⁹¹ As a result, his service in Spain was not even an experience in diplomacy per se. However, he certainly had an opportunity to learn and practice French and to grasp the dynamics of trade and politics in the eastern Atlantic and western Mediterranean.

²⁸⁹ Kochubinskii, pp. 25-27.

²⁹⁰ Kochubinskii, p. 27; *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar* has entry only on the Veshniakov clan as a whole.

²⁹¹ Ulianitskii, *Russkii konsul'stva za granitsei v XVIII veke*, pp. 1, 115-119, 150-152. Ulianitskii also admits lack of information about Veshniakov before 1725 and even questions whether he was ever physically present in Cadiz before that, p. 119.

Reportedly, Veshniakov was older than Nepliev and knew French very well: according to one historian, Veshniakov knew French “too well, and his entire mind was frequently one French rhetoric.” The CFA appointed him in September 1729, resolving to grant him resident’s credentials that he would withhold until he could officially assume Nepliev’s responsibilities. As usual, Veshniakov brought a relative, nephew Nikolai, with him to study Turkish language. Veshniakov was surprised to find that the only person who did not welcome him in Constantinople was Marquis de Villeneuve, while the Ottoman government and other foreign ministers appeared friendly and open to recognizing him as a valid representative of Russia. Kochubinskii argued that most likely Villeneuve was threatened by the first Russian diplomat who knew French.²⁹²

1730 opened a decade of tumult, especially in Russo-Ottoman relations. On the Bosphorus, the year ended with a new sultan, Mahmud I, and government due to a bloody revolt in fall of the Constantinople mob, which had become extremely dissatisfied with the course of the war in Persia, exhausted treasury, and the corrupt administration led by Nevşehirli Ibrahim Paşa. In a few years, Russia gave back all the southern Caspian provinces back to the shah but continued its political and military presence in the region to prevent Ottoman interference in what the Russian government regarded as its own sphere of influence. The Ottomans began to suffer defeats at the hands of the shah’s able general Tahmasp Kuli Han and were in no position to respond to French encouragement to open military operations in Europe. Since 1727 France hoped to put Stanislaw Leszczyński, who had found refuge in France since the 1700s, back onto the Polish throne after the expected death of King Augustus II. Beginning in 1729, French ambassador in Constantinople, as well as Bonneval and the Hungarian rebel Rakoczy,

²⁹² Kochubinskii, pp. 27, 28.

encouraged the Porte to support Leszczynski against the king's son, future Augustus III, who was supported by both Russia and Austria.²⁹³ Russian interference in Poland, which finally helped Augustus II secure the throne, and Russian resistance to the passage of Crimean Tatar forces through the Caucasus to the aid of the Ottoman army in Persia created several crises, the last of which brought on a full-scale war in 1736. Austria, which was exhausted from fighting France in the War of the Polish Succession that started in 1733, joined forces with Russia in 1737 but proved more of a burden than an effective ally.

Cultivating an Intelligence Network Anew

Before discussing the actions of Russian residents during these events, we will turn to the setting in which they found themselves in Constantinople. Throughout the 1720s and in the 1730s Nepliuev and Veshniakov relied on a network of friends and informants that was usual in composition to those used by other foreign diplomats. This consisted of friendly foreign ministers and paid agents within the Ottoman government, not least within its translator section. The other source of intelligence involved the ubiquitous group of dragomans, on whom devolved the day-to-day business of contacts with the Porte. Strikingly, old friends such as Luka de Barka Junior became staunch enemies. Still in service to the British embassy as its dragoman, de Barka, known at the time mostly as Luka Kirikov or, alternatively, as Luka Kirin or Luca Cherico/Chirico, worked against Russian interests, helping the French to incite the Porte to a war against Russia. Nepliuev even had to lodge complaints with the British government about its

²⁹³ On the dating of these efforts, see Kochubinskii, pp. 17-24, 47-49, 63-68.

ambassador Lord Kinnoull being completely influenced by his translator's anti-Russian tendencies, asking the king to recall Kinnoull or at least to fire Kirikov.²⁹⁴

In response, Kinnoull characterized Nepliev as “a very artful cunning minister [who] is working underground & might occasion false impressions to be given to the Court of Vienna & likewise to His Majesty in order to serve the views of his own Court.” Supposedly, Nepliev together with the Dutch pursued the objective of trying to diminish English influence at the Porte. Luca, on the other hand, was “ought to be valued as a precious jewel.” Indeed, the English did not fire Luka, but the king recalled Kinnoull, who was from the start ill-fit for this diplomatic post.²⁹⁵

Kinnoull's embassy was indeed replete with problems, most importantly with his personnel. Apart from Luka Kirikov, who apparently worked to manipulate both Kinnoull and his predecessor Abraham Stanyan, other employees such as secretary Louis Monier and translator Antonio Pisani—“a Greek of the Latin church,” according to Kinnoull,—maintained secret contacts with the Dutch and the Russians. Pisani reportedly bore a grudge against Luka and Kinnoull for demoting him. As a result, Pisani entered into cooperation with the Russian embassy.²⁹⁶

Clearly, there was considerable division within the ranks of the British embassy in Constantinople at the time, which highlights both the lack of rigorous structure in British diplomatic service in the Levant and the preeminent influence of dragomans on the course of

²⁹⁴ Webb, Nigel and Caroline Webb, *The Earl and His Butler in Constantinople*, pp. 95, 99-100, 108-110. Strange spelling of names stems from the English translation of the original by the British embassy in St. Petersburg.

A.C. Wood makes no mention of Luka Kirikov when he discusses the seemingly unreasonable suspicions of Kinnoull's pro-French attitudes that Calkoen—the Dutch ambassador—and Nepliev planted in the mind of the Duke of Newcastle. Wood, A. C. “The English Embassy at Constantinople, 1660-1762.” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 40, no. 160 (1925), pp. 533-561, here pp. 552-554.

²⁹⁵ Webb, Chapters 1, 3, pp. 68, 102-103, 109, 111-120.

²⁹⁶ Webb, pp. 95-98, 102-109, 114.

affairs. In his study of the British embassy in Constantinople between 1660 and 1760 A. C. Wood concluded that “English diplomacy at Constantinople during this century 1660-1770 is, broadly speaking, a story of ineffectual effort and failure.”²⁹⁷ Wood also correctly pointed out that the dragomans of the British embassy, on whom so much of the diplomacy depended, were not very satisfactory employees. They were mostly natives of Pera, of Italian extraction, and as subjects of the sultan could scarcely guarantee security of information or fidelity to their employer. One English ambassador, who served in the first two decades of the century, called them “incapable, inexperienced,” and, quite significantly, “because of their catholic [sic] faith, addicted to French interests.” However, as Wood noted, the English made “no real effort...to remedy the flagrant abuses of this system, or to imitate the successful experiment of the French, who in 1670 began to send out boys to the convents of the Capuchins at Constantinople and Smyrna to be brought up with a knowledge of Turkish so that they might act as interpreters.”²⁹⁸

The Russian mission in the Ottoman capital depended on these dragomans to the same extent as other foreign embassies and, therefore, faced similar risks. Like everyone else, for example, Russian residents employed translators who had complex systems of loyalties and were connected in various ways to translators of other embassies. After all, the dragoman families of Constantinople had very deep roots. The Pisanis, for example, of Genovese origin, served as translators to foreign ministers for generations, having resided in Constantinople for centuries, and were one of those established families that many foreign diplomats tapped into for assistance at the Ottoman court. It was not uncommon, therefore, when different foreign embassies in Constantinople employed dragomans from the same Constantinople family, as close in blood ties

²⁹⁷ Wood, p. 560.

²⁹⁸ Wood, pp. 539-540.

as brothers. Indeed, the dragomans were a suspicious lot and the Constantinople diplomatic corps frequently heard of special gatherings of various dragomans at one location for the purpose of exchanging information. In other words, it was not clear whether they were subordinate employees or masters of the situation.²⁹⁹

For this reason, the Russian government tried to select its dragomans as carefully as possible while also cultivating native language specialists. During this early period after the re-establishment of the mission in 1721, there were as yet few native Russian subjects working at the Russian mission, but there was only one dragoman of foreign origin. Records identify Grigorii Maltsev, a translator in the employ of Nepliev in the early 1720s,³⁰⁰ as well as translator Fedor Seniukov in 1730. Significantly, Maltsev apparently had very good knowledge of Greek, because Obreskov employed him as his chief liaison with the Constantinople Greeks of the Fener district and the Patriarchate. *Pod'iachii* Fedor Seniukov had come to Constantinople along with Nepliev in 1721 in order to study Oriental languages. In 1730, however, Maltsev was no longer mentioned. Instead, we know that at the time the mission trained three students of Oriental languages: Konstantin Retkin, Iakov Pokhvisnev, and Petr Potrusov. Retkin would later be transferred to Kiev.

On the other hand, the mission also employed dragoman Antoni(o) Marini, who along with Maltsev remained to serve the Russians after envoy Dashkov, who had originally employed them, left Constantinople. However, Marini was not Russian, but likely belonged to a local

²⁹⁹ Cassels and Berridge gives examples: Lavender Cassels, *The Struggle for the Ottoman Empire, 1717-1740* (London: Murray, 1966); Berridge. Eldem Edhem discusses the dragoman families that traditionally served the French embassy in the eighteenth century: *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 217-218. Also see de Groot, Alexander H., "Dragomans' Careers: Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829," in Alastair Hamilton, *et al.*, *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Brill, 2000), pp. 239-243.

³⁰⁰ Soloviev, pp. Vol. XVIII.

dragoman clan with distant or recent Italian or Ragusan origins. For example, since the early 1720s Russian diplomats in Constantinople paid a regular pension to one “Ragusan” Andrei Magrini, who could have been related to Antoni. Moreover, we know that in 1724 Marini married a daughter of one of the French dragomans.³⁰¹ This situation might have been less problematic during the period of French-Russian cooperation at the Porte in the early 1720s, but Marini’s service must have become more suspicious after the Russo-Austrian alliance of 1726, when France naturally stopped supporting Russia in Constantinople. However, Antoni Marini was still the chief dragoman of the mission in the 1730s.

Nepliuev and Veshniakov were also able to hire several independent agents who supplied them with information from distant regions. These were Italian brothers Vuzino who operated in Iași and at the court of the Grand Crown Hetman of Poland; one Dyma in Kamenets; and Iuria Tomazin, Greek by origin, in Lvov, whom Nepliuev trusted the most.³⁰²

It is interesting that for the first few years of his service in the Ottoman capital Nepliuev used Italian in his reports to St. Petersburg and the CFA. Peter I even had to ask him not to quote Italian speech but to translate everything into Russian. Italian was the language of diplomacy at the Porte, and Russian government passed letters to Constantinople in Russian and Italian because, as Peter I explained to Nepliuev in 1723, there were no good translators of Ottoman

³⁰¹ Mikhneva, *Zemiata*, pp. 204-206, 208-209. We also know that Nepliuev decided to stop working with the old dragoman Theyls. Nepliuev was also of low opinion about the son of Theyls, I. Theyls, mostly because he lacked discipline and commitment to service. Nepliuev wanted to stop employing him, but the Russian government ordered Nepliuev to hire new agents, “regardless of which nation, and if necessary to liberate galley [slaves].” As a result, Nepliuev kept I. Theyls because the latter knew Turkish, Italian, and Latin, but the resident still thought that the dragoman would be useful only if he was employed back at the CFA under strict discipline. Mikhneva, *Zemiata*, pp. 209-210.

³⁰² Tatiana Soboleva, *Istoriia shifroval'nogo dela v Rossii* (Moscow: OLMA-Press, 2002), pp. 98-102.

language at the CFA.³⁰³ But Italian only helped to exchange information with the Dragoman of the Porte. Nepliev needed translators who knew Ottoman in order to build and maintain relations with Ottoman officials.

Nepliev's and Veshniakov's Contributions to the Outbreak of War

It took, naturally, great skill and vigilance to be able to navigate such a tricky environment. The eventual outbreak of a war does not mean that the Russian residents failed at their mission, but their assessments and actions did play a significant role in feeding the flames. Indeed, they seem to have done everything they could to provoke a war because, according to their estimations, it was the most opportune time for Russia to do so. This particular calculation drew both on their hopes as well as on their fears. On the one hand, they hoped to achieve the tasks bequeathed to Russia by Peter I: access to the Black Sea, pacification of the Crimea, protectorate or influence over the Danubian principalities which had to be freed from Ottoman control, and perhaps, ultimately, capture of Constantinople itself. On the other hand, they feared that it was only a matter of time before the Ottomans would end fighting in Persia and attack Russia. Therefore, their recommendation came down essentially to a preemptive war.

Nepliev and Veshniakov's recommendations represent a curious episode in the history of Russian missions to Constantinople in the eighteenth century. In general, very few studies based on archival material have been done on Russian residents at the Porte, apart from intense interest in the mission of Petr Tolstoy. A major study of the 1730s, however, was done by a

³⁰³ RGADA, F. 89, Op. 1, 1723, D. 2, LL. 4ob, 5. Original'nyia Reskripty s prilozheniiami k Rezidentu v Konstantinopole Ivanu Neplievu (ot Petra I).

nineteenth-century Russian Slavacist Aleksandr Kochubinskii, who made the most detailed use of the archives, rivaling the even admittedly more general compilation of material by Sergei Soloviev. Kochubinskii and Soloviev consulted similar material but it was Kochubinskii who ventured to put forward a more analytical thesis regarding Russo-Ottoman relations during the decade in question. Taking both studies into account, it appears that Kochubinskii was not too far of the mark when he explained Nepliuev's and Veshniakov's actions as a result of their rootedness in the age of Peter the Great, which sensitized them to the vulnerability of Russian borders in the south and imbued them with a desire to reverse the humiliation of the Prut. As Peter's "fledglings" they were perhaps too eager to embroil their country in a promising war. Russian historian Svetlana Oreshkova has recently revisited this period in the history of Russo-Ottoman relations and she also lauds Kochubinskii's meticulous scholarship and insightful analysis.³⁰⁴

Kochubinskii has shown that the Russian government under Empress Anna hoped to avoid a war but the resident and his assistant advocated attacking the Ottoman Empire, which they found to be a reasonable course of action for several reasons. Thus, in November 1730 St. Petersburg instructed Nepliuev to offer concessions in Persia in order to pacify the Porte and the Constantinople mob, who had demanded to stop the war in Persia and instead to attack Russia or Austria. Nepliuev and Veshniakov, however, painted ominous but alluring pictures: Constantinople was a Babylon that was set to fall and disappear shortly. Nepliuev was more and more impatient to leave Constantinople. In summer 1731 he received a promise from Osterman that as soon as Persian affairs were settled he would be able to leave, but for the time being he

³⁰⁴ Svetlana Oreshkova, *Nemirovskii kongress: ot dvustoronnikh osmano-rossiiskikh otnosheniii k vostochnomu voprosu* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Institut vostokovedeniia, 2015).

was needed on the Bosphorus. Nepliev replied with gratitude even for this distant hope, for he longed to liberate himself from this place “as a blind man longed to see light.”³⁰⁵

The Russian diplomats highlighted weaknesses in Ottoman government and economy, which were not too surprising given the rebellions in fall 1730 and spring and summer of 1731. Veshniakov, in particular, insisted that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse. His report—a memoir, according to Kochubinskii’s witty description,—from early 1731 pointed to an “apparent deterioration of the Turks.” He blamed the former grand vizier, Nevşehirli Damat Ibrahim Paşa (1718-1730), for accustoming Ottoman subjects to the life of merriment, peace, and pleasure, as a result of which the Ottomans lost their fighting spirit and abilities. The elites preferred to spend time in their large houses with lavish entertainment, and common people had their peaceful occupations that made them reluctant to go to war. The Persian war, moreover, as everyone could see, brought little profit, but much woe. The late grand vizier also made sure to eliminate all able military commanders and soldiery could not acquire practical training. Politically and militarily, the Ottomans were internally weak, lacking resolute and able leaders. Therefore, they were in no position to fight in Europe. As for Ottoman intrigues in and deception regarding Persia, Veshniakov hoped that God would perhaps punish the Turks for that with great misfortune and even demise, for even the Islamic law proscribed violation of peace treaties.³⁰⁶

Overall, the Patrona Halil rebellion in 1730 exposed important weaknesses in the Ottoman system, but such rebellions had occurred before, including at the very beginning of Tolstoy’s residency. Unlike Tolstoy, however, Nepliev and Veshniakov took this crisis too seriously. They were encouraged by the events to take the Porte lightly, seeing that the Porte

³⁰⁵ Kochubinskii, pp. 32, 34-37.

³⁰⁶ Kochubinskii, pp. 37-38, Appendix III, pp. XIII-XVIII.

warned the Tatar Khan not to upset Russia, while *Kapudan Paşa*, a Bulgarian by origin, who could understand some Russian, even approached them in October 1730 to ask for Russian mediation in the war with Persia.³⁰⁷

At the same time, in the next two years the French propaganda at the Porte succeeded in causing several rifts with Russia, using not only the initially weak but potentially useful tool of Saxon succession in Poland—which they tried to portray as an existential threat to the Ottomans—but also a more attractive resort to disputed territories in the North Caucasus, where Crimean Tatars clashed with Russian forces in 1733 and 1735 for the right of passage to Persia through Kabarda. Beginning in summer 1733 Nepluev began to call for a war against the Porte, to prevent further conflicts and to repay the humiliation in the Caucasus.³⁰⁸

After another Ottoman defeat in Persia in fall 1733, Nepluev assured the court in St. Petersburg that the Porte was in no position to threaten Russia, but he argued that this was precisely the moment to “suppress Muslim pride,” and “to carry out the intention of Peter the Great.” Nepluev acted with great passion because he had learned of secret French plans to return lands captured by Russia from Sweden, Poland, and Persia since the seventeenth century,³⁰⁹ although this could have been part of a French ploy to incite Russia to a war, because Nepluev received this news from an employee of the French embassy, who was supposedly a secret agent of the Russians.

In 1734, after the Russian capture of Danzig from Stanislaw, the Porte demanded that Russia withdraw its troops from Poland. To settle the escalating situation, both sides agreed to the mediation of English and Dutch ambassadors. The grand vizier refused to deal with Nepluev

³⁰⁷ Kochubinskii, pp. 38-40, 48-53.

³⁰⁸ Kochubinskii, pp. 57-59.

³⁰⁹ Kochubinskii, pp. 62-71.

directly, for the grand vizier could not stand the latter, accusing the latter of “always slyly covering up the behavior of his empress.” The grand vizier likened Nepliev to Tolstoy in that the latter also had lied to the Porte even during his imprisonment in Yedikule about Russian intentions. Similarly, the grand vizier did not expect Nepliev and Veshniakov to be truthful.³¹⁰

In fall 1734 Nepliev feared a potential conclusion of peace between the sultan and the shah, and intensified his calls for a preemptive war: “at this opportune moment, which might not recur perhaps in hundreds of years, with God’s help [we should] bring the Turks to their senses.” But the inspired invitations to start a war fell on careful ears of Andrei Osterman who was not eager to make such a risky decision with only preemptive considerations in mind, especially when Russia’s energies were focused on Poland. At the same time, both Constantinople and St. Petersburg made military preparations on the borders, well aware of the potential for an outbreak of war.³¹¹

The mood in St. Petersburg, however, started to become more militaristic in 1735. Kochubinskii does not note this, but his evidence suggests that part of the reason for this lay in Veshniakov’s increasing initiative in Constantinople. Nepliev felt very sick and invited Veshniakov officially to take over his responsibilities early in the year. Veshniakov’s reports, unlike those of Nepliev, did not simply argue that a war would be in the interests of Russia’s own safety. He went further and, for example in his March report, drew attention to the widespread challenges to Ottoman rule—in the Arab lands, Bosnia, among the Kurds,—and to the dire condition of the empire as a whole. Russia, argued Veshniakov, would have an easy time defeating the Ottomans; it would free many Christian provinces from the inhumane, barbaric

³¹⁰ Kochubinskii, p. 83.

³¹¹ Kochubinskii, pp. 86, 88-92.

Ottoman yoke, for many people talked about the fact that Ottoman borders and its very existence depended on the Russian empress. He pointed out that financial difficulties led to high taxes and confiscations among the rich; consequently, no unity could be expected from such a state, in which members would destroy each other before fighting an outsider. The Turks were no longer worthy of their former glory, but rather of contempt. The world feared only their past glory, which was no more. There was no longer martial spirit, or ideological maxims, “the Turks live like beasts outside of their element, in disorder, and still exist only by virtue of being left in peace by others.” But their minds, concluded Veshniakov, were full with pride in the fact that others feared them.³¹²

Osterman was unhappy about Veshniakov’s assuming the official mantle of resident without even consulting the Russian court. Despite Nepliev’s request, Osterman insisted that Nepliev stay in Constantinople until tensions in mutual relations because of Persian and Polish affairs subsided. He warned Veshniakov, on the other hand, to always consult with Nepliev regarding any and all steps and decisions. Nepliev defended his successor and assured St. Petersburg that Veshniakov’s every report was written with his, Nepliev’s, agreement.³¹³ Gradually, however, Osterman became more open to a war with the Ottomans. First, a peace treaty with Persia in March 1735 freed many Russian forces in the Caucasus for operations elsewhere thanks to surrendering back to Persia Peter I’s earlier conquests along the Caspian littoral, while Persia pledged to assist Russia against its enemies, thus assuring continued Ottoman-Persian conflict. The Porte raised the stakes by approving the initiative of the Crimean

³¹² Kochubinskii, pp. 93, 95-96, 98-99.

³¹³ Kochubinskii, pp. 98-100.

Khan to go to the Caucasus in response to Dagestan's appeals for protection, effectively threatening to take over the provinces that Russia had just returned to Persia.

Nepliev advised that General Veisbakh demonstrate his readiness at the border and even send troops to Moldavia and Budjak and the Cossacks to Kuban. He couched his advice as an absolute necessity, especially if St. Petersburg, as he could feel, wanted to avoid a real war the following year. Veshniakov expressed his utter surprise at the latest Ottoman resolution regarding movements of the Crimean Tatars, for he saw it as reckless for the Porte to risk a war in its weakened state: "Their dying state is apparent, both internally and externally...: without money, without people, borders are exposed, and provision and ammunition stores—defenseless. On the other hand Your Imperial Majesty is in full readiness and very close to the border with a great number of forces, and almost finished with the Polish issue." He reported that common people in Constantinople all realized the risk and vociferously objected to the Tatar movements, which they feared would surely lead to Ottoman demise. The grand vizier was also known to be against the war: his decision, therefore, could either be a ploy to only partially satisfy the French, or a real commitment to the French plot. Veshniakov believed in the latter, arguing that the French persuaded the Porte that Russia was afraid to wage a war.³¹⁴

The Dutch ambassador in Constantinople also advised Russia to begin a war in order to punish the Ottomans for their brazen actions and to avoid a larger war that could change the European balance of power. The Austrian resident shared the details of his audience with the grand vizier with Veshniakov: the grand vizier's kahya Osman—in office since 1710—reminded about Russia's humiliation at the Prut and railed against St. Petersburg's insatiable ambition. Veshniakov reported the futility of all efforts—his and those of friendly ministers—to talk the

³¹⁴ Kochubinskii, pp. 100, 102-105.

Porte out of the decision to support the Tatar movements. Therefore, war was the only solution. Given the unprecedented dire condition of the Ottoman state, vulnerability of its European borders, Veshniakov believed in easy victory—capture of Moldavia and ammunition stores on the Danube being the first goal—and, together with Nepliev, was already preparing to sacrifice himself in case he was imprisoned or taken with the Ottoman army during the campaign. He also catalogued the mission's archive and removed it for safe keeping with the Dutch ambassador.³¹⁵

St. Petersburg, upon receipt of these reports in June 1735, concluded that war was inevitable and began to plan accordingly. The main objective for the time being was not to alarm the Porte, so as to prevent rapid mobilization of its forces. In the best-case scenario, the Russian government hoped to stop further conflict by pacifying the Crimea and Kuban and assuring continued Persian attacks on Ottoman territory. If this approach failed, St. Petersburg had to prepare for a war in alliance with Austria and Poland, although the two could hardly help Russia in a tangible way. Still, Osterman was reserved in his letter to the residents, warning them that resolution of the Polish crisis had to precede any declaration or even hints of war. Moreover, the crisis had to be limited preferably to Crimea, thus possibly avoiding a war with the Porte altogether.³¹⁶

But Nepliev and Veshniakov were greedy for reparation of past insults. Despite the renunciation of the throne by Leszczyński in May and Russian negotiations for the renewal of the peace treaty with Sweden—all developments that improved the safety of the Russian Empire from French intrigues,—in June Nepliev advocated taking advantage of Tahmas Kuli Han's victories over the Ottoman forces by attacking the Porte's territories and forcing it thereby to

³¹⁵ Kochubinskii, pp. 108-109, 114.

³¹⁶ Kochubinskii, pp. 110-113.

seek peace on conditions advantageous to Russia—primarily, reversal of the Prut Treaty. After the change of grand vizier in July, Veshniakov again stressed “the veritably anarchic disorder” in the Ottoman Empire, which “requires only a minor external push before everyone instantly and completely overturns and destroys themselves and their entire lawless existence.” He thought that the removal of the grand vizier Ali Paşa, the only person who cared about common good, was God’s way of delivering the Ottomans and their fate into the hands of the Russian Empress. He assured his court that every thinking individual in Constantinople—friends and enemies, Turks and Christians—thought likewise.³¹⁷

By August 1735 Russian residents in Constantinople and Osterman were on the same page, surreptitiously preparing the ground for war. They knew that the Porte had information about the Russian preparations and was also making its own in secret. Chances of maintaining peace were gradually evaporating, but Nepliev and Veshniakov announced publicly that Russian plans involved only punitive measures against the Tatars. Nepliev was finally allowed to leave the Bosphorus, which he did in September. He had already sent back his wife and two young children in 1733. Interestingly, in his last report he justified his return saying that it was impossible for him to stay any longer, for he did not see any outward signs indicating a potential break of relations, and his stay could be interpreted as a harbinger of war.³¹⁸ Indeed, the Ottomans for months had pressured Nepliev to leave, but the latter used the pretext of his bad health to stay as long as matters required.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Kochubinskii, pp. 114-116.

³¹⁸ Kochubinskii, pp. 116-118.

³¹⁹ RGADA, F. 188. Rukopisnoe sobranie TsGADA, Op. 1, 1829, D. 272, L. 201. “Kratkoe khronologicheskoe obozrenie politicheskikh snoshenii Rossii s Portoiu Ottomanskoiu.” Sochineno v 1824 godu chinovnikami Moskovskago arkhiva Kollegii Inostrannykh Del. Otdelenie II (1725-1742).

Veshniakov, now alone responsible for the sensitive post, could not contain his belligerence. When the Porte approached him suggesting Russian mediation between the Ottomans and Persians in return for important concessions, such as acknowledgement of the Russian imperial title, non-interference in Polish affairs, change of the Crimean Khan, concession of Kabarda, settlement of the mutual border along the River Kuban, return of captives, and “some other minor things,” he was indignant. He pointed out that the suggested concessions were unsatisfactory—reversal of the Prut terms being his goal—and that the Porte was incredibly audacious to offer so little in return for help in the most pressing issue on her agenda.³²⁰

It is true that there was no guarantee that the Porte would remain peaceful once the Persian war was settled. The Russian government feared that the sultan, upon taking control of Dagestan, could force Tahmas Kuli Han to sign peace advantageous to the Porte and then declare a war in favor of Stanislaw Leszczynski.³²¹ However, the concessions offered by the Ottoman side were very valuable. Indeed, Oreshkova shows that there was an influential pacific faction in the Ottoman government that sought to maintain peaceful relations with Russia before the war. She blames Nepliev and Veshniakov for interpreting all friendly approaches of Ottoman officials as ploys and cunning tricks. It was also important that even after the start of the war an influential section of Ottoman elite hoped to conclude peace with Russia at the Nemirov Congress in 1737. It was the grand vizier’s kahya, Osman Halisa Efendi, who had been in office

³²⁰ Kochubinskii, p. 122.

³²¹ RGADA, F. 188, Op. 1, 1829, D. 272, L. 202.

for several decades, who believed that Austria would provide effective mediation of the conflict with Russia.³²²

At the end of October 1735, however, news reached Constantinople from border pashas about Russian military advances against Azov and Crimea. Veshniakov pretended that he knew nothing about the matter and suggested that these were probably punitive actions against Crimean Tatars only. He was confident that the Porte would be hard-pressed to open negotiations with Russia and make greater concessions. In response to the suspicious quiet in Constantinople along with secret Ottoman war preparations, Veshniakov called for a quick and resolute blow. One Russian attack could bring down the Ottoman government, even the sultan himself could lose his throne in a popular uprising, especially if the Ottomans lost Crimea, for, in that case, “everyone, even the mob, thinks that Constantinople itself would not be far from falling.”³²³

The campaigns of 1735 proved unsuccessful. However, they did not dampen Veshniakov’s enthusiasm: he advocated a decisive campaign the following spring, noting as usual the complete disorder, awful fright, and impending peril of the Ottoman Empire. His wishful thinking was similar to Peter’s maximal plans during the 1710-1711 war: to capture the Dabunian principalities, incite Ottoman Orthodox subjects to rebellion, and reach the Bosphorus.³²⁴ His enthusiasm was shared among Russian leadership but to different degrees. Field Marshal Count von Münnich, for example, was beyond himself with enthusiasm and

³²² Osman Halisa Efendi was executed in August 1737 because instead of keeping to the role of mediator, the Austrian government finally decided to enter the war on Russia’s side. Oreshkova, pp. 153, 155, 163-164, 177-181, 182, 205-208.

³²³ Kochubinskii, pp. 124-128.

³²⁴ Kochubinskii, pp. 140-143, 149-150.

excitement about the prospective capture of Constantinople, where he envisioned Empress Anna donning the imperial mantle.³²⁵

Osterman's Plan of Partitioning the Ottoman Empire

Chancellor Count Andrei Osterman, however, represented the most balanced opinion. He did not believe for once in the extreme ease of defeating the Ottomans. He realized that Russia would need Austria to support and strengthen its position and demands, even though he was realistic about what Austria was willing and could provide in terms of help in actuality. However, his vision also included partial partition of the Ottoman Empire if conditions allowed. Kochubinskii, in fact, credits Osterman with formulating a political program in regard to the Ottoman Empire that was so prophetic that later governments eventually carried it out over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Osterman's program became evident from his instructions to the Russian delegates to the peace congress at Nemirov in 1737.

The war, for Osterman, had the ultimate objective of providing more security. Therefore, he defined the most important goal as the annexation of Crimea. All his other instructions involved concessions in relation to this primary goal but had the same objective in mind.³²⁶ If Crimea could not become Russian, Osterman put forward the following demands: resettlement by the Ottomans of Crimean Tatars away from the peninsula along with bringing non-Muslim subjects to the Crimea, solidification of Russian control over the southern steppe, and the fixing of the border along Dniestr and Kuban. But, if circumstances allowed, Osterman prescribed to

³²⁵ Kochubinskii, pp. 129-132.

³²⁶ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. XIII of Appendixes.

demand independence of the Danubian principalities, which would bring them under symbolic protectorship of Orthodox Russia, thus effectively setting the Russian border along the Danube.³²⁷ Kochubinskii is right in highlighting the visionary aspect of Osterman's program. It was certainly not a good blueprint for a peace congress, however. For one, the Porte could not relinquish Crimea, despite Russian readiness to promise that it would not maintain military fleet in the Black Sea.³²⁸ Secondly, Osterman's plan met an obstacle in Russia's own ally, Austria, which jealously guarded the Danubian principalities for itself.

With the official declaration of war by Russia in spring 1736 and the entrance of Austria into the war in early 1737, Ottoman fortunes did not necessarily deteriorate as Veshniakov had expected. Veshniakov himself was courteously taken by the grand vizier to accompany the Ottoman army into the campaign and released once the Ottomans reached the Danube in late 1736. Bonneval's advice informed the Ottoman strategy of a defensive war against Russia, which the Tatars were largely expected to contain, and offensive operations against Austria, which had incidentally lost its military genius, Eugene of Savoy, in spring 1736. French political advice and diplomatic support were likewise instrumental in negotiating a favorable peace at Belgrade in 1739. But Ottoman strategy also paid out in the sense that the offensive program in the Balkans had indeed greater chances of success, due to the weakened state of the Habsburg army following the War of the Polish Succession. As a result, Münnich's capture of Ochakov, Hotin, and—at the very end—Jassy, albeit after several years of disastrous campaigns in Crimea, were absolutely fruitless because they were completely ignored by the negotiators at Belgrade. There, a controversial Habsburg-Ottoman separate peace was hurriedly signed by the Austrian

³²⁷ Kochubinskii, pp. 143-148, 206-221; Oreshkova, pp. 116-121, 204-205.

³²⁸ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. XIII of Appendixes.

representative, Count Neipperg, for which Charles VI imprisoned him for the rest of his reign. According to some historians, however, Neipperg was neither frightened nor isolated, but acted in accordance with secret instructions of the Austrian heiress Maria Theresa and her husband, who were afraid of having to fight Turkey in addition to states that opposed the Pragmatic Sanction upon the death of Charles VI, which at the time seemed imminent, and indeed proved to be so.³²⁹

Very little of Osterman's program was achieved in 1739, belying optimistic projections of Veshniakov and Münnich, who in their predictions of looming Ottoman collapse failed to take into account Ottoman resilience as well as strong jealousies of other European nations. Of Osterman's specific initial goals, ironically, the treaty mentioned only the guarantee of Russia's right to maintain permanent representative in Constantinople and the right of all Russian diplomats to enjoy the same privileges and freedoms as were granted to ministers of other most respected foreign nations.³³⁰ St. Petersburg could not even achieve the Porte's cession of Ochakov after Russia renounced its demand for Crimea in 1737, chiefly because of the resistance of France, England, Holland, and even Austria. In regard to Azov, whose recapture was one of the unconditional demands of St. Petersburg, Russia failed to achieve its goal. Instead of receiving it back into its possession, Russia was obliged to raze the fortress of Azov, while Azov and the surrounding territory had to remain uninhabited, serving as a buffer zone between the two empires.³³¹

³²⁹ Cassels, p. 200; Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. XX of Appendixes.

³³⁰ T. Iuzefovich, *Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom: politicheskie i torgovye* (Moskva: Gos. publichnaia istoricheskaia biblioteka Rossii, 2005), pp. 15-24.

³³¹ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. XIII-XVII, XIX of Appendixes. The latter article concerning Azov actually fulfilled the Ottoman suggestions at the peace congress at Nemirov in 1737. Namely, during the last meeting between the Ottoman and Russian delegations in September/early October 1737, the Ottoman delegates

Veshniakov's Continuing Career in Constantinople

It is difficult to say whether the war was indeed inevitable, as Nepliev and Veshniakov had argued. Judging by their reports, a good dose of wishful enthusiasm informed their thinking, in particular Veshniakov's. Most Russians who were responsible for the war and peace negotiations at Nemirov were Peter's fledglings. Many of them had vivid, even personal, memories of the Prut campaign. Osterman, for example, was personally present during the negotiations at the Prut. Shafirov, Nepliev, and Volynsky—Russian delegates at Nemirov—all had personal experience in Ottoman/eastern affairs. Nepliev, both father and son, the latter having been appointed secretary of the resident mission under Veshniakov, had almost twenty years between them of residing in Constantinople. Petr Shafirov had been a hostage ambassador in the early 1710s. And Artemii Volynsky had not only shared Shafirov's tribulations in the Ottoman Empire after Prut, but served as governor of Astrakhan on the Caspian and an effective diplomatic agent in Persia. Yet, this able team of men was powerless at Nemirov to overcome the opposition of the Ottomans, the adversary, and the Austrians, the supposed ally. Overly ambitious demands were a large part of the problem. Oreshkova calls the Nemirov congress, for example, an "apotheosis of mutual (*vzaimnykh*) mistakes," because the Russian, Austrian, and Ottoman sides all made critical miscalculations.³³²

Kochubinskii does not shy away from putting the blame for the war—untimely but with daring objectives—on Nepliev and especially Veshniakov.³³³ Could one perhaps argue that

offered to raze Azov, take back Ochakov and Kinburn, and form barrier zones between the Bug and lower Dnieper, and around Azov. Oreshkova, *Nemirovskii kongress*, pp. 201-203.

³³² Oreshkova, pp. 204-210.

³³³ Kochubinskii, p. 525.

Veshniakov exhibited irresponsibility and dilettantism, consumed as he was by dreams of Ottoman collapse? In that case, it appears puzzling why he was appointed Russian resident in Constantinople again after the conclusion of the war. In fact, as late as 1745, the year of his death, Veshniakov reported from the Ottoman capital that:

It depends on Your Imperial Majesty to ravish with no great effort this evil force and to restore the cross: it seems that God's providence has laid down everything to assure this. All poor Orthodox Christians are waiting to be delivered by You; it will only take for a Russian army to make a sudden attack on the Danube this fall and bring extra ammunition, in order to increase in size ten times; Moldavia, Wallachia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Montenegrins, Albania, all Greece, islands and Constantinople itself all at once will take up the cross and run to help Your Imperial Majesty; the army would find provisions, forage, and funds in excess amounts. European states, being consumed in conflicts among themselves, will not be able to oppose Russia. Now is such an opportune time for an attack as there has never been before and never will occur again. I am writing this not on my behalf, but on behalf of the commanders of all these poor Christians, who are tearfully asking for at least a faint ray of hope—they would arrange everything, and large section of the best of the Turks would also join them, because there are many Christians among them who are called Trinitarians, such as *Kızlar Ağā* and *Mufti* Esad-Efendi and many others; all of them are Muslims only outwardly and are burdened by the hopelessness of the current administration; the common Turkish folk would be destroyed or become Christian, for they are outnumbered in the whole of Rumelia more than one to five.³³⁴

Even though one can allow that there might have been kernels of truth in these statements, overall Veshniakov's projects appear irresponsible and reckless, given that there was not a note of moderation, caution, or nuance in his generalized propositions.

The fact that St. Petersburg appointed him again as resident suggests that there was still a dearth of able men not only versed in foreign languages, at least French, but also ready to make sacrifices in their quality of life. It is telling that Osterman could appoint neither Nepluev, nor Veshniakov to the negotiations in Belgrade. Nepluev did not evoke friendly feelings in the Ottomans and we know that Villeneuve consistently avoided Veshniakov while in Constantinople, so the latter would not have been an effective assistant to the French ambassador, who represented both Austrian and Russian interests in Belgrade. Instead, Osterman

³³⁴ Soloviev, Vol. XII, p. 374.

appointed a Florentine who had entered Russian service not long before—commerce counselor Karlo Kanioni (Cagnoni) [Kangioni/Kan'oni] —as the Russian agent at the negotiations.³³⁵

Cagnoni's main asset was being Italian, which meant that he was qualified to work with the text of the treaty, since the originals of such documents have been traditionally composed in Italian. Osterman, however, was later criticized for this choice, for the appointment was highly important.

For the time being, Veshniakov was the person most familiar with Ottoman affairs and, therefore, he was the person of choice to represent Russia in day-to-day communications with the Ottoman government. He continued to paint a bleak and vulnerable picture of the Ottoman Empire throughout the five years of his last residency. In 1742, for example, he wrote that Europe should no longer fear the Ottomans; they were no longer a formidable empire with fervent military spirit. He pointed out that economically the empire had also grown weak, the Ottoman government barely managing to collect a fifth of its customary revenue from taxes.³³⁶ Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, Veshniakov barely managed to control the budget of the Russian mission in Constantinople and incurred a lot of debts that Empress Elizabeth eventually agreed to write off after his death.

³³⁵ Kochubinskii, pp. 509-512, 516; Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 62.

³³⁶ Tveritina, pp. 318-319. Thus, he wrote that the Ottoman treasury could collect only 600,000,000 levki, or 36,000,000 rubles in 1742, one fourth of which amount would not even reach the treasury thanks to stealing by tax-collectors. Half of the remaining amount would also be stolen due to war conditions. As a result, the treasury was empty even though the government already collected revenue for 1744.

PART II: Obreskov's Apprenticeship and the Functioning of the Residency

Chapter 4. Obreskov's Apprenticeship and Embassy Finances

The war with the Ottoman Empire in 1735-1739 interrupted Russian diplomatic presence in Constantinople. As a result, after the Treaty of Belgrade the Russian government had to re-establish its residential mission almost from scratch. This perhaps was the reason for the appointment of Aleksei Veshniakov as the resident: having served as *chargé d'affaires* and then resident before the war he could provide a measure of continuity. The period of stability in mutual relations from 1739 to 1768 provided the Russian mission in Constantinople with opportunity for growth, development of skilled personnel, and entrenchment in the diplomatic corps of the Ottoman capital. Although not specifically planned by St. Petersburg, one person became a constant feature of the Russian mission: first as an embassy officer, then as de facto *chargé d'affaires*, and, finally, as resident, Aleksei Mikhailovich Obreskov became an important pillar of Russian foreign policy in the Ottoman capital and provinces.

Any discussion of Obreskov's contribution to Russian diplomacy on the Bosphorus in the 1750s and 1760s—when he was the official resident—cannot be complete without understanding his earlier background and without reconstructing the life of the mission more generally. What follows then is an account of the circumstances in which the mission as a whole functioned during this peaceful period and how Obreskov gradually built it up to become a well-run institution representing Russian interests in the Ottoman Empire.³³⁷

³³⁷ Extended length of experience certainly translated into greater familiarity with Ottoman politics and society. For example, in characterizing the significance of foreign ambassadors' reports for Ottoman history, Norman Itzkowitz

Obreskov's Origins and Attitude towards Service in Constantinople

Little is known about Obreskov's origins. He came from a Iaroslavl gentry family. The origins of Obreskovs dated back to the sixteenth century but by the eighteenth century they were not rich by any means. Likewise, young Aleksei did not have any powerful relatives or patrons at the court. His father, Lieutenant Mikhail Afanasievich Obreskov, died in 1732, a year before Obreskov entered the recently established Noble Cadet Corps.³³⁸ One historian suggests that Obreskov's early marriage—at the age of eighteen³³⁹—was not something the German directors of the Noble Cadet Corps would have approved of and, as a result, Obreskov sought to avoid penalty by going abroad.³⁴⁰ According to the records of the Noble Cadet Corps, Obreskov

noted that “In general, the longer any particular ambassador remained in Istanbul, the more instructive his correspondence. There are fewer gaps in the reporting, he has had more time to test the reliability of his sources, and most of all, he has reached a more understanding mastery over his environment.” Norman Itzkowitz, “Mehmed Raghıb Pasha: The Making of an Ottoman Grand Vezir,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1959), p. 171.

³³⁸ The Noble Cadet Corps was founded under Empress Anna in 1731 and opened its doors in 1732. Petr Luzanov, *Sukhoputnyi shliakhetnyi kadetskii korpus (nyne 1-i kadetskii korpus) pri grafe Minikhe s 1732 po 1741: istoricheskii ocherk* (St. Petersburg: Knigopечатnia Shmidt, 1907), p. 4; A.N. Antonov, *Pervyi kadetskii korpus: kratkii istoricheskii ocherk, 1732-1917 g.* (Gallipoli: Pechatnits V. Ianakiev, 1921), pp. 1-3; Maksim Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia v Evrope v seredine XVIII veka: Ot Akhenskogo mira do Semiletnei voiny* (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2012), p. 62; N. A. Kudriavtsev, *Gosudarevo oko. Tainaia diplomatiia i razvedka na sluzhbe Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Neva; Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), p. 445.

³³⁹ Gavriil Kessel'brenner notes that Obreskov married in 1740 “but three weeks later state service required his trip to Turkey.” Gavriil Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del: k 450-letiiu diplomaticheskoi sluzhby Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki i kartolitografiia, 1999), p. 374. This information appears incorrect, however.

³⁴⁰ Petr Stegnii writes that Obreskov married secretly from his parents just two years after entering the Noble Cadet Corps. The marriage proved to be unhappy. Moreover, Obreskov risked being demoted to soldier if the German directors of the corps found out about the marriage. Therefore, Obreskov found a way to save his future by asking his corps peer Peter Rumiantsev to convince his father, Aleksandr Rumiantsev, to take Obreskov to Constantinople. Petr Stegnii, *Posol III klassa. Khroniki “vremen Ochakovskikh i pokoren'ia Kryma”* (Moscow: Feoriia, 2009), p. 13; E. Likhach, “Obreskov, Aleksei, Mikhailovich,” *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar'*, Vol. 12 (St. Petersburg, 1902), pp. 61-64, here p. 64. The story about the marriage appears to go back to the biography of Obreskov by the early nineteenth-century historian Dmitrii Bantysh-Kamenskii, who was a son of Nikolai Bantysh-Kamenskii, a prominent archivist of the CFA in the eighteenth century: D. N. Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Slovar' dostopamiatnykh liudei Russkoi zemli, soderzhashchii v sebe zhizn' i deianiia znamenitykh polkovodtsev, ministrov i muzhei gosudarstvennykh, velikikh ierarkhov pravoslavnoi tserkvi, otlichnykh literatorov i uchenykh, izvestnykh po uchastiiu v sobytiiaakh otechestvennoi istorii* (Moscow: A. Shiriaev, 1836), pp. 35-39, here p. 36. Bantysh-

completed a program of studies between March 1733 and April 1740.³⁴¹ Stegnii writes that during his studies at the Corps Obreskov became friends with one of his peers, Peter Rumiantsev, the son of the famous associate of Peter I, Aleksandr Rumiantsev, and that it was this friendship that facilitated Obreskov's first trip to the Ottoman Empire.³⁴² However, Peter Rumiantsev studied at the Corps only for five months, from July to December 1740.³⁴³ Therefore, the exact circumstances surrounding Obreskov's appointment to the Russian mission to the Ottoman Empire on May 6/17, 1740³⁴⁴ remain unclear.

We know that Obreskov first set foot in Constantinople as the page of the Russian extraordinary embassy led by Aleksandr Rumiantsev in 1740-1741. Obreskov was a capable young officer and knew several foreign languages—French and German,³⁴⁵—which resulted in his becoming Rumiantsev's right hand at the time of the embassy. Obreskov helped Rumiantsev maintain diplomatic correspondence.³⁴⁶ According to his biographers, Obreskov quickly learned

Kamenskii's biography of Obreskov is probably the earliest one. It is based on "contemporary documents, *Notes of Poroshin*, and stories of trusted individuals." Bantysh-Kamenskii, p. 39.

³⁴¹ Luzanov, pp. 147-149, here p. 147. Luzanov also recounts the story mentioned by Bantysh-Kamenskii, Likhach, and later Stegnii, namely that Obreskov, being of a "passionate disposition by nature" (*pylkogo nrava ot prirody*), secretly married when he was eighteen years old. Luzanov, p. 147.

³⁴² Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 13;

³⁴³ Luzanov, pp. 157-158.

³⁴⁴ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 373.

³⁴⁵ In the absence of educational literature in Russian, as well as qualified Russian instructors, the administration of the Noble Cadet Corps had no choice but to use German materials and teachers. Therefore, native Russian students—as opposed to the Baltic Germans who comprised about one-third of the student body—absolutely had to learn German. Indeed, they were forced to do so because they usually preferred to study French as their foreign language of choice. They ended up learning French only after mastering German. Occasionally, the Corps offered Italian and English, but as few as one or two cadets enrolled in these subjects in a given term. Foreign languages—along, ironically, with dancing and fencing, as well as drawing—were one of the biggest attractions of the higher education for the nobility. Igor Fedyukin, "Learning to Be Nobles: The Elite and Education in Post-Petrine Russia," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), pp. 133-135, 246-249, 250-251. It would be interesting to know, if ever possible, if Obreskov had taken any Italian languages classes at the Corps.

³⁴⁶ Likhach, p. 61. The Noble Cadet Corps also emphasized translations of foreign-language news and composition of polite letters of friendship and gratitude in foreign languages as academic exercises, as well as maintained the practice of reading of foreign newspapers to the cadets at mealtimes, thereby fostering "a feeling of belonging to a wider European community of the educated and the worldly, who were concerned with the affairs of other countries. ... Graduates from the Corps were not only supposed to be at ease talking about foreign courts, ambassadors, and

Turkish and Greek languages, for which he was rewarded in 1742 with the rank of Lieutenant.³⁴⁷

In a short period he also mastered Italian.³⁴⁸

Obreskov's service report from June 1, 1754 provides the fullest account of his early career, giving a glimpse into his original intentions. According to Obreskov, he had requested to be sent abroad because he wished to pursue a career in foreign service.³⁴⁹ Born in 1718, Obreskov matriculated as a cadet at the *Shliakhetnoi Kadetskoi Korpus* (Noble Cadet Corps) in 1733. In 1740 he joined the extraordinary embassy led by Count Aleksandr Rumiantsev along with a few other cadets who were recruited as pages of the embassy. Obreskov explained that he eagerly left the Cadet school because he was motivated to see foreign lands: he sacrificed his already sufficient rank—*efreitor*—and an ober-officer rank he was expecting at graduation in order to travel with the ambassador. He served diligently as a page and in addition filled de facto the role of Rumiantsev's translator from French and German, because the count did not know any foreign languages. Rumiantsev promoted Obreskov to the rank of lieutenant of the dragoon regiments in December 1741, before leaving Constantinople. Then, in 1748, the CFA recommended the State Military College to promote Obreskov to the rank of captain of army regiments. In 1750, when Obreskov returned to Russia, upon another recommendation from the CFA, he was promoted to the rank of second major of land militia regiments. Obreskov wrote that the CFA deemed him capable of serving abroad and in order to find him easily when the need arose, the CFA appointed him in the same rank to the St. Petersburg infantry division for

navies, but also to assume perspectives beyond Russia's narrowly conceived interests. In short, they were supposed to be members of the European elite." Fedyukin, "Learning to Be Nobles," pp. 137-138, 139-140.

³⁴⁷ Bantysh-Kamenskii, p. 36; Likhach, p. 61; Luzanov, p. 148.

³⁴⁸ Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 14.

³⁴⁹ This document is valuable because it has never been used in literature before. A copy of it was perhaps included into another collection of AVPRI—Vnutrennie Kollezhskie Dela,—which was used by Kessel'brenner. However, Kessel'brenner does not use but a small part of the information available in it. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 373.

temporary service. In early 1751 the empress appointed him court counselor and *chargé d'affaires* at Constantinople, and in 1752 he was promoted to the position of resident with a salary of 5,000 rubles a year,³⁵⁰ which was double his previous salary. As of 1754, Obreskov claimed that he had no children and his property in Russia consisted of up to 40 male “people and peasants” in the Iaroslav uezd.³⁵¹

This early service autobiography is the only document in which Obreskov described his professional goals. While some historians have explained the circumstances of his trip to the Ottoman Empire in 1740 differently, on paper Obreskov claimed that he was interested in foreign service all along. He did not even mention that by going to Constantinople he sacrificed not only his military rank, but also his young wife, whom he married in 1740. Obreskov’s service autobiography also sheds some light on his plans in 1750. While later authors have noted that at the time Obreskov expected to continue his military career, this document reveals that Obreskov was found to be fit for promotion and appointment to other foreign posts.

³⁵⁰ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757. Vedomosti, po trebovaniu Geroldii o sluzhbakh byvshikh v ofiterskikh chinakh pri Turetskoi missii, i o peremene ikh chinami, LL. 2-3.

³⁵¹ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, L. 3. The number of serfs in his ownership puts him in the middle stratum of the Russian nobility, whose representatives owned between 20 and 100 male souls and comprised approximately one third of the entire noble population of Russia. This social group was the second most numerous among the cadets of the Noble Cadet Corps, where it formed about a third of the student body. The most numerous group was that of the upper-middle nobility, who owned between 100 and 500 male souls. They formed about fifty to sixty percent of the student body, making the Corps an educational institution for the privileged, because in the eighteenth century this middle nobility formed only about ten to fifteen percent of the entire noble population of Russia. On the other hand, the lower nobility—those who owned less than 20 male souls and were considered poor—comprised only ten to twenty percent of the student body at the Corps, despite the fact that such nobles formed the majority of the Russian noble population, ranging from fifty to sixty percent in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the Corps was more elite in its social profile than the private ranks of the Guards regiments. Fedyukin, “Learning to Be Nobles,” pp. 222-230, 235-236. Between 1708 and 1719 Iaroslavl was part of the Moscow *guberniia*. Subsequently, between 1719 and 1774 the Iaroslav province became part of the St. Petersburg *guberniia*. A. A. Titov, *Iaroslavskii uezd. Istoriko-arkheologicheskoe, etnograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie. S kartoi Iaroslavskago uezda* (Moscow: “Russkaia” tipo-litografiia, 1883), p. XIII. At his death Obreskov was a rich man by Russian standards. He was part of the approximately one percent who owned more than 1,000 male souls. Thus, we know that after his death, Obreskov’s children peacefully divided the substantial total of 1,102 male souls, acquired as a result of his long diplomatic service. In addition to Iaroslavl, Obreskov was granted lands in the Moscow and Novgorod provinces. Kessel’brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol’skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 373.

If we are to believe Obreskov himself, therefore, his passion for foreign service motivated him to stay in Constantinople—far away from his wife and relatives. Like no other Russian diplomat, he withstood the intrigues and the unhealthy climate of the Ottoman capital for almost thirty years, which comprised nearly half of his entire life.³⁵² However, perhaps Constantinople did not turn out to be his dream post initially. After all, in the archives we find evidence of his periodic attempts to gain permission to leave, not unlike his predecessors. The very first known request dates to the time when lieutenant Obreskov was still a relatively unrecognized member of the mission's staff. On December 20, 1744 he penned a letter to his old benefactor Alexander Rumiantsev reminding him about his earlier requests to gain release from his post. Obreskov also asked Veshniakov to make an official appeal to the CFA in his upcoming report indicating the impossibility of keeping Obreskov in Constantinople any longer. He thought that Rumiantsev's intercession would strengthen Veshniakov's petition, closing his letter to Rumiantsev with a line: "All-submissive, all-humble, and all-devoted servant and slave Aleksei Obreskov."³⁵³

The excuse for asking leave was Obreskov's extreme problems with health due to local climate. Two years prior Obreskov had caught a head cold while wearing a wig ("wearing hair") and since then "head wetness" affected his eyes from time to time, causing great pain. He was compelled to repeat his request because at the beginning of December the symptoms reappeared, causing great pain and noise in the head. He was afraid of losing his eyesight, if not for the

³⁵² Of course, climate and local diseases presented problems for Russian diplomats in other locations as well. Nikita Panin, for example, complained about the ubiquitous disease of *skorbutika*/scurvy in Sweden. To ward it off, he drank Selzen waters the whole summer of 1749. 90.301.1747-1750, L. 68. Count Petr Chernyshev asked to be recalled from London because he could not withstand its climate. Chernyshev left England in summer 1755—right on the eve of critical diplomatic developments. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 65.

³⁵³ 90.243.1744. Kopia s pis'ma Obreskova iz Konstantinopolia Grafu Rumiantsevu o razreshenii vozvratit'sia emu v Rossiю (s pros'boi iskhodataistvovat' ob ot'ezde po bolezni), L. 1.

saving skill of Doctor Kastelii, who applied “Spanish flies” to the back of Obreskov’s head. After twenty days the extreme symptoms subsided but he still suffered with his eyes. All local doctors, he hurried to add, recommended to leave the area because, according to their experience and many such known examples among foreign diplomats, the disease affecting Obreskov did not stem from problems in his eyes or eye muscles, but was solely due to thin, icy winter air in Constantinople. Veshniakov himself could attest to the express harm to health effected by any slight change in weather and Obreskov had no doubt that the resident would sympathize with his plight and present his petition to the government. Rumiantsev’s help could add weight to Veshniakov’s appeal, however, and Obreskov hoped that his old patron would bestow “fatherly benefaction” upon and put in a word for him in order to help Obreskov depart for Russia in spring or at least before autumn.³⁵⁴

Whether true or not, Obreskov’s stated reasons for requesting leave reflected the harsh reality of the local climate which affected other ambassadors and their staff, causing quite a number of deaths throughout the decades. Obreskov—he could not know it then, of course—would be blessed with staying alive during his entire three-decade service in Constantinople and harsh conditions of his captivity during the war, and even enjoying another thirteen years of life on his native soil where he married for the third time.

Deaths and Legacies of Aleksei Veshniakov and Andrian Nepliev

Obreskov did not receive permission to leave until the end of the decade. In the meantime, he continued to serve as the embassy officer under two different residents, Aleksei

³⁵⁴ 90.243.1744, LL. 1-2.

Veshniakov and Andrian Nepliev. Their respective terms as residents certainly provided Obreskov with comparative insight on what made for good diplomacy and successful administration of the mission, and what did not. In addition, the particular fates of his two predecessors essentially paved the way for Obreskov's later career in Constantinople.

Both Veshniakov and the younger Nepliev died at their posts, being interred at a Greek cemetery near the mission's summer residence in Büyükdere. Health problems were cited in both cases, although both times the circumstances appear somewhat suspicious. Thus, Mikhneva and Stegnii write that Veshniakov died as a result of a serious illness.³⁵⁵ Kesselbrenner notes that Nepliev died unexpectedly; Stegnii specifies that Nepliev experienced a fatal stroke at a dinner at the residence of the Prussian envoy.³⁵⁶ This succession of Russian residents' deaths at five-year intervals appears suspicious because both residents were relatively young: at the time of their deaths, Veshniakov was forty-five and Nepliev—only thirty-eight—years old.³⁵⁷

Existing literature did not pick up on indications, even if only alleged, from archival sources about possible foul play at the death of Veshniakov. Thus, on August 15, 1745, about two weeks after Veshniakov's death, Aleksandr Pini—the chief translator of the mission—and Obreskov reported to the CFA that rumors concerning Veshniakov's death circulated in Constantinople. One of them, in particular, was worthy of note. Pini and Obreskov outright declared that they did not believe it and had no evidence that could substantiate the rumor but they wanted to inform the empress directly, lest she found out about it from another

³⁵⁵ Rumiana Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh v seredine XVIII veka, 1739-1756* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 75-76; Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 14.

³⁵⁶ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 373; Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 16.

³⁵⁷ Such deaths were not completely exceptional. For example, in the late seventeenth century at least four English ambassadors died in the span of two decades. John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 28-29.

source. Namely, according to some the Swedish envoy Carlson poisoned Veshniakov out of spite for the latter's constant complaints about him to St. Petersburg, which resulted in heavy reprimands directed at Carlson by his court. It was alleged that on July 18, on the occasion of the Swedish King's name day, Veshniakov was at Carlson's residence and spent the night there. Since that night he continuously complained of heaviness in his head and internal heat/fever. At the time of death it took only ten minutes for his body to begin to emit a foul smell from inside and his face turned black. Pini and Obreskov asked doctor Kastellii if there was anything unusual about Veshniakov's illness. The doctor replied that even though Veshniakov's death was unexpected he did not believe the rumor. According to Pini and Obreskov's report, employees of the mission did not say anything, but all the outsiders discussed this and noted Carlson's latest actions: for three days following the death he stayed with the Austrian resident Penkler, allegedly in order to find out if anyone mentioned him in discussions; furthermore, Carlson wrote a letter to Obreskov in which he persuaded the latter to obtain a medical report-certificate on Veshniakov's death.³⁵⁸

This version of events, despite having been denied by Pini and Obreskov, as well as doctor Kastellii, could be plausible.³⁵⁹ After all, according to Pini and Obreskov's report,

³⁵⁸ 90.259.1745-1746. Doneseniia /otpuski/ perevodchika rossiiskoi missii v Konstantinopole Piniia i poruchika Obreskova v KID o smerti rezidenta Veshniakova i tseremonial ego pogrebeniia; o neudachnom srazhenii turetskago voiska s persami pod Karsom i po drugim voprosam. Imeiutsia dokumenty na ital'ianskom i turetskom iazykakh, LL. 28-29. Indeed, Carlson advised Obreskov in a letter to obtain a report from doctor Kastellii about the nature of Veshniakov's illness and about treatment that the doctor administered to the late resident. Carlson stressed that this was standard protocol in such cases and Obreskov needed to include this letter into his next dispatch to St. Petersburg. Moreover, Carlson argued that the doctor had an obligation to compose such a report, which among other things would provide satisfaction to "Madame Wichnyakow" who Carlson hoped would find consolation in the love of her small children. 90.259.1745-1746, L. 70. Of course, if allegations of Carlson's involvement are true, his concern for Veshniakov's wife and children, which also figured in his letter to Stockholm, was highly hypocritical. On the other hand, with his suggestions about doctor's report Carlson was essentially attempting to remove any suspicions from himself, which could be helpful whether or not he was guilty of anything.

³⁵⁹ Here is how the two described what happened on July 31, in their first report after Veshniakov's passing. On July 25 Veshniakov had hosted a dinner for the Venetian ambassador. On July 26 he did not leave his house during the

Veshniakov had been feeling unwell for about a week before he died, although one also finds earlier indications of Veshniakov's ill health, such as a heavy headache in November 1744.³⁶⁰ In any case, the Russian government never officially investigated Carlson's alleged role in Veshniakov's death, although Doctor Kastelii was fired as soon as St. Petersburg learned of the rumor.³⁶¹

The circumstances of Nepluev's death also appear suspect. The late 1740s-1751 witnessed a very intense diplomatic game in Constantinople by France and Sweden, aimed at involving the Porte in Swedish affairs in opposition to Russia.³⁶² The Prussian King Frederick II also became decisively anti-Russian at exactly the same time. His attempts to conclude an anti-Russian alliance with the Porte since 1749 met their greatest obstacle in Russia's fairly good credit at the Porte.³⁶³ It is possible that a vacuum in Russian diplomatic representation was in the Prussian and French-Swedish interests at the time. Be that as it may, both residents, Veshniakov and Andrian Nepluev, died of a stroke about five years apart from each other. It could have been a simple coincidence, but something remains suspicious about the two deaths in rather close succession in a century that was prominent for considerably longer life expectancy among higher-class adults.

day due to headache and fever, about which he had complained for several days. When he did go out in the evening, he got the shakes. He was treated with leeches. On July 27 he was given a purgative twice: first time it did not help, the second time it resulted in vomiting of a lot of bile. On July 28 Veshniakov felt great relief, he spent the day walking around his room reading a book. But at 2AM on July 29 he began to shake feverishly. Doctor Kastelii treated him with bloodletting; the blood was expressed with great difficulty because it was very thick. At 7PM the shakes intensified but physician Stefaneli decided that Veshniakov's body would be able to deal with it on its own. But suddenly Veshniakov experienced a stroke. An attempt to let blood from his leg failed. At 9PM the resident died with indescribable scream and cry. 90.259.1745-1746, LL, 1ob.-2ob.

³⁶⁰ 90.280.1746, between LL. 15-16.

³⁶¹ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 176.

³⁶² See Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 280-287

³⁶³ Mikhneva discusses Russo-Ottoman relations in the context of European developments and politics of the time in her book. The section on Prussian intrigues is in Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 104-108.

Their deaths also revealed the tenuous nature of the Russian mission's position in Constantinople. Thus, in addition to the constant lack of money,³⁶⁴ the mission also experienced difficulties in organizing Veshniakov's burial due to the resistance of the Constantinople Patriarch. Veshniakov was buried next to the mission's summer house in the village of Tarabya, in a Greek church, as was seen appropriate by his family and friends, who found it impossible to transport his body from Tarabya to Pera. But the real problem appeared when the Patriarch of Constantinople refused to officiate and instructed the church's bishop not to do anything if the Russians did not present a ferman, or the sultan's edict, from the Porte that permitted interment in the said church. Such resistance stemmed from the patriarch's fear of the harm that could come from the Ottoman government to the entire Greek nation in the empire in punishment for helping the Russians. He said that even if the Porte ordered him to be at the funeral, he would try to find ways to avoid it. The permission of the Porte was received and on July 30 the ceremony took place. But to avoid negative consequences, most of the clergymen present at the funeral were paid through Buidi, a translator in the service of the mission who acted as middleman between the Russians and local Greeks.³⁶⁵

The next resident, Andrian Nepliev, also appears to have disappointed the expectations of the local Greeks. None other than the chaplain of the mission, Hieromonk Iosif Krasnitskii, complained to his patron, the Pskov archbishop Simeon Todorskii, that in addition to being a very unpleasant individual, Nepliev also failed to be a good Orthodox Christian. Krasnitskii wrote to Todorskii that resident Nepliev had refused to confess before death and was most

³⁶⁴ Overall, the funeral cost the Russian embassy 503 levki and 2 aspr—money that had to be borrowed from Penkler because the mission's treasury contained only 82 levki and 73 aspr.

³⁶⁵ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 9-9ob., 11ob.-12, 15ob., 45, 65. One of the metropolitans, Reverend Samuil of Derk and Neokhor, read a sermon in Greek; it was so touching that almost everyone who knew Greek teared up. It was written down and translated into Russian by Nikolai Veshniakov, the resident's nephew, in order to distribute in Russia.

likely a Lutheran or an atheist, for he kept company with the English ambassador, who was an obvious atheist. Iosif claimed that Nepliev's residency was detrimental to Russia's standing among the Ottoman Orthodox: "There are various Orthodox peoples in Stambul, who have high respect for the [Russian] resident as a representative of an Orthodox state, but this time everyone was surprised and shamed Russia for beginning to waver in its faith and becoming corrupted despite being the only Orthodox state in the world; the whole Stambul dubbed the late [resident] an atheist for his evil deeds." According to Iosif, Nepliev's disposition was also marred by fierceness and rage. Therefore, Iosif asked Simeon Todorskii to ensure that the CFA sent a good Christian in Nepliev's stead.³⁶⁶

Obreskov's De Facto Management of the Mission, 1745-1746

On both occasions, in 1745 and 1750, Veshniakov and Nepliev's deaths propelled Obreskov to positions of greater responsibility. In the year after Veshniakov's death, Obreskov was the chief person responsible for the daily functioning of the embassy as well as for all of its diplomatic activity. Although the Austrian internuncio in Constantinople, Baron Penkler, was officially representing Russian interests in the interim, his protection and support of the mission mostly expressed itself in helping with money and helping Pini and Obreskov at the Porte when they could not achieve desired results. Likewise, although Pini had a higher status as the

³⁶⁶ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, pp. 98-99; Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 373; Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 63-64. Once in Constantinople, Obreskov made a list of books from Nepliev's personal library, which contained a wide variety of literature. Besides the Bible, Nepliev had read the classics, contemporary scientific treatises, and contemporary philosophy. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 64. Indeed, Nepliev had received education in the Dutch Republic and was exceptionally well read. On Andrian Nepliev's education and library, also see Rumiana Mikhneva, "II.1. Khorata na imperiata. Rezidentite—ruskiiat primer (Ivan i Adrean Neplievi)," in *Zemiata izvyn "vremeto"* (Varna: Slavna, 2003), pp. 221-241.

embassy's dragoman, Obreskov enjoyed greater trust of the Russian government as a native Russian subject.

The following episode demonstrates the types of challenges and limitations that faced Obreskov. Upon Veshniakov's death, the grand vizier and the *reis efendi* took measures to show their respect for Russia by sending an official condolence letter to the Russian grand chancellor, Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin. However, the French and Swedish ambassadors tried to diminish the honor that such an unusual move indicated by convincing the *reis efendi* to replace a *çuhadar*—the appropriate rank for such task—with a *çavuş*, or messenger. It is interesting that after Pini, together with Penkler's translator Gaspar Momars, appealed this decision with the *reis efendi* and the grand vizier's *kahya*, the latter decided to send a *çegodar* named Uzun Ağa, whom the *kahya* recommended as being reliable—"quiet and not a drunkard"—and who, moreover, had been to Russia many times and even earned Rumiantsev's approval.³⁶⁷

This episode is indicative of the complicated web of Constantinople politics and intrigue, including internal relations within the mission. On the one hand, the Russians had to counteract the efforts of the French and the Swedish, who did not desire that the Porte send a *çuhadar* to St. Petersburg. On the other hand, the Porte's idea to send a *çuhadar* with a letter of condolences in itself required vigilance on the part of the mission and St. Petersburg. Uzun Ağa, the *çuhadar* that the *kahya* so wholeheartedly recommended, noting his familiarity with Russia, could have been chosen primarily to be a spy. This particular suggestion was made by the Jerusalem Patriarch: in a secret message passed through Buidi to Obreskov he informed the Russians that it was in their interest to prevent the dispatch of the *çuhadar*. The patriarch claimed that the Porte sought out a smart individual who knew Russian well and thus could investigate what was

³⁶⁷ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 26-28; Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 76.

happening in Russia, its public opinion, as well as developments in Polish Ukraine. Obreskov thought that the patriarch's suggestion could be true but he did not feel confident attempting to prevent the *çuhadar*'s trip without an approval from St. Petersburg. He merely reported to the Porte through Pini that a proper quarantine procedure would be applied to the *çuhadar*. Significantly, he did not inform Pini about the intelligence submitted by the patriarch, because the latter asked Obreskov not to do so.³⁶⁸

Indeed, Obreskov did not completely trust Pini with all the information. This can be seen from his decision to conceal the identity of a Montenegrin, Stefan Ivanovich, a nephew of His Grace Metropolitan of Montenegro and Skender Sava. Stefan had arrived with a letter addressed to Veshniakov from the whole Montenegrin nation and from the church councils of Montenegro and Skender. Obreskov wanted to keep him until new resident arrived but it was unsafe because someone—Turks or other intriguers—could understand the purpose of Stefan's visit and find out about correspondence between the Russian Empire and Montenegro. Obreskov concealed Stefan's identity from Pini, saying only that Stefan was a Slav by origin and was traveling to Russia to visit his brother who was in Russian service.³⁶⁹

Further evidence of limited trust that the Russian government and Obreskov had in Pini was in separate correspondence that was sent by the CFA to Obreskov only, marked “the most

³⁶⁸ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 66-66ob. As we know, the Porte did send messengers that year: it was not Uzun Ağa but instead the delegation consisted of two other *çuhadars* and people from Hotin and Wallachia—an unusual number for a rather ceremonial announcement of condolences.³⁶⁸ The patriarch's suggestion that this was a spying enterprise appears very probable. However, the Porte's attempt to procure intelligence in this way underlined the inadequacy of its non-resident diplomacy: the Porte had to utilize convenient pretexts—absent a standard cause for an official embassy dispatch such as a death of a sultan—for organizing investigative missions because it could not rely completely on what other foreign ambassadors in Constantinople were saying about Russia's domestic situation and its intensions. Young Obreskov, while not having power or resolution yet to obstruct the sending of the *çuhadar*, still made sure to take helpful measures. For example, he informed the Kiev Governor-General, Mikhail Leontev, and St. Petersburg regarding the matter. Obreskov advised Leontev to forbid all Russian subjects to enter into long conversations with the *çuhadar*, for the latter knew Russian and perhaps had an order to collect intelligence.

90.259.1745-1746, LL. 74-75.

³⁶⁹ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 152-152ob.

secret,” in addition to regular orders to both Pini and Obreskov, as was the case for example with orders from October 25 that were received in Constantinople on November 30. But the CFA trusted Pini more than Penkler. To witness, Pini and Obreskov assured the CFA in one of their reports that Penkler would not be informed about Russian secret friends who shared intelligence. In addition, Pini asked the dragoman of the Porte to inform him alone, and not Penkler, about matters pertaining to the interests of the Russian Empire.³⁷⁰

During the year of effectively running the mission along with Pini, Obreskov personally collected and reported intelligence on the most pressing issues of Russian-Ottoman diplomacy. The key task of the Russian mission was to ensure that the Porte did not intervene against the Habsburgs in the War of the Austrian Succession. The ongoing war between the Ottomans and the Persians was a helpful factor in this respect. Nevertheless, Obreskov, as well as the Austrian and Venetian missions kept a close watch over developments on the eastern front, exchanging intelligence with each other. Obreskov also reported Persian news to Lanchinskii, the Russian ambassador in Vienna. Obreskov also learned a lot about the functioning of the Ottoman government and society through the prism of the Persian war. Thus, Obreskov concluded that political equilibrium depended on the support of the Constantinople masses. Therefore, news of Ottoman losses in battles against the formidable Nadir Shah were concealed, revealed only partially, or even staged as victories, announced by cannon-fire from the towers of the city. Popular displeasure was however palpable and foreign ambassadors even learned of a plot against the Porte’s ministers and even the sultan himself, which was masterminded inside the sultan's palace in cooperation with rebellious pashas on the eastern border. As a result, eight top palace officials were executed in one night and in several weeks more than 160 palace officials

³⁷⁰ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 171-172.

were murdered. The Constantinople mob in the meantime was reported to have been seeking janissary help in deposing the sultan, causing the government to dispatch death squads against armed groups in the city and in Galata. In view of these disorders, the month of Ramadan was awaited with trepidation for the government could not forbid the masses to go out in the night and form into groups during the holy month.³⁷¹ In late 1745 an unofficial Persian plenipotentiary arrived in Constantinople in order to negotiate with the Porte. Obreskov noted the inferior ceremonial treatment afforded Fetki Ali Beik Turkman, noting that the Porte tried to present his visit as evidence of the shah's fear of the Porte and his seeking of peace. In reality, the Porte needed peace and the Shah's agreement to less stringent conditions.³⁷²

Obreskov depended for all of this intelligence on the mission's secret informants. Thus, one Miralem³⁷³—one of the chief secret informers for the Russians—reported through Buidi on Persian developments. For example, in 1746 Miralem reported that the Shah's letter brought by envoy Fethi Ali was read in the general council, which included all officials of the central government. The council aimed at arriving at a unanimous decision, thereby avoiding public criticism in case of problems. Miralem also provided insight into the decision-making process: several days after the council would submit its decision to the palace the *Kızlar Ağası* would send his spies to investigate public opinion and would then take a decision that would placate the crowds and ensure peace in the capital.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 76-86.

³⁷² 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 264, 267, 268, 269-272ob.

³⁷³ Miralem was an Ottoman court official who oversaw standard-bearers and musicians. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. VI (Brill, 1989) p. 531.

³⁷⁴ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 148-149ob., 251ob.; 90.280.1746, LL. 37-38ob. According to all the available information, even though the sultan's letter to the shah was kept in greatest secrecy, Obreskov deemed it safe to conclude that the war would not be ending soon. In this light, he found it laughable that the common folk on the street, desiring the end of the war, was already rejoicing and celebrating peace, not knowing what was really coming. 90.280.1746, LL. 48, 52-52ob.

Another informant, the old scribe of the dragoman of the Porte, İbrahim Efendi, provided insight into the court intrigues. İbrahim Efendi claimed, for example, that the internal administration, namely the *Kızlar Ağası*, *Mufti*, *Hekimbaşı*, and others in the palace, became highly suspicious and fearful in their hearts that Russia, having free hands while staying away from the European war, could make a move against the Ottoman Empire. Their suspicion and fear, according to İbrahim Efendi, were not unfounded, for the Ottoman treasury, strength, as well as order and obedience of its troops were all depleted; the people were angry with the sultan because of the military misfortunes and simultaneous extermination of the most able military men during campaigns to protect the capital from uprisings. While the Porte was mired in crisis and European states were consumed by war, there was no one to stop prosperous and happy Russia from attacking the Ottomans. *Kızlar Ağası* was old and sick and did not attend the sultan, leaving the eunuchs to care for him and not allow anyone else in his presence. Every minister tried to earn as much profit as possible, all the while kowtowing to the eunuchs in state affairs, because these ministers were in reality unintelligent and ignorant.

İbrahim Efendi also reported on the actions of his immediate superior, the dragoman of the Porte. The dragoman shared in confidence with İbrahim Efendi, as his long-time secretary, that he found the first minister of the Russian Empire to be very astute for his decision to stay away from the European conflict. The old scribe İbrahim Efendi also reported what the dragoman of the Porte said after he ran into Buidi himself at the residence of the Bishop of Chios (*Kizitskii*). Buidi was carrying out Obreskov's order to wish the patriarch a happy Christmas. The dragoman of the Porte favorably recommended Buidi to the bishop, to which the latter smiled, saying that he loved Buidi as much as the dragoman of the Porte. Here the dragoman stated that

he knew the reasons for Buidi's visits to the Fener quarter, but he cautioned not to reveal to anyone that he was in the know for it was contrary to his position. The dragoman of the Porte had also frequently reported relevant news during confessions to the Jerusalem Patriarch—news that were shared with him not by Ottoman ministers but by private individuals. However, the dragoman always observed extreme caution and refused to inquire whether the patriarch passed the information to the late resident Veshniakov or not. According to İbrahim Efendi, *Hekimbaşı* Patron as well as Miralem, the trusted friend of the Russians, were at the time in great confidence of the sultan, *Kızlar Ağası*, and the eunuchs.³⁷⁵

An important overview of the Ottoman Empire came in December 1745 from the Patriarch of Constantinople. He forwarded his message through the Bishop of Tarabya Samuil who then communicated it to the Russian mission through Buidi. The Patriarch dated the misfortunes of the empire to the start of the reign of the current sultan, Mahmud I. Disorderly rule and the war with Nadir Shah brought the empire to its knees. The Patriarch argued that the weak character of the sultan resulted in the devolution of power to the *Kızlar Ağası*, the chief eunuch.³⁷⁶ The Patriarch further claimed that the Ottoman government had very little similarity to the former regime of sultanic autocracy that relied on the assistance of the grand vizier and instead acquired likeness to a republican form of rule. The sultan became almost a figurehead; the grand vizier's powers have also become quite limited. Those who absorbed all the power cared only about their own well-being and were not concerned about an impending collapse of

³⁷⁵ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 251ob.-253ob. In later years, İbrahim Efendi was known not to provide any substantial intelligence but here he shared quite a few important pieces of information.

³⁷⁶ Mikhail Meier noted that Hoca Beşir Ağa was indeed one of the most powerful Ottoman figures of the first half of the eighteenth century. He was a close confidant of every sultan from 1702 until his death in 1746, and especially Mahmud I, whom many dubbed the “slow-witted” sultan. The crowds openly disdained Mahmud I also because he did not have any progeny and frequently called for his deposition. Meier's introduction in Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 10.

the empire. The situation was all the worse because the powerful officials had no unity: they fought each other to death. “In short,” concluded the patriarch after listing the damages of internal chaos and unsuccessful campaigns against the Persians, “Lord God took away intelligence and strength from this monarchy, which could help it come out of the obvious current crisis. There could be no other occasion more favorable than this one: it is obvious that this chance was provided by God's providence to free so many Christian peoples that are dying under the tortures of the current barbaric administration.” Samuil reported that the bishops of Chios (Kizitskii) and Heraclea (Irakliiskii), as well as other high hierarchs, fully agreed with and supported the opinion of His Holiness the Patriarch.³⁷⁷

Another responsibility of Pini and Obreskov was to continue efforts to rescue Russian captives. Six years after the end of the war, the Russian mission in Constantinople was still trying to uncover Russian subjects who were hidden by their owners. In mid-January 1746, for example, Obreskov sent away 18 captives, three of them women, back to Russia. Corporal Kozlov was instructed to prevent drinking, arguments, and robbery among the captives during their travel. More importantly, he had to note if he heard about any other Russian captives on the way, writing down the place, name of the owner, and the latter's identity—whether Turk or someone else.³⁷⁸

Pini and Obreskov suggested facilitating the process by rewarding the *çavuş* who was assigned by the Porte to perform the searches. They pointed out that Veshniakov, characteristically, had failed to pay the *çavuş* anything in all his years at the head of the mission. Regardless of the *çavuş*'s zeal, the main problem consisted in the true difficulty of locating the

³⁷⁷ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 150-151ob.

³⁷⁸ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 273-274ob.

captives. Pini and Obreskov maintained that there were very few Russian male captives remaining in Constantinople. Most of them were transported by various owners to distant places, especially in Asia. Female captives were still numerous in the Ottoman capital but they were kept behind closed doors of the harems of prominent Turks where entrance was forbidden. Many Jews also kept Russian female captives in their houses but it was nigh impossible to retrieve them because they were constantly hidden in different houses and the Jews relied on the protection of Turkish officials. No one paid any heed to the Porte's official orders to release captives.³⁷⁹ In fact, Obreskov suggested that the best method for rescuing captives was to make deals with local Muslims to steal Russians from their owners.³⁸⁰

On January 12, 1746 Pini and Obreskov finally received news regarding Nepliuiev's appointment as resident.³⁸¹ Right away, they began their direct correspondence with Andrian Nepliuiev, who was on his way to Constantinople.³⁸² They also informed Penkler, the *reis efendi*,

³⁷⁹ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 174-175.

³⁸⁰ Even this method, however, was not without risk, as seen from the following episode. A Turk brought two Russian captives to the Russian mission from Aksar and reported that there were more than 200 Russians there. The Turk promised to bring more in return for a reward. However, the janissary who guarded the Russian mission, Kara Mustafa, lured one of the captives outside and almost handed him over to the former owner, but the employees of the embassy did not allow it. Obreskov fired Kara Mustafa but the incident escalated and was brought to the attention of the *Çavuş Başı*, the *reis efendi*, and even the grand vizier. They pointed out that a Turk who had recently fled Russian captivity reported that there were more than 5000 captive Muslims in Russia and that the Russian government did not try to return them. Penkler assisted the Russian mission in protesting the Porte's arrest of the returned captives and the Porte eventually returned the two Russians. However, it promised not to do so again until Russia released some Muslim captives. 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 97-101. In March 1746 Obreskov reported that the grand vizier's *çuhadar* Ali who had returned from his mission to Russia a month earlier praised the treatment he was given by the Russian government. However, he reported that many captives in Russia were said to have become Christian but they were really Muslim. For the time being, however, the Porte did not present any note about it to the Russian mission. 90.280.1746, L. 54ob.

³⁸¹ 90.280.1746, LL. 50ob.-51.

³⁸² Andrian/Adrian Nepliuiev was educated in Holland, where his father, fearing an impending outbreak of hostilities between St. Petersburg and Constantinople, sent him from the Ottoman Empire in 1722. In 1740 Andrian Nepliuiev became a secretary at the CFA and served as extraordinary envoy Aleksandr Rumiantsev's secretary during the latter's embassy to the Ottoman Empire in 1741-1742. In 1743 Nepliuiev took part in the Abo peace congress, which ended the Russo-Swedish war of 1741-1743. After that Nepliuiev returned to the CFA where he became the right hand of vice-chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov. Some historians have argued that because of this allegiance to

and the grand vizier about Andrian Nepliuev's appointment as resident. The latter two expressed great pleasure since they knew of his “praiseworthy qualities.” Some problems did, however, arise in matters of the tayin and the meeting of the new resident by Vezir Ağa. Although difficult to ascertain completely, most likely the opposition was a result of the Swedish resident Carlson's intrigues, and not without French prodding. Instead of a Vezir Ağa, the grand vizier's *kahya* advised the grand vizier to send a less distinguished official—a *divan çavuş*. In addition, to Obreskov's dismay, the Porte's *ferman* to the Bender Pasha did not include the official title of the Russian Empress, instead saying only that a resident was coming from the Muscovite tsaritsa. Pini's numerous approaches, as well as Penkler's and his dragoman Mumors' help, resulted only in the inclusion of the official imperial title, but not the correction of the amount of the tayin. Obreskov also suspected that the *reis efendi* perhaps wanted to eliminate earlier precedents of high tayin, offering the Russian resident only 15 levki as opposed to 50 levki that had been dispensed daily to his father, Ivan Nepliuev, and the Austrian resident Thalmann during their trips from and to Constantinople, respectively, in 1735 and 1728. Obreskov advised Nepliuev to keep to the original demand of 50 levki.³⁸³

Obreskov notified Nepliuev that the Porte disbursed a daily tayin to the Russian resident while in Constantinople. Veshniakov used to get 5 levki per day, paid at the *Defterdar*'s chancellery every three or four months to Guglielmo Dandri. But contrary to information available to Nepliuev, Obreskov had never heard about another portion of the tayin—3 levki per

Vorontsov, Bestuzhev-Riumin sent Nepliuev to a distant post in Constantinople in 1745. Vorontsov was abroad at the time and could not prevent this appointment from happening. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 63.

³⁸³ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 275-275ob., 311; 90.280.1746. Doneseniia /otpuski s prilozheniiami/ perevodchika Piniia I poruchika Obreskova rossiiskomu rezidentu v Konstantinopole A. Nepliuevu po voprosam vneshnei politiki Turtsii i ob usloviiakh mira Turtsii s Persiei. Imeiutsia dokumenty na italianskom i turetskom iazykakh. 13 January—31 March 1746, LL. 15ob., 25-28, 30ob., 33, 39-39ob., 53ob.

day paid in lieu of rent. At Veshniakov's death, tayin had not been paid for two preceding months. Obreskov and Pini unsuccessfully tried to claim it and even appealed to the dragoman of the Porte and *reis efendi* to do a friendly favor to the Russian court by continuing to provide monthly tayin in order to support Veshniakov's family members. The *reis efendi* seemed to agree to everything, but the *defterdar* most likely wanted to keep the money in his pocket and made various excuses in order to drag out the matter.³⁸⁴

Obreskov also updated Nepliuev on the situation at the mission. First in order was a transgression at the mission involving the resident's widow, Lavra Veshniakova. She had attempted to sell state furs for her own profit. Obreskov reported about this incident in a secret note, for the widow had asked Obreskov not to divulge anything.³⁸⁵ The manner in which the theft was brought to light reveals Obreskov's investigative skills coupled with a due measure of circumspection, patience, and ability to calculate several steps ahead. Resident Veshniakov had requested furs from the mission's treasury that was evidently guarded by Obreskov. Veshniakov never returned them and they disappeared from sight. After Veshniakov's death, upon thorough search, Obreskov realized that they were gone somewhere rather than tucked away in some corner of the mission's summer or winter residencies. In about a month Veshniakov's widow's maids revealed to Obreskov in confidentiality that their mistress had two furs in her possession. Obreskov decided first to consult with Pini and together they chose not to confront Veshniakova directly or even voice the claim through a second person because they wanted to protect their

³⁸⁴ 90.280.1746, LL. 74, 95-95ob. As a result, Obreskov announced to Madame Veshniakova that she would receive a regular pension of 60 rubles a month but she had to leave the mission's residence and move to her mother's house or some other place she could rent. The widow said that her mother's house was full. As a result, the Russian mission was helping her find another place, but she was expected to move out on April 1, in time for the new resident's arrival. 90.280.1746, LL. 54ob., 148.

³⁸⁵ 90.280.1746, L. 16ob.

informants, the maids, whom Veshniakova could punish, all the while easily avoiding repercussions by claiming that she did not have the furs. Obreskov and Pini decided to wait out if Veshniakova would try to sell them and catch her in the act.

Indeed, in November 1745, when Veshniakova moved from Tarabya to Pera, she asked Buidi to sell the furs, which offer Buidi accepted in violation of his obligations because he knew well that the furs belonged to the Russian government. However, at the end of the year Buidi returned the furs to Veshniakova through her maid at midnight, in great secrecy, saying that he could not sell them for a high enough price and recommended that Veshniakova find someone else for this task. Obreskov suspected that Buidi either had quarreled with the widow or had come to his senses and become concerned that he would suffer the consequences of breaching his duties. Veshniakova found another agent, one Susein, a Frenchman whom Veshniakov had accepted into Russian protection,³⁸⁶ for the job, noting that she had other furs to sell afterwards as well. Obreskov learned about it through the usual channel and decided to act. He called Susein and berated him for his actions, threatening to report him to the Russian government. To avoid this, Obreskov instructed Susein to go back to Veshniakova and ask for the remaining furs, saying that he had found a merchant who wanted to see all the goods. But at an agreed-upon time, right when Obreskov would be at Veshniakova's, Susein had to return everything, explaining that the merchant did not like the furs. Susein followed Obreskov's orders and when Obreskov saw the furs in Veshniakova's presence, he inquired if they belonged to the state for they looked similar to what he had seen in the mission's treasury. Veshniakova replied that her

³⁸⁶ Nepliev specifically inquired if the Russian mission had taken any foreigner under its protection. Obreskov explained that Veshniakov had publicly announced that he would not accept anyone into Russian protection except for Russia's own subjects. Frenchman Susein was taken into protection in 1745 only temporarily—until the arrival of the English ambassador. 90.280.1746, LL. 74-74ob.

husband gave her the furs as a gift. Obreskov did not object but prohibited selling anything according to an order from St. Petersburg. Veshniakova apologized, saying that she would never have tried to sell them if not for Buidi who advised her that she was in full right to sell them as they belonged to her. Obreskov said that Buidi would be punished for this but the furs would be placed in the treasury. If the CFA approved, said Obreskov, he would return them to her.³⁸⁷ Even in this minor episode, Obreskov exhibited diplomatic tact and vigilance.

The closer Nepliev approached Constantinople, the more secret his correspondence with Obreskov became. The latter used a special code to inform Nepliev about latest developments in the Ottoman capital. One of the chief reasons for the confidentiality was the fact that they uncovered the disloyalty of the janissary who carried their letters. Selivri Ahmed turned out to be spying on Russian correspondence.³⁸⁸ In addition, he tried to obstruct a secret dispatch of circumcised Russian captives back home. In his official letter to Nepliev Obreskov prefaced one ciphered paragraph with an unciphered announcement that Obreskov had fired the janissary who accompanied the most recent dispatch of Russian captives to Russia. The coded part of the passage, however, contained a detailed suggestion by Obreskov to get rid of the said janissary completely. He explained that he considered it dangerous to fire the janissary while the latter was in Constantinople. Ahmed was quite cunning and could cause many problems due to his nosiness. He could reveal the mission's plans to dispatch circumcised Russian captives back to Russia, as he had already done in January when he revealed the whereabouts of a captive to his

³⁸⁷ 90.280.1746, between LL. 15-16.

³⁸⁸ Indeed, correspondence of the Russian mission was exposed to such risk. Namely, its mail messengers collected various intelligence along the route, for example what common people talked about, whether provisions and troops were being collected and sent to Asia, whether there were any Russian captives around, whether there were plague outbreaks in the region. But then all of this information was passed back to the Russian representative in Constantinople through the janissary who accompanied the messenger to the border and then returned back. 90.259.1745-1746, L. 166.

former owner. He could also create other problems for the mission in Constantinople. Therefore, Obreskov recommended using a convincing pretext for sending Ahmed to the Russian border, either as company to a Russian courier proceeding to Vasilkov or as guard to the Russian captives sailing home by sea to Cherkask. There it would best to send him into the most forgotten corner of Russia from where he would never be able to escape. Then it could be announced in Constantinople that Ahmed had died. Obreskov submitted this suggestion to Nepliev and asked for approval. He found Ahmed so dangerous that he sent him together with his correspondence to Nepliev in order to keep him away from the Russian mission's residence in Constantinople, where at the time Obreskov kept in utmost secrecy one Russian captive who had been forcefully circumcised and who fled his owner, a *levend*.³⁸⁹ If Nepliev found measures suggested by Obreskov unwarranted, Obreskov asked to send Ahmed back to Constantinople and order what to do with him.³⁹⁰ One of the circumcised captives was successfully sent to Russia on March 22, but there remained three others whom Obreskov was afraid to send all at once.³⁹¹

Amid these troubles ended Obreskov's eight-month term as de facto *chargé d'affaires*. When Nepliev entered Ottoman territory, arriving in Bendery on February 9/20, Obreskov and Pini wrote to Lanchinskii in Vienna a self-deprecating letter: "The expected arrival of His High Born/*vysokorodie* takes away the need to burden Your High Excellency/*vysokoprevoskhoditelstvo* with our unsophisticated and rough style due to our lack of ability in writing. From the depths of our hearts we thank you for the innumerable generousities in forgiving our mistakes that stemmed from our little knowledge of the current rather complicated

³⁸⁹ The term denotes irregular militia hired for the duration of campaigns.

³⁹⁰ 90.280.1746, LL. 98ob., 113-114.

³⁹¹ 90.280.1746, L. 148ob.

and disorderly affairs of this court.”³⁹² Admittedly, Obreskov managed the affairs of the mission quite well, with unavoidable assistance of Pini. Obreskov did, however, commit a negligent mistake when in March 1746 he forgot to include the newly-acquired copy of the Austrian-Prussian peace treaty in the mail package that he sent to Nepliev during the latter’s approach to the capital. Nepliev later learned about it by mail from the Russian resident in Vienna, Lanchinskii.³⁹³

Following this experience of being responsible for the functioning of the entire mission, Obreskov became an indispensable employee under Nepliev.³⁹⁴ The latter admitted to Empress Elizabeth that Obreskov was his right hand and there was no one more capable than he in certain critical tasks, such as management of the mission’s personnel and taking care of and sending back home Russian prisoners of war. In April 1747 Nepliev even sacrificed his personnel-management needs when he appointed Obreskov for a more important task: accompanying back to Russia a pretender, a certain Fedor Ivanov.³⁹⁵ Despite Obreskov’s careful efforts to placate Ivanov’s vigilance in order to deliver him to Russia, Ivanov probably guessed that his fate in Russia would amount to cruel execution and carried out a successful escape.³⁹⁶ Despite the dramatic failure of Obreskov’s mission, Nepliev protected him and, for fear of angry crowds in Constantinople, almost immediately sent him to Kiev. Nevertheless, despite the potential danger

³⁹² 90.280.1746, LL. 49-49ob.

³⁹³ 90.280.1746, L. 85ob.

³⁹⁴ Although it should be mentioned that in 1746 the CFA did not respond to Nepliev’s request to give a 40-ruble raise to lieutenant Obreskov. 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 6.

³⁹⁵ Ivanov claimed to be the son of Peter the Great’s half-brother smuggled decades ago out of Russia—through Caucasus into Asia Minor—by a priest hired by his mother. The incident is described in Soloviev, Book XI, and Vol. 22, p. 495. Fedor Ivanov’s outlandish life story did not sound convincing, if only because he dated his birth to more than twenty years after Tsar Ivan V’s death.

³⁹⁶ At a stop near Aydos, in Bulgaria, he screamed for help when he saw some Turks. They ran to his help and Fedor complained that he was a Greek doctor from Aleppo and the Russians were taking him away by force. After Obreskov’s failed attempt to shoot him in the head at a distance of two footsteps, Fedor accepted the Turkish offer to accept Islam on the spot, after which he knew he would be invincible.

of bringing him back, Nepliev stressed in his report to the empress that he needed Obreskov to return. The case of the pretender from Aleppo luckily did not reach the ears of the unfriendly grand vizier and Obreskov was back after two months. Likewise, the mishap did not prevent the Military College, upon the CFA's recommendation, to promote Obreskov to the rank of captain (Rank 9) in late 1748, and to that of second major (colonel, Rank 8) in 1750.³⁹⁷ In 1750, Obreskov was back in Russia, where he became a captain of the St. Petersburg infantry regiment.³⁹⁸ However, the death of resident Andrian Nepliev forced him to return to the Bosphorus.

The temporary role of *chargé d'affaires* in the early 1750s would turn into Obreskov's long residency, during which Obreskov's would exhibit not only his energy and personal professionalism, but also a good grasp of the needs of the mission, gained through his earlier experience. The next three sections—on the mission's finances, secret intelligence network, and staff—will reveal how Obreskov's efforts continued those of his predecessors, but also highlight his personal input into the re-establishment of the Russian mission in Constantinople on a more solid footing.

³⁹⁷ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 371-372, 376. There is conflicting information about Obreskov's whereabouts in 1747-1748. British ambassador in the Ottoman Empire James Porter reported to his government that Obreskov had to leave Constantinople in April until the incident was forgotten. Basil C. Gounaris, "The Alexei Obreskov Case: the Levantine Backstage of British Mediation in the Russo-Turkish War (1768-74)." *The International History Review*, Vol. 38, no. 4 (2016), pp. 675-693, here p. 677. However, Gounaris writes that Obreskov returned only in 1751, which is incorrect. Stegnii writes that in 1747 Obreskov rode away straight to St. Petersburg. He found help in the capital and returned back to Constantinople the following year. Moreover, Stegnii writes that after the 1747-1748 stay in Russia, Obreskov would not see his homeland for another twenty years. Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 16. As usual, Stegnii does not provide any sources so one must prefer Kessel'brenner's account instead. Kessel'brenner refers to archival documents as sources of information on Obreskov's whereabouts in 1747 and his presence in Russia in 1751.

³⁹⁸ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 62.

Embassy Finances

Russian residents in Constantinople had very tight budgets to work with. The Russian government further subjected spending at the mission to periodic reviews, especially when Russia was engaged militarily in Europe, as in 1747 and 1758. These financial evaluations had the purpose of optimizing spending by finding ways to cut expenses. The penury of Russian residents in Constantinople, as well as their subordinates, was pretty constant. It was only under Catherine II, who wanted the Porte to remain indifferent to her ambitious projects in Poland, that the mission extricated itself from the cycle of borrowing and indebtedness. Indeed, the financial picture helps us better understand how the Russian residency functioned and what areas of its activity received greater emphasis. The bread-and-butter details also shed light on the everyday life of people who served in the mission and their interactions with various facets of Constantinople.

Debts and Penury under Veshniakov

Veshniakov's residency was particularly problematic from the financial point of view. After his death in 1745 the mission was left almost without a penny. Pini and Obreskov asked for a loan of 5,000 levki from Penkler who was able to give only 3,000 at first. Some employees had not received their salary for a year and a half to two years before Veshniakov's death. In order to avoid being ridiculed and mocked by others, Pini and Obreskov decided to pay for everyone's meals—without splurging—out of the mission's budget, with Penkler's agreement.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 6-6ob., 41-41ob., 45, 65.

Pini and Obreskov asked if they could use the small *tayin* given by the Porte to cover the above-mentioned food expenses. In response, the Russian government replenished the mission's treasury with 15,500 levki in late November, enabling Pini and Obreskov to repay Penkler⁴⁰⁰ and perhaps pay back the salaries. By early 1746, however, the mission's treasury contained only 358 levki. Pini and Obreskov had to borrow another 1,000 levki from Penkler in order to celebrate the birthday of the Russian Empress.⁴⁰¹ In January they also borrowed 1,000 levki and then another 500 from Magrini, and reported that they would have to borrow money again.⁴⁰²

Much of the extreme penury of the embassy and its staff was attributed, sometimes openly and at other times indirectly, to Veshniakov's mismanagement of funds. For example, after Veshniakov's passing the chief dragoman of the mission, Aleksandr Pini, wrote a petition to the CFA asking to be remunerated for his services for years 1743-1745 and for his expenses on the mission's needs from the moment of his employment in 1739. He reported that he had approached resident Veshniakov numerous times about this matter but did not receive anything. Another translator, Nikolai Buidi, also decided to remind the Russian government about his missing salary: he had not been paid for fourteen months in 1739 and 1740 in addition to travel expenses for the trip from St. Petersburg. Buidi wrote that he was promised that resident Veshniakov would pay him for the past years, but the resident only "appeased him with pleasant promises." Veshniakov could not even pay, in one instance in 1742, 70 rubles for a noble and necessary cause of saving Russian prisoners of war and awarding those who helped bring them back. Namely, he did not have the money to cover the cost of transporting thirty-two Russian captives from Izmir, where a Greek priest hosted them for three months using his own funds. The

⁴⁰⁰ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 175.

⁴⁰¹ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 255, 266ob.

⁴⁰² 90.280.1746, L. 40ob.

only reason the Greek cleric asked for money was to pay back the captain of the ship that transported the captives to Constantinople. After Veshniakov's death, the bishop made another appeal about this case to Obreskov.⁴⁰³

It remains an open question whether the problems stemmed from poor funding by the government, or whether Veshniakov should be solely blamed as someone who spent state funds unwisely. One thing is undeniable: the state of the mission's treasury was indeed deplorable. Its records consisted mostly of debts: among others, to merchant Hübsch, a Constantinople banker who was also a court counselor to the Polish King, and agents of the Moscow merchant Gavrila Zhuravlev. More tangible arrears involved secret informants in the Ottoman capital, whose underpayment could potentially be detrimental to Russian interests. Minor debts, mostly for food and household provisions, completed the picture. In all, it is clear that Veshniakov had to borrow goods and money from various people for many essential needs, as well as less essential but perhaps still necessary items such as good clothes, wine, deserts, sugar and coffee, olive oil, and honey. More pertinent to his responsibilities, Veshniakov had borrowed a geographic map and various books from the Dutch agent at the Porte. In the meantime, his house servants and staff of the embassy went unpaid for many years. Lack of money forced the resident to borrow for both government and personal purposes. The treasury also was almost deplete of assets that had to be used as gifts in order to facilitate the work of every ambassador in Constantinople: furs were few and none of the more valuable nature; remaining silverware, table linens, and napkins had been left by Rumiantsev and were not presentable any more; only a smattering of less prized gifts such as rhubarb and green and black teas remained; plus some mirrors. Although this situation might not have been entirely Veshniakov's fault, the resident could be blamed for not being very

⁴⁰³ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 14-14ob., 17-17ob., 46-46ob.

responsible about documenting all the finances as Pini and Obreskov feared that there could have been even more debts they did not yet know about.⁴⁰⁴

Indeed, Pini and Obreskov wrote that Veshniakov had not sent budget or spending reports to St. Petersburg for years 1743 and 1744. They made an attempt to reconstruct the financial picture for these years. In 1743 money spent on government needs equaled 29,653 levki and Veshniakov “took away” (*zabral*) another 22,861 levki. In 1744 government expenses amounted to 15,374 levki and Veshniakov took 11,562 levki. In 1745, up to Veshniakov’s death, embassy expenses on government needs comprised 9,416 levki and Veshniakov took 8,851 levki. Pini and Obreskov reported that overall in 1745 the mission’s treasury contained very little money, all left over from the previous year. With some additional funds generated by selling rhubarb, though very small, available funds for 1745 amounted to 18,351 levki. After subtracting expenses incurred up to Veshniakov’s death, however, the money left equaled a paltry sum of 82 levki.⁴⁰⁵

Veshniakov’s extensive debts most likely stemmed from his family obligations. His personal life underwent a substantial change since his second arrival in the Ottoman capital. Here he found his second half and planned to marry her. Lavra Tarsia was a progeny of two dragoman clans. One of them, on the side of her father, Hristofor Tarsia, had been firmly rooted in Constantinople since the early seventeenth century. Hailing from Venetian Capodistria, the Tarsias had served as first dragomans of the Venetian embassy in Constantinople for generations and Hristofor was the latest in the line. One of Lavra’s ancestors, Tomazeo Tarsia, had been a famous dragoman at the Porte in the 1640s.⁴⁰⁶ On her mother’s side, Lavra was a granddaughter

⁴⁰⁴ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 17, 18-20, 32-33.

⁴⁰⁵ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 39, 45.

⁴⁰⁶ The Tarsias were one of the most prominent and well-entrenched dragoman clans of Constantinople in the early modern period. Together with the Borisi and Brutti dragoman clans, they had originated in Venetian colonial

of Willem Theyls, the translator of the Dutch embassy who had served the Russian government for a decade or two, starting with his assistance in rescuing Russian ambassadors from Yedikule in 1712 and 1713.⁴⁰⁷ Aleksandr Rumiantsev had not granted his permission for Veshniakov's nuptial plans because he was concerned about the burden that marriage and family life would put on the Russian resident: Veshniakov was a poor noble and his salary was likewise not sufficient for the purpose of supporting a family. Rumiantsev considered Lavra Tarsia a poor bride as well. Rumiantsev's concerns proved to be well founded in the long-term. However, Veshniakov appealed for support in St. Petersburg and Empress Elizabeth gave her personal approval in November 1742. The wedding took place in early 1743,⁴⁰⁸ which could explain the exorbitant spending that year.

Upon resident Veshniakov's death, his choice of wife again proved to be unwise for the well being of the mission. Indeed, the suite of Madame Tarsia-Veshniakov, including herself, consisted of seventeen people: two small children,⁴⁰⁹ one female relative, one female servant (*kamardiner*), a wet nurse, one old lady, one woman, one young lady, one male servant/valet (*kamardiner*), two lackeys, one *çuhadar* who made coffee, one stableman, a saka (*vodonosets*)⁴¹⁰, and two cleaning ladies (*portomoiki*). All of them lived off of the mission's

territories but by the seventeenth century they had become heavily centered on Constantinople, with multiple kinship connections across the Venetian and Ottoman empires. Female members of these clans married into other Constantinople dragoman clans, as well as into Venetian, Habsburg, Danish, Polish, and Moldavian aristocracies and merchant elites. E. Natalie Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 51, no. 4 (2009), pp. 771–800, here pp. 780-781. As we can see, with the entrance of the Russians on the Constantinople diplomatic scene in the eighteenth century, the Tarsias also gave their brides to the Russians.

⁴⁰⁷ See Chapters 2 and 3.

⁴⁰⁸ Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 74; 90.259.1745-1746, L. 67.

⁴⁰⁹ In early 1746 Veshniakova was listed as having three children, 90.280.1746, L. 70.

⁴¹⁰ Mikhneva, *Zemiata izvyn "vremeto,"* p. 263.

budget.⁴¹¹ The burden of maintaining Veshniakov's widow and her retinue was only one reason for the strained finances. In addition, Madame Veshniakov tried to appropriate valuable goods that belonged to the state treasury—such as the furs that her late husband had taken from Obreskov in 1744—in order to sell them and procure some funds. Obreskov precluded this transaction and moved all the property from the Tarabya residence in order to prevent further theft.⁴¹²

Available financial records, or lack thereof, indicate that Veshniakov failed at managing the finances of the embassy in a transparent and effective manner. At the time Russian missions abroad were relatively new and small and their heads were expected to combine several responsibilities. They single-handedly had to fulfill their diplomatic obligations at foreign courts; participate in the social life of their respective capitals; manage staff of their missions, their provisioning and training; manage embassy finances—prudently, of course; and arrange the housing, transportation, and postal logistics. Resident Veshniakov proved to be a poor fit on two counts. He harbored unrealistic hopes of Russia completely defeating the Ottoman Empire, which led him to call for war repeatedly in the 1730s when he was shadowing Nepliev. Such calls were incommensurate with his function and scope of action as a secondary diplomat. In addition, once he became the sole representative after the war in 1739 and especially after Rumiantsev's departure in 1742, he proved unable to manage embassy funds effectively, tightening his budget if necessary. Ironically, he was the most vociferous augurer of Ottoman demise due to, among other things, the Porte's severe financial insolvency.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 183.

⁴¹² 90.280.1746, L. 16ob.

⁴¹³ In his preface to Mikhneva's book, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, Mikhail Meier, a prominent Soviet and Russian Ottomanist, notes that subsequent developments showed Ottoman ability to adapt and survive, mocking

At the end of 1745 Pini and Obreskov promised all the individuals who were owed money by Veshniakov that they would be repaid when the new resident arrived. In the meantime, Obreskov noted that all the claimed debts appeared to be real and not opportunistic, for there existed written agreements (*rospiski*) and detailed accounts for each of them. In order to prevent the recurrence of financial disorder, unaccountability, and want, from late 1745 Obreskov committed to sending financial reports on a monthly basis.⁴¹⁴

Obreskov's Attempts to Feed the Mission on a Budget in 1745-1746

As promised, Obreskov kept detailed accounts of the mission's finances since the start of 1746. From them we learn that at the end of 1745 the mission's treasury contained 1,070 levki. After taking loans from Magrini, Obreskov had 2,570 levki for expenses. In the month of January the latter amounted to 1,622 levki. Out of these, 386 levki, or about a quarter of the budget, went to cover food and household products. The majority of spending—1,254 levki,—consisted of other necessary as well as extraordinary expenses, such as rent, salaries; maintenance of, travel money for, and clothing for returning captives; other travel expenses connected with Nepliev's expected arrival; pay to the six janissaries who guarded the mission; candles for the church; and a gift of tea that the grand vizier had asked for.⁴¹⁵

Considering the amount of expenses in January, Obreskov as a precaution borrowed another 500 levki from Magrini in early February to supplement 947 levki that remained in the treasury after January. However, he ended up spending only 499 levki, which resulted in 948

those—and here he undoubtedly implied Veshniakov—who predicted Ottoman demise on the basis of dire financial reports, p. 12.

⁴¹⁴ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 173, 176ob.

⁴¹⁵ 90.280.1746, LL. 145-146ob.

levki remaining for March. Expenses were divided into regular—248 levki—and extraordinary—252 levki—ones. In addition to regular food expenses—106 levki, Obreskov had to buy coffee (12 levki), sugar (5 levki), wine (37 levki), white lard candles (32 levki), two torches (11 levki), soap (7 levki), firewood (30 levki), coal (23 levki), as well as barley/*iachmen* (2 levki) and hay (2 levki) for the horses. An outside cook and porters were also hired. Extraordinary expenses included mostly travel expenses for messengers, their horses, and interpreters, as well as money paid to returning Russian captives.⁴¹⁶

Despite extreme prudence in spending, in February 1746 Nepliev forwarded to Obreskov the CFA's criticism of the fact that Obreskov and Pini had not yet repaid 1,000 levki borrowed from Penkler in November and, in addition, borrowed 1,000 levki from the Dutch dragoman Magrini.⁴¹⁷ While one might be struck by the harshness of this criticism, it should be pointed out that the CFA evidently did not yet know of another 1,000 levki that Obreskov borrowed from Magrini, although he did pay back the debt to Penkler. Nepliev continued in his letter to argue that the Russian government sent sufficient sums to the mission and recommended to be very circumspect in spending. Obreskov “took a daring” to defend himself by explaining all the various needs that had to be covered from the latest government check. Nevertheless, he promised Nepliev in early March 1746 not to pay or lend money, or pay any debts, until Nepliev arrived in Constantinople.⁴¹⁸

He further explained that daily meals were so minimal that it was not possible to cut back on the food budget: more than forty people were fed on 4 levki a day. He believed that Nepliev would understand that this daily budget translated into very basic sustenance because he was

⁴¹⁶ 90.280.1746, LL. 59-59ob.

⁴¹⁷ 90.280.1746, L. 68.

⁴¹⁸ 90.280.1746, LL. 68-68ob.

familiar with how excessively expensive food was in the Ottoman capital. He summed up the existing debt to be at 2,000 levki, all of them owed to Magrini. For further information, Obreskov sent Nepliuev the mission's budget reports for 1743, 1744, and 1745 up to July 30, 1745, the day of Veshniakov's death. He noted that these reports had not been altered in any way and had only his, Obreskov's signature, because Pini was not involved in financial questions.⁴¹⁹

Nepliuev likely received this information on spending critically, because Obreskov wrote to him again later in March 1746 defending his inability to cut back on domestic expenses. He wrote that he did not give anything to the staff except necessary food and candles. There was potentially a way to economize, namely to deprive those with a salary higher than 100 rubles of the right to eat at public expense. But Obreskov did not think it would be very effective because starting on March 20/31 public table was available only to Madame Veshniakova with her servants and five students. Obreskov likewise had to defend his hiring an outsider as a temporary cook. He explained that the only reason that compelled him to make this decision was the fact that after the dispatch of all captives—who evidently had been used as cheap kitchen labor—back to Russia there was no one left except those captives who were circumcised. Obreskov was wary of hiring those men because at any time there could be problems if their former owners found out their location through the janissaries or someone else. He assured Nepliuev of his staunch efforts to save every levok/ruble, “staying away from the least of cravings and indulgences/*slastoliubie*,” and announced that he was ready to humbly submit to the resident’s wrath if the latter found out upon arrival that expenses could have been cut further.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ 90.280.1746, LL. 68ob.-69.

⁴²⁰ 90.280.1746, LL. 87-89.

Mission's Finances during Obreskov's Residency

After his appointment as *chargé d'affaires* in 1751, Obreskov continued to send detailed financial reports, although only three times a year. These records are well preserved for the years of his residency, allowing us to look in depth at the evolution of the mission's financial situation over time.

As usual, in its initial instruction the CFA ordered Obreskov to be frugal in spending and to try to decrease the mission's expenses. The CFA recommended slightly increasing salaries for the poorest students in order to abolish the practice of providing meals for them.⁴²¹ Obreskov arrived in Constantinople on July 5, 1751 but soon sent a report to St. Petersburg of all expenses that Pini and Shokurov incurred from the death of resident Nepliev on November 9, 1750 up to his own arrival. Overall, between Nepliev's death and Obreskov's arrival, the Russian mission in Constantinople expended 29,700 levki out of available 30,286.⁴²²

On September 9, 1751 Obreskov reported from the village of Belgrade near Constantinople that he could not pay salaries to the embassy employees due to lack of money. Obreskov explained that he spent more money on his trip from Bendery to the Ottoman capital than Nepliev had before him. Obreskov justified higher expenses by his use of different type of horses for which he, unlike Nepliev, had to pay, as well as by his lack of furs, cuts of cloth, and tea, which forced him to pay for everything in cash. Obreskov explained that despite his lack of official character of a diplomatic minister, the Ottomans accorded him honors against his will throughout his journey, which forced him to reciprocate with more generous gifts than he

⁴²¹ 89.1.1751-1768.10. 19 Aprelia 1751. General'nye tretnye shchety vsekh prikhodov i raskhodov denezhnykh, i pushnykh tovarov, derzhannykh byvshim v Konstantinopole poverennym v delakh, a potom Rezidentom i Poslannikom Alekseem Obreskovym so dnia priezda ego v Konstantinopol' (5 iulia) po 1 sentiabria 1768 goda, v kontse koego Ottomanskaia Porta narushiv mir s Rossieiu, zakliuchila ego rezidenta v Edikul', LL. 305-305ob.

⁴²² 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 307-319ob.

wished. He pointed out that Nepliuev had had another advantage as Ottoman common subjects supplied him with provisions. By contrast, Obreskov paid for everyone's meals out of his own pocket, not daring to use government money for this. As a result, he experienced an acute dearth of funds, given an additional difficulty of locating the Greek agent Paraskevii Paskaliev⁴²³ who usually cashed letters of exchange for the Russians. In his usual constructive manner, Obreskov suggested to keep a reserve of funds in Nezhin or in Kiev. The government could allocate funds from the budgets of Kursk and/or Kiev, from where they could be sent to Nezhin, the main Greek trading colony. This would allow for a quicker delivery of letters of exchange provided by the Greek merchants of Nezhin, as opposed to those of Moscow. The following year Obreskov wrote that if his suggestion was not practical, alternatively the Russian government could ask Greek merchants traveling between Moscow and Nezhin to pay money for letters of exchange in Nezhin, which would be returned to them in Moscow.⁴²⁴

Obreskov's first expenses as *chargé d'affaires* included transporting Nepliuev's entourage to the village of Domuzder(e) and paying for the medical care and burial expenses of a mission's servant, Saka, who died from plague on July 19. Another outbreak of plague in the mission on July 24 sent everyone running to the nearby village of Belgrade. Obreskov continued to communicate with dragomans Pini and Buidi who remained in Pera by sending couriers there every three days. The six janissaries who guarded the Russian mission remained in Pera, where they lived in a separate rented apartment. In total, Obreskov ended up spending 2,917 levki out

⁴²³ This name sounds Bulgarian. Mikhneva has pointed out that many Orthodox merchants trading between the Ottoman and Russian empires were lumped into the category of "Greeks," while their actual names reveal more varied origins: Mikhneva, *Rossiiia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 117-120. Obreskov wrote that Paskaliev traveled regularly between Moscow, Nezhin, and Constantinople, 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 359.

⁴²⁴ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 320-321ob., 361ob.

of 3,919 available in the period from his arrival to Bendery until the end of August. However, he already incurred 1,001 levki in expenses by September 9, leaving him with only 22 levki.⁴²⁵

Obreskov had to resort to selling furs from the mission's treasury. However, he sold sable fur for less money than it was originally worth because the condition of the fur had deteriorated as a result of prolonged storage. The main category of expenses was payment of pensions and awards to secret informants. From September until the end of the year Obreskov paid 3,561 levki for this purpose. In line with his earlier concern about the building of the residence and its self-sufficiency in water, he spent 155 levki on repairing fallen walls and damaged water canals, which resulted from a strong storm and rain in summer, and on fixing the roof tiles. He had to pay 45 levki to the Turkish neighbor in Pera because the water canals of the embassy passed through his property: 5 levki was a contribution to the neighbor's annual *vakif* payment and 40 levki were paid for the inconvenience that the embassy caused him when the canals became backed up.⁴²⁶

Obreskov meticulously noted down every item of his spending and tallied numbers every four months. His constant struggle was to have enough money, after expenses, to last until the next check arrived from St. Petersburg.⁴²⁷ Thus, in the last third of 1751 his total expenses proved to be very high: only 4,664 levki remained after he spent 19,136 levki out of 23,801 available.⁴²⁸ Gifts usually required unexpected expenditures. On March 13, 1752, for example, Obreskov had to gift a tobacco box to the brother of the *reis efendi* who was also the head of the latter's chancellery and asked for the gift himself. When there were no extraordinary expenses it

⁴²⁵ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 322-326ob.

⁴²⁶ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 327-332ob.

⁴²⁷ Money arrived from Russia in the form of letters of exchange (*vekselia*), which Obreskov cashed from English, Dutch, and Greek merchants in Constantinople.

⁴²⁸ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 326, 329ob., 331-338, 345ob., 401.

was more normal for Obreskov to spend about 5,000 levki out of 8,000 available, as was the case in the first third of 1752. However, the next third of the year could require almost all of the available funds, as happened in the second third of 1752, when Obreskov was left with only 600 levki after spending 7,600 out of total 8,200. He wrote on September 2, 1752 to St. Petersburg, alerting his government that he did not have sufficient funds even for the month of September. He asked the Russian government to send more money because he could not count on local Greeks who lacked any spare funds at the time. A letter of exchange transferred through the Hague in early December helped Obreskov balance his budget in the last third of the year, when he was left with 3,000 levki after spending 9,100 out of 12,100 available.⁴²⁹

In 1753 Obreskov's triannual budgets were less constricting, although irregular: he had at his disposal 20,800 levki in the first third, 19,300—in the second third, but only 11,150—in the last third of the year. He consistently spent about 15,500 in the first two thirds but in the last third he tried his best to tighten his spending, managing to save 226 levki from the total amount of inflow. Various small extraordinary expenses could eventually add up to a considerable amount. Thus, Obreskov had to pay 136 levki for the release of a Russian captive from a distant town with the assistance of a local Greek bishop and a Georgian merchant. He also had to spend 86 levki to repair the imperial coat of arms on the façade of the mission's building: it had never been tended to since it had been first installed during Rumiantsev's embassy in 1741. Likewise, he had to manage the plumbing system at the embassy: due to constant complaints of the Turkish neighbor, through whose land passed the water canals of the Russian mission, Obreskov rerouted the canals in a different direction, which cost him 200 levki.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 342, 345ob., 354ob., 358-358ob., 377-377ob., 392ob.

⁴³⁰ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 412, 418-418ob., 424, 434.

In 1754 Obreskov spent between 11,600 to 17,600 levki every four months. His budgets, however, were unusually high: 48,800 levki in the January third, 32,500 in the May third, and 23,100 in the September third of the year, which is explained by the beginning of the conflict over the fortress of St. Elizabeth. If one is to analyze the financial activity of the Russian embassy in Constantinople in the first four years of Obreskov's leadership, from 1751 to 1754, it appears that it was possible to spend as little as 9,000-12,000 levki every third of a year, and only unusual extraordinary expenses drove the expenditures to 15,000-18,000 levki per third.⁴³¹ In lean years, Obreskov could spend as little as 3,000-5,000 levki in a third of a year, but most likely this was achieved by withholding salaries and other necessary payments due the following third. When Obreskov had a smaller amount of money to work with, he tried to cut corners and economize, knowing that he had to leave something for the next third because the upcoming money transfer from St. Petersburg could be late or, again, insufficient. Thus, in the January third of 1755 he spent only 8,400 because he did not have a large sum to begin with: by the end of the third, inflow amounted to 13,400 levki, leaving the resident with 5,000 levki of surplus available for the next third,⁴³² which would have been bare minimum if there were any problems with transferring money from Russia.

In 1755 the breakdown of expenses was similar to the previous years. Pensions to secret informants comprised by far the largest and most regular portion of the budget. For example, in fall 1755 Obreskov paid at least 280 levki to some of his secret agents every month, in addition to paying about 2,140 levki to the other set of agents a couple of times a year. The second spending category by virtue of its regularity consisted of monthly payments to freed captives,

⁴³¹ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 459, 471, 482ob.

⁴³² 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 491ob.

five-ten of whom were usually living at the embassy at any one time, awaiting a ship that would transport them via Ochakov to the Zaporozhian Sech in Russia—a trip that took about five days of sailing. The cost of maintaining houses in Pera and Büyükdere was also notable. The land where the mission’s main residence in Pera stood belonged to a local *vakıf* that collected a rather modest payment of 60 levki a year. But the country house was rented from a private owner for 500 levki a year. There was also a stone warehouse/store where the dragomans of the Russian embassy held secret meetings with their informants and the cost of its lease was 180 levki a year. Expenses for the hospital and medications added up to 140 levki and 76 levki per year, correspondingly. Doctor Balistreli was paid 200 levki a year.⁴³³

The last third of 1756 was characterized by higher than usual expenses connected partly with Dolgorukov’s farewell audiences but also with the increasing need to give gifts and secret pensions in light of the new diplomatic challenges. Obreskov spent 19,113 out of 47,312 available, leaving 28,200 untouched. The almost unprecedented influx of funding is explained, of course, by the outbreak of what would become the Seven Years’ War. Obreskov, for example, felt the need to make more lavish occasional presents, such as sweets—“*konfekty*”—that were sent to the grand vizier and the head of the customs, İsak Ağa, on the occasion of the dinners they arranged for the sultan. While it was customary to pay about 40-60 levki for a gift of sweets, on September 19/30, 1756 Obreskov spent 300 levki for the sweets given to the grand vizier and the customs director. He also gifted various types of cloth worth 40 levki to the newly appointed *Beylikçi* Efendi, a chancellery official second only to the *reis efendi*. Another occasion was found to please the sultan: a sugar dessert—“*sakharnye zaedki*”—worth 30 levki was presented to him

⁴³³ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 2-8, 15, 37ob., 313ob.

when he visited a public Turkish school⁴³⁴—in Pera on October 31/November 11, although it was done to follow the example of other foreign ministers. On the other hand, the sexton of the embassy church was paid only 12 levki for four months.⁴³⁵

Out of the Seven Years' War and into the Polish Cauldron

The remaining years of the Seven Years' War put severe pressure on the budget of the Russian mission in Constantinople. On September 2/13, 1760 Obreskov confessed to his government that the mission's treasury was almost completely empty. Namely, Obreskov spent 5,207 levki out of 5,581 available for the May third, leaving him with only 373 levki for the rest of the year. He complained that the Greeks were not willing to lend money because they had difficulty collecting debts from their debtors. Therefore, Obreskov requested his government to send 6,000 rubles through Holland. On November 3, 1760 Obreskov repeated his plea. The Greeks, he wrote, were afraid to make the same mistake as they had done with the late resident Veshniakov. They were reluctant to lend to the Russian resident because they claimed that the letter of exchange that Obreskov had given to Paraskev Paskaliev on January 2/13 was not properly paid by the CFA. Paskaliev's agents in Russia reported that the money was paid very late and mostly in copper coins, which made for a loss in value. Obreskov had to resort to borrowing 5,000 levki at an interest rate of eight percent on September 15/26, which he needed to return. The Russian government approved Obreskov's request for 6,000 rubles but probably criticized him for borrowing money because in January 1761 Obreskov had to defend his actions: he had to borrow money, he claimed, in order not to be in a position of owing money to people

⁴³⁴ It reminded Obreskov of the Russian Cadet Corps.

⁴³⁵ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 36-43ob.; 90.1.375.1756, LL. 339ob.-340. In 1765 ponomar of the mission's church still received the same salary—36 levki a year. 89.8.394.1766, L. 7.

who supplied everyday necessities to the mission. Otherwise, “due to the wiliness/*kovarstvo* of the locals soon one can find oneself in the same regretful circumstances as had befallen resident Veshniakov.”⁴³⁶

Obreskov continued to experience chronic shortages of funds. In May 1761 he decided to ask St. Petersburg not for money but at least for tea, which could help him cover various expenses in Constantinople. But in 1762, with the change on the Russian imperial throne, Obreskov decided to take a more definite step. On May 20/31 he informed the government that once again he had to borrow money and hoped to replenish the mission’s treasury with the arrival of Peter III’s extraordinary envoy Dashkov. However, probably taking into account that Russia had disengaged from the European war, Obreskov also added that it would be best if the Russian government committed to transferring 10,000 levki for every new third of every future fiscal year and thereby freed Obreskov from having to borrow money constantly, “as this is not appropriate for the honor of Your Highest Imperial Court, and especially in this place.” Indeed, Obreskov had to borrow 3,000 and 5,000 levki from different people at an interest rate of eight percent. Obreskov had no other choice because he could not survive the May third with just 1,369 levki remaining from the January third.⁴³⁷

It is clear that Catherine II committed herself to supplying her Constantinople mission with necessary means to survive and help her carry out her policies in the Ottoman Empire, which she wanted to prevent from interfering in her far-reaching designs for Poland. Catherine’s generous funding did not begin right away, but by 1763 Obreskov’s average budgets for every third of the year were much higher than they had been during Empress Elizabeth’s reign, even

⁴³⁶ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 139-140, 147, 150-150ob.; 89.8.39.1760, LL. 12-12ob.

⁴³⁷ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 159, 182ob., 183.

before the Seven Years' War put a strain on the Russian government's finances. Occasional shortages did take place again but overall Catherine infused significant amounts into her Constantinople mission, especially during years when her actions in Poland carried the highest risk of irritating the Porte.

Thus, in his first financial report to Catherine II for the May (summer) third of 1762, Obreskov noted that he owed 10,000 levki at an eight-percent interest, which he had borrowed from an Armenian merchant of the Julfa Company, Artemii Nazarovich Lazarev. Overall, in the May third Obreskov spent a modest 12,999 levki out of 21,010 available, which left him with 8,111 levki.⁴³⁸ In the September third of 1762 Obreskov continued to economize, spending 12,572 levki out of 18,181 available. At the start of 1763 Obreskov had only 5,608 levki,⁴³⁹ which was not enough to cover even half of necessary expenses during the following four months.

However, with Catherine on the throne, increasingly financial support began to reach Obreskov before he could find himself in dire straits. Already in late November 1762 Catherine ordered the CFA to supply Obreskov as soon as possible with money and necessary gifts of all sorts.⁴⁴⁰ However, whatever was sent was clearly not enough because Obreskov continued to pinch pennies in the January third of 1763. Namely, he spent what was probably the bare minimum of 9,802 levki out of 15,954 available. At the beginning of May 1763 Obreskov had only 5,152 levki, as a result of which he borrowed 10,000 levki at an eight-percent interest rate.⁴⁴¹ On April 9/20 Catherine ordered Vorontsov to transfer 5,000 rubles to Obreskov, which

⁴³⁸ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 16, 17ob., 22ob.

⁴³⁹ 90.1.454.1763, L. 14ob.

⁴⁴⁰ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 198.

⁴⁴¹ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 60ob., 93

translated into 8,250 levki.⁴⁴² Not surprisingly, on June 27 Obreskov informed St. Petersburg that the money from the last transfer was about to end and that he needed additional funds.

The two remaining thirds of 1763 were characterized by relatively high spending. Obreskov prefaced his budgetary report for the May third with a warning that the amount of total expenditures could surprise the empress; he maintained that he spent money as usual but extraordinary costs inflated the total amount of expenses. Namely, Obreskov spent 27,914 levki out of 28,819 available in the summer third, which left him with mere 904 levki remaining for the September third. But out of the total amount spent, almost 21,000 were spent on extraordinary needs. For example, on May 22 Obreskov had to pay the *kahya* and the *reis efendi*, as well as the intermediaries who facilitated their communication with Obreskov, for their help in the successful resolution of the case of the fortress of St. Dimitrii. This cost Obreskov a considerable sum of 6,200 levki.⁴⁴³ On June 10, Obreskov spent 10,100 levki to repay a loan with interest.⁴⁴⁴ He spent another 1,800 levki on the extraordinary envoy Dolgorukov's audiences with the grand vizier and the sultan. Finally, he spent 2,650 levki on the purchase, maintenance, and dispatch of four horses that he bought for the imperial court.⁴⁴⁵ Consequently, Obreskov spent an absolute minimum of 7,000 levki in that third on running the mission proper, although part of the gifts should be added to this amount, as this was a regular category of expenses. However, if one takes into account that a lot of Obreskov's expenses were connected

⁴⁴² *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 436.

⁴⁴³ Obreskov paid 1,500 gold *findiks* (*funduklii*) to the *kahya* and the *reis efendi* and 100 *findiks* to the intermediaries. 90.1.454.1763, L. 92ob. If the latter payment was also in gold coins, then the gold rate at the time was 3.875 levki for one gold/*chervonnyi findik*.

⁴⁴⁴ It is unclear why Obreskov hurried to repay the loan that he took out only one and a half months earlier, and as a result of which his budget became very circumscribed. But it is possible that one of his creditors urgently demanded repayment because of Obreskov's grave illness.

⁴⁴⁵ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 64, 89-95ob.

with envoy Dolgorukii's presence in Constantinople,⁴⁴⁶ one cannot but conclude that Obreskov severely restricted his spending in summer 1763 and perhaps withheld payment of salaries.

In the last third of 1763, which was marked by the death of King Augustus III of Poland—Obreskov spent 21,477 levki out of 23,654 available, leaving him only with 2,177 levki at the end of the year. Pensions to secret informants constituted 1,943 levki. The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s secretary received 880 levki. The secretary of the *kahya* got 220 levki. A Greek informant was paid 91 levki. A scribe from the *reis efendi*'s chancellery and translator Baruk each received 44 levki. The Armenian, whose store was used for secret meetings, was paid 22 levki. These were payments for the last third of 1763, but Obreskov also paid annual salaries to the old scribe of the dragoman of the Porte—366 levki—and to the young scribe of the dragoman of the Porte—275 levki.⁴⁴⁷ High expenses must also have been connected with arrangements for the envoy Aleksandr Dolgorukov's departure from Constantinople. It is noteworthy that in late November Obreskov had to pay salaries to all the four nobles of Dolgorukov's embassy because Dolgorukov requested in writing that Obreskov use government funds in order to pay salary arrears to his embassy nobles, who had not been paid since February 1763.⁴⁴⁸

Expenses for 1763 were so high that Obreskov continued to pay for them in 1764. In fact, for this purpose he had to take 15,000 levki out of the sum intended only for extraordinary expenses. This extraordinary sum of 78,333 levki—an unprecedented amount in the whole history of Russia's diplomatic representation at the Porte—had been sent by St. Petersburg on

⁴⁴⁶ Apart from the audiences, Obreskov had to provide money for Dolgorukii on other occasions. For example, during Dolgorukii's entry into Constantinople on June 2 Obreskov spent 370 levki on tips to *çavuşs*, *çegodars*, carriers, and horses. Obreskov tipped higher officials with furs. During audiences with the grand vizier and the sultan, Dolgorukii likewise presented gifts of fur to attending Ottoman officials. 90.1.454.1763, LL. 96-100ob.

⁴⁴⁷ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 30-33ob.

⁴⁴⁸ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 120-121ob.

October 18/29, 1763, obviously to cover any expenses connected with the Polish interregnum. By May 1764 Obreskov spent 24,118 levki out of this sum.⁴⁴⁹ Still, Obreskov struggled to keep the mission running on the allocated “public” funds. Thus, his “public” budget for the January third of 1764 looked rather modest: 14,344 levki of inflow and 11,559 levki of outflow.⁴⁵⁰ In the last third of 1764 Obreskov spent 8,329 levki out of 8,521 levki available, leaving him with only 192 levki at the start of 1765. Moreover, he survived the last third of 1764 only because he borrowed money on September 1764 in the amount of 8,000 levki, at an interest rate of nine percent. Given that he was out of funds again at the start of the new year, Obreskov admitted that he would have to borrow again. However, he warned St. Petersburg that it looked as if it would be very difficult to find a lender, “especially one who would keep silence, for any disclosure of such loans here greatly hurts not only the minister’s credit but also the dignity of the Highest Court.”⁴⁵¹

Catherine II could not ignore this situation at a time when the Porte began to express opposition to the election of Stanislaw August Poniatowski in Poland. Consequently, between January and April 1765 she transferred letters of exchange for the amount of 68,000 levki—another exceptional sum. Most of this money, however, went to cover Obreskov’s extensive debts with interest: 10,300, 5,200, 10,500, and another 8,360 levki. As a result, he was left with 33,640 levki after paying 34,360 levki to his lenders. This enormous influx of money, along with subsequent regular and sufficient transfers from St. Petersburg, allowed the mission to exist without substantial debts until the outbreak of the war in 1768. On occasion, when Polish affairs

⁴⁴⁹ After borrowing 15,000 levki from this sum for the public budget, Obreskov remained with only 39,118 levki left for extraordinary purposes. 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 99, 103. Obreskov had to use this sum only for extraordinary purposes and reported on it in a scripted note.

⁴⁵⁰ 89.8.1.356.1764, L. 87.

⁴⁵¹ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 190-191, 218-223ob.; 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 87, 89.

required making substantial bribes at the Porte, Catherine sent additional, very large sums of money.⁴⁵² This financial commitment was a clear evidence of her resolve to bribe herself out of a potential conflict with the Ottoman Empire over the issue of Poland.

Judging by the financial report from the last third of 1765, approximately one-fifth of the budget went to cover all sorts of intelligence gathering needs.⁴⁵³ Another third was spent on salaries to the mission's employees.⁴⁵⁴ Therefore, interaction with the Porte⁴⁵⁵ and maintenance of the mission proper—rent,⁴⁵⁶ food and household provisions, salaries to the teachers and payment for study materials,⁴⁵⁷ payment for the boat and rowers, salaries to the mission's janissary guards, transportation,⁴⁵⁸ and postal correspondence—constituted about half of the mission's budget in the last third of 1765. This amount also included occasional payments for rescue of Russian captives and other extraordinary expenses.⁴⁵⁹ All in all, taking into account

⁴⁵² 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 226-231.

⁴⁵³ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 218/248; 89.8.394.1766, LL. 4, 5ob., 6-6ob., 7ob., 8ob., 9a-9aob.

⁴⁵⁴ 89.8.394.1766, LL. 7ob.-8.

⁴⁵⁵ Every time Obreskov visited the Porte, he was compelled to give small money gifts to its junior employees. For example, on July 11/22, 1768, when Obreskov had a conference with the *reis efendi*, he gifted 55 levki to the *reis efendi*'s various employees. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 290. The same tips had to be given when representatives or messengers of the Porte visited the Russian mission, both on ordinary days and on holiday occasions.

⁴⁵⁶ On September 1, 1765 Obreskov paid rent in the amount of 936 levki for the mission's houses in Pera and Büyükdere for two thirds of the year. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 240ob. Annual rent for the countryside house in 1765 was 600 levki. 90.1.542.1766-1767, L. 6ob. Moreover, we know that Levashov rented a separate house for 700 levki, as of November 13, 1767. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 278. Therefore, the cost of maintaining the mission's residence, in which lived Obreskov with his family, was about 100 levki. Indeed, this was probably the 60 levki that Obreskov paid to the *vakıf* that owned the land. Therefore, the total rent for both residences was about 1,400 levki a year. In addition, on May 10, 1768, Obreskov also paid 520 levki for a countryside house for Levashov. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 289ob.

⁴⁵⁷ In 1765 teacher of Italian employed by the mission received 75 levki per third. On May 15, 1768, for example, Obreskov bought various Turkish books—worth 58 levki in total—for the students of the mission. 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 240ob., 289ob. In 1745 the Armenian teacher of Italian used to be paid 120 levki a year, while twenty years later he received almost twice as much—225 levki a year.

⁴⁵⁸ On July 16, 1768, for example, Obreskov dispatched a courier to Warsaw and gave him 213 levki for travel expenses. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 290.

⁴⁵⁹ On July 8, 1762, for example, Obreskov paid 22 levki to a Greek who brought one Russian captive with his wife and three children. 90.1.420.1762, L. 19ob. On November 14, 1765 Obreskov paid 318 levki to disinfect Levashov's residence and to relocate his servants as well as the mission's chaplain and two students because of an outbreak of plague there. In the following third, on January 2, 1766, Obreskov paid 66 levki for the rescue of a captive, Zaporozhian Cossack Kondrat Maksimov. On April 11, 1767, Obreskov paid 40 levki to a Greek who brought a

that Obreskov was not constricted by funds that year, the mission cost the Russian government about 15,000-18,000 levki every third of the year, or 45,000-54,000 levki a year. This translated into 27,273-32,727 rubles a year. It should be noted that in the first half of the 1750s the mission in Constantinople cost on average 9,000-12,000 levki per third, or 15,000-18,000 levki in case of extraordinary expenses. If one is to account for the new student Sergei Lashkarev's salary and separate housing, possible inflation, as well as the growth of the mission's staff and salary raises, Obreskov's spending was fairly consistent with his expenses more than a decade earlier. To his credit, he was able to diminish or at least successfully control the cost of regular secret intelligence. Thus, in 1765 he spent about 4,700 levki compared to 4,800 levki in 1747 and 5,200 levki in 1758, although one should bear in mind that in 1765 he did not use the services of the old scribe of the dragoman of the Porte, who usually received about 370 levki.

In the following three years before the outbreak of the war, the mission's treasury was consistently full and every third Obreskov even had sufficient funds to cover the following fiscal period. Thus, in the last third of 1766 he received letters of exchange from St. Petersburg for the amount of 54,900 levki, making his total inflow for that third an impressive 68,114 levki. Obreskov spent only the usual amount—16,186 levki. Out of 51,928 levki available at the start of 1767 Obreskov spent 17,385 levki, leaving him with 34,542 levki remaining for the second third of 1767. However, over the course of that summer St. Petersburg transferred another 50,453 levki, making Obreskov's budget for the second third an unprecedented 84,995 levki. Of these, Obreskov spent only 15,023 levki, leaving him with 69,972 levki.⁴⁶⁰

Russian captive, Vasilii Mikhailov, from Asia. On January 5, 1766 Obreskov had to pay a large sum of 450 levki for the three-day illumination [of the mission's residence] occasioned by the birth of an Ottoman princess. 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 242, 246ob., 265.

⁴⁶⁰ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 256-260, 266ob., 269-272ob.

Theoretically, this amount was sufficient to cover the following four fiscal thirds, but the real purpose of the transfer was to offset any necessary expenses for diverting the Porte's attention from Russian actions in Poland. Moreover, an unexpected series of events significantly decreased the budget. Thus, in the last third of 1767 Obreskov spent 46,605 levki, however out of this amount 13,200 levki were spent on placating the Porte in regard to Poland.⁴⁶¹ On the other hand, Obreskov had to return two letters of exchange for the amount of 16,122 levki because they were found to be defective. In addition, Obreskov found himself spending money because of the fire that consumed the mission on September 16/27, 1767. Taking into account these unexpected expenses, argued Obreskov, “[my] expenditure is the same as usual.”

As a result of the fire, Obreskov moved to another apartment provided by the Porte. And on December 24, 1767/January 4, 1768, evidently for the purpose of celebrating Christmas, he spent 580 levki on the construction of a chapel in his new apartment and on the organization of necessary religious services.⁴⁶² According to the numbers provided by Obreskov, regular expenses for that fiscal third plus damages from fire amounted to 17,283 levki. This sum was indeed close to his usual spending. However, the cost of the fire was higher than the amount of cash spent in its wake, because the fur treasury burned down together with the building of the mission's residence, leaving Obreskov with only two sable furs and three *sorok* of ermine furs. Therefore, he had to ask his government to send him additional sable and ermine furs, as well as rhubarb and tea.⁴⁶³ The fire was particularly distressing because on its very eve, on August

⁴⁶¹ As per Obreskov's reports to Panin from November 5/16 and December 10/21, 1767.

⁴⁶² 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 275ob.-280ob.

⁴⁶³ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 275-275ob.

15/26, 1767, Obreskov had spent 1,900 levki for the general repair of the residence, which had suffered from a strong earthquake back in 1766.⁴⁶⁴

In 1768 Obreskov's correspondence with St. Petersburg was obstructed by the disturbances on the Polish-Ottoman border as a result of the Bar Confederation. Therefore, his fiscal report for the first third of the year—sent on June 22/July 3, 1768—did not arrive in St. Petersburg until August 18/29, 1768, having taken about twice as long to reach its destination. The report showed that Obreskov had 37,206 levki of inflow over the course of the first third, which means that St. Petersburg had transferred additional funds—almost 14,00 levki—during that period. Obreskov's expenses on the maintenance of the mission were on the lower end—about 15,000 levki. At the same time, he disbursed a special bribe in the amount of 11,625 levki,⁴⁶⁵ making his total expenditure for the first third 26,665 levki. This amount also included other minor bribes in the amounts of 1,657, 1,100, 850, and 550 levki. Thus, he was left with 10,540 levki remaining for the May third of 1768.⁴⁶⁶

In summer 1768 the Russian government transferred substantial funds to Obreskov again, making his total inflow for the May third 45,413 levki. Out of this amount, Obreskov spent 25,931 levki for what proved to be his last complete fiscal third in the capacity of the mission's resident. However, it turned out that Obreskov was not fully forthright in late 1767 when he noted that his expenses were the same as usual. On September 4/15, 1768 he confessed that he still had not paid all the salaries in full for 1766 and had not paid salaries at all for 1767. Therefore, he used the money set aside for extraordinary expenses to pay salary arrears. Accordingly, Obreskov requested that his government replenish the extraordinary sum, because

⁴⁶⁴ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 271.

⁴⁶⁵ As per his report from April 30/May 11, 1768.

⁴⁶⁶ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 282ob., 285ob., 286ob.

it had also diminished as a result of having to pay for the construction of a tall stone wall around the mission's residence. Moreover, Obreskov expected that he would need to use the extraordinary funds again in order to avert—"as far as possible"—the Porte's hostility. On July 20/31 he already had to spend 2,500 rubles, or 4, 125 levki, on bribes to several individuals and their intermediaries in "an attempt to remedy, at least somewhat, the newly-disturbed state of affairs,"⁴⁶⁷ which referred to the famous Balta incident.⁴⁶⁸ It is obvious from Obreskov's tone and from his sudden decision to finally pay salaries for 1766 and 1767 that he did not expect anything favorable to come out of the brewing crisis. Moreover, it is noteworthy that despite having sufficient funds for more secret bribes, Obreskov could not find who to give them to. In addition, it was prudent of him to leave 19,481 levki in the budget for the following third in order to be able to cover the minimum of expenses and bribes in case there were difficulties in receiving the next money transfer from St. Petersburg.

⁴⁶⁷ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 288-290ob.

⁴⁶⁸ See Chapter 16.

Chapter 5. The Embassy Intelligence Network

After the Treaty of Belgrade and the exchange of ambassadors in 1741-1742, the Russian embassy in Constantinople returned to its usual pace. Veshniakov was back and did not experience much difficulty in restoring the old network of connections, fueled by lavish payments and gifts. In October 1742 he reported to St. Petersburg information of highest confidentiality regarding secret friends in the Ottoman capital.⁴⁶⁹ Relations with some of them dated back a decade or two. The Russian extraordinary ambassador Aleksandr Rumiantsev, who came to present the Russian ratification of the Treaty of Belgrade, was able to reevaluate these individuals and garner more informants willing to work either for pay or out of sheer goodwill towards Russia.

Over subsequent decades, Russian residents were able to assess the value of individual informers and make improvements—by raising their secret pensions or by firing those who did not justify the expenses. Obreskov continued to build the secret intelligence network on the basis of the existing framework that had been laid down after the war, although he as well as Nepliev had to undo some damage done by Veshniakov. As a person closely familiar with the situation, Obreskov made especially notable progress by finally recruiting the dragoman of the Porte in return for regular salary and by finding reliable agents who could report on Persian affairs. Secret informants in the chancellery of the *reis efendi* became one of the chief sources of intelligence for the Russians. Significantly, in contrast with the pre-war period and especially the times when Russia did not have a representative in Constantinople, local Greeks and Orthodox patriarchs were not particularly helpful.

⁴⁶⁹ 89.1.33.1742-1759. Vypiska o tainykh rossiiskomu dvoru v Konstantinopole priiateliakh, i o naznachenii im denezhnykh pensii, L. 1.

Ottoman Officials

In the early days after the war, the first in the list of agents who received regular pay from the Russian government was Miralem, who was described as having been recruited during his stay in Moscow in 1728. Therefore, Miralem was the Ottoman envoy who had traveled to present the Russian sovereign with letters from Ahmed III and Damad İbrahim Paşa. According to Veshniakov, Miralem was promised an annual pension of 500 “Christian” gold coins, a considerable amount, but more importantly, he consistently received them from 1728 until 1735 or 1736 when the war broke out. Miralem even made spying for the Russians a family business: his son-in-law Hasan Ağa—who also reportedly was in Russia with Miralem—received 500 levki a year in 1735 and 1736, before Veshniakov had to leave the country. In 1742 Rumiantsev, before departing for Russia, established that the pension to Miralem and his son-in-law should continue. He allocated 500 Turkish small gold coins for Miralem, but the latter appealed this decision with Veshniakov’s support and his pension reverted to 500 large “Christian” gold coins. Veshniakov also suggested increasing Hasan Ağa’s pension to 200 “Christian” gold coins because he had advanced into the top layer of society and could be more useful. Hasan Ağa had become a *zaim* with a salary of 1,000 levki, and if the current grand vizier managed to stay longer at his post, Hasan Ağa could likely receive even more for he had some family connection to the grand vizier. Veshniakov also reported that Miralem had hinted from afar that he desired to continue receiving gifts from Russia. He used to get gifts worth 300-400 rubles, and it would

be advisable to resume sending gifts of fur from the Russian chancellor or vice-chancellor at least up to 200 rubles in value.⁴⁷⁰

Andrian Nepliuev cast a more critical eye on the state of the Russian intelligence network in the Ottoman capital. Empress Elizabeth, keen on reining in spending, in August 1747, tasked Nepliuev with cancelling payments to his informants wherever it was possible to do. In carrying out this task, Nepliuev implicitly revealed that he believed that Veshniakov had not been an efficient manager of precious government funds. Thus, Nepliuev claimed that Miralem and Hasan Ağa had not received annual pension until the early 1740s. Instead, both of them used to get occasional awards and gifts of fur in return for their help; but when Rumiantsev was unpleasantly surprised by his discovery of the total sum that such gifts amounted to every year, he found it more economical to dispense a set figure of 500 and 200 small gold coins. However, upon his arrival he found out that Veshniakov had paid them in large gold coins.⁴⁷¹

We know that Veshniakov had explained this increase in his 1742 report with some additional reasons but it seems that Nepliuev might have had a different source of information regarding the pre-war payment arrangement. Also, it appears that Nepliuev simply did not approve of Veshniakov's choices. Indeed, it is known that Veshniakov had accumulated 7,500 rubles in debt to Ottoman subjects for purchases as necessary as food provisions. These were kindly forgiven by the Empress Elizabeth in 1751, since she decided that confiscating the few villages in his family's possession would leave his small children to starve. She also nullified the 1,700-ruble debt of Veshniakov to the Military Commissariat. However, she made a strong point to the CFA that Veshniakov's case should not serve as an example to others and "such debts

⁴⁷⁰ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 1-2ob., 7-7ob.

⁴⁷¹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 7-8ob.

would henceforth not be forgiven.”⁴⁷² In any case, initially Nepliev could not change the existing arrangement because Miralem and Hasan Ağa continued to report valuable news since they, although not in key positions themselves, were familiar with many officials. Cutting the connection meant also to endanger intermediaries, by whom Nepliev probably meant Magrini. Finally, Nepliev concluded that he could benefit from these particular informants without much detriment to Russian interests by following the rule of not sharing anything with them but only collecting their own reports. So far, he noted, they were the first ones to report key news—such as the articles of the Ottoman treaty with Persia and the fall of the previous *reis efendi*—correctly and in a timely manner.⁴⁷³

All in all, Nepliev concluded that the number of informants was very small and all of them were highly necessary. It was, according to him, impossible to dispense with them; otherwise, the Russian embassy would be deprived of information. It would likewise make little sense to try to procure news only through the dragomans of the Russian mission, because these translators had to behave with greatest caution at the Porte and anything they could find out came from employees of Ottoman ministers. Thus, it made more sense to have a few, effective

⁴⁷² *AKV*, Vol. VII, p. 268 contains a record of CFA’s report to the empress on November 17, 1747 about Veshniakov’s debts. The Empress had refused, as before, to pay his debts to private Ottoman subjects. But after Nepliev’s appeal and explanation that some of the money was spent on government needs, the empress agreed to it. Nepliev actually asked her permission to try to persuade the loaners to lower the amount of debt since it was private and there was no one who could pay it back. Mikhneva writes that the government paid his debts in 1747 and 1751, first the 2,000 rubles and then the private debts. Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 147, En. 11. The private debts worth 7,500 were indeed ordered to be repaid by Obreskov on account of state funds in 1751: 90.1.338.1751, LL. 14-14ob. But as late as September 1752 he wrote that the creditors were constantly gathering in a noisy crowd in front of the embassy. Therefore, he asked the Russian government to transfer money through Holland, even though he knew that the exchange rate was unfavorable. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 361. It is clear that not all the debts were returned right away. In September 1754—almost a decade after Veshniakov’s death—the Russian government ordered Obreskov to repay banker Hübsch and doctor Kastelii, but secretly, so that other creditors would not find out about it. This was done because Hübsch, a Constantinople financier tied to the Saxon court, had escalated his case by writing about the debt to the Saxon envoy to Russia Funk, who in turn presented the matter to the Russian chancellor. 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 448-449, 452-452ob.

⁴⁷³ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 8ob.-9ob.

informants among the Ottoman ministers themselves than many less sound ones. As for the pensions, their large size was determined by length of service. In response to the empress's suggestion to replace old agents with new, better ones and thereby also save money, Nepliev opined that perhaps it would be possible to substitute Miralem and Hasan Ağa, but he could not vouch that the new ones would not be even worse. Otherwise, he assured the CFA that a proper degree of carefulness was observed in interactions with the informants since the trade in intelligence was such a common feature of the Constantinople diplomatic scene. People who were sent to speak to them were warned very strictly to watch what they said during meetings.⁴⁷⁴

However, in July 1748 Nepliev reported that he had dispensed with Miralem, in whose place he found two informants whose services cost one third of Miralem's former pension. A certain Vezir Ağa and a Greek received about 400 rubles in total, as opposed to Miralem's salary of 1,100 rubles. Thereby, Nepliev managed to substantially cut the amount of money that he spent on secret informants. Indeed, in 1747 his total expenditure on intelligence was 2,820 rubles, with the majority going to Miralem and his son-in-law. After firing Miralem, therefore, Nepliev saved 700 rubles, which constituted one fourth of the intelligence budget.⁴⁷⁵

We also know that as of 1758 Hasan Ağa, the well-known son-in-law of Miralem continued to receive 200 gold coins, or 450 rubles, from the Russians. However, in early 1763 Hasan Ağa stopped receiving a pension because he left for a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he died.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 15ob.-16.

⁴⁷⁵ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 16ob.

⁴⁷⁶ 89.8.356.1764, L. 29-29ob.; 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 32ob. By 1763 Hasan Ağa's pension of 200 *zincirlis* translated into 330 rubles. It must be that between 1758 and 1763 his pension was converted from large gold coins to small *zincirlis*.

Local Dragomans

If one wonders how Ottoman officials maintained communication with Veshniakov, one should go no further than the next informant on Veshniakov's list. Andrei Magrini was likely a member of the Pera dragoman clan of Marinis, one of whom, most likely named Antonio,⁴⁷⁷ has already been mentioned as the translator of the Russian embassy in the 1720s-1730s. In another document from 1742 Andrei Magrini was identified as a Dubrovnik merchant who sent his goods to Russia.⁴⁷⁸ In 1746, Magrini was known as the dragoman of the Dutch embassy.⁴⁷⁹ Veshniakov explained that it was not possible to establish an independent connection with Hasan-Ağa as Magrini had always been in closest confidence with him. Magrini used to be paid 500 levki annually, but with the start of the war in 1735 his salary doubled and he continued to receive payments during the war through Dutch banks and other channels.⁴⁸⁰

This chain of communication gave rise to some tensions, especially during times of instability and change. Thus, at the very end of 1745, when the Ottoman society and government was undergoing one of its sharp political and economic crises resulting from its war with Persia, Miralem informed Obreskov that the Russians had to be extremely careful with all the local dragomans, especially Magrini. Miralem stated that previously the Porte was not strong enough and did not try as hard to find out about the secrets and affairs of other states, but finding itself in a deep crisis the Porte now became suspicious and touchy about every little thing. Ottoman ministers became embroiled in petty activity and began to inquire about the affairs of foreign

⁴⁷⁷ Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p.78.

⁴⁷⁸ Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 116.

⁴⁷⁹ 90.280.1746, L. 68.

⁴⁸⁰ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 2ob.-3.

ministers. As a result, local dragomans, especially Magrini, who was well known at the Porte, might have been expected to share some secrets with the Ottoman government either out of fear or out of desire to ingratiate themselves, or for some other reason. Buidi, to whom Miralem related this information, assured him that Magrini was trustworthy and was ordered to keep Miralem's name and cooperation with the Russians in extreme confidentiality.⁴⁸¹

On the other hand, Nepliev had a very favorable opinion of Andrei Magrini, whom he described as having served as Russian agent since the time of Peter I, when Aleksei Dashkov recruited him during his embassy to Constantinople in 1719-1720. Magrini continued to serve during the 1736-1739 war when he passed reports through Vienna and through special couriers who were dispatched to him from Kiev, such as a Greek named Fotii Femelii and Iuria Ivanov. Rumiantsev saw the value of this informant and increased his pension from 600, which had usually also been augmented by many rich gifts from Nepliev Sr. and the Imperial resident Thalmann, to 1,000 levki, an equivalent of 600 rubles. Nepliev advocated the continuation of Magrini's pension because the latter was not only well informed about the affairs of other foreign ministers at the Porte, but also was a close friend of the Grand Dragoman and therefore knew about any discussions with other diplomats.⁴⁸²

However, over the years, Miralem's warning proved to be not without ground. Namely, in early 1756 Obreskov wrote about Magrini disparagingly, pointing to the false intelligence he had provided to the Dutch ambassador as the latter's former dragoman. Obreskov explained that

⁴⁸¹ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 250-251ob.

⁴⁸² 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 14-15.

Magrini kept the habit of reporting nonsense despite having left politics. Magrini, claimed Obreskov, became the tool of French secret diplomacy.⁴⁸³

Another example of a local dragoman who offered his services to the Russians was the so-called “Zham Zhoglu,” or Pierre Camcioğlu—an Armenian Ottoman subject whose family served the Swedish embassy throughout the eighteenth century. Camcioğlu appeared on the scene in the early 1750s, after a stay in Sweden. This latter fact naturally made Obreskov very suspicious of the dragoman. In Constantinople, Camcioğlu served as translator for the Swedish embassy, but he began to voluntarily share information with Obreskov. Thus, in early 1753 Obreskov reported that Camcioğlu shared some intelligence and was hoping to be paid 100 levki for it. But Obreskov did not find the information particularly noteworthy and decided to wait for more substantial intelligence.⁴⁸⁴

By approaching Obreskov in 1753, Camcioğlu was probably following in the footsteps of many in his circle, who tried to make a living and manage not to betray their masters at the same time.⁴⁸⁵ But exactly this circumstance made local dragomans an unreliable source of intelligence. Therefore, the number of such agents serving the Russian embassy was very small. In the 1750s and 1760s a minor role was played by one local dragoman, Baruk. He had provided services to

⁴⁸³ 90.1.375.1756, L. 45ob.

⁴⁸⁴ Camcioğlu supposedly spied on the Swedish envoy for Obreskov and reported on the political situation in Sweden. In particular, for example, he reported that the Swedish chancellor, Baron Gepsin, was secretly attached to the French-Prussian faction, just as were most employees of the chancellery. 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 27ob.-28.

⁴⁸⁵ Camcioğlu later bought a house for the Swedish legation in 1757 and amassed great fortune throughout the decades, commissioning his own portrait in 1787, perhaps the only portrait of a dragoman working for a foreign embassy in Constantinople. He was promoted to the position of chief dragoman and then secretary of the Swedish embassy. Aykut Gürçağlar, “The Diplomatic Trinity: Ambassadors, Dragomans, and the Porte,” <http://www.arteorientalis.com/thediplomatictrinity.pdf>, p. 21.

Obreskov since 1752 and, having liked his work, Obreskov assigned a regular pension to him in 1753, in the amount of 132 levki, or about 80 rubles.⁴⁸⁶

Dragomans of the Porte

For some time, the all-important dragomans of the Porte received only occasional awards in money and gifts, depending on services performed. In the early 1740s Rumiantsev doubted the advantages of working with the chief dragoman and cancelled the usual annual pension of 1,000 large gold coins that had been paid regularly to the dragoman's predecessor and ordered to make payments only in return for particular services. Rumiantsev reasoned that regular pay made dragomans lazy while he wanted them to work harder in expectation of reward. Veshniakov appealed this decision, arguing that some other informant's pay could possibly be cut, but the dragoman of the Porte was too important an official. The chief translator of the Ottoman government at the time, Ioannis Kallimaki,⁴⁸⁷ or Ianaki Kalimaki in Russian sources, was highly regarded and very close to the *reis efendi* because he knew much about foreign affairs, since he was the key official through whom the Ottomans made their initial inquiries about other countries.

⁴⁸⁶ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 34-34ob.

⁴⁸⁷ 90.184.1741,1763,1775, L. 12. His family was of peasant Romanian origin and hailed from Bessarabia, but eventually rose to prominence, Hellenized its last name, and married into eminent Danubian and Phanariot clans. Ioannis Kallimaki proved to be a highly valuable dragoman for the Ottomans: he occupied that post for about fifteen years, from 1741 to 1750 and again from 1752 to 1758 (Obreskov mentions one Iakuvakii Rizo as the dragoman of the Porte in 1751: 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 401). After that he was the Prince of Moldavia (1758-1761), being succeeded at that post by his son, who was the Prince of Moldavia in 1761-1764 and 1767-1769. Christine M. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (University of California Press, 2010), p. 184.

Moreover, argued Veshniakov, Kallimaki surely knew about his predecessor's Russian emolument and quietly expected to receive the same. He was once even sent by the previous dragoman, as the latter's confidant, to collect his payment from Veshniakov. The latter, therefore, expected Kallimaki to feel offended by the cancellation of his annual pension. Consequently, Veshniakov feared that even if Kallimaki would not take an anti-Russian line, he would certainly stop doing favors. This outcome would be unavoidable because the dragoman also had been waiting for a payment of 7,000 levki, promised to him by Veshniakov in 1741 as a restitution for the ravaging of his brother's property by the Russian army in Moldavia. He deserved to be paid because he let Veshniakov in on the Ottoman-Swedish alliance treaty. Lastly, Veshniakov believed that a regular pension would have an added benefit—above the dragoman's sharing of information—of making sure that he translated well during audiences. Occasional payments could only be an additional form of reward, larger or lesser, depending on circumstances and the extent of helpfulness.⁴⁸⁸

At first, the CFA heavily criticized Veshniakov for having committed himself to making regular payments to the dragoman of the Porte. Before the CFA received Veshniakov's first report on the situation with informants from October 1742, its members came out in support of Rumiantsev's suggestion to give Kallimaki gifts only when the latter would perform a certain favor. In response to Veshniakov's appeal, the CFA wrote almost a year later, in September 1743—for some reason St. Petersburg reviewed it with longer than usual delay—that it essentially deferred to his experience and agreed to pay the dragoman a pension of 1,000 gold coins. However, in August 1744 the CFA suddenly berated Veshniakov for promising to pay 7,000 levki to the dragoman. The confusion and concern in St. Petersburg was understandable.

⁴⁸⁸ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 3-4ob., 36ob.

On the one hand, the foreign ministry learned that Kallimaki was apprehensive about receiving regular pension from Russia but kept asking for 7,000 levki that he had requested in 1740 to cover the loss of his brother's property in Moldavia—a request that St. Petersburg saw as having no precedent. Veshniakov promised to honor his request supposedly according to the government's order from January 1741. But the CFA now pointed out that in April 1740 it had ordered Veshniakov to cultivate the said dragoman who at the time served as the agent of the Moldavian Prince if Veshniakov deemed him useful. The concomitant permission to reward him, however, in no way implied license to make such inordinate promises.

In addition, members of the CFA were irritated by the lack of Veshniakov's reporting on his expenses, which left the CFA in the dark as to how much the dragoman was actually paid after Rumiantsev's departure, whether in fulfillment of his demand or in addition to it. The appropriate solution, according to St. Petersburg, was to grant the dragoman 7,000 levki but to announce that this was not done because of his request but as payment for his favorable attitude and the past favor, the likes of which would be expected henceforth. Given the large amount, the CFA ordered that Veshniakov pay it in two installments, in 1744 and 1745. However, in testament to the dire budget-management skills of the resident, he reported in late 1744 that he had assured the dragoman of the upcoming payment but, having no money available, asked him to wait. The following spring, the year he died, Veshniakov was able to dispense only 2,000 levki.⁴⁸⁹

When Nepliev became resident, he analyzed the history of and the use that came out of bribing dragomans of the Porte. Pension of 1,000 large gold coins was first paid to Gregorios

⁴⁸⁹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 35-35ob.

Ghika, who then became the hospodar of Moldavia,⁴⁹⁰ then to the latter's brother and successor, Aleksandr Ghika,⁴⁹¹ until his tragic execution in 1741 after 14 years of service. Nepliev was critical of the quality of assistance of the dragomans. He personally witnessed in 1740 how Aleksandr Ghika had to be paid not for beneficial reporting but in order to prevent him from harming Russian interests. As for Ioannis Kallimaki, Nepliev claimed that, despite continuing back-and-forth arguments about whether he required a regular pension or occasional rewards, the dragoman failed to exhibit a desire to serve the Russian government either during the big embassy led by Rumiantsev, or during Veshniakov's and Nepliev's residencies. The dragoman instead insisted on the outstanding promise of paying 7,000 levki to his family in Moldavia. So the regular pension was never resumed. The dragoman was paid a lump sum for copying the convention with Sweden, at which time he exhibited a high degree of confidentiality. Nepliev concluded that the most reasonable course of action, therefore, was to continue rewarding the dragoman on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁹²

In spring 1753 Obreskov sent a special report on the Dragoman of the Porte, in which he suggested a policy opposite the one voiced by Nepliev in 1747. Unlike his predecessor, Obreskov advocated assigning a regular pension to the dragoman. Obreskov underscored the great credit enjoyed by Ioannis Kallimaki among Ottoman ministers due to his long experience and acquired knowledge. In fact, claimed Obreskov, the Porte did not take any decision concerning foreign affairs without asking for the dragoman's opinion. Obreskov noted that his

⁴⁹⁰ Grigoreos II Ghika, Imperial Dragoman from 1717 to 1727, *Voyvoda* of Moldavia (1726-1733, 1735-1739, 1739-1741, 1747-1748), *Voyvoda* of Wallachia (1733-1735, 1748-1752). Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, p. 184. He became Grand Dragoman in 1717, so his pension might have started during Dashkov's embassy or certainly under Ivan Nepliev.

⁴⁹¹ Alexander Ghika, Imperial Dragoman (1727-1740). Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, p. 184.

⁴⁹² 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 12ob.-13ob., 39ob.

predecessors, Veshniakov and Nepliuev, had also felt the value of cultivating Kallimaki's friendship and applied for the CFA's approval to pay him regular pension, but the main problem chiefly lay in the dragoman not being open to this arrangement. Thus, to Veshniakov the dragoman reportedly revealed that he served the interests of the Russian empress only because he was a fellow Orthodox Christian and only when it did not endanger his own life. When Veshniakov promised the dragoman a pension but could not say the same about the restitution payment, the dragoman sounded non-committal. He then refused to accept a pension from Nepliuev, excusing himself by his inability to help with anything.

Obreskov now reported that the chief dragoman had recently visited him to remind about his brother's loss in Moldavia and to argue that he had already deserved at least 1,000 gold coins for assisting Russia's interests a month earlier. Obreskov interrupted him and, having expressed his gratitude for the dragoman's good intentions, regretfully pointed out that the case of his brother was a very old affair and he was not able to help in any way but by procuring a pension for Kallimaki. The latter was leaning towards declining this offer, which could have put his life in danger, but finally asked for some time to think it over. In a couple of days the dragoman informed Obreskov through Pini that he was ready to accept a pension but he hoped that the Russian resident would uphold the highest confidentiality in order to ensure the dragoman's safety. He also hoped to receive 1,000 gold coins just as his predecessor. Here Obreskov took an opportunity to make the best of what the dragoman could offer. He assured that if Kallimaki showed sincere effort, the salary would be much higher. Most importantly, Obreskov asked him to concentrate his energy not so much on reporting other ministers' intrigues but on furnishing advice at the Porte that would be beneficial to Russia and aiding in any matters that were

important to St. Petersburg. Obreskov summed up his report by saying that he was confident that the funds spent on the dragoman would not cause any remorse for the Russian government but would surely render tangible results.⁴⁹³

The CFA approved Obreskov's suggestion and ordered him to pay the dragoman the 1,000-gold coin pension starting from the day when Obreskov voiced his promise, divided in monthly or tri-monthly installments. To ensure maximum effectiveness, the CFA prescribed Obreskov to pay close attention to Kallimaki's actions and carry out face-to-face meetings with him, devoid of intermediaries. The CFA also urged Obreskov to promise and seriously honor confidentiality in interactions with the chief dragoman. At the next meeting, the grand dragoman thanked Obreskov for the pension and promised to do his best. He, however, implored the resident to be very cautious and not to cause any suspicions, as well as not to make inordinate demands, which the dragoman could not fulfill without endangering himself and his family.⁴⁹⁴

In 1758 Kallimaki was appointed the Prince of Moldavia. His place, as Obreskov reported in August, was taken by the son of Alexander Ghika, the dragoman who had been executed in 1741. Obreskov had relatively high hopes for Grigoreos III Ghika, writing: "he seems to be a great chap, if only he doesn't become spoiled."⁴⁹⁵ Obreskov's expectations proved correct: Ghika became one of the most helpful secret agents for the Russians, as will be discussed in Chapter 15.

⁴⁹³ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 36-38.

⁴⁹⁴ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 38-39. Ioannis Kallimaki had four siblings and four children.

⁴⁹⁵ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 39-39ob.

Minor Ottoman Bureaucrats and Other Ottoman Agents

In his report, Veshniakov also specified a category of informants who were paid for specific services in money and gifts of some fur, tea, or other valuable items such as gold and silver watches. These included both Ottoman Muslim and Orthodox subjects, but the former predominated. Thus, in the 1740s a *çuhadar* of the *reis efendi* on several occasions was rewarded for taking out certain letters from mail sacks and providing copies of them through the Russian dragoman Pini. The young İbrahim Efendi—to be distinguished from another İbrahim Efendi, who was older—assisted Veshniakov from his position as a scribe of the dragoman of the Porte. Another helper, İakub Ağa, communicated with the Russian embassy through a Greek fur-coat maker Yurgaki. Veshniakov also expressed hope that he could build a closer connection with a certain efendi who was found by dragoman Buidi and could prove to be extremely useful, if not right away then in the long-term, because he was from among the clerical class and enjoyed the favor of the sultan's *Kezreli Efendi* and *Kızlar Ağası*.⁴⁹⁶

Perhaps the latter agent was the mullah whom Nepliev mentioned in 1747 as having cooperated with Veshniakov on an occasional basis. The mullah's clerical status, argued Nepliev, helped not only in the task of procuring critical information, but was an influential channel for spreading or countering rumors among the crowds of the capital. The only downside was that he served the Austrian internuncio as well, through the latter's translator, the all-pervasive Luka Kiriko. The mullah planned to leave for Bursa in 1748, however, so his services were put on hold.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 4ob.-5, 6.

⁴⁹⁷ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 9ob.-10.

As for the old scribe of the dragoman of the Porte, İbrahim Efendi—a renegade Hungarian, according to one historian,—Nepliev argued that, although of no great value, the scribe had to be continued to be cultivated. Nepliev explained that he paid the old İbrahim Efendi 100 large gold coins annually not for any special information but because all other foreign ministers paid him a pension for he was the key person in the Ottoman ministry who received memoranda of foreign representatives and wrote down their translation in Turkish according to the dragoman’s oral dictation. Merchants of western nations also gave him presents of cloth and silk because their line of work required İbrahim Efendi to work on their written petitions. Unfortunately, therefore, it was disadvantageous and nigh impossible for the Russian foreign ministry to cancel his pension. Despite Nepliev’s attempts to achieve a closer degree of confidence, İbrahim Efendi simply did not respond to anyone’s approaches.⁴⁹⁸

As of 1763, the tight-lipped old scribe of the Dragoman of the Porte, İbrahim Efendi, continued to receive the pension of 100 gold coins, or 225 rubles. The young scribe, also named İbrahim Efendi, got 100 *zincirlis*, or 165 rubles. The latter scribe had become a salaried informant, as opposed to someone who was rewarded only occasionally, only in 1756. His case proves his own patience, if not diffidence, and Obreskov’s extreme prudence in expending government funds. In 1751 Obreskov reported that young İbrahim Efendi was working very hard on Kabarda affairs, but only after five more years of “continuous diligence” did Obreskov commit to paying him a yearly pension.⁴⁹⁹

As mentioned above, one of the informants whom Nepliev found as replacement for Miralem was a certain Vezir Ağa, who was promised 400 levki or 240 rubles if he proved to be

⁴⁹⁸ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 12-12ob.; Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 48.

⁴⁹⁹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 32ob.-33ob.

useful.⁵⁰⁰ Similarly to Miralem, Nepliev also decided to fire some informants cultivated by Veshniakov for being of poor value.⁵⁰¹ In the early 1750s, however, on his own initiative, Obreskov decided to fire Vezir Ağa, whose uselessness he had a chance to ascertain.⁵⁰²

Nepliev also tried to maintain his connection to a scribe in the chancellery of the former *reis efendi*. In fact, according to an extract from the archives made at the CFA in 1758, originally there were two scribes from that chancellery who cooperated with the Russians. It was Pini who had first found them. Namely, upon entry into Russian service Pini had become friends in 1741 with an employee of the *reis efendi*, who shared various news, but due to his low rank had to find another comrade in the chancellery. Since then the two always had worked together, sharing with the Russians copies and sometimes the originals of all the Porte's secret diplomatic correspondence, despite considerable danger to their lives if their treason were to be discovered. At one point, they almost left Russian service, however. It happened due to arrears in payment by resident Veshniakov, who as we have seen was not good in financial matters. Not wanting to lose them, he gave them gifts of gold watches, 50 levki and 20 *zincirlis* in value, respectively, and promised to pay them their full salaries, to which he said he would add a pension of 600 levki a year. Given his constant problems with money, Veshniakov could not fulfill such a far-fetched promise and the scribes stopped cooperating. Pini lamented this situation and that the scribes suspected him of stealing money that was due to them. After Veshniakov died in 1745, therefore, Pini and Obreskov felt the need to revisit the matter and applied to the CFA for a

⁵⁰⁰ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 16ob.

⁵⁰¹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 15.

⁵⁰² 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 24ob.

resolution on whether it was worth it to placate these informants, whose assistance was indispensable.⁵⁰³

In 1758 Obreskov remembered only one scribe, the one who had been working with Nepliuev, but did not recall the circumstances surrounding the recruitment of the second scribe.⁵⁰⁴ In his turn, earlier Nepliuev claimed to have personally discovered that one scribe during Rumiantsev's embassy. During Nepliuev's residency, this "simple *pod'iachii*" of the old *reis efendi*'s secretary refused to report any information orally. Instead, he only passed copies of chancellery records. Nepliuev was confident that the scribe deserved the 1,200 levki-pension, equivalent to 700 rubles, that the resident was paying him, because his information was most reliable. Having failed to attach himself to the new *reis efendi*, the scribe was preparing to leave the capital with the former *reis efendi* for Edirne. Despite this fact, Nepliuev believed that it was worth investing the same amount to see if anything useful could again come out of this informant.⁵⁰⁵

Evidently, the scribe continued to cooperate with the Russians. In his last report on the subject in late June 1750, the year he died suddenly at the age of thirty-eight, Nepliuev requested the highest imperial approval for an increase in pension to the scribe of the *reis efendi*'s secretary. This simple clerk felt that the Russians needed him and decided to raise the stakes. At the end of May, he refused to serve in return for the previous amount of money, which he considered small. He hoped for a larger award from the empress for his efforts in order to repay his debts and complained that he had only received small gifts that did not help his situation. Consequently, Nepliuev had to make an independent decision on the spot to grant a one-time

⁵⁰³ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 31; 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 163-164.

⁵⁰⁴ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 31-31ob.

⁵⁰⁵ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 10-10ob.

sum of 275 levki to cover the clerk's debts and to increase his annual pension to 50 small gold coins a month. The total pension of the chancellery scribe now comprised 1650 levki, or 970 rubles. Nepliev defended his decision by explaining that the scribe had served faithfully and that he was the only one who was able to report both oral news and written copies of chancellery documents. All other informants brought in only oral intelligence.⁵⁰⁶

In November 1751 Obreskov reported that the two scribes of the *reis efendi's* secretary almost threatened to cease their assistance if their pensions were not increased to 500 gold *zincirlis* for what they called their selfless work because they frequently put their lives in danger through assisting the Russians. They complained that their current pensions were very small, leaving them less than a quarter of the amount after they paid other individuals who helped them procure necessary documents. Obreskov admitted that these scribes were the most reliable channels, which he would hardly be able to replace and therefore could not risk losing. On the other hand, he feared making such a costly commitment on his own—without an approval from St. Petersburg,⁵⁰⁷—being concerned that the scribes could stop their cooperation upon receiving such a large sum of money or, alternatively, ask for even more. The latter scenario was not very likely but Obreskov knew that he could not trust the locals. The resident decided to subtly resist the scribes' demands, deceitfully telling them that his predecessor, resident Nepliev, had not reported about them to the government, while as they themselves could admit, they have not yet deserved much if one was to count from the time Obreskov became *chargé d'affaires*. He had the foresight to instruct his dragoman, Pini, at the time he arrived in Constantinople to let

⁵⁰⁶ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 16ob., 18-180b.

⁵⁰⁷ In its instruction to Obreskov earlier, in April 1751, however, the CFA had already allowed him to grant the scribes 500 gold coins each already in his first instruction from the CFA in April 1751. At the time, in view of the scribes' exceptional help in monitoring Swedish, French, and Prussian actions at the Porte, the Russian government was ready to make this concession. 90.1.338.1751, LL. 11-11ob.

indirectly the scribes feel that the documents they shared did not have great significance but were merely perused by Obreskov out of curiosity. He was ready to concede only a small increase in pension and a one-time gift of 100 gold coins or less.⁵⁰⁸

The CFA responded to his letter about the scribes with an approval for meeting their demands if it was completely unavoidable and allowed Obreskov to increase the scribes' pensions without requiring any guarantee of their future service. However, Obreskov contested this decision. He stressed that such a commitment was dangerous. Instead, he reported that he was able to convince them to receive a small increase in their pension: from 50 gold *zincirlis* a month up to 50 Dutch ("large Christian") gold coins. It turned out that such a small compromise was quite enough to secure their continuing commitment to report on all European affairs discussed at the Porte, although Obreskov again added that it was impossible to believe that the matter was settled completely, taking into account "the impudence and avarice of the local people." But at the least he believed that most likely the CFA could expect not to hear similar demands for a long time.⁵⁰⁹

This episode demonstrates Obreskov's independent-mindedness. He evidently judged such an easy concession a bad precedent for the future and made a persistent effort to negotiate the scribes' demands down. His final counter-offer to the scribes was again less than what St. Petersburg was willing to concede. Thus, a subsequent order from the CFA envisioned a more generous increase to the scribes' pensions. Namely, the Russian government agreed to add up to

⁵⁰⁸ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 22-24.

⁵⁰⁹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 22-22ob.

100 gold coins to each of their pensions. It had also advised Obreskov to try to satisfy the scribes in various ways in order to keep their friendship.⁵¹⁰

Persian affairs were the only subject on which the scribes could not report for lack of knowledge. In the early 1750s, the Persian Empire—a formidable adversary under Nadir Shah during the preceding several decades—was in a state of extreme weakness that followed upon Nadir Shah’s death in 1747. Russia was concerned about potential Ottoman involvement in Persian internal conflicts, including help to the Afghans and sabotage of the Georgians.⁵¹¹

Obreskov was responsible for reporting any news regarding Persia to the Russian government, but he regretfully admitted that everything he heard was doubtful. The Ottomans, it turned out, had a special arrangement in their foreign policy, according to which all information about Persia was deposited not in the chancellery of the *reis efendi*—the purveyor of all Christian foreign countries—but in the chancellery of the *kahya*, the deputy of the grand vizier. Therefore, Obreskov experienced utmost difficulty in finding a reliable channel through which to procure information about the eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire. The dragoman of the Russian embassy did not have a pretext for visiting the *kahya*’s chancellery. The other challenge consisted in the fact that the Ottomans jealously protected information about Muslim co-religionists from Christian eyes and ears:

Moreover, due to the similarity in faith with that people, not everyone will succumb to a bribe, despite all their natural proclivity for money, for they consider those affairs truly their own, not like in the chancellery of the *reis efendi*, where they cover up their treason by saying that they have little at stake in regards to the European states, at least they attempt to dampen their conscience with this argument.

⁵¹⁰ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL, 25-26ob.

⁵¹¹ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, p. 151.

But Obreskov made a determined attempt to find an agent in the *kahya*'s chancellery. He finally succeeded in recruiting a scribe, who already reported during his second meeting with Pini some pertinent intelligence: namely, that the Porte had assured the Afghans of its support and sent an order to Ali Paşa to secretly help them and, if he found that Russia was helping the Georgians, to act openly in support of the Afghans.⁵¹² The scribe later reported that the sultan's desire to help the Afghans subsided and he was not concerned about the Georgians due to their lackluster efforts. In this situation, Obreskov did not find it necessary to address the Porte directly, which was in line with St. Petersburg's suggestion that the surest way to dissuade the Porte from interfering in Persian affairs was not to make it suspicious by officially bringing up these issues.⁵¹³

Obreskov, ever diligent, had to report in a month that the scribe he had found was not well versed in the situation. In order to avoid having to pay someone who could not know the real facts but—in order to continue to draw a salary—might have resorted to telling some unfounded news, which could cause more confusion given the lack of alternative channels, Obreskov decided to fire him using a seemly pretext. In his stead Obreskov was able to find another secretary in the same chancellery. According to Obreskov's "humble intelligence"—one of his favorite expressions—he believed that the new agent had greater proximity to the source of news and would be a better fit. His pension was set at 12 large gold coins a month. St. Petersburg approved Obreskov's independent initiative to find a reliable informant in the *kahya*'s

⁵¹² 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 24ob.-25, 26.

⁵¹³ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, p. 151.

chancellery and encouraged him to continue looking for select, even if few, agents who could justify expenditures from the Russian treasury.⁵¹⁴

In 1753 and 1754 Obreskov had to request approval for another increase in the salary of the scribes in the *reis efendi*'s chancellery and of the newly recruited secretary of the grand vizier's *kahya*. The latter left Obreskov no choice, given his singular importance as the source of intelligence on Persia, but to increase his salary from 44 to 55 levki a month.⁵¹⁵ The *reis efendi*'s scribes also once again pressed Obreskov for a higher pay. He still believed that they were one of the most reliable and useful sources. Even though they were supposed to share copies of memoranda submitted by other foreign ministers to the Porte, they regularly went beyond this responsibility and informed about everything that was discussed during meetings and discussions in the foreign ministry. In his "poor judgment," Obreskov argued that it was necessary and helpful for him to continue working with these scribes. The latter swore that more than half of their pensions went to placate and satisfy those individuals who happened to be present at the meetings and hearings. Obreskov made a decision to add 10 gold coins a month, to which they agreed. The CFA found his actions appropriate and reminded that it expected substantial reports from these secret sources. Altogether, the pension of the scribes now amounted to 1,584 rubles a year in total.⁵¹⁶

In 1758 Obreskov described all his informants and listed their annual pensions. By that time, the scribes of the *reis efendi*'s secretary became the leading informants for the Russians, although they still received the same amounts in pension. Obreskov reiterated that he, just like his predecessors—Andrian Nepluev, as well as translator Pini and lieutenant Shokurov in

⁵¹⁴ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 26ob.-27.

⁵¹⁵ This was 2.5 times less than the salary of the scribes in the *reis efendi*'s chancellery.

⁵¹⁶ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 28ob.

1750,—found these scribes to be the only reliable channel for collecting timely news and written memoranda.⁵¹⁷ The secretary of the grand vizier's *kahya* continued receiving the same salary as in 1754 as well. However, there was a problem: communication with the *kahya*'s secretary through Pini was unsustainable because the latter had no business in that chancellery and his contacts with its employee were quickly noticed. Therefore, in 1753 Obreskov had to hire another scribe in the *reis efendi*'s chancellery who agreed to serve as an intermediary with the *kahya*'s scribe. He was not a completely random find for he had previously received one gold coin a month from the Russians because he was attached to the chancellery's section dealing with Russian affairs and was responsible for keeping the corresponding registry book.⁵¹⁸

It is worth nothing the method by which Obreskov received intelligence from the aforementioned scribes. They all apparently came to a special place—a shop run by an Armenian—where they held meetings with Pini. Obreskov paid the Armenian merchant 66 levki, or about 40 rubles, a year for leasing the space.⁵¹⁹

Local Greeks

In the first half of the 1740s, Greeks were more prominent among informants who spied for free, out of respect and dedication to the Russians. Here we find the metropolitan of Heraclea and the Jerusalem Patriarch, although the latter frequently was away on trips to collect alms. Veshniakov also paid a tribute of gratitude to numerous unnamed Greeks, clerics and laymen,

⁵¹⁷ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 31-32.

⁵¹⁸ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 31ob.-32ob.

⁵¹⁹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 34.

who reported useful information only because they felt a sense of obligation to Russia as a fellow Orthodox nation.

Nepliev, however, was not so enthusiastic about local Greek clerics. The other reason that he did not think to mention them was because their friendship was not costly at all, maintained by gifts of tea and rhubarb, items that came at small to no expense to the Russian treasury. Nepliev thought that it was only occasionally that Greeks reported any news, and those were of small importance anyway.⁵²⁰

Still, one of the people Nepliev replaced Miralem with in 1748 was a Greek who was the Constantinople Patriarch's agent among the Turks. Nepliev tasked him with reporting various news that he managed to pick up through his activities. The Greek was promised 100 small gold coins or 275 levki.⁵²¹ As of 1758, this Greek continued working for the Russian mission for the same pension.⁵²²

Local Foreigners

Several foreigners were also on the list of Russia's secret informants in Constantinople. Such was, for example, Friedrich Hübsch, commercial advisor to the Polish king who reported on the Swedish affairs and internal developments in the empire. In the 1740s a certain Frenchman, named "Imbe," helped the Russians in his capacity as a confidant of the Moldavian

⁵²⁰ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 15.

⁵²¹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 16ob.

⁵²² 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 34.

Hospodar Ghika. Indeed, Imbe held a position at the mission of college secretary since 1741 but he demanded salary while not being able to report anything of value.⁵²³

Provincial/Border Agents

In early 1749, Nepliev also had to explain to the CFA his grant of 100 small gold coins, or 275 levki, to another informant in October 1748. Petr Duka used to serve the Wallachian hospodar and his late brother also used to be a secretary to Hospodar Ghika during the last war.⁵²⁴ Duka lived in Poland for a while and recently returned to Constantinople, where he rekindled his contacts with the Russian resident. Nepliev benefited from Duka's reports about Wallachian developments but also about the French embassy in Constantinople. Thus, Nepliev paid him for revealing important information about a Pole Dzerzanowski, which was contrary to French claims. Nepliev planned to reward Duka for other useful services during the latter's stay in the Ottoman capital.⁵²⁵ Nepliev suggested to his government to find a reliable informant in Moldavia, whose potential usefulness was recognized by the CFA. The latter eventually advised Obreskov, after Nepliev's death, to try to identify such a person in Kiev and Constantinople, possibly with Duka's help.⁵²⁶

Aleksei Obreskov took the task of collecting intelligence to a new level once he became *chargé d'affaires*. This was one of the areas to which he immediately turned his attention upon

⁵²³ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 5-5ob.

⁵²⁴ One Petr Duka was reported to have been sent by the Moldavian Hospodar Gregorios Ghika to the Russian plenipotentiary representatives after the failed Nemirov peace congress. In November 1737 Duka confidentially reported to the Russians that the Porte was not afraid of Austria because France promised to attack the latter. At the same time, the Porte also hoped that the Russian threat would abate when Sweden declared war against Russia. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, Appendix 4, p. IX.

⁵²⁵ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 17-17ob.

⁵²⁶ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 11ob.-12.

arriving in Constantinople in July 1751. Indeed, he started addressing this issue already during his trip to the Bosphorus. Namely, Obreskov was interested in improving information-gathering in places from which he was personally distant, that is at the Moldavian/Crimean/Ottoman-Polish border, one the most critical sectors in mutual relations. It is clear that Obreskov believed that existing practices, methods, and personnel were lacking in effectiveness. Through experience he attested to the unreliable nature of border intelligence which was collected by means of occasional dispatches of Cossacks and “other such *podlye*/baseborn and ignorant people, whose reports are far removed from truth and frequently even harmful to imperial interests.” Consequently, Obreskov set the goal of finding a reliable person from around Bender, an important Ottoman border fortress, who could inform the CFA much better. With this purpose in mind, he approached the afore-mentioned informant Petr Duka and asked him to find a reliable person in Jassy, the Moldavian capital. Duka promised to find one but asked for some time. Obreskov characterized Duka, an old acquaintance, as exhibiting usual sincerity and staunch fidelity to the interests of Her Highest Imperial Majesty.⁵²⁷

Next, Obreskov suggested cultivating a devoted informant on the Polish-Crimean/Ottoman border, also near Moldavia, about fifty miles north of Bendery. He pointed out an individual whom he met during his transit through Polish Egorlyk, an Orthodox priest Ianii, who could fit this role well. Ianii was smart and had already assisted Obreskov in the past. He was eager to help, evidently out of pure devotion, for Obreskov paid him only 5 gold coins that one time. If the CFA was to approve Obreskov’s suggestion, he estimated that the priest would be happy with getting merely 20 gold coins a year. Obreskov thought that Ianii was the best candidate for the job because he could inform the Russians about those who passed through

⁵²⁷ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 19-19ob.

Egorlyk and also about happenings in the surrounding area, including Bendery and Budjak. Moreover, the Crimean town of Dubasary was only one mile away from Egorlyk and the area was richly populated by merchants who traded in Crimea and who all knew Ianii. Finally, Obreskov made a suggestion that revealed his developed sense of vigilance. He proposed not to send special couriers to Ianii from the Kiev Guberniia's Chancellery, as was commonly practiced. Instead, he offered to instruct the couriers who carried his letters to Russia on a monthly basis to always stop by Egorlyk. In the process, it was necessary to maintain the highest degree of secrecy and conceal the nature of Ianii's functions even from the couriers, to whom Ianii was instructed to say that he had letters for the border translator Korbii about private matters.⁵²⁸

The Cost of Intelligence

With the exception of irregular gifts and awards, in 1758 maintenance of long-term spies by the Russian mission in Constantinople cost the Russian government 3,183 rubles a year, only 363 rubles more than in 1747. Considering that in 1747, under Andrian Nepliev, regular pensions were paid only to five informants, Obreskov's employment of nine agents for a very similar amount attests to his diligence and ability to maximize benefits derived from the limited sums of money entrusted in his care. The afore-mentioned sum, it has to be noted, did not include the Grand Dragoman's pension: in 1747 Ioannis Kallimaki did not yet receive it, and in 1758 Kallimaki was appointed the Prince of Moldavia.⁵²⁹ If one is to count the 600 rubles a year

⁵²⁸ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 19ob.-20.

⁵²⁹ 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 16ob., 34ob., 39-39ob.

that Kallimaki received between 1753 and 1758 under Obreskov, as well as Nepliev's savings of 700 rubles when he fired Miralem, the difference in intelligence budgets between 1747 and 1758 becomes 1,663 rubles, which was still frugal considering the number of people employed in these two different years.

How did spending on intelligence compare to total expenditures of the Russian mission? As an example, we can take 1765, the year when the Austrian internuncio Penkler betrayed Russian secret channels to the Porte.⁵³⁰ Overall, Obreskov's treasury contained 25,518 levki in August 1765, which indicates that he had spent 15,081 levki in the second—"May"—third of the year, out of the available 40,599 levki. Over the course of the September third he spent 17,948 levki, which left him with 7,570 levki at the start of 1766. Obreskov gave a detailed account of his spending, which is important for us in order to gauge the effect that Penkler's revelation of Obreskov's secret channels had on the work of the Russian mission. Obreskov's financial spending report indicates that he continued to benefit from secret informants within the Ottoman government, although the resident became exceedingly careful about revealing their identities. Thus, unlike in the rest of the report, Obreskov used secret cipher for listing expenses on intelligence. We learn, for example, that Obreskov paid 500 gold *zincirlis*, or 1,375 levki, for two letters that he then attached to his October 9/20 report to Panin. On October 27/November 7 Obreskov gifted a gold watch, which cost 150 levki, to "one courtier" and an English telescope, worth 40 levki, to another one. On November 14/25 the resident gifted one sable fur, worth 550 levki, to *Mektupcu Efendi*. On December 30/January 10, 1766 Obreskov paid the last installment of annual pensions to his secret informants, which added up to 1,576 levki. We learn that Obreskov still employed the two scribes of the *reis efendi*'s secretary. They received 880 levki

⁵³⁰ See Chapter 15.

for the last third of 1765—the same salary they had been receiving since 1754. The secretary of the grand vizier’s *kahya* received the customary 220 levki. The Armenian, the Greek, the scribe of the *reis efendi*’s chancellery, translator Baruk, and the young scribe of the dragoman of the Porte—all received their usual pensions. Only the old scribe of the dragoman of the Porte was missing from the list. It is unclear whether he had passed away or refused to cooperate with Obreskov after Penkler’s betrayal. Over the course of the year Obreskov also gifted precious furs, mostly sable, to *Defterdar* Efendi, dragoman of the Porte, old and new *reis efendis*, grand vizier’s *kahya*, *Kesedar* of the *reis efendi*, Iakub the translator of the Crimean Khan, and *Beylikçi Efendi*.⁵³¹

Thus, secret intelligence comprised about nine percent of the mission’s budget in the “September” third of 1765, which was similar to the ratio spent in the last third of 1763. In other words, about one tenth of the budget went to cover secret pensions. However, this amount excluded gifts distributed on special occasions, which in the last third of 1765 added up to 2,115 levki, effectively rendering the amount spent on secret intelligence one fifth of the total budget for that period. Moreover, this category of expenses generally did not include occasional gifts to various Ottomans that had to be given upon request rather than in exchange for information. For example, one “respectable and indispensable Turk” asked Obreskov to provide him with spirits. On June 15/26, 1766 Obreskov brought two dozen bottles of Hungarian wine (100 *para* per bottle), two dozen bottles of Rhine wine (50 *para* per bottle), and a dozen of *polushtofy* of various Corfu vodkas (worth 2 levki 30 *para* in total). All in all, Obreskov spent 123 levki on this gift.⁵³²

⁵³¹ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 218/248; 89.8.394.1766, LL. 4, 5ob., 6-6ob., 7ob., 8ob., 9a-9aob.

⁵³² 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 252.

As a final note, it should be stressed that the development of the intelligence network was a delicate and risky enterprise. We can see that the Russians tried to minimize the risk by not sharing anything with their informants, but only gathering what the informants knew. This approach did not preclude the danger of becoming a victim of false intelligence. Indeed, as we know from translator dragoman Buidi' report, which he submitted to the Russian government in 1752, the Ottomans had a practice of supplying "fake confidants/informants" to especially gullible foreign representatives, who as a result fed their government information that the Porte wanted to share.⁵³³ The close attention that Russian residents in Constantinople paid to their secret informants over several decades, however, helped avoid this pitfall by and large because with time it was easier to determine who could really be trusted.

⁵³³ Mikhail Meier, "Nicolay Boudii on the European Diplomatic Activity on Bosphorus in the mid-18th c.," *Electronic Science and Education Journal "Istoriya,"* Vol. 5, Issue 9 (32) (2014), pp. 1-11, here p. 11.

Chapter 6. The Embassy Staff and Disorders

Embassy Residences

Besides managing the various aspects of the mission's functioning at once, Obreskov also paid special attention to the quarters that housed him and his family, as well as his subordinates. Obreskov found time to attend to repairs and periodically suggested to St. Petersburg measures to improve the condition of the residence building, the mission's church, as well as the embassy's safety from the threat of fires. His reports on this matter allow us to reconstruct the picture of the immediate urban and social environment of Russian diplomats and mission employees in Constantinople.

From the time of Petr Tolstoy, Russian residents occupied a building belonging to a Greek woman, one Sevasto. During the war of 1735-1739 the owner of the property decided to sell it and the Russian government took advantage of the low price of 3,500 levki. The English ambassador Fawkner assisted the Russians in conducting the transaction in 1738. However, disputes over ownership continued until 1748, when the Russian government finally was confirmed as the owner of the property.⁵³⁴ As a result, the mission paid very little for the central residence building: 45 levki in 1745 and 60 levki since the 1750s went to the *vakıf*, "or the mosque," which owned the land. In March 1762 St. Petersburg approved Obreskov's registration of the building in the name of an Englishwoman Abbott—most likely his wife. The other

⁵³⁴ Irina Kasimova, *Russkii dvorets v Stambule = İstanbul'da bir Rus sarayı = The Russian palace in Istanbul* (Istanbul: Irina Kasimova, 2012), pp. 12-15. Despite destructive fires this particular building complex became one of the centers of Russian diplomacy in Constantinople. Today it houses the General Consulate of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Turkey.

residence was located to the north of Constantinople on the Bosphorus channel, at first in the village of Tarabya, where a house was rented from the chief customs inspector from 1744 for 200 levki a year. Later, the summer residence was moved to the neighboring village of Büyükdere, where a private house was rented for 500 and, later, 600 levki a year.⁵³⁵

The purpose of the summer villa was to provide an escape from the summer elements of Constantinople and Pera, which were a fertile ground for plague outbreaks during warm months. The Russian mission followed the example of other foreign embassies in migrating twice a year—first to Büyükdere in late May and then back to Pera in late October. Other foreign representatives also had summer residences either in Tarabya or Büyükdere.⁵³⁶ As a result, Russian diplomats and their staff interacted with their foreign colleagues all year round. Both in Pera and Büyükdere, life consisted of frequent social gatherings and mutual visits, although regardless of season the air the diplomats breathed was first and foremost filled with scents of secrets, intrigues, and ceremonial rivalries.

After his appointment as *chargé d'affaires* in 1751—even before he departed from Russia, Obreskov immediately proposed measures to improve the mission's self-sufficiency in water. On March 5 Obreskov wrote that it was necessary to build a cistern or stone vault on the premises of the embassy residence in order to collect and keep water. An independent source of clean water, he noted, would be especially critical during plague outbreaks and fires. The CFA approved the idea and allowed Obreskov to spend 600-700 rubles on the cistern. In addition, it

⁵³⁵ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 18; 90.280.1746, L. 145ob; 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 7, 15; 90.1.417.1762, L. 19.

⁵³⁶ Paolo Cirardelli, "Power or Leisure? Remarks on the Architecture of the European Summer Embassies on the Bosphorus Shore," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 50 (2014), pp. 29-58.

confirmed that, similar to other foreign ministers, Obreskov could leave the city for an apartment in the countryside to avoid plague.⁵³⁷

Upon arrival in Constantinople, Obreskov did not have a chance to realize his plan right away. At first, he had to address a more immediate problem: strong summer storms and rains had damaged walls, roof tiles, and water canals of the residence. These repairs cost 155 levki. Moreover, he had to pay 45 levki to the mission's Turkish neighbor because the water canals system of the embassy passed through his property: 5 levki was a contribution to the neighbor's annual *vakif* payment and 40 levki were paid for the inconvenience that the embassy caused him when the canals became backed up.⁵³⁸ As noted, in 1753 Obreskov decided to get rid of the problem—the Turkish neighbor constantly complained about the canals—by rerouting the canals in a different direction, at the cost of 200 levki, although it seems that this project was not carried out. On a much more solemn note, however, Obreskov also took the initiative of repairing the imperial coat of arms on the façade of the mission's building: it had never been tended to since it was first installed during Rumiantsev's embassy in 1741.⁵³⁹

In the first year of the Seven Years' War, despite the need for frugality stemming from the financial burden of the war, Obreskov had to request funds for repairs at the embassy. Namely, he wanted to salvage the mission's church and fix the new wing of the embassy building. He reported on February 11/22, 1757, that the church was about to fall because of the disproportionate weight of its roof, which had caused the walls to angle outward. Despite all the efforts to install supports for the walls, it was becoming dangerous to enter the church. Obreskov also noted that a recently constructed wing of the residence apparently had weak foundations and

⁵³⁷ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 18ob.-19.

⁵³⁸ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 327-332ob.

⁵³⁹ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 412, 418-418ob., 424, 434.

after the 1754 earthquake sloped to the side. He asked for permission to rebuild the church and fix the wing during spring and summer, making initial projection of the cost of the project at 3,000-4,000 rubles.⁵⁴⁰ In response, the CFA asked the Senate for funds and, in the meantime, requested that Obreskov draw on the mission's treasury to complete the project, in order not to accrue additional expenses that would be inevitable if the repairs were not completed in summer.⁵⁴¹ The Senate approved the disbursement of 4,000 rubles for the purpose and the CFA asked Obreskov to keep a separate account for this sum and to economize as much as possible. The money, however, was slow to be dispensed, and in November 1757 the Moscow office of the CFA wrote to St. Petersburg that it had only received 1,000 rubles.⁵⁴²

In spring 1755, the CFA became interested in the mission's residence in Pera and instructed Obreskov to submit its plan. But Obreskov admitted that such a plan did not exist and he did not know anyone who could draw it. He promised to produce it himself in his free time.⁵⁴³ It was only in spring 1764 that Obreskov provided the detailed report on the building, together with a plan of its location in Pera. Using this report and the attached plans we can reconstruct the relative location of the Russian mission and imagine what it was like to live at the mission in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

The building stood on a downward slope at a distance of 19 *sazhens*⁵⁴⁴ from the Pera Street. There was only a narrow passageway—1.5 *sazhens* in width—that connected it with the main street. Other houses and buildings surrounded the Russian mission on three sides. On the

⁵⁴⁰ 89.1.1757.7. Delo o perestroike nakhodiashcheisia v Kazennom Ministerskom v Konstantinopole dome tserkvi. 18 March 1757, L.2

⁵⁴¹ 89.1.1757.7, LL. 1, 3-3ob.

⁵⁴² 89.1.1757.7, LL. 4-9.

⁵⁴³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 128-128ob.

⁵⁴⁴ At the time one *sazhen* equaled approximately 2 meters, or 7 feet. Therefore, the length of the passageway was 40 meters, or 133 feet.

fourth side the residence bordered another property—the orchard of the Catholic Monastery of the Promised Land,—which was located on the slope at a level that was 6 *sazhens*—lower than the level of the Russian embassy. Therefore, warned Obreskov, there was a danger of being trapped in fire, especially if one of the two houses that abutted on the one and only passageway caught fire. There was also another difficulty that forced Obreskov to think about a possible solution. Namely, the underground canals still passed through a neighboring Turkish property. That property was connected to the Tophane Street through a very short passageway. The late resident Veshniakov had expended up to 1,000 levki on the construction of the underground canal with stone walls and connecting it to the Tophane Street. However, noted Obreskov, Veshniakov had not concluded any clear agreements with the Turkish owner of that land. As a result, the Turk, not being satisfied with gifts that the Russian mission granted him from time to time as a sign of gratitude, had a habit of closing the canal whenever he wanted. This produced unimaginable humidity inside the Russian mission, especially in warm months, and left the residence without drinking water. Originally, at the time of his appointment in 1751 Obreskov was given permission to build a cistern. However, Obreskov realized that there was no suitable place for it on the premises of the mission's property.⁵⁴⁵

Obreskov decided that the best solution would be to buy out the Turk's house and demolish it. That would also solve the problem of lack of light in the adjoining part of the Russian mission. Instead, Obreskov suggested erecting a very thick and high stone wall from the side of the Tophane Street, where two small Turkish houses abutted the short passageway. The wall would protect the Russian mission from fires in the two Turkish houses, while the mission would also have a second fire exit through the passageway to the Tophane Street. Other

⁵⁴⁵ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 161.

problems would also be solved with the purchase of the neighboring property. Namely, the underwater canal would then pass under the property of the Russian mission. Moreover, Obreskov discovered that there were two cisterns—a small and a very large one—on the property of the Turk, which would also pass into the mission’s estate.⁵⁴⁶

Obreskov wrote that he came up with the idea while the Seven Years’ War was still going on and therefore did not find appropriate time for suggesting the purchase. “But extreme necessity and my personal safety demanded it and, although it was a stretch for me, I managed to buy it myself for 3,000 rubles.” In addition, Obreskov spent another 1,000 rubles on bureaucratic needs such as registration, as well as on warding off complaints from Turkish neighbors. Obreskov also paid 2,000 rubles out of his pocket for the stone wall in order to separate the mission “forever” from the Turkish neighbors and to safeguard Russian property from fires from that side. Therefore, altogether Obreskov had spent 6,000 rubles on this project. The purchased land belonged to a local *vakif*, but the annual payment was mere 9 levki.⁵⁴⁷

Obreskov further wrote that he hoped that St. Petersburg would allow him to finally return to his homeland. Therefore, rather than asking his government to reimburse his expenses, Obreskov wanted simply to notify it that he planned to sell the newly acquired property. However, he wanted to check if his court wished to add the property to the Russian mission proper, because future Russian ministers in Constantinople could benefit from the new addition.⁵⁴⁸

In April 1764 Panin openly suggested to Catherine that Obreskov voiced his desire to leave, possibly because he felt inconvenienced by the arrival of a new *chargé d’affaires*, Pavel

⁵⁴⁶ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 161.

⁵⁴⁷ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 161-162.

⁵⁴⁸ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 162.

Levashov. However, Obreskov's presence in Constantinople was indispensable and Panin recommended to the empress to assuage and encourage Obreskov by approving his plan to buy the additional house for the Russian residence there. At the time, however, besides noting that she desired Obreskov to stay at his post, Catherine left Panin's latter suggestion without a comment.⁵⁴⁹

Judging by the plan of the location of the mission provided by Obreskov, we can reconstruct part of the atmosphere in which Russian diplomats and staff lived in Pera. Access to the mission was available only from the Street of Pera, through a narrow passageway in between two houses: a house of an Armenian and a Turkish house occupied by an English merchant.⁵⁵⁰ On the north side, the mission neighbored a Catholic monastery. An orchard of another Catholic monastery—of the Promised Land,—adjoined the eastern side of the mission's property. And on the south side the mission neighbored a Turk, through whose land had passed the underground water canals of the mission. When Obreskov bought the latter property—with a size of about 4,000 square feet⁵⁵¹—during the Seven Years' War, he became the neighbor also of the envoy of Naples, whose residence faced the Street of Tophane. Elsewhere along the Pera Street stood houses belonging to Greek owners.⁵⁵² Thus, the Russian mission existed in a mix of local Turkish, Armenian, and Greek inhabitants of Pera, as well as fellow foreign representatives and merchants. The immediate proximity of two Catholic monasteries must have been a constant reminder for Obreskov and local Orthodox Christians that they did not have their own church in Pera.

⁵⁴⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 304.

⁵⁵⁰ Could the merchant have been Obreskov's relative Abbott?

⁵⁵¹ 560 square *sazhens*: 40 *sazhens* in length, 14 *sazhens* in width.

⁵⁵² 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 162.

Shortly before the outbreak of war in 1768 the houses of the Russian mission sustained several serious damages. A strong earthquake in 1766 damaged both residences—in Pera and in Büyükdere. In August 1766 Panin allowed Obreskov to use government funds to cover expenses for repairs.⁵⁵³ But only a year later did Obreskov manage to complete general repairs of the building in Pera, spending 1,900 levki for the purpose.⁵⁵⁴ A month later, however, on September 16, 1767, a fire consumed the mission. Most of the street burned down and Obreskov lost the residence with all his furniture. However, out of great respect for St. Petersburg, according to Obreskov, the Porte provided him with an apartment that was especially quiet, and the Porte took upon itself all the expenses. This treatment was exceptional, as evidenced by the failure of the Dutch ambassador and the Naples envoy to attain similar compensation.⁵⁵⁵ Levashov, on the other hand, had to find a separate place. As of November 1767 he was renting a house for 700 levki. In May 1768 Obreskov also paid 520 levki for a separate countryside house for Levashov.⁵⁵⁶

As a result, Obreskov's last years before the war were full of upheaval.⁵⁵⁷ On the eve of a crisis in mutual relations, he found himself having to get used to a new house. Moreover, he became involved in efforts to rebuild the residence just as the situation was unraveling. Thus, in June 1768 he reported that shortly before that the land where the mission's residence stood passed out of the *vakıf*'s property.⁵⁵⁸ As a result, he felt more enthusiastic about constructing a new building on the site. In early August, Catherine approved this suggestion and ordered to

⁵⁵³ *SIRIO*, Vol. 71, p. 58.

⁵⁵⁴ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 271.

⁵⁵⁵ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 33ob.-34ob.

⁵⁵⁶ 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 275ob., 278, 289ob.

⁵⁵⁷ His wife also died in fall 1767.

⁵⁵⁸ 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 289ob.

send Obreskov money, as much as he needed.⁵⁵⁹ As we know, by the time this order arrived, it was too late. After the war, the Russian government chose another location for its mission.

Embassy Staff

As we can see, Obreskov was involved in every aspect of the mission's functioning, from intelligence gathering to financial planning. One may wonder how he found time for managing relations with the Ottoman government if he alone was responsible for documenting all the daily expenses. Nevertheless, this situation was somewhat inevitable in Constantinople, because foreign diplomats did not visit the Porte in person: their dragomans were responsible for communicating with the Ottomans on a daily basis. Perhaps for this reason the Russian residency in Constantinople stood out among Russian missions abroad as the only one, in which for a long time there was no embassy secretary. Another peculiarity of the residency was its employment of a large—compared to other Russian missions—number of translators and language students. Thus, Russian residents in Constantinople managed a team of up to twelve and even eighteen staff members, which was twice to four times higher than at other places.⁵⁶⁰

The translators, or dragomans, dealt with the Porte and collected intelligence. They also helped Obreskov oversee students of Oriental languages who were preparing to become future translators of the mission in Constantinople or to go back to Russia, where they could work as translators at the CFA or at a border post. Most of these students, unlike the dragomans, were native Russians or Ukrainians, and some of them indeed managed to attain the position of

⁵⁵⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 136.

⁵⁶⁰ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 52, 74-75.

translator, although it was very difficult. Overall, between 1739 and 1768 there existed a core of personnel, which provided continuity in the management of the mission. Among this group, besides Obreskov himself, one can name dragomans Aleksandr Pini and Guglielmo Dandri, and student-brothers Denis and Stepan Melnikovs.

However, there were others as well. Among them were very talented linguists—such as Petr Shchukin and Sergei Lashkarev, as well as less able and less disciplined students. But on the whole one can say that, like residents themselves, employees of the mission were also of modest social backgrounds and only in rare instances did they chose to go to the Bosphorus voluntarily. The following discussion will focus on recruitment, training, remuneration, and contribution of the mission’s staff to the work of the embassy.

Dragomans in Russian Service

In the 1740s the Russian mission in Constantinople employed only one dragoman, Aleksandr Pini. He received the largest salary after the resident himself. Namely, he received 400 rubles a year, 200 rubles for housing, and 80 rubles for the ferries that he had to hire to cross the Golden Horn when he went on business to the Porte.⁵⁶¹ Having served there for almost thirty years, from 1739 to 1768, Pini proved to be the backbone of the Russian residency in Constantinople. After the Treaty of Belgrade he was the most indispensable employee. In July 1746 resident Nepliuev stressed that Pini was privy to all secret and confidential matters in relations between the Russian resident and the Porte.⁵⁶² As we saw earlier, the Russian government did not fully trust Pini in the beginning. Namely, Obreskov did not reveal all the

⁵⁶¹ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 40.

⁵⁶² 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 3.

information to Pini when they ran the mission together in 1745-1746. However, over the decades of service Pini proved to be a loyal translator, which made him an exceptional representative of the Constantinople dragoman class.

Indeed, to our knowledge Pini was not someone who was fully integrated into the scene that consisted of whole clans of hereditary dragomans.⁵⁶³ He appears to be a second-generation immigrant to the Ottoman Empire. Pini talked about his origins, although quite concisely, in a report he submitted in 1754. Pini wrote in Italian that he was born in 1718⁵⁶⁴ and entered Russian service in 1739 in the rank of translator. He was the youngest son of late Aleksandr Pini, a native of Florence, who had worked as a doctor of medicine in Venice.⁵⁶⁵ The succinct account gives us a sense that Pini made an early commitment to the dragoman profession: he was twenty-one years old when he started to work for the Russian mission. In turn, the fact that he did not belong to a long-standing dragoman clan was probably an important consideration for the Russians, who needed loyal cadres who were not influenced by their families' prior allegiances.

Significantly, Pini did not know Russian. However, his main task was to carry out contacts with the Porte in Italian and Ottoman Turkish, languages that Pini knew well.

Subsequently, Russian employees of the mission who knew Italian translated his Italian reports

⁵⁶³ The name Pini was not prominent or even known among Constantinople dragomans before Aleksandr Pini was hired by the Russians. Even afterwards, the name does not appear to have become established as a dragoman clan. See, for example, Marie de Testa and Antoine Gautier, *Drogmans et diplomates européens auprès de la porte ottoman* (Istanbul: Editions Isis, 2003). Perhaps, Aleksandr did not have sons who could continue his line. We know that he had a son-in-law with a last name Gara. It is clear that Aleksandr Pini participated in the intermarriage practices of the local Catholic community. We know very little, however, about his social contacts on the basis of Russian sources. Nevertheless, it is clear that one of the key employees of the Russian mission—if not the most important person after the resident himself—was not as deeply integrated into the local dragoman milieu as dragomans of other foreign embassies.

⁵⁶⁴ Obreskov was also born in 1718.

⁵⁶⁵ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, L. 7. Stegnii identified Pini as a Phanariot Greek: Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, pp. 14, 26. This might be incorrect, unless Pini's mother was a Phanariot Greek, providing him with connections among the Constantinople Phanariot milieu. However, we know that Pini did not have contacts in the Phanariot community, for which purpose the Russians relied on the Greek dragoman Buidi. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 91.

into Russian. In fact, Obreskov himself knew Italian. As early as 1745, we find evidence that Obreskov translated Nikolai Buidi's memoranda from Italian into Russian, because Buidi could not write in Russian. Obreskov noted that he did this voluntarily, for he was only an embassy officer and translations were not part of his responsibilities.⁵⁶⁶

This brings us to a consideration of other specialists at the embassy who effectively served as translators, namely Nikolai Buidi and Guglielmo Dandri. In 1745 the Russian government assigned them to positions of senior student and second translator. Their salaries—200 rubles—were higher than those of beginning students, but still two to three times less than that of Pini. Buidi and Dandri did not achieve the same position as Pini right away because both of them had certain professional weaknesses.

It appears that Veshniakov had praised Buidi to the CFA. As a result of Veshniakov's representations, on the eve of his departure for Constantinople Andrian Nepliuev was firmly intent on giving Pini and Buidi a raise and promoting Buidi to the position of translator. Nepliuev wrote to the CFA while still in Russia that Buidi was an important liaison with secret informants who assisted the Russian mission in Constantinople. Therefore, he deserved to receive the rank of translator. The CFA agreed to Nepliuev's proposal but wanted to know how many languages Buidi knew. Upon arrival at his post, however, Nepliuev had to admit that Buidi was not yet fluent in Turkish despite having been diligent in his studies. Consequently, Nepliuev could not employ him as a translator at the Porte. He also thought that Buidi would not be completely safe working there, because as an Ottoman subject he could be subject to insults by

⁵⁶⁶ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 147.

Ottoman ministers. On the whole, however, Nepliev gave a favorable characteristic to Buidi, whom he found to be diligent, loyal, and good at writing in Italian.⁵⁶⁷

Nepliev reported that Guglielmo⁵⁶⁸ Dandri also did not qualify enough to be a full translator. Dandri could speak Turkish well, but could not read and write in it. He was therefore employed on minor business at the Porte, in translations for Russian merchants at the customs houses, and in finding Russian captives. Nepliev recommended that instead of promoting both Buidi and Dandri to the rank of translator, as he had suggested before, the two should simply be given the rank of lieutenant (Rank 12) so as to give them opportunity to improve in order to deserve the rank of translator (Rank 10). Importantly, Nepliev noted that such a step would be more appropriate as it would not offend Lieutenant Obreskov.⁵⁶⁹ This was a testament to the significant contribution of Obreskov to the functioning of the Russian mission in general and especially during the break in representation after Veshniakov's death.

We know that Guglielmo Dandri was a son of late Ignazio (Ignatii) Dandri, a native of Genoa who moved to Constantinople. Dandri entered Russian service together with Pini—in 1739,—as a student of Oriental languages with a salary of 200 rubles. With the help of Veshniakov and Nepliev he was promoted to the rank of actual translator in 1746 with a 100-ruble increase in salary, followed by another equal increase in 1750. In 1754, following Obreskov's recommendation, he became first translator and received a similar raise once again.⁵⁷⁰ However, as late as 1749 a proficiency review mandated by St. Petersburg revealed that translator Dandri still was not literate in Turkish. Dandri spoke Turkish so well that he sounded

⁵⁶⁷ 89.1.17.1745-1750. Vypiska o byvshikh v Konstantinopole pri Rossiiskikh rezidentakh raznago zvaniia sluzhiteliakh, s pokazaniem ikh sposobnostei, LL. 2-3ob.

⁵⁶⁸ Referred to in documents alternately as Vilgelm/Vilim/Gulerma/Gulielm.

⁵⁶⁹ 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 3ob.

⁵⁷⁰ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, LL. 5-5ob.

like a native Turk: his pronunciation was very clear and correct. But Nepluev noted that Dandri's age was one of factors that prevented him from learning difficult Turkish grammar.⁵⁷¹ Perhaps this explains why Dandri had omitted his date of birth in his service biography.

As for Nikolai Ivanovich Buida, as he used to call himself, he hailed from the Greek city of Arta and had lived in Ioannina (Yanina) as a trader until the early 1730s. After a bad experience of being attacked and robbed by Turks, Buidi moved to Constantinople and found employment at the Russian embassy. Veshniakov wrote about him in 1740: "One poor Greek is with the mission already for the ninth year, and is fit for making translations from Greek and Italian into Russian, and from Russian, is of very quiet demeanor, and of proven loyalty... His name is Nikolai Buidi, he is a native of Arta in Albania, from kind and best parents there."⁵⁷² According to a report from 1745, Buidi entered Russian service as a student of translation in 1739 and ten days after that he was sent from St. Petersburg to Constantinople together with resident Veshniakov. This means that Buidi followed the Russian embassy to Russia when the war broke out in 1736.⁵⁷³ Therefore, by the time Andrian Nepluev arrived in the Ottoman capital Buidi had worked for the mission for more than a decade.⁵⁷⁴

While visiting Constantinople in 1741, ambassador Rumiantsev noted that Buidi, "besides his own native simple and partly literal Greek, knows Italian very well and writes in Russian, he also speaks Turkish and can read whatever is necessary."⁵⁷⁵ He also reportedly knew Latin.⁵⁷⁶ However, as we saw above, it turned out that Buidi could not write in Russian and did

⁵⁷¹ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 8ob.-8.

⁵⁷² Meier, "Nicolay Boudii," p. 1.

⁵⁷³ Meier, "Nicolay Boudii," p. 1.

⁵⁷⁴ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 14.

⁵⁷⁵ Meier, "Nicolay Boudii," p. 1.

⁵⁷⁶ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 14.

not know Turkish sufficiently well to start visiting the Porte. Therefore, Buidi's main function was maintaining contacts with local Christians, including the Patriarch of Constantinople. Dragoman of the Porte, knowing this, sometimes used confessions to the patriarch as a means of passing messages to the Russian resident.⁵⁷⁷

In spring 1747 Nepliev had to report that employing Buidi was no longer safe. The latter incurred the wrath of the grand vizier due to a false accusation: a scribe from the Porte's chancellery complained to the grand vizier that Buidi had convinced one of his [scribe's] Russian servants—a captive who adopted Islam—to renege on his new faith. If he had not been an employee of the Russian mission, and if not for the assistance of the English and Austrian ambassadors, as well as efforts of the *reis efendi* and the chief dragoman, Buidi would have hardly escaped execution. Nepliev recommended sending Buidi to Russia. He also asked that in Buidi's place the CFA send a translator from Kiev named Konstantin Retkin. Otherwise, Nepliev would have only two translators remaining, which was insufficient. But St. Petersburg did not recall Buidi right away. Instead, we find that Nepliev mentioned Buidi again in February 1749, by which time Buidi already had the rank of translator. In the same report, Nepliev commented on the results of his proficiency exam. He noted that Buidi diligently studied Arabic grammar, and Nepliev had little doubt that Buidi would learn to translate sufficiently well because he realized how much he needed it for his career.⁵⁷⁸

Intelligence procured by Buidi was very important for the Russian mission. It began to figure in the residents' reports more often starting in 1745 and was especially helpful in 1750-1751 after the death of Nepliev. However, in 1752 he was recalled back to Russia. Meier does

⁵⁷⁷ Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 75.

⁵⁷⁸ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 6-7, 9; Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 75.

not indicate the reason for this recall, noting only that Buidi was called to continue his service in Russia. For example, in 1755 Buidi provided translation services to the visiting Ottoman envoy, Dervish Mehmed Efendi.⁵⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding the recall are very important. Both in 1745 and in 1751 Buidi showed lack of integrity, which was detrimental to the interests of the Russian mission in Constantinople. As described above, in 1745 Buidi agreed to sell Madame Veshniakov's furs even though he knew that they belonged to the Russian state. After a while he changed his mind and returned the furs to the widow, however Obreskov was displeased with him. It was again Obreskov who had to deal with a difficult situation at the mission upon his arrival in 1751, in which Buidi played a less than constructive role.

The latter episode will be described below in greater detail, but for now it is important to note that, similar to an earlier episode with Ivan Suda (1710s-1720s), the Russian government could not easily dispense with people who had valuable language skills and, moreover, knew a lot about Russia, even if their track record was less than credible. The solution was to at least keep them in Russia, where their actions could be monitored and controlled more easily. Buidi, unlike Ivan Suda, was not suspected of betraying Russian interests. But there were at least two reasons to recall Buidi. First, he engaged in dubious intrigues against Pini that contributed to internal disorder at the mission in 1751. Here his main fault was blind ambition. Secondly, Buidi was a Greek Ottoman subject and, as noted above, the Russians discovered that such people were in great danger of incurring the wrath of the Ottoman government, which circumstance could not allow Buidi to become an effective dragoman.

As a result, St. Petersburg decided that it was best to take advantage of Buidi's expertise in Russia. Indeed, the Russian government even commissioned Buidi to write several reports

⁵⁷⁹ Meier, "Nicolay Boudii," p. 2.

upon his arrival in 1752. One was “A short declaration on the present condition of the Ottoman Empire”; the other—“A short description of actions and character traits of European ministers residing in Constantinople.” In his report on the state of the Ottoman Empire, Buidi highlighted the pitiful condition of the central Ottoman treasury and the related centrifugal trends in the Ottoman provinces, especially in Asia, where population was fleeing villages as a result of hunger and organizing resistance to the center, especially against taxes from Constantinople.⁵⁸⁰

In his description of the Constantinople diplomatic corps Buidi stressed that the Ottoman Empire tried to compensate for its military weakness and weak central authority by becoming more actively engaged in European politics. Buidi was critical of the majority of foreign diplomats in the Ottoman Empire, citing their poor knowledge of affairs and equally unsatisfactory professional training. He singled out only three European diplomats who were universally recognized as mature and skillful: the French ambassador Marquis de Bonnac (1710-1724), the Venetian Bailo Emo (1720-1734), and the Russian resident Ivan Nepliev (1721-1734).⁵⁸¹ Buidi’s criticism and choice of examples indicates that he was not impressed with Russian residents after Ivan Nepliev, including his supporter Aleksei Veshniakov and Ivan Nepliev’s son. It is not entirely clear if Buidi was also trying to criticize Obreskov, but it is possible because he wrote his report in September 1752—the very month that the Russian government finally decided to appoint Obreskov as resident.

More importantly, the report helps us understand better Buidi’s views and motivations in serving the Russians. Namely, Buidi revealed himself as a staunch opponent of French hegemon-like behavior. He was especially worried about French efforts to convert Greeks and Armenians

⁵⁸⁰ A.S. Tveritina, “K istorii russko-turetskikh otnoshenii v elizavetskoe vremia,” *Sovetskoe vostokovedenie*, Vol. 6 (1949), pp. 312-326, here p. 320.

⁵⁸¹ Meier, “Nicolay Buidii,” pp. 2-4, 12.

to Catholicism.⁵⁸² This position indicates that Buidi's work for the Russians also stemmed from his belief that someone had to check French power and it would be better if it were a fellow Orthodox nation.

Thus, the main translators of the Russian mission were foreigners and, in particular, of more recent immigrant and non-Venetian origin. After Buidi's departure, Pini and Dandri continued to serve the Russians until war erupted in 1768. Unlike Buidi, they proved to be unquestionably loyal throughout this period. In view of their value, Obreskov made sure to encourage their continuous good service. He achieved permission to pay a bonus to dragoman Pini in 1751 and in 1754 supported Pini's request for an increase in salary, asking also to promote him to the rank of secretary of the embassy. Dragoman Guglielmo Dandri also asked for promotion in 1754 and Obreskov helped him not only acquire the rank of the first dragoman—available only to Pini before—but also to get an increase in salary. Pini's salary increased from 780 to 930 rubles a year; Dandri's—from 400 to 500 rubles annually.⁵⁸³ Thereby, in 1754 the Russian mission in Constantinople acquired its first embassy secretary in Pini, and Dandri succeeded Pini as the dragoman proper. Dandri served in this capacity until the outbreak of the war in 1768, after which he emigrated to Russia. In early 1766 he petitioned St. Petersburg to accept his twelve-year-old son into Russian service as a student of Oriental languages. Obreskov supported Dandri's request, noting that with a salary of 500 rubles a year Dandri could not provide necessary education for his son.⁵⁸⁴

The Russian government in St. Petersburg did not always appreciate how crucial the dragomans were. For example, as a result of a fire that took place in Pera on September 9/20,

⁵⁸² Meier, "Nicolay Buidii," pp. 5-8.

⁵⁸³ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, LL. 9-9ob., 13.

⁵⁸⁴ 89.8.394.1766, L. 17.

1762, translator Dandri and medico Stefaneli lost all their belongings and were left merely in their nightdress. Obreskov petitioned St. Petersburg to provide financial assistance to Dandri and Stefaneli, besides salary, in the amount of up to 100 and 60 rubles, respectively.⁵⁸⁵ This was a very modest request. However, as late as spring 1764, Catherine's government did not react to it. In April 1764 Obreskov reminded St. Petersburg that it was necessary to assist Dandri and Stefaneli because all other foreign embassies, "including even the Ragusan Republic," had awarded—and generously at that—all their employees who had suffered losses due to the said fire. It was inappropriate for Russia's honor, argued Obreskov, to remain the only nation—in the eyes of representatives of almost all European nations in Constantinople—that did not support its employees. In view of the pressing developments related to Poland in 1764, the empress quickly responded to Obreskov's petition with approval.⁵⁸⁶

By the early 1760s, the Russian mission faced the need to find new dragomans. Dandri's abilities were insufficient to be the main contact person with the Porte. Pini, on the other hand, had a weak constitution and experienced various frequent illnesses. Therefore, Obreskov wanted to hire an assistant for Pini. Initially, Obreskov was equally open to hiring a foreigner or a Russian subject for this position, but he experienced certain disappointments with both options. As a result, he began to look for a foreigner again.

In 1760 Obreskov found one Gaspar Gara (Gasparagaru) and suggested to hire him in order for him to assist and eventually replace Pini. At first, Gaspar Gara showed promise, but soon he appeared to be regretting the commitment he had made and started to be evasive and

⁵⁸⁵ 89.8.2303.1762, L. 16.

⁵⁸⁶ 89.8.356.1764, LL. 4-4ob. On the margins of this petition a CFA employee noted that Obreskov had asked to pay Dandri and Stefaneli an amount equal to a third of their respective annual salaries, namely 166 rubles for Dandri and 60 rubles for Stefaneli.

showed no diligence in acquiring necessary training. Gaspar Gara was a son of Pini's son-in-law; consequently, his entire family, including Pini, tried to encourage him to take an effort and show diligence, but to no effect. As a result, Obreskov decided to fire "Garu," but before he undertook to write to St. Petersburg about it, Gaspar Gara committed a crime of not showing up for the third time to pledge an oath of allegiance to the Russian empress. Therefore, Obreskov dismissed him from service as being unworthy of such an honor.

It is understandable that after this disappointment Obreskov confessed to the empress that he did not think anyone else from among the foreigners in Constantinople was good for the job. Therefore, he became preoccupied with advancing native Russian translator cadres. In September 1762 Obreskov reported to the new ruler—Empress Catherine II—that he saw student Denis Melnikov as fit for the position of Pini's assistant. Melnikov had mastered Turkish so well, wrote Obreskov, that he could read and write it. Melnikov also spoke French, Italian, Greek, and Armenian fluently. Melnikov's personal qualities were likewise suitable: he was sharp-witted, modest, adaptable, and in conversations responded in a noble and pleasant way. Obreskov hoped that Melnikov would quickly master ceremonies observed at the Porte by shadowing Pini. In addition, Obreskov recommended promoting student Gerasim Myshkin in rank because the latter had mastered Turkish equally well and could work as a translator at a border post. Obreskov also asked the Russian government to give a raise to both Melnikov and Myshkin.⁵⁸⁷

In February 1763 St. Petersburg approved Obreskov's decision to dismiss Gaspar Gara and approved the suggestion to promote students Denis Melnikov and Gerasim Myshkin to the position of translators, in the rank of lieutenant, and to increase their salary by up to 100 rubles

⁵⁸⁷ 89.8.2303.1762, LL. 14, 18, 20-20ob.

each. Melnikov and Myshkin were expected to receive training under Pini's supervision in how to work with the Turkish chancelleries.⁵⁸⁸ In May 1763 Obreskov forwarded to St. Petersburg Melnikov's and Myshkin's petitions to increase their salaries further in order to procure Turkish dress, without which they could not perform their duties.⁵⁸⁹ In February 1764, however, Obreskov had to admit that translator Myshkin "is completely unfit to remain here and expenses for him would be without any use," recommending to appoint Myshkin at some border post.⁵⁹⁰

A year later Obreskov wrote that he did not see anyone from among the Russian employees who was fit for the post of Pini's assistant. He noted that he had attempted to find the assistant twice before, but without success. Therefore, he found a local dragoman "of Latin faith" named Joseph Crutta, "a man of mature age and honest behavior." Panin and the empress approved Obreskov's request to accept Crutta into Russian service with a salary of 400 rubles a year. In fall 1765 Crutta received a raise.⁵⁹¹ However, by hiring Crutta Obreskov exposed the mission to risks that were inherent in employing a dragoman from one of the local clans. Crutta's brother was the dragoman of the English embassy and with time it turned out that Iosif had a habit of sharing with his brother everything that he heard from Obreskov or other employees of the mission. This situation was disconcerting because Crutta's brother had poor character and

⁵⁸⁸ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 137-137ob.; 90.1.450.1763, L. 11.

⁵⁸⁹ 90.1.454.1763, L. 61ob.

⁵⁹⁰ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 53ob. However, as late as the end of 1765, Myshkin's name still appeared on the list of the mission's employees. 89.8.394.1766, LL. 7ob.-8.

⁵⁹¹ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 147-147ob.; 90.1.526.1765, L. 48.

questionable professional qualities. In 1771 Obreskov described him in very harsh terms—“a scatterbrain, chatterbox, insolent liar, and an excessive braggart.”⁵⁹²

For the time being, however, Crutta remained with the mission, which he followed back to Russia when its members were released from captivity in 1771. In the last decade before the war, therefore, the mission employed several people in the capacity of translators. However, as before, the dragomans who did the most responsible work of carrying contacts with the Ottomans were foreigners. Russian subjects mostly had the position of junior translators. They were paid accordingly. For example, according to the 1765 budget report, the most highly paid employee was Pini—due to his promotion to the position of embassy counselor he received 2,200 rubles. Joseph Crutta received 600 rubles and Guglielmo Dandri, who was employed mostly in matters relating to customs, earned 500 rubles a year. Melnikov and Myshkin, however, received only 250 rubles.⁵⁹³ After the war ended, Russian *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople, Christophor Peterson, evaluated Joseph Crutta as effective at communicating

⁵⁹² 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 21, 28-29ob. Indeed, the Cruttas were a dragoman clan of Tosk Albanian origin that served many masters. Jean Crutta (1695-1777) was the dragoman of the English consulate in Cyprus. The polyglot Antoine Crutta first had worked as the dragoman of the Venetian consulate in Cyprus but in 1765, following the suggestion of the English ambassador in Constantinople, became one of the chief language specialist in the reformed Polish foreign affairs department under Stanislaw August Poniatowski. Antoine continued active correspondence with his brothers in Constantinople throughout his service in Poland-Lithuania. Antoine's brother, Pierre Crutta (1735-1797), also entered Polish service and left the English consulate in Cyprus in order to head the Polish school of Oriental languages in Constantinople. However, Pierre's performance was controversial and in 1766 he entered English service as the dragoman of the English embassy in Constantinople. After the outbreak of the 1787-1791 Russo-Ottoman war Pierre left English service and became the dragoman of the Polish ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, after which he moved to Poland-Lithuania, where he served the government of Tadeusz Kościuszko. Two other Crutta brothers established themselves in Russia after 1769. Jan Reychman, "Une Famille de drogman orientaux en Pologne au XVIIIe siècle," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (1961), pp. 83-97, here pp. 84-87, 88-90. Pierre, apparently, was the brother of the dragoman in Russian service, whom Obreskov detested.

⁵⁹³ For comparison, Obreskov received 6,000 rubles a year, and Levashov—4,000 rubles a year. 89.8.394.1766, LL. 7ob.-8. Obreskov was not impressed by Myshkin, therefore in 1766 he asked for a raise only for Melnikov. In summer 1767 St. Petersburg approved Obreskov's request and added 150 rubles to the annual salary of Melnikov, but noted that it was preferable for Denis Melnikov to pay for his Turkish dress himself. Only if it was not possible, Obreskov could give him up to 200 rubles for the purpose. 90.1.542.1766-1767, LL. 37-37ob. Not surprisingly, as soon as Obreskov received this imperial order, he disbursed 333 levki to Melnikov to purchase Turkish clothes for himself. 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 276ob.

with the Ottomans, but as insufficiently fit for carrying out written correspondence with the Porte. As a result, Crutta left for Poland-Lithuania in 1776, where he died in 1780. Dragoman Pini, on the other hand, continued to serve the Russian mission.⁵⁹⁴

Russian Chancellery Scribes and Embassy Secretaries

This picture does not mean that there were no Russian employees who were talented linguistically. Most of the time, it was difficult for Russian subjects to carry out face-to-face contacts with the Ottomans due to insufficient conversational knowledge of Turkish and lack of familiarity with cultural conventions and customs. But several Russians knew Turkish well enough to engage in written translations and chancellery work. The CFA and Russian residents were committed to rearing, over time, a cadre of native language specialists whose loyalty and high degree of protection from the Russian government made them in prospect more reliable.

In 1745 Russian students who worked in the chancellery—and thus knew Turkish enough to read and write in it—were Petr Shchukin and Petr Voronin, who were each paid 150 rubles and received additional 30 rubles on housing.⁵⁹⁵ When Nepliev became a resident, he gave them a raise in recognition of their work. However, Petr Voronin reportedly always felt sick because of the local climate and to save money Nepliev suggested to dispense with him. Student Petr Shchukin, on the other hand, was to remain, noted Nepliev, because he could translate from Italian and Latin very well.⁵⁹⁶ Voronin's loss was likely unwelcome because he and Shchukin had been employed by the mission since 1740 as chancellery scribes and the two were said to

⁵⁹⁴ Reychman, "Une Famille de drogman," pp. 96-97.

⁵⁹⁵ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 40-40ob.

⁵⁹⁶ 89.1.17.1745-1750. Vypiska o byvshikh v Konstantinopole pri Rossiiskikh rezidentakh raznago zvaniia sluzhiteliakh, s pokazaniem ikh sposobnostei, LL. 2-2ob., 3ob.-4.

know Turkish, Italian, and Latin. Indeed, they were one of those few who had studied in the 1730s under Professor of Oriental Languages G.Ia. Ker in St. Petersburg.⁵⁹⁷

Shchukin is a good example of a person of modest social standing who advanced thanks to his language skills. Petr Shchukin was a son of Antip Ivanovich Shchukin, a townsman from Moscow's Meshchanskaia sloboda. Although initially successful and an important community leader, Antip's finances began to deteriorate, sending him to Kazan, where his son Petr was born. After eight years, Petr moved in with relatives because his father attempted to try his luck again in Moscow, albeit unsuccessfully. Later, Petr entered the Spassk Slavic-Greco-Latin monastery school and at fifteen years of age he became a student at the Rhetorics School. Around the same time the CFA requested the Synod to send six best students—two from the subjects of theology, philosophy, and rhetoric each—to join the school at the CFA. Thus, upon the Synod's recommendation, Shchukin began one of the very few to join the school at the central diplomatic institution of the Russian Empire. He studied Persian, Arabic, and Turkish under Professor Ker.⁵⁹⁸

Obreskov was familiar with Shchukin's skills and work. Therefore, in March 1751, upon being appointed *chargé d'affaires*, Obreskov recommended to promote the chancellery scribe Petr Shchukin to the position of translator and to increase his salary by sixty percent. The CFA was ready to approve this request if an examination by senior translators of the mission confirmed Shchukin's advanced language skills. Evidently, Shchukin passed the test because he received the rank of translator. One historian argues that Shchukin was promoted thanks to the

⁵⁹⁷ Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 74, 75, 78. Even in the 1760s, the CFA language school was small, numbering a few teachers and less than ten students. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 451.

⁵⁹⁸ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 77.

support of an influential member of the CFA, senior secretary I.O. Pugovishnikov.⁵⁹⁹ However, Shchukin was indeed a talented linguist fully supported by Obreskov himself.⁶⁰⁰ Although having a rank of translator, Shchukin was not a dragoman. He was in charge of the embassy's chancellery.

By early 1760s Shchukin advanced to the position of embassy secretary. However, on March 21, 1762 the government of Peter III ordered Obreskov to send secretary Shchukin back to St. Petersburg. In his stead, the Russian government appointed CFA's recording secretary Gavril Bogoliubov, but student Stepan Melnikov had to fill Shchukin's role in the interim. However, St. Petersburg informed Obreskov that it expected Melnikov also to return to the CFA after Bogoliubov's arrival. St. Petersburg assigned a salary of 500 rubles a year to Bogoliubov.⁶⁰¹ Shchukin had served as the backbone of the mission since 1739, therefore his recall must have been a serious blow to the strength of Obreskov's team. Stepan Melnikov was similarly a valuable member of the mission, whose absence would also have been very tangible if he did not end up remaining in Constantinople after all. Moreover, Bogoliubov, who arrived in the suite of envoy Dolgorukov in June 1763, could not replace Shchukin in terms of linguistic expertise. In fact, in February 1764 Obreskov admitted that he had to keep Stepan Melnikov because Bogoliubov did not know any foreign languages. Therefore, Bogoliubov could not help much either with chancellery tasks or with composition and translation of correspondence. In June 1765 Bogoliubov petitioned for a recall and in September Obreskov sent Bogoliubov back to

⁵⁹⁹ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 75.

⁶⁰⁰ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 17ob.-18ob.

⁶⁰¹ 90.1.417.1762, LL. 25-25ob., 32-32ob.

Russia. Obreskov did not try to keep him and, in fact, thanked the vice-chancellor Golitsyn for permitting Bogoliubov to leave.⁶⁰²

Therefore, Stepan Melnikov became the next embassy secretary. Melnikov served at the mission for more than twenty years and his professional growth reflected the opportunities that existed for men of low social standing if they had valuable language skills. We hear about Melnikov for the first time after Nepliev's arrival in Constantinople in 1746. After the proficiency review conducted by Nepliev among students of the mission, the resident decided to replace Ivan Foteev, a student who did not know any language besides Russian, with the Kiev chancellery scribe Stepan Melnikov. The latter appears to have attached himself voluntarily to the Russian mission in the mid-1740s. Consequently, in the beginning Melnikov paid for his expenses in Constantinople out of his own, or rather his family's, pocket. Stepan was only sixteen years old in 1746 but Nepliev already noticed his brightness: in a short time Melnikov learned to speak French fluently and also understood a little colloquial Greek.⁶⁰³

This young man was an example of a talented boy whose family—simple people from Ukraine—decided to invest in his future in a way that followed and certainly expanded on his father's experience. Matvei Melnikov served as an interpreter in the chancellery of the Kiev governor-general since 1748. Interpreter was a position lower than translator because it only involved oral translation and thus could be done by illiterate people who picked up a language from their surroundings, which was for example common among the Cossacks. Matvei was born in Nezhin, a trading Greek colony in Russian Ukraine. Matvei learned Turkish at a young age when he accompanied Greek merchants on their trips to Crimea and the Ottoman Empire proper.

⁶⁰² 90.1.478.1764, L. 22; 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 53-53ob.; 89.8.394.1766, LL. 5, 5ob.; 90.1.526.1765, LL. 44-44ob., 47.

⁶⁰³ 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 7ob.

His linguistic abilities reflected the nature of the commercial network built by the Nezhin Greeks: he spoke Greek and Turkish fluently and could get by in Tatar, Romanian (“Wallachian”), Hungarian, and Serbian. Matvei consciously groomed his son to make the most of the linguistic wealth available to him: starting in childhood, he taught his boy Greek and Turkish. Then, in adolescent years, with the help of the governor-general, Stepan was sent to work in Constantinople.

The Melnikov family’s decision proved to be the right one. Young and talented Stepan would indeed become an indispensable employee of the Russian mission in Constantinople, serving there for more than twenty years, first as a student, then as translator, and in 1767 attaining the position of secretary of the embassy. He and his father later shared the fate of captivity with resident Obreskov at the outbreak of war in 1768. Stepan, an unsung hero of sorts of Russian diplomacy, continued to carry out secretarial tasks of the embassy during this period of imprisonment, then at peace negotiations, and, unlike Obreskov, took part, as translator, in the very final round of talks that led to the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. The difference in status between the father and son was such that even in the 1760s Matvei earned less than a third of Stepan’s starting salary as a student in 1748.⁶⁰⁴ In 1757 the Melnikov family also sent its other son, Denis Melnikov, to serve at the mission,⁶⁰⁵ where the latter also distinguished himself as a skilled translator.

⁶⁰⁴ Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, pp. 26, 98, 101-102, 364. Writing about the 1760s, Stegnii notes that the Kiev governor-general had up to 300 *reitars* and 12 interpreters (*tolmachi*). In 1745 Nepliuev had complained to the CFA, however, that *reitars* and interpreters from Kiev were poorly dressed and dirty, for which common folk [in the Ottoman Empire] despised them, a shameful sight on arrival in Constantinople, and many of the interpreters were so bad at their job that they should not have been sent at all, p. 101. There is a mention in 1741 of a Georgian interpreter Fedor Bulavinets in the entourage of ambassador Rumiantsev, 90.184.1741,1763,1775, L. 4.

⁶⁰⁵ 89.8.31.1757, L. 55ob.

Students of Oriental Languages

Students of local languages were attached to the Russian embassy since the time of Peter Tolstoy. In the 1740s the Russian mission employed about seven students of Oriental languages, if one is to exclude the foreign-born translators and Russian chancellery scribes, who also were called students but carried out more advanced responsibilities. Most of these students were Russian subjects. They either voluntarily chose to come to Constantinople or were sent by the CFA in order to learn languages, especially Turkish and Italian. In some cases, the mission hired small children—after about twelve years of age—of other mission employees, especially local dragomans. Apart from learning languages, students were expected to begin translating and interpreting whenever needed as soon as they reached a certain level of language proficiency. Some students managed to make a career at the Russian mission. Others disappeared from records, although usually the Russian government moved them back to Russia, where they served as translators at the CFA or at some border post such as Kiev.

The more enigmatic of these students was Nikolai Veshniakov, a nephew of the late resident Aleksei Veshniakov. Mikhneva claims that Nikolai was groomed to replace Pini.⁶⁰⁶ However, we do not hear much about Nikolai Veshniakov from Nepliuev or Obreskov. We know he had arrived together with his uncle as early as 1730 in Constantinople in order to study Turkish. He must have left the Bosphorus at the outbreak of war in 1736. Indeed, in 1746 Nepliuev reported that Nikolai had come to Constantinople in 1743. In 1745 Pini and Obreskov that the late resident Veshniakov said that he paid his student nephew 200 rubles a year, however there was no official document or information about Nikolai's exact stipend.⁶⁰⁷ This salary put

⁶⁰⁶ Mikhneva, *Rossii i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 78.

⁶⁰⁷ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 40.

him on a level higher than chancellery scribes Voronin and Shchukin, either because he was the resident's relative or because he was more skilled than them, although the latter is by no means clear. According to Nepliev, Nikolai was fluent in Greek and could speak Italian. But he was planning on leaving Constantinople together with his aunt, widow Veshniakova.⁶⁰⁸ Despite this, in 1754 Obreskov noted Nikolai in passing in connection with the latter's translation work from Italian.⁶⁰⁹ Veshniakov's later career steps are unknown.

In 1745 other Russian students of Oriental languages included newly hired Giovanni (Ivan) Marini and Ivan Foteev, although for some reason their salary of 100 rubles was higher than those of established students such as Vasilii Rubanov (80 rubles), Ivan Adverkov (50 rubles), and Semen Dementiev (42 rubles). There were also Francesco Marini (50 rubles) and Vasilii Pastushkov (42 rubles).⁶¹⁰

Nepliev reported in 1746 on the students and their progress in studies. His report reveals that the number of promising students was very low. Experienced translators Veshniakov and Voronin were leaving. On the other hand, only Adverkov and Rubanov showed any promise. Nepliev believed that young Adverkov would become a good translator. Therefore, Nepliev intended to attach him to Pini during visits to the Porte the following year, when Adverkov's moustache would grow in—a prerequisite for dealing with the Turks.⁶¹¹ In 1747 Adverkov took a proficiency test and both of his examiners confirmed that he was the only student in the mission who would soon be capable of translating Turkish, but he still required some practice in

⁶⁰⁸ 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 3ob.

⁶⁰⁹ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, L. 7.

⁶¹⁰ 90.259.1745-1746, LL. 40-40ob.

⁶¹¹ 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 4.

order to be able to freely read and write in Turkish.⁶¹² Unfortunately, there was no more mention of Adverkov among the mission's employees in later years.

Vasilii Rubanov was older than Adverkov and could translate from Turkish for Russian merchants at the customs and on other minor errands. He was not as bright as Adverkov but he was still needed because it often happened that three to four translators had to be carrying out their tasks simultaneously. Other nations, noted Nepliuev, usually had five to six translators for this reason. Nepliuev requested that Adverkov and Rubanov receive a raise due to their experience, if only because less-qualified and newly-recruited students who knew very little received a salary of 100 rubles. One of these newly-hired students, Ivan Foteev, for example, knew only one language, his native Russian, and Nepliuev expressed his concern about the amount of effort Foteev needed to put in in order to learn Turkish, because instruction was in a third language.⁶¹³

Nepliuev was not very optimistic about other students. Semen Dementiev had good beginning training and with due effort could successfully apply himself at some border location but he was too timid for staying in Constantinople. Young Vasilii Pastushkov caused an outright suspicion in Nepliuev. Nepliuev expected that Pastushkov would grow up and abandon service and Russia would have trained him in vain, only to benefit the Poles. Therefore, Nepliuev planned to send Pastushkov back to Russia together with Veshniakov's widow.⁶¹⁴

The Russian embassy also employed two sons of the former secretary and dragoman Marini who had left Constantinople together with Veshniakov at the start of the war in 1736. As

⁶¹² Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperia*, p. 78.

⁶¹³ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 4-4ob., 5. Most likely, the language of instruction was Italian, since the local Turkish and Armenian teachers could not know Russian. It is known, for example, that the only dictionaries at their disposal were Ottoman-Italian. 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 9ob.

⁶¹⁴ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 4ob.-5.

a reward for his service, Marini's wife received a pension from the Russian embassy and their sons, Giovanni and Francesco, were employed as students despite their young age.⁶¹⁵

After receiving this report, the CFA evidently became concerned and ordered to carry out a comprehensive language proficiency review in 1747 and then again in 1748. In 1747, after translator Konstantin Retkin arrived from Kiev, he and Pini carried out a round of examinations among the rest of the staff. According to their findings, Semen Dementiev and Vasiliï Rubanov were relatively well qualified: in a year and a half, wrote Nepliev, they would be able to translate freely. But Nepliev still felt that the two could not be used at the Porte due to their "natural condition," which most likely meant their status as former Ottoman captives, as he again described Dementiev as timid. Instead, Nepliev foresaw productive careers for them serving at the border. Nevertheless, Dementiev received a raise—he now earned 120 rubles just as Adverkov and Rubanov.

Newly recruited Konstantin Iuriev and Francesco⁶¹⁶ Marini were found by the examiners to be able to write in Turkish at the beginning level and Nepliev foresaw that in several years Iuriev had the potential to become a good border translator. Employment at the border rather than at the Porte in Constantinople was certainly less prestigious but it was nevertheless a

⁶¹⁵ 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 5; Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 78. Antonio Marini had served as the dragoman of the Russian mission in Constantinople since the early 1720s and emigrated to Russia in the wake of the 1736 war. He died during the trip in early 1737, in a field 13 miles (20 *verstas*) before Moscow, and was buried in a German church in that city. Antonio's nephew, student Ivan Bragiotii, and a servant died a month later. Marini's belongings consisted mainly of clothes, shoes, accessories, and household items, lacking anything of great value, except for a silver watch.⁶¹⁵ 89.1.1753.11. Delo o vozvrashchenii Ivanu Marini pozhitkov ottsa ego Sekretaria Marini, ostavshikhsia v rukakh plemiannikov byvshago rezidenta Veshniakova. 5 August 1753, LL. 1-12.

Bragiotii's last name was spelled in five different ways in just one short document: Bragiotii/Bragiotov/Brailov/Briota. He used to serve as a copyist at the Constantinople mission before the war. We know that he died but there was one Bragiotii mentioned as a translator of the Russian extraordinary embassy in 1740-1742, led by Rumiantsev. He could have been his relative, thus pointing to an existence of a number of Constantinople dragoman families, Greeks and Levantines, whose members moved to work at the CFA in Russia in the 1730s: Khrizoskuleev, Marini, Bragiotii.

⁶¹⁶ Called in the documents alternately Frantsiska/Frantsesko/Frantsisk.

significant achievement. The Russian government sent students to Constantinople not only to become translators at the embassy but also to learn Turkish in order to be posted to other locations in Russia where they were needed. Indeed, St. Petersburg inquired if anyone was yet available to serve as translator in Kiev. To this Nepliev replied in February 1748 that unfortunately none of the students was yet capable enough to work in Kiev, especially because there was no one there to assist them with questions and to check their translations.⁶¹⁷

It becomes clear that Retkin's departure from Kiev created a palpable gap there, which led to the government's request for a newly minted translator. This fact once again highlights how slowly language training proceeded in both St. Petersburg and Constantinople and how rare were people in Russia who could translate from Turkish. A year later, in spring 1749, Nepliev had to explain to the CFA that, despite long-time training, no Russian student was yet qualified to be a translator "because of the difficulty of the language, for if one does not know a certain word, one cannot read it because of lack of vowels" (*po neimenii odnoglasnykh liter*).⁶¹⁸ Moreover, he noted that, according to others, the students began to study seriously, including Russian grammar, only after Nepliev's arrival.⁶¹⁹ Judging by the disappearance of Retkin's name from the mission's records, he must have been recalled to Kiev.

The last review was mandated in December 1748 with a stern warning: if the students did not study well, they would have to pay back the money spent on them. Nepliev was allowed to send those who did not exhibit diligence or committed some wrongdoing back to Russia without asking for an approval from the government. The CFA expected Nepliev to monitor the studies

⁶¹⁷ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 7-7ob.

⁶¹⁸ Ottoman language was written in Arabic script which does not use all the vowels in writing and therefore someone who does not know Arabic has to be familiar with the word and its context in order to read it by guessing missing vowels.

⁶¹⁹ 89.1.17.1745-1750, L. 9ob.

and behavior of all students, especially the youngest ones, because the latter required intensive training not only in Turkish but also in their native Russian. The CFA also expressed its hope to soon see, as Nepliuev promised, Dementiev and Rubanov take on translator functions in Russia.⁶²⁰

In response to this order, Nepliuev tasked Pini with overseeing another round of tests in February 1749. Pini had to test all students and translator Buidi. As a result, Semen Dementiev proved to be to be the best in Turkish: he was able to read and translate several reading samples written in three different styles of Ottoman. Semen also understood Italian and was able to speak Greek. Rubanov took second place but Nepliuev highlighted that Rubanov was not as strong in Turkish and Italian as Dementiev. Otherwise, Rubanov also spoke Greek. Konstantin Iuriev made a lot of progress since the preceding year and Nepliuev expected him soon to become as good as Rubanov in Turkish. Iuriev was not as strong in Italian, however. Nepliuev reserved special praise for Stepan Melnikov: despite having started studying Turkish only recently, Stepan was a very promising student due to his natural cleverness, as his *hoca*, or teacher, also confirmed. Stepan could speak French fluently and understood Italian. Nepliuev also encountered several disappointments: brothers Marini were not as diligent as he had hoped. Native Russian students therefore received better salary and seniority over the Marinis. As had been mentioned many times before, wrote Nepliuev, the latter were kept largely because of their father's prior services to the Russians.⁶²¹

Marinis eventually indeed proved to be a poor fit for the Russian embassy. In June 1750 Nepliuev requested that the older brother Giovanni, aged twenty-four, be sent to Russia and

⁶²⁰ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 8-8ob.

⁶²¹ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 8ob.-9.

asked permission to release the other brother, Francesco, aged 20, from service. Their mother had died at the beginning of the month and the two remained penniless; their combined salary of 150 rubles a year was not enough to feed themselves and their younger brother. Had the two been more studious and well behaved, perhaps Nepliev would not have resorted to the option of abandoning them. But, with Giovanni's impudent and reckless behavior for the preceding two years, as well as his neglect of studies—especially the Russian language,—and Francesco's gravitation towards quiet existence as a devoted Catholic, the two were simply out of place at the Russian mission. Short of leaving them out on the street, Nepliev asked their close relatives, uncles Fontons, to take care of them. Fontons were first dragomans of the French embassy. The latter pleaded with Nepliev to request St. Petersburg's permission to send Giovanni to Russia in order to avoid troubles that could befall him: his misbehavior was not specified but Nepliev indicated that Giovanni could face danger as a Christian for his improper tendencies. The CFA graciously granted the Fontons' wish and ordered Nepliev to terminate Francesco's salary—for he was not a promising student and a Catholic ("Papist").⁶²²

Giovanni Marini became a student at the CFA in Russia, but soon he requested to return to his homeland. He pleaded with the Russian government to save his life by sending him back to Constantinople, for he had been suffering from tuberculosis/*chakhotnaia bolezn* ever since his arrival in Russia and finally became so emaciated that doctors and their medications could not help him. Marini wrote in summer 1753 that he would not survive the upcoming winter in Russia. Needless to say, he could not fulfill his duties at the CFA in such poor health. He reasoned that his being in Constantinople would give him a chance to recover, "God willing." After all, he was born and raised there, and was most accustomed to its climate. He also had

⁶²² 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 10ob.-11ob.; 90.1.338.1751, L. 9ob.

relatives there who could look after him. Moreover, Marini argued that he could learn Turkish language much better in Constantinople than in Russia, where “there were no teachers who knew that language.” Thus, for reasons of health and purported desire to serve Russia’s interests better, Marini asked to be sent to the mission run by Obreskov and to be appointed to his previous position there.⁶²³

Obreskov, in his turn, began to defend Giovanni Marini as soon as he became *chargé d'affaires* in 1751. At the time he wrote to the CFA that Giovanni Marini was not guilty of any wrongdoing or bad behavior and requested to send him back after two years. As a result, the CFA approved Marini’s request with ease in September 1753 and sent him to Constantinople as courier. The CFA expressed hope that Marini would be diligent in studies and upright in behavior. He was to receive the same salary as in Russia—200 rubles,—which was twice the amount he received in 1745.⁶²⁴

Marini evidently proved to be useful at the mission because the following year Obreskov applied for Marini’s promotion to the position of junior translator with the rank of lieutenant. However, Marini died some time after 1756, as is seen from Obreskov’s petition in 1766, asking St. Petersburg to help Giovanni Marini’s widow financially so she could take care of her ten-year-old son and a daughter. The widow barely managed to put food on the table. Therefore, Obreskov suggested that the CFA could pay 60 rubles a year to Giovanni Marini’s son, who was already showing promise, as an investment in his education, so that in time he would join the

⁶²³ 89.1.1753.13. Delo ob otpravlenii studenta Marini v Konstantinopol’ k Rezidentu Obreskovu dlia obucheniia Turetskomu iazyku. 15 September 1753, LL. 1-1ob.

⁶²⁴ 89.1.1753.13, LL. 2-2ob.

ranks of students of Oriental languages at the mission.⁶²⁵ In this way, Obreskov continued to take care of the branch of the Marini dragoman clan that began to work for the Russians in the 1720s.

Obreskov cultivated other students as well. In addition to Marini, in 1754 Obreskov also promoted Semen Dementiev to the position of junior translator. Stepan Melnikov received a rank of warrant officer of the *reitar* division of the Kiev Provincial Chancellery,⁶²⁶ where his father officially served as interpreter. The CFA approved these suggestions, especially stressing that Melnikov had to study Turkish language well.⁶²⁷

Obreskov took initiative to make new hires as well, especially with the view of introducing more native linguistic talent. Thus, he petitioned St. Petersburg to allow him to hire Iakim Prihodchenko, a Cossack of the Poltava regiment freed from Ottoman captivity, as an interpreter serving the mission. Prihodchenko had already been working at the mission as a doorkeeper, but Obreskov took note of the Cossack's exceptional linguistic abilities: Prihodchenko knew Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and Italian languages. Moreover, he was quiet and calm by nature and did not indulge in drink. Bestuzhev-Riumin made a note of this person while reading Obreskov's report and, indeed, in 1756 Iakim Prihodchenko accompanied Russian couriers as an interpreter.⁶²⁸

However, Obreskov also had to deal with a less pleasant case involving translator Dementiev. As we know, Andrian Nepliev had always praised Dementiev's translation skills and knowledge of Ottoman and Italian. However, the late resident also pointed out his timidity and consequently saw him as unfit for promotion in the mission, which required frequent errands

⁶²⁵ 89.8.394.1766, LL. 17-17ob.

⁶²⁶ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, LL. 10, 11.

⁶²⁷ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, L. 10.

⁶²⁸ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatia*, pp. 77-78.

to the Porte. Nepliuiev advised to employ Dementiev at some border post in Russia. However, Dementiev's Russian was not very good and the CFA wanted to employ him at the Constantinople mission's chancellery first in order to improve his knowledge of his native tongue. In fall of 1756 Obreskov managed to send Dementiev back to Russia together with the departing Russian envoy Dolgorukii. Obreskov wrote that translator Dementiev was going to Kiev in order to see his father. Apparently, Semen had fallen into Turkish captivity twenty years earlier and had not seen his father since.⁶²⁹ Obreskov wrote that Dementiev also wished to visit St. Petersburg and Obreskov allowed him to ask the CFA's permission for this. The resident argued that it would be very beneficial for Dementiev to see the Russian capital, "for he will at least acquire exact and fundamental knowledge of the flowering state and power of the empire of Her Imperial Majesty; therefore he would henceforth be able to serve here [at Constantinople] even better, and not judge things the way a blind man judges colors."⁶³⁰

It is unclear how long Dementiev stayed in Russia in the 1750s but by the early 1760s his name again appears on the list of the Constantinople mission's staff. Thus, on February 19/March 2, 1763 St. Petersburg forwarded to Obreskov the petition received at the CFA from Semen Dementiev who was sent from Constantinople to meet envoy Dolgorukov at the border.⁶³¹ Dementiev asked for a raise and requested to be appointed to the Constantinople

⁶²⁹ Indeed, Semen Mironovich Dementiev was born in a small town of Keleberda of the Poltava regiment in 1726 and in 1734 he was captured by the Tatars and sold in Constantinople. In 1740 he fled and found protection at the Russian mission in Constantinople, which at the time was headed by Aleksei Veshniakov. The latter kept Dementiev at the mission as a student of Oriental languages. In 1754 Obreskov promoted him to the rank of translator. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 78. Thus, having been abducted at eight years of age Dementiev must have known Turkish very well and must have had difficulties using Russian fluently. Six years of captivity could have also left a mark on his character, rendering him timid.

⁶³⁰ 90.1.375.1756, L. 292ob.

⁶³¹ Dementiev stayed on the border between the summer of 1762 and April 1763. Obreskov decided not to call him back to Constantinople because of the cancellation of Dashkov's mission. Therefore, Dementiev remained there until the arrival of Dolgorukov's embassy. Obreskov argued in his report to St. Petersburg from August 27, 1762

mission as translator for Russian merchants, in place of translator Dandri. The Russian government noted that Dementiev was offended that his salary was lower than those of translators Dandri and Melnikov. In view of his seniority, Dementiev asked for a 200-ruble increase in his salary—from 100 to 300 rubles. Dementiev claimed that Russian merchants were unhappy with Dandri's services and planned to ask the CFA to appoint Dementiev instead. St. Petersburg admitted that it did not know whether Dementiev's claims were true and allowed Obreskov to increase Dementiev's salary by up to 100 rubles. However, the Russian government found Dementiev's suggestion to appoint him to the customs service a good idea, because, "being a native subject of ours, he can safeguard the affairs of our merchants better than any foreigner." Therefore, St. Petersburg allowed Obreskov to replace Dandri with Dementiev if that was what Russian merchants in Constantinople really wanted. At the same time, Dementiev was also expected to continue helping at the mission's chancellery.⁶³²

On April 1/12, 1763 Obreskov replied with a great deal of surprise. It was up to the Russian empress, he wrote, to determine whether Dementiev deserved a raise, but Obreskov was confident that Dementiev was incapable of attending to the affairs of Russian merchants in Constantinople because he did not know anything about them or about various customs practices in the Ottoman Empire. "Moreover, there are no tariffs, and a duty is assessed based on the value of goods at a currently-prevailing price; therefore an experienced translator who knows various customs officers can be much more useful to merchants than someone who is not familiar and not knowledgeable." Obreskov assured the CFA that Dementiev's claim that merchants wanted

that Dementiev could be useful at the border by notifying the Kiev governor of the movements of the Crimean Khan, who was in his Budjak estates—in Kaushany, just south of Bendery. 90.1.420.1762, L. 9. Judging by this fact, it appears that Obreskov did not find Dementiev's presence at the mission to be essential.

⁶³² 90.1.450.1763, LL. 11ob.-12.

him to become their translator could not be true, because the merchants could not have announced it unless they had not first appealed to Obreskov with a complaint against Dandri. But Obreskov had never heard a single criticism of Dandri from Russian merchants throughout his entire stay in Constantinople. Obreskov, nevertheless, offered a Solomonic solution: when Dementiev came back to Constantinople, Obreskov promised to attach him to Dandri so that the young translator could gradually learn local customs practices.⁶³³

We, therefore, learn that Dementiev not only returned to Constantinople after a trip to Russia in the second half of the 1750s but also had ambitions concerning his employment at the Russian mission. For Dementiev, the Ottoman Empire was a place where he spent most of his life and where he had greater chance of advancement than in Russia, where his insufficient knowledge of Russian language likely continued to present a professional obstacle. In any case, we know that despite the government's decision to raise Dementiev's salary in Constantinople in early 1764,⁶³⁴ later in the year Dementiev was already back in Russia. On November 17/28, 1764—two weeks after the imperial order to stop the construction of the fortress of St. Elizabeth—the CFA ordered Dementiev to travel to the fortress, where he was to serve as translator to General-Liutenant Melgunov, who was prescribed to have two translators. On January 19/30, 1765 Kiev governor-general Glebov signed an order for Dementiev to depart, but citing poor health Dementiev asked to remain in Kiev. Dementiev used this time to lodge a request with the CFA to send him to Constantinople, where he had clothes and books that he wanted to sell, and where he still had to settle his debts. On May 27/June 7 Glebov informed

⁶³³ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 137-137ob.

⁶³⁴ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 53ob.

Obreskov about Dementiev's upcoming arrival but warned that the translator had to return and travel to the fortress of St. Elizabeth immediately upon resolving his personal business.⁶³⁵

The life of the students, most of whom were of very middling or simple origins, was very austere. Demanding curriculum and poor pay produced a hungry, exhausting existence. Nepliev made a request to complement their salary with government-funded meals. He reasoned that daily expenditure on feeding all the poor students would be no more than 1 ruble. The meals would not be lavish, but contain only the most necessary products. Still, Nepliev foresaw some wine—not much, in consideration of the students' young age. The CFA approved this suggestion, motivated by the desire to see the students dedicate themselves to studies and not worry about what to eat on a daily basis.⁶³⁶ Later, in 1749, Nepliev would also request more money for food, heat, and baths for the least-paid students. For comparison, he reported that the Venetian government allocated 60-100 gold coins—equal to 126-210 rubles⁶³⁷—to students whose daily expenses were already covered by the embassy; the Habsburg (“Imperial Roman”) internuncio spent 300 guildens per student a year, or about 150 rubles a year. For the same reason noted above and especially keen on removing any need for the students to leave the premises of the mission, the CFA approved this request as well, adding 100 rubles a year for each of the six students with the lowest salary.⁶³⁸ Admittedly, this was still less than the respective expenditures at the other foreign embassies, but most likely Russian students were expected to get by much more modestly by their government.

⁶³⁵ 90.1.530.1765. Perepiska Kievskogo General Gubernatora Glebova s rezidentom Obrezkovym ob otpravlenii sekretnoi pochty, o smerti v doroge k Peterburgu turetskogo posla Dervish Efendiia i vozvrashchenii ego svity obratno. January 1-December 12, 1765, L. 17.

⁶³⁶ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 5-5ob.

⁶³⁷ Conversion made based on Nepliev's report on pensions to secret informants in 1747.

⁶³⁸ 89.1.17.1745-1750, LL. 9ob.-10.

The situation was not peculiar to Constantinople, although it employed much more translators and students. Other Russian missions abroad also suffered from insufficient pay. Even ambassadors and envoys themselves complained that their salaries could not meet the high cost of living. It is not surprising, therefore, that staff members of Russian missions abroad accumulated debts, which were only sometimes paid off by the Russian government, especially when the latter feared for the loyalty of employees versed in the secret correspondence cipher and other states secrets. Some employees, including clergy, gave in to heavy drinking and failed their duties on purpose—in order to be recalled back to Russia.⁶³⁹ The last section of this chapter will demonstrate that internal disorders also happened at the Constantinople mission.

By the early 1760s the staff of the mission was one of the smallest it had ever been, comprised mostly of the old guard. It included counselor Aleksandr Pini, dragomans Guglielmo Dandri and Stepan Melnikov, and only two students of Oriental languages, Gerasim Myshkin and Denis Melnikov.⁶⁴⁰ As we know, the new student Denis Melnikov was the brother of Stepan Melnikov. Otherwise, it is obvious that there were very few volunteers for this location.

The fact that the Constantinople mission was poorly staffed, especially with translators, did not escape Catherine's attention. Consequently, she sent four students of Oriental languages together with Pavel Levashov—who was appointed as assistant to Obreskov—to Constantinople in September 1763. The new students were brothers Petr and Nikolai Iablonskii, Ilia Ivanov, and Sergei Lashkarev. It is obvious that Catherine aspired to improve the functioning of the Constantinople mission because the students were expected to study two languages in particular: Turkish and Italian. Obreskov had to ensure that the new students would study diligently and not

⁶³⁹ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 52-53

⁶⁴⁰ 89.8.334.1763, L. 33.

waste time. Petr Iablonskii was to receive a salary of 120 rubles a year, Nikolai Iablonskii—100 rubles, Ivanov—80 rubles, and Lashkarev—60 rubles. On January 31/February 11, 1764 Obreskov informed St. Petersburg of their arrival and promised, following the official order, to place them in the house of the same Armenian who hosted Denis Melnikov and Gerasim Myshkin.⁶⁴¹

Ironically, it was the student who was paid the least—Sergei Lashkarev, an ethnic Georgian—who excelled first as a student and then as a skilled translator, polyglot, and negotiator, advancing to a top position at the CFA later in his life.⁶⁴² Lashkarev's exceptional abilities were noticed from the very beginning. Thus, in April 1764 Obreskov petitioned St. Petersburg to increase Lashkarev's salary to the level of his peers. He argued that there were several reasons to do so. First, the sixty rubles were insufficient to ensure that Lashkarev, as well as other students, could maintain presentable appearance, which was indispensable for any member of the Constantinople diplomatic corps. Secondly, Obreskov singled out Lashkarev as a very promising student: "Moreover he also deserves this indulgence due to his qualities, for he is already more proficient in and speaks Turkish language better than his comrades, and it seems that in the future he will be successful." Finally, Obreskov drew attention to Lashkarev's orphan status.⁶⁴³

In Constantinople Lashkarev began to study Latin and continued in his studies of Turkish, Italian, French, and Greek. Lashkarev acquired languages with great ease and even had time to help Obreskov with special tasks, as well as taught Turkish to Levashov. When Obreskov

⁶⁴¹ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 22ob.; 90.1.450.1763, LL. 54-54ob.

⁶⁴² Lashkarev's life and career became the subject of a whole book by Gavriil Kessel'brenner: *Khronika odnoi diplomaticheskoi kar'ery: Diplomat-vostokoved S.L. Lashkarev I ego vremia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987).

⁶⁴³ 89.8.356.1764, L. 4.

was imprisoned in Yedikule, Lashkarev remained free and effectively became *chargé d'affaires* of the mission. Despite many risks and attacks on his life, he was very successful in repairing channels of communication: he corresponded with Obreskov, Aleksei Orlov in the Mediterranean, Field marshal Aleksandr Golitsyn of the Danube army, and Russian ambassador in Vienna Dmitrii Golitsyn. He also managed to take care of Russian merchants by sending them to Russia on ships through Holland. Upon returning to Russia in 1771, Obreskov composed a glowing assessment of Lashkarev's achievements and character: "He can speak Turkish, French, Italian, Greek, Tatar, Armenian, and Georgian languages, and he was responsible for all who stayed in Pera during my imprisonment and until we all reunited in Demotika. He earned praise from all of them for his behavior. Many feel goodwill towards him." According to Obreskov's recommendation, in July 1772 St. Petersburg sent Lashkarev to the Fokshany Congress as second dragoman, where he frequently carried out important orders of Field Marshal Peter Rumiantsev.⁶⁴⁴

Among other additions to the staff before the war were several new students: Dandri's twelve-year son, Giovanni Marini's son of approximately the same age, Dmitrii Mironov, and Trofim Malyshev. From the latter two, we know only about the background of Mironov. He was a sergeant/*vakhmistr* of the Kiev *reitar* crew and in 1765 he requested the CFA to send him to Constantinople. Mironov knew Russian as his native language and also learned to read and write in German, as well as studied arithmetic and geometry. Mironov wished to study Italian, French, and Turkish. Panin sent Mironov to Obreskov and expressed hope that due to young age and diligence Mironov would soon learn these languages. Panin especially wanted to acquire another

⁶⁴⁴ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 451-452.

specialist in Turkish language, since such people were lacking in Russia.⁶⁴⁵ Interestingly, Obreskov hired a private French language instructor for Mironov.⁶⁴⁶

Up until the end of Obreskov's residency, cut short by the 1768 war, the mission employed six students, most of whom received very low salaries. For example, one student, Trofim Malyshev, earned only 48 rubles a year, while the highest-paid student Petr Iablonskii received 120.⁶⁴⁷ Accordingly, a year later Obreskov requested St. Petersburg to raise the salaries of students Malyshev and Mironov, the latter of whom earned the second lowest salary of 60 rubles a year. Obreskov explained that this had to be done to save them from destitution. In summer 1767 St. Petersburg approved a raise of 20 and 30 rubles, correspondingly.⁶⁴⁸ Like all other members of the mission, students were also expected to allocate a portion of their salaries—up to one percent—to cover expenses for the hospital.

Embassy Officers and Embassy Nobles

Obreskov began his service in Constantinople as embassy officer. His biography and service are described in other parts of this work. It appears that the officer's responsibilities were to maintain order at the mission and oversee Russian subjects who were freed from captivity.

Lieutenant Ivan Shokurov arrived in the late 1740s and served in the capacity of both embassy officer and language student. According to his service report from 1754,⁶⁴⁹ he was very similar in origins to Obreskov: just eight years younger, he attended the same Noble Cadet Corps since 1742 and owned 37 male souls back in Russia. In August 1748 the Senate, upon

⁶⁴⁵ 90.1.375.1756, L. 94.

⁶⁴⁶ 89.8.394.1766, L. 7.

⁶⁴⁷ 89.8.394.1766, L. 8.

⁶⁴⁸ 90.1.542.1766-1767, LL. 37-37ob.

⁶⁴⁹ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, LL. 4-4ob., 10-12.

recommendation from the CFA, promoted Shokurov to the rank of lieutenant of army regiments and sent him to Constantinople to study Oriental languages. His salary was a considerable 300 rubles a year,⁶⁵⁰ which was a lot given that Obreskov had been receiving only 260 rubles a year at the time of Veshniakov's death in 1745. It is likely that in 1748-1750 Obreskov and Shokurov received equal amounts, which was unfair to Obreskov who had served for so long and contributed so much to the mission. Perhaps it was Shokurov's additional position as a student of Oriental languages that justified the difference, for Obreskov was never officially studying languages at the mission, even though we know that he picked up Turkish, Greek, and Italian during his service.

It is possible that the Russian government sent Shokurov to replace Obreskov, either taking into account Obreskov's earlier requests to be recalled due to his physical intolerance of the local climate, or as a result of the fallout from Obreskov's unsuccessful mission to deliver false pretender Fedor Ivanov to Russia in 1748. When Obreskov left for Russia in 1750, Shokurov remained in the position of the embassy officer and as Obreskov before him helped maintain order and run different aspects of the mission's activity, which probably did not leave him much time for studies. At the death of resident Nepliuev, like Obreskov before him, Shokurov together with Pini ran the affairs of the mission for eight months in 1750-1751. When Obreskov returned as head of the mission in 1751, Shokurov served under him just as Obreskov had previously served under Veshniakov and Nepliuev as embassy officer.

But the case of lieutenant Shokurov proves how fast the turnaround of the mission's personnel was simply because of difficult climate, highlighting Obreskov's exceptional endurance compared to others. Shokurov served continuously from 1748 until 1753, when he

⁶⁵⁰ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, LL. 4-4ob.

was tasked with going to Russia with some important mission. He stayed there until 1754, being awarded the rank of captain in March. He then returned to Constantinople after delivering an imperial order to the Russian ambassador in Vienna Count Keyserling.⁶⁵¹ But following his arrival on the Bosphorus in fall 1754, Shokurov's health began to deteriorate with every passing month. Shokurov suffered from frequent incidents of a dangerous fever and also "yellow disease" (*opasnaia likhoradochnaia, a potom i zheltaia bolezni*). In October 1755 Obreskov reported to the CFA that Shokurov could not withstand local climate any further. Obreskov took an independent decision to send Shokurov to Russia, first to Kiev, and—if his condition did not improve there,—to St. Petersburg. Shokurov requested permission to proceed to St. Petersburg and be employed at the CFA. In March 1756 Shokurov was awarded the rank of major "for his labors and acquired knowledge of Turkish affairs." He was attached to the Turkish division at the Secret Expedition of the CFA.⁶⁵²

Over the following decade, the mission in Constantinople remained a distant post where hardly anyone desired to go voluntarily. But there were some exceptions. For example, one of the nobles attached to the special Russian embassy to Constantinople in 1759, Lieutenant Prince Sergii Meshcherskii, asked St. Petersburg for permission to remain in Constantinople with Obreskov. Meshcherskii wanted to learn French and Italian languages and to receive diplomatic training. The CFA sent the respective order to Obreskov in February 1760, noting that Meshcherskii would be counted toward the three nobles that every embassy had to have among its staff. Indeed, only several years earlier, on April 14, 1758, Empress Elizabeth had issued a

⁶⁵¹ 89.1.1754.11.1754-1757, L. 4ob.

⁶⁵² 89.1.1755-1756.25. Delo po prozbe byvshago pri Konstantinopol'skoi missii Poruchika Ivana Shokurova ob otzyve ego v Rossiuu, I ob opredelenii k delam pri Kollegii, s nagrazhdeniem china kapitanskogo. 19 September 1755-1756, LL. 1-9ob.

special order that required the CFA to attach nobles to each Russian minister abroad in order to provide these nobles with diplomatic training. Meshcherskii's salary was set at 300 rubles a year.⁶⁵³ However, on November 10, 1760 Meshcherskii asked the chancellor to allow him to return to Russia for several months because he could not get used to the difficult local climate. Ever since arriving in Constantinople, Meshcherskii complained, he began to experience internal and then external fevers/*likhoratka*, with the result that he felt completely emaciated physically. Doctors advised him that changing climates was his only option to feel better. Meshcherskii assured St. Petersburg that this was not a pretext for leaving his duties behind: "I am a faithful servant of my fatherland, and after all I have learned something at this place."⁶⁵⁴

The chancellor received Meshcherskii's petition on December 10, 1760 and evidently allowed him to return. On April 6, 1761 Meshcherskii was reported to have departed from Kiev to St. Petersburg, carrying letters from Constantinople.⁶⁵⁵ On May 12, 1761, in a much longer letter to Empress Elizabeth, Meshcherskii described his long career that spanned all three branches of government service in Russia: first as a page at the imperial court for fourteen years; since 1757 as an army lieutenant who fought for three years and was wounded in the Battle of Küstrin in the Seven Years' War; and, finally, as an embassy noble in "Tsar'grad," following his long-time desire to serve at a Russian embassy abroad. Meshcherskii then described the kind of self-designed training he received at Constantinople: "Through effort and diligence I have acquired understanding about the affairs of that place, about Turkish mores and traditions—and I hope to attain even better knowledge in this area, and henceforth I will try to apply myself in

⁶⁵³ 89.1.1759-1760.6, LL. 94, 95; 89.1.10.1760-1761, LL. 4-4ob., 8-8ob, 36.

⁶⁵⁴ 89.1.10.1760-1761. Delo po proz'be byvshago v Konstantinopole dvorianinom Posol'stva, Porutchika Kniazia Sergiia Meshcherskago, o opredelenii ego v Kollegiiu Tituliarnym Sovetnikom, a potom ob otpravlenii zh v Venu, a ottuda paki v Konstantinopol'. December 22, 1760-December 17, 1761, LL. 3-3ob.

⁶⁵⁵ 90.1.414.1761, L. 3.

everyday reading of the mission's archive, in translations, writing, and partly in essay composition." The purpose of his letter to the empress was to request a promotion to the rank of major, in reward for his military service, because his attempts to remind the Military College about it through the CFA were unsuccessful. Indeed, Obreskov himself recommended Meshcherskii for the already promised rank of major in February and September 1760, but to no avail.⁶⁵⁶

Meshcherskii, nevertheless, saw his future in state service abroad, probably because his wound had thwarted his hopes of advancing up the military ladder. Therefore, Meshcherskii asked the empress to grant him the state rank of titular counselor with the corresponding doubling of his salary, and eventually to send him back to Constantinople, where he hoped to become even more proficient in diplomatic service. In the meantime—until he recuperated physically,—Meshcherskii desired to serve in the CFA's Turkish department in St. Petersburg.⁶⁵⁷

About ten days after submitting his petition, Prince Meshcherskii received an approval from the chancellor. However, six days later, on May 29/June 9, 1761, the empress and the chancellor changed their minds and decided to send Meshcherskii with sensitive orders to Vienna as a courier and to leave him there in the character of embassy noble. St. Petersburg desired to supply the newly appointed Russian extraordinary ambassador to Vienna, Prince Golitsyn, with a fitting entourage. Meshcherskii was to oversee the mission's archive. At first, Meshcherskii did not mind and immediately set out to prepare for the trip. He took with him two

⁶⁵⁶ 89.1.10.1760-1761, LL. 8, 8ob.-9, 35, 36ob.-37, 38-38ob. This proves that diplomatic career still lagged behind military one in prestige. As mentioned earlier, even in 1751 Empress Elizabeth had to remind the Military College to keep up with promotions of people like Obreskov in order not to discourage individuals from serving in the diplomatic corps. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 376. Consequently, one must conclude that not much had changed after one decade.

⁶⁵⁷ 89.1.10.1760-1761, LL. 9-9ob.

servants: one serf Andrei Miasnikov and a former Ottoman subject the Greek Dmitrii Nikolaev. However, it is clear that Meshcherskii longed to return to the Bosphorus and, moreover, he was in a rush to do so. On August 1/12, 1761 he wrote from Vienna to the chancellor about his reservations about staying in the Austrian capital and his desire to advance Russian interests in the Ottoman Empire. Meshcherskii first thanked the chancellor for the appointment and for entrusting him with the Vienna mission's archive.

Vienna did not appeal to Meshcherskii and he pleaded with the chancellor—"my gratitude will be limitless"—to send him to Constantinople. He was dismayed by the social mores of the Austrian capital, which required him to lead a lavish lifestyle, for which Meshcherskii simply did not have money. He, moreover, was quite repulsed by the great hubris and pride of the locals, "which does not sit well with my character." Finally, he realized that the only way he could be useful in Vienna was through the attendance of frequent assemblies. However, he believed that at first he needed to acquire better professional training and therefore he preferred to immerse himself in studies rather than waste time at social functions. And, finally, Meshcherskii underscored his burning desire to work in Constantinople, which was marked by a touch of enigma: "...I find solace only in the merciful promise given by Your Illustrious Highness to send me back to Constantinople, and to appoint me to such a position, to which all my desire is directed, and in which I can serve my fatherland, having such intentions that will become clear with time."⁶⁵⁸

The Chancellor instructed the CFA to satisfy Meshcherskii's request and in late September 1761 the CFA already notified Obreskov about Meshcherskii's upcoming arrival,

⁶⁵⁸ 89.1.10.1760-1761, LL. 10-11, 13-13ob., 14-15ob., 18, 24-28.

counseling the resident to assure that Meshcherskii would study with diligence.⁶⁵⁹ However, Meshcherskii did not come to Constantinople for some reason—his name does not appear in the mission’s records for these years. It is unclear what goals Meshcherskii was pursuing in returning to Constantinople. The loftiness of his expressions indicates that he might have been aiming at the position of Russian resident in the Ottoman capital. In any case, Meshcherskii’s interest was quite peculiar and even intriguing. It must be noted that initially his interest in foreign service was not so focused on the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, he had at first aimed at learning only French and Italian languages, which he could then easily apply elsewhere. But for some reason Constantinople captivated him. It is another question whether this impoverished Russian aristocrat truly possessed the stamina and humility of Obreskov, without which qualities he could never fit into the often-demeaning atmosphere of dealings with the Porte.

On March 21, 1762 the government of Peter III appointed titular counselor Petr Zhukov as an embassy noble, citing the 1758 imperial regulation that prescribed every Russian embassy abroad to employ three young embassy nobles who were well off and talented, who could thereby receive practical diplomatic training. St. Petersburg assigned a salary of 600 rubles a year to Zhukov,⁶⁶⁰ which was twice as much as what Meshcherskii received in 1762. However, Zhukov was expected to travel with the extraordinary embassy of Dashkov who was representing Peter III. Most likely, he returned to Russia from the middle of the journey together with Dashkov, whom Catherine II recalled upon her accession to the throne.

Therefore, one can conclude that positions like embassy officer and especially embassy noble did not play an important part in the everyday work of the Russian mission in

⁶⁵⁹ 89.1.10.1760-1761, LL. 29-31.

⁶⁶⁰ 90.1.417.1762, LL. 25-25ob., 32-32ob.

Constantinople. Embassy officers were mostly necessary to help maintain order at the embassy, especially during interruptions in leadership. But by virtue of being less burdened by regular everyday responsibilities, these officers had a chance to observe how various parts of the mission functioned together. An embassy officer or an embassy noble could also hope to change his career track from military to state service. This latter fact attracted some people to Constantinople, but the volume of interest could not compare with other diplomatic posts in Europe. Aristocratic enthusiasts such as Meshcherskii were a rarity in their ranks. After all, the reality of Obreskov's existence, and especially that of his subordinates, was far removed from the dynamic social life of Dmitrii Golitsyn in Vienna.

Supporting Personnel

The rest of the staff included personnel that prayed, healed, and taught those engaged in diplomacy and its supporting trade of translation. In 1745 the chaplain of the mission, Hieromonk Iosif Krasnitskii, received 200 rubles a year. Hieromonk Ignatii Chasovikov served as a teacher, most likely of Russian language, for 100 rubles. Monk Zakharii was the sexton of the embassy's church, getting a less than modest 24 rubles a year. Doctor Kastelii (210 rubles) and physician (*lekar'*) Stefaneli (150 rubles) were paid despite the lack of official resolution of the CFA about their salaries. Hoca⁶⁶¹ Megmed Efendi received 180 rubles. Hoca Ali Efendi (90 rubles) worked as a scribe, thus filling the relative vacuum of those employees who knew or could easily write in Ottoman. The Armenian "pope", or priest, who taught Latin, Italian,

⁶⁶¹ Hoca is a Turkish for "teacher." In the document it is spelled *khodzhi*.

arithmetic, and geometry received 120 rubles.⁶⁶² Most probably in order to cut down on expenses, the CFA ordered in October 1745 to send Hieromonk Ignatii back to Russia. Instead, student Voronin was charged with teaching Russian to the rest of the students.⁶⁶³

In summer 1751 Hieromonk Iosif requested to be released from his post.⁶⁶⁴ Through the corresponding resolution of the Synod we learn more about this long-serving mission cleric. Iosif Krasnitskii was attached to the Constantinople mission as early as 1730 and after more than twenty years of service he desired to return to his previous location, the Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos. He asked the Synod to consider lightening the fate of future priests appointed to Constantinople by limiting their commitment to five years. If a certain priest desired to remain longer, Krasnitskii recommended not prohibiting it. The Synod accepted Krasnitskii's suggestion, requiring however of those priests who did not want to stay longer than five years to write in advance through the resident to the CFA and the Synod, so that replacement could be found in time. In Krasnitskii's case, the Synod approved his leaving the embassy and, upon the CFA's request, tasked His Grace Metropolitan of Kiev Timofei with finding a deserving, honorable, and knowledgeable hieromonk or widowed white priest in Krasnitskii's stead.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶² 90.259.1745-1746, L. 40ob. Before 1746 the Armenian priest and the Turkish hoca used to live at the residence of the Russian mission. However, in preparation for Andrian Nepluev's arrival, Obreskov wanted to free space in the residence and asked them to leave it. Pini volunteered to take the hoca into his own place, for he knew him as a good-natured and honest man. 90.280.1746, L. 148. It is also possible that the Armenian priest could find an alternative housing in the foreign district of Pera and Galata, while the hoca could find himself on the street and in danger of retribution for working for the Russians. In addition, it might have been more prudent to keep an eye on the Turkish hoca rather than on the Armenian teacher. The Armenian teacher did find a house for himself, where he also hosted Russian students of Oriental languages.

⁶⁶³ 90.259.1745-1746, L. 176.

⁶⁶⁴ We do not know if the troublesome events inside the mission in spring of that year served as a catalyst for his petition, but they could have played a role.

⁶⁶⁵ The Synod declined to pay a monetary award to Iosif, claiming that the CFA had to take care of him since the synod did not have money for such expenses. The CFA kindly granted Iosif an award of 100 rubles on top of his remaining salary. 90.1.338.1751, LL. 20-22ob.

After Krasnitskii's departure, a new chaplain of the mission, Hieromonk Arsenii, arrived in 1752, but he died in early January 1756 from pleurisy.⁶⁶⁶ For the next five months Hieromonk Vladimir from Mount Athos conducted religious services at the embassy on a temporary basis.⁶⁶⁷ At the end of August 1756 the mission welcomed its new chaplain—Hieromonk Iosif from Kiev—whose salary was increased from the usual 200 rubles to 300 rubles a year.⁶⁶⁸

By the end of the period, the number of people belonging to the mission was almost sixty. Judging by Obreskov's letter from June 1771, in which he notified the Russian vice-chancellor of his arrival in Zemlin after Turkish captivity, we could reconstruct the cast of characters that became common at the mission. The senior staff of the former mission traveling back to Russia included Obreskov, chancellery counselor Pavel Levashov, embassy counselor Aleksandr Pini, embassy secretary Stefan Melnikov, and chaplain Leontii Nevolia. Translators Guglielmo Dandri, Iosif Crutta, Denis Melnikov, and Guards Sergeant Aleksei Tregubov formed the intermediary group of the mission's hierarchy. Below them in status were students of Oriental languages: Petr Iablonskoi, Nikolai Iablonskoi, Il'ia Ivanov, Sergei Lashkarev, Dmitrii Mironov, and Antonio Marini.⁶⁶⁹

Supporting personnel included a substantial group of members of the Kiev postal messenger team: *Vakhmistr*/Sergeant Evstafii Renekev, Corporal Prafen Mal'eninov, and *reitars*

⁶⁶⁶ 90.1.375.1756, L. 21ob.

⁶⁶⁷ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 27-31ob., 146ob. Hieromonk Vladimir was one of many monks who visited Constantinople for various reasons. Some of them were productively employed, as was the case with Vladimir. Others caused troubles from the moment they set their foot on the ground. Thus, one Ukrainian monk arrived by sea from Ochakov in late August 1756. He managed to enter into an argument with the Turks right after disembarking near Galata. The Turks brought him by force to the Galata mullah, accusing him of defaming the Turkish faith. The mullah, however, helped save the monk from heavy punishment in return for a couple *zincirlis*. Dragoman Dandri bribed him with 8 *zincirlis*, or 22 levki, and the mullah announced that by force of capitulations the monk enjoyed extraterritoriality and could be judged only by the Russian resident. 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 30ob.-31.

⁶⁶⁸ 90.1.375.1756, L. 261ob.

⁶⁶⁹ 89.8.2212.1771. Otpuski byvshego rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova vitse-kantsleru kniaziiu Golitsynu o svoem obratnom puteshestvii v Rossiiu s prilozheniem spiska svoei svity. June 13—November 10, 1771, LL. 1, 3.

Ivan Kozlov, Vasilei Roshchepkin, Gerasim Kudriavtsov, and Petr Leventsov. A large number of interpreters, who usually accompanied postal messengers, likewise accompanied Obreskov. They were: Grigorei Beloi, Mikhaila Khanenko, Iakov Senchenko, Matfei Lazarevskii, Fedor Zverev, and Il'ia Ivanov.⁶⁷⁰ Many of these people had been serving the mission for a decade or longer.

The group also contained family members and domestic servants of Obreskov, Levashov, and Pini. Obreskov's children—Petr, Mikhaila, Ivan, and Katerina—were accompanied and looked after by their teacher Angeli Laterno and two nannies, both named Maria. Obreskov's family maintained many domestic servants, such as butler Fedor Dolgoi and his wife and four children, valet Grigorei Sokolov, first cook Aleksandr Efimov with his wife and five children, second cook Filippo Bertucci, and coachman Timofei Lebedev with his son. Levashov was served by valet Ianii Lipar', servants Georgii Medici and Evdokim Albertiev, and washerwoman Avdot'ia. Embassy counselor Pini had only one servant, Dmitrii Kurtsula. In addition to the mission's staff, family members, servants, and Kiev messengers, the group of former captives included a merchant from the Zaporozhian Sech, named Andrei Trofimovskii.⁶⁷¹ Captives were also a constant feature of the mission's existence in peacetime.

Disorder at the Mission

Before proceeding to the discussion of Obreskov's diplomatic activities in the 1750s and 1760s, we will examine here the extreme disorder at the mission, which occurred during his absence. This episode is quite valuable for shedding light on internal dynamics and personal

⁶⁷⁰ 89.8.2212.1771, L. 3.

⁶⁷¹ 89.8.2212.1771, L. 3.

relations at the mission. Moreover, it highlights the effect of many of the circumstances described above, such as financial and everyday difficulties and status differences among various groups of employees.

On March 5, 1751, in preparation for his departure, Obreskov advised the CFA to fire Aleksandr Ivin, an officer employed at the mission since 1748, because the latter did not show any desire for and diligence in studies, according to Obreskov's observations for a year. It would be more effective, argued Obreskov, to employ Ivin in the army. In addition, Obreskov criticized student translators: they needed to spend time in Russia and work in the chancellery there for their written Russian was poor. The CFA resisted these suggestions. Concerning Ivin, the CFA asked Obreskov to observe him for another year in order to ascertain whether he indeed did not want to study. As for student translators, the CFA suggested keeping them at the mission in order for them to complete their training in foreign languages, especially Turkish. In the meantime, the mission could assist students Dementiev and Rubanov in improving their Russian by employing them on occasion in writing and reading at the mission's chancellery.⁶⁷²

It is clear that the CFA and Obreskov pursued different goals when discussing this matter: Obreskov aspired to make the mission run as effectively as possible but the CFA wanted to make sure that the students it had attached to the mission in Constantinople first and foremost acquired necessary foreign language skills before returning to Russia, even if their presence proved burdensome for the embassy. It is also interesting to note that the language of desire and diligence in application to the choice and pursuit of studies was an integral part of Obreskov's

⁶⁷² 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 377; 90.1.338.1751, LL. 17ob.-18ob.

education at the Noble Cadet Corps.⁶⁷³ Obreskov seems to have internalized the criteria that had been applied to students at his school and applied them in his professional life.

Obreskov turned out to be a clairvoyant concerning Ivin and unsuccessful students in general. A few days after preparing official instructions for Obreskov, the CFA changed its earlier decision not to recall anyone because news from Constantinople completely vindicated many of Obreskov's suggestions. Having lost the last trace of discipline in Obreskov's absence, subordinate employees of the mission were insensitive to Pini and Shokurov's admonishments. As a result, helpless to stop the disorders, Pini and Shokurov wrote to St. Petersburg in late February. They explained the mission's internal problems, which necessitated the attention of the Austrian ambassador Penkler himself. "Umilissima Supplica al Sublime Colleggio di Stato delli affari esteri," began the humble letter of "umilissimo interprete Pini." The dragoman complained about first the doorman/*dvoretskoi* and lackeys who began to drink and leave the premises of the embassy until late at night. At first, Pini asked the Kiev governor-general to send some *reitars* who managed to discipline the unruly servants.⁶⁷⁴

The trouble soon came from the students of Oriental languages who were supposed to spend all their free time studying. Students Vasilei Rubanov and Konstantin Iuriev began to visit shady places, coming back only at 10PM together with strange and uncouth people, with whom they continued to drink and whom they left in the embassy overnight, thereby violating good order and common practice. Once Iuriev even bared his sword and threatened Shokurov, using foul language, to open the residence gates in order for him and his guests to leave the residence and go to shady places after 2AM. Pini and Shokurov were afraid of negative consequences for

⁶⁷³ Igor Fedyukin, "An Infinite Variety of Inclinations and Appetites: Génie and Governance in Post-Petrine Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (2010), pp. 741-762.

⁶⁷⁴ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 143-148, 152-152ob.

the entire embassy and tried to use chancellery scribe Shchukin and student Semen Dementiev's influence to convince the wayward students to stay away from dissolute companies and instead to apply themselves in studies. Otherwise, they threatened to report their behavior to St. Petersburg. The students were asked to notify the senior staff when and where they left the embassy. In that case Pini and Shokurov would forgive them and recommend them favorably to the future resident. But this approach did not work. The students persisted in their irreverence. In particular, Vasilei Rubanov announced in front of Shchukin and Dementiev that he was smarter than them and did not need their advice; he only asked to treat him gently and not interfere in his actions. Otherwise, Rubanov threatened to find one or many Turkish patrons "by kissing a robe," which would make Shchukin and Dementiev regret having meddled into the affair. Pini and Shokurov were appalled at these words and asked if Rubanov considered himself to be a Russian subject, in which case his daring to say such things was unbelievable. Rubanov answered in harsh terms and Pini and Shokurov decided to step back for a while in order to avoid an explosive scandal.⁶⁷⁵

Events took a turn to the worse. The more Pini and Shokurov tried to prevent nightly escapades by instructing the gatekeepers to keep the gates closed until morning, the more the number of defiant employees increased. Lieutenant Aleksandr Ivin suddenly joined the students, despite the fact that his position required him to show good example and persuade the students to obey. Ivin declared that neither he personally nor the students wanted to obey the orders of a person—referring to Shokurov—who was in the same officer rank as they. Moreover, he advised Pini to stay out of the matter "as a foreigner and a Catholic." Ivin proceeded to disrupt the order by demanding to serve lunch exactly at noon, as opposed to the practice established by Nepliev

⁶⁷⁵ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 148-149.

whereby lunch was served after 12PM because the students had to study until noon. In this situation, Shchukin decided to completely distance himself from the conflict and began to eat lunch in his room at his own expense. Indeed, Shchukin rarely left his room during these events and complained to St. Petersburg that he alone was doing all the work of deciphering and ciphering diplomatic correspondence. As a result, both Pini and Ivin stopped talking to Shchukin, blaming him for lack of support.⁶⁷⁶ Ivin also forced Shokurov to hand the list of daily provisions and food money to student Iuriev under the pretext that the meals had been insufficient and inadequate. Ivin then threatened to remove “every live rib and bone” from the gatekeeper’s body if the latter locked the gates at night and refused to open them. Ivin thereby emboldened the disobedient students further, to the point that Pini not only avoided admonishing them but feared coming to the residence for several days. He felt he had no choice but to ask Penkler for help. Penkler’s solution was to call upon Ivin and his accomplices and announce that Pini and Shokurov were following his personal orders; therefore, he would complain to Vienna if he heard about any further disobedience.⁶⁷⁷

Pini’s move backfired. The rebellious employees got upset even more about having to obey the order set by “foreigners and Catholics.” They proceeded “to stir up such frenzy among the residence’s servants with their inflammatory words that a veritable tragedy could well occur,” if not for the intercession of the chaplain Father Iosif, warrant officer Mikhailo Grebenkin, and other “sober and sensible people.” Penkler ordered to send Iuriev back to Russia for the latter could become the casualty of his own misbehavior. Penkler promised to notify the Russian chancellor personally about the matter and ordered Pini and Shokurov to report

⁶⁷⁶ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 289.

⁶⁷⁷ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 147ob., 149ob.-150.

everything to the CFA. But before Iuriev's departure could take place, on February 18, on the first day of Lent, drunken Ivin and Iuriev attempted to take one boy who was a freed Russian captive from the embassy.⁶⁷⁸ Interpreter Mikhailo Iuriev, who stood guard at the time, did not allow them to pass. Infuriated, Ivin and Iuriev beat the interpreter and then also *reitar* Egor Kharlamov so badly that worried Grebenkin barely managed to save them with the help of the priest and others. Ivin took out his sword and aimed it at Grebenkin. A minute later Ivin and Iuriev were pursuing *reitars* and interpreters who tried to escape by running out into the street. The drunken hooligans shouted that they would not stop before they killed one *reitar* and one interpreter.⁶⁷⁹

As soon as Pini and Shokurov heard about the disgraceful incident, they ran to Penkler for help. Penkler sent his adjutant lieutenant Robolli to arrest the offenders. Unruly Ivin scornfully declared, holding onto the handle of his sword, that he would not relinquish his sword to anyone and dared the internuncio Penkler himself to come and try to get it. He warned the people who surrounded him not to come close, and Iuriev followed his example. Penkler ordered to confiscate their swords by force, put Ivin in a cell guarded by a janissary and a *reitar*, and to restrain Iuriev in a separate room. This was achieved with great effort and risk with the help of the embassy janissaries. In the process, Ivin unexpectedly took out a second sword. Eventually, both offenders were disarmed and locked up.⁶⁸⁰

In an ironic twist, Iuriev submitted a voluntary written confession, in which he claimed that Ivin had forced him to disobey against his will. Moreover, he wrote that they were

⁶⁷⁸ This could possibly have been done with the purpose of selling the boy back to his former owner. Anisimov writes that Ivin and Iuriev wanted the boy to dance at their drunken party. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 91.

⁶⁷⁹ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 150ob.-151ob.

⁶⁸⁰ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 151ob., 153.

emboldened by an oral promise from dragoman Nikolai Buidi to defend them in front of the future minister. Allegedly, Buidi also spoke badly about Pini, which was confirmed in writing by *reitars* and interpreters.⁶⁸¹ The incident, therefore, exposed not only the unruliness of the mission's students and staff in the absence of a strong hand, but the petty struggle of one less successful translator against the other.⁶⁸²

The report from the mission was dispatched to Russia on February 22/March 5, which was later than usual due to disorders at the residence. Likewise, Penkler wrote on March 5/16 that he could not send his letter directly through Poland because the Russian *reitars* who were employed for such purposes were needed as guards at the embassy, in view of the recent disorders. Therefore, Penkler sent his letter through Vienna.⁶⁸³ Upon learning about the disgraceful chaos at the Constantinople mission, the CFA immediately resolved to send lieutenant Aleksandr Ivin and students Rubanov and Iuriev back to Russia in view of their deplorable behavior.⁶⁸⁴ As we know, Buidi also was ordered to come to St. Petersburg.

Upon arrival at his post, Obreskov sent away the disobedient students—first Konstantin Iuriev on August 22 and then Vasilii Rubanov on November 16—to their homeland.⁶⁸⁵ However, the CFA continued to pay salaries to all three of them in 1752⁶⁸⁶ and the two students were promoted at the CFA in 1753.⁶⁸⁷ Moreover, it is quite possible that “interpreter Iuriev” who was later employed by the Malorossia Hetman Razumovskii was Konstantin Iuriev. In 1753, for

⁶⁸¹ 90.1.338.1751, L. 153ob.

⁶⁸² Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 91.

⁶⁸³ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 143ob., 157-157ob.

⁶⁸⁴ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 142-142ob.

⁶⁸⁵ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 326, 331ob.

⁶⁸⁶ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 371ob.-372.

⁶⁸⁷ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 92.

example, Razumovskii charged one Iuriev with buying horses in Constantinople.⁶⁸⁸ Rubanov appears to have been assigned to a border post as well. Thus, he is mentioned as the translator of the Russian consul in Crimea in the mid-1760s.⁶⁸⁹ We also know that Buidi was employed at the CFA in the 1750s. This evidence highlights the great dearth of individuals with necessary language skills, forcing the government to rely on people—both in St. Petersburg and in border provinces—who were known to have committed professional transgressions.

This episode captures the troublesome atmosphere that welcomed Obreskov in 1751. It also highlights the complexity of running a diverse mission, which claimed a lot of the resident's time and energy. Nevertheless, his primary focus was on diplomatic issues, to which we are turning next.

⁶⁸⁸ 89.1.1751-1768.10, LL. 395-397.

⁶⁸⁹ 89.8.356.1764, L. 8ob.

PART III: In the Shadow of the Prussian Challenge, 1750s-1762

Chapter 7. First Years as Resident

In 1751, Obreskov found himself again in Constantinople. But he did not yet suspect that he would spend seventeen more years there. At thirty-three years of age he felt an interest in continuing his career in the diplomatic service but he was hardly prepared for the extraordinary whirlwind of diplomatic transformations and struggles that awaited him during the first decade of his residency in the Ottoman capital. Initially only a *chargé d'affaires*, Obreskov became invested in remaining in Constantinople,⁶⁸⁶ with the result that he effectively promoted himself to the position of resident in 1752.

Considering that fact that between 1748 and 1756 Europe was only nominally in a state of peace—others have called this period an eighteenth-century cold war,⁶⁸⁷—almost every issue confronting Obreskov at Constantinople during his first decade as resident had to do, in one way or another, with the intensifying diplomatic and then military confrontations in Europe. Problems that were specific to mutual relations between the Russian and Ottoman empires were pushed into the background because the Porte and the Russian government were interested in preserving peace with each other. For Russia, it was important to prevent Ottoman opposition to the passage of its troops through Poland, which was the only way to aid Austria against Prussia. The Porte's

⁶⁸⁶ His first child, from Maria-Angelina Abbott, daughter of the treasurer of the English Levant Company, was born in 1752. Stegnii, p. 18. Another scholar cites Obreskov's wife's name as Maria-Cannela Abbott. Gounaris, p. 677. Gounaris also notes that Maria-Cannela's father, Peter Abbott, became the treasurer of the Levant Company only in 1759.

⁶⁸⁷ Francine Liechtenhan does not consider the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 revolutionary. The real revolution for her was caused by Frederick II's capture of Silesia in 1740, which "blew up the customary order." This event pushed various heretofore-adversarial powers to seek rapprochement with each other. All of them were also concerned with the growing power of Russia. Consequently, she calls the period from 1748 to 1756 a "cold war." Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan, *Rossii vkhodit v Evropu. Imperatritsa Elizaveta Petrovna I voina za Avstriiskoe nasledstvo, 1740-1750* (Moscow: O.G.I., 2000), pp. 227, 255, 263-264.

approach, in turn, was the epitome of reactive diplomacy⁶⁸⁸: its statesmen shrewdly calculated the advantages and disadvantages of remaining at peace or entering into the European war. Despite Mustafa III's desire to reignite the military glory of his ancestors, the diplomatic shifts and changing military fortunes of the Seven Years' War kept the Porte constantly disoriented. The chief factor stopping Constantinople from joining in on the Prussian side and attacking Austria or Russia was France's support of the two imperial courts during the Seven Years' War.

In this context, Obreskov's responsibilities were to preserve the Porte's pacific mood. But, as we will see below, Obreskov also aspired to balance this objective with the needs of defending Russia's long-term strategic interests. After a decade of observing and participating in the work of the Russian mission in Constantinople, Obreskov developed a sense of what constituted chief Russian interests in the Ottoman Empire and how best to protect and advance them. Similarly, he also astutely felt his limits as a diplomat. In one episode in the middle of the 1750s, the complicated nature of his mission in general combined with intense divisions within the Russian government itself to produce a conflict between Obreskov and his patron—the chancellor Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin. The conflict over the St. Elizabeth fortress revealed much about Russo-Ottoman relations, Russian and Ottoman foreign policy decision-making, and the role of an individual diplomat in shaping relations between two countries.

As almost every other issue during the 1750s, however, the episode was also a reflection of existing international tensions and the accompanying pan-European search for new alliances. The veritable diplomatic maze confronting Obreskov during the reign of Empress Elizabeth tested his experience and diplomatic abilities. After an initial shock produced by the diplomatic

⁶⁸⁸ Thomas Naff has also pointed out the progressively reactive nature of Ottoman foreign policy in the eighteenth century: Thomas Naff, "Ottoman Diplomatic Relations with Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Patterns and Trends," in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), pp. 88-107, here p. 89.

revolutions of 1756, Obreskov began to adapt to the situation and take advantage of the almost unprecedented cooperation between the French and Russian embassies in Constantinople.⁶⁸⁹ His new main challenge was to oppose Prussian intrigues at the Porte. Consequently, Obreskov was as surprised by the pro-Prussian reversal under Peter III as Vergennes had been surprised in 1756-1757 by the French alliance with Austria and Russia.

As a whole, however, Obreskov came out of his experience during the war with better appreciation of the workings of Ottoman government and diplomacy. He could also identify particularly weak points in mutual relations: Poland, Crimea, and border fortresses. Obreskov knew that under different circumstances the Porte would react much more strongly to Russian involvement in these issues. Other matters, such as Russian help to Ottoman Orthodox subjects, had to be approached extremely carefully. As for the Russian right of navigation on the Black Sea, Obreskov, just as his predecessors, had very little hope of achieving this through diplomatic means.

Self-Promotion from *Chargé d’Affaires* to Resident

In 1750 at the time of Nepliev’s death Obreskov was away from Constantinople, where the affairs of the mission fell into the hands of Pinii and lieutenant Ivan Shokurov. It was they who informed the Russian government about Nepliev’s death on November 10, 1750. At the very end of the year, Bestuzhev-Riumin and Vorontsov wrote to Pinii and Shokurov, approving of their appeal to the Austrian ambassador Penkler for protection, as had been done in 1745, and instructing them to be very circumspect in spending and to provide continuous updates on the

⁶⁸⁹ This had not happened since the early 1720s when the French ambassador Marquis de Bonnac had provided assistance to the Russians at the Porte, although it was not fully authorized by his government. See Chapter 3.

situation in Constantinople.⁶⁹⁰ In January, the CFA promoted Obreskov to the rank of court counselor (Rank 7) and appointed him *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople with a salary of 2,500 rubles a year.⁶⁹¹

It took Obreskov a long time to depart. In May the CFA instructed him to leave Moscow for Turkey right away. He finally arrived in July 1751 in Constantinople and swiftly and resolutely took up his responsibilities. He subjected many areas of mission's activity to review, such as intelligence gathering and staff-training.⁶⁹² To avoid heightened attention to each courier arriving from Russia with new instructions, Obreskov also suggested establishing regular, monthly correspondence on the example of Vienna.⁶⁹³ Through his reports, one gets a sense of his piercing intelligence and critical disposition. He treated his new appointment at an old post with diligence and energetically tackled existing problems.

However, it took a long time before the CFA finally recommended to the empress to appoint Obreskov as resident. The lengthy instruction given to Obreskov on April 1751, on the eve of his departure from Russia, highlighted the temporary nature of his appointment as *chargé d'affaires*: he was appointed to the Turkish court “in view of the lack of a Russian minister there...until new minister arrives.” His passport even lacked reference to his new position because the CFA was worried that Obreskov's journey could become protracted if he had to pay attention to the ceremonial details of his reception, for which there were no precedents since he

⁶⁹⁰ 90.1.322.1750-1751, LL. Ukazy KID perevodchiku A.Piniiu I poruchiku I.Shokurovu v Konstantinopol' o zameshchenii imi umershego rezidenta Nepliuveva, o naznachenii rossiiskim poverennym v delakh v Konstantinopole A.M.Obreskova, 30 December 1750—15 May 1751, LL. 3-4ob.

⁶⁹¹ Empress Elizabeth ordered the Military College not to exclude such officers as Obreskov from the roster and to keep up with promotions in order not to disadvantage them compared to their peers. Gavriil Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del: k 450-letiiu diplomaticheskoi sluzhby Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki I kartolitografiia, 1999), p. 376; Maksim Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia v Evrope v seredine XVIII veka: Ot Akhenskogo mira do Semiletnei voiny* (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2012), p. 290.

⁶⁹² 89.1.33.1742-1759, LL. 376-377.

⁶⁹³ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 291-292.

was the first Russian *chargé d'affaires* in the Ottoman Empire. In Constantinople Obreskov could procure information about reception of diplomats of similar rank from other nations by the grand vizier, such as the Swedish resident Celsing who used to serve as *chargé d'affaires*. But the CFA recommended avoiding entering into serious arguments about protocol in his case.⁶⁹⁴

It is unclear why the appointment of a new resident took so long. Obreskov was a good choice for purposes of continuity and simply because St. Petersburg had very few specialists on relations with the Ottoman Empire. However, it appears that he was not an obvious choice. Some historians attribute the lag in Obreskov's appointment and indefiniteness in his official status at the Porte to the power struggle between Bestuzhev-Riumin and Vorontsov. Namely, Vorontsov wanted to replace late Andrian Nepluev—who used to be his right hand in Russia—with another loyal supporter. Bestuzhev-Riumin, on the other hand, saw value in sending Obreskov to Constantinople in view of his experience. In the end, Vorontsov could not find anyone and had to agree to appoint Obreskov as *chargé d'affaires*.⁶⁹⁵

Indeed, appointment on the Bosphorus more often than not meant a form of political exile, as evidenced by the following comment of the English ambassador in St. Petersburg, Colonel Guy Dickens. The latter reported to his government in December 1750 about Nepluev's death, noting: "By the character which m-r Porter, His Majesty's ambassador [in Constantinople], has sent me of the deceased, I find he could wish that whoever succeeds him, should be in another way of thinking. M-r Nepluef was a creature of the vice-chancellor

⁶⁹⁴ Likewise, Obreskov was told not to demand the *tayin*—daily provisions in cash or in kind—too vociferously, but first to mention it in conversation with the dragoman of the Porte, and then write a reminder in polite fashion, leaving the sum to the discretion of the Ottoman government. The gifts of furs and tea, supplied by the government to Obreskov, were relatively modest as well, worth only 1,260 rubles. 90.1.338.1751. Instruktsiia KID I rescript rossiiskomu poverennomu v delakh v Konstantinopole Obreskovu. Prilozheniia: pis'ma, promemorii, doneseniia Kievskogo general gubernatora o pograniichnykh delakh, LL. 1-3, 23-24ob. Given this information, Dickens' speculation that the Russian government postponed its appointment of resident due to financial reasons appears more likely.

⁶⁹⁵ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 62. Anisimov writes that Vorontsov bore a grudge against Obreskov for this and constantly tried to point out his mistakes and reprimanded him severely.

[Vorontsov] and sent on that remote mission by the great chancellor [Bestuzhev-Riumin] on purpose to remove him from hence, and they talk of filling again that post by another friend of the vice-chancellor m-r Alsuius, one of the secretaries of the chancery, but he bears here a very good character.”⁶⁹⁶ Constantinople did not appear attractive as a diplomatic post to most Russians at the time. After all, it was far away and offered little prospect of further promotion but an ominous chance of death, as had happened with Veshniakov and Nepluev in close succession.

Guy Dickens shed some light on the reason for the delay, which was more prosaic. While reporting to London on his conversation with Bestuzhev-Riumin in August 1751, Dickens noted that he personally encouraged the Russian government to appoint a new resident as soon as possible, “since it appeared that the want of one was the occasion of our affairs there not being in so good a way, as they have been.” But Dickens also hastened to add to the grand chancellor, “how careful he ought to be to let the choice fall upon one who is perfectly well intentioned, as an ill disposed man (as the late m-r Nepluief was) might do more hurt in Turkey, than here.” In other words, Dickens advised not to give short shrift to the diplomatic representation in Constantinople by sending someone who simply was not desired in St. Petersburg. Bestuzhev asked Dickens to put his suggestion into writing, which Bestuzhev then showed to the empress “with his own remarks upon it.” Dickens mentioned Obreskov but without even a name, and he certainly did not know about Obreskov’s critical experience: “There is actually at Constantinople a major on the part of this court, who was sent from the frontier; but he has no character and is only to be there per interim and till a minister comes.” Finally, Dickens offered his take on the reasons for the delay in appointment: “Your grace will hardly believe me, when I tell you that the only reason of this delay in sending a new minister to Constantinople is the small debt of about

⁶⁹⁶ *SIRIO* editors concluded that Dickens could have been referring to Alsufiev/Olsufiev. *SIRIO*, Vol. 148, p. 173.

twelve thousand pounds, which this court owes there for a rich silver *Kass* and other things, taken up by their orders for presents to some of the chief ministers of the Porte.”⁶⁹⁷

In writing this report, Dickens acted on an order from the Duke of Newcastle in July 1751, who was likewise worried about the lack of a full-status Russian diplomat at the Porte.

Duke of Newcastle wrote:

I send you in confidence an extract of m-r Porter’s last letter (23-d May), by which you will see that our affairs at the Porte are not in so good a way, as they have been and that the french and swedish [sic] ministers seem to be gaining ground there. M-r Porter attributes it, in a great measure, to the want of a proper minister there from Russia, who may act in the most perfect concert with him and the minister of the empress-queen. You will therefore press the sending one away immediately; and you will endeavor to get one who is perfectly well intentioned, and not any person, who is sent out of the way because the chancellor Bestuchef may be apprehensive of him, if he stays at home; for an ill disposed man may do much more hurt in Turkey, than he can in Russia.⁶⁹⁸

At the end of August 1751, Bestuzhev assured Dickens that a new resident would be appointed very soon, since the empress found Dickens’ suggestion convincing.⁶⁹⁹ As we saw, however, a new resident was never appointed and instead Obreskov was promoted to the position in November 1752. This happened because Obreskov himself was interested in the position of resident, while the chancellor, Bestuzhev-Riumin, subtly supported his candidacy.

Once in Constantinople, Obreskov began to report about the excellent treatment he received from the Porte and about the difficulties arising from his lower-than-traditional diplomatic character. About his first audiences, for example, he wrote that he received such high honors—with no need to argue and demand, all the same—that had not been accorded to any person in his position. Indeed, the Ottomans welcomed him as if he was a full-fledged plenipotentiary envoy. The grand vizier received him in a very friendly way, which went against Nepliuév’s earlier negative characterizations of him. After Obreskov’s third bow, for example, the grand vizier bent down in response lower than any grand vizier had ever bent in front of any

⁶⁹⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 148, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁹⁸ *SIRIO*, Vol. 148, p. 252.

⁶⁹⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 148, p. 273.

foreign minister. However, Obreskov was only a *chargé d'affaires* and his character began to cause issues. Speculations on this count started as early as July 1751, when Obreskov arrived in the Ottoman capital from Russia. French ambassador Comte des Alleurs tried to convince the Porte of Russia's disdain for the Ottoman Empire, as evidenced by the low rank of its new representative. He assured the Porte that it could not trust Obreskov's promise that the new resident would soon arrive. It was as unlikely as was the prospect of Obreskov being promoted to the position of resident, all because of Russia's immeasurable arrogance. The Ottoman government seemed not to be concerned in the beginning. However, upon reading in the official letter brought by Obreskov that the Russian government would soon send a diplomat in the character of envoy, *reis efendi* Abdullah Paşa wondered out loud: "why chose another one, when this one is [already] here[?]"⁷⁰⁰ The British Foreign Office also seemed to be in favor of Obreskov since his arrival in Constantinople. It met the news with a sense of hopefulness: Obreskov's "good inclination may entitle him to more regard and confidence than his predecessor."⁷⁰¹

In every report, Obreskov asked his government to appoint a resident to Constantinople or at least to instruct him how to respond to the Porte's unending concerned inquiries about the matter. The Ottoman government could not but interpret Obreskov's lower rank, as opposed to traditional appointment of Russian diplomats in the rank of resident, as a sign of Russia's disdain for the Porte. Despite Bestuzhev-Riumin's efforts to draw the empress's attention to this issue, as well as encouragement from friendly Austria, Elizabeth did not do anything. In a move that neatly highlighted Obreskov's self-confidence in making critical decisions, he essentially promoted himself to the character of resident in summer 1752. Having despaired of getting an

⁷⁰⁰ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, p. 148; Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 290-291, 294-295.

⁷⁰¹ Gounaris, p. 677.

answer from the empress, on June 9 Obreskov reported that he decided to announce to the Turks that he was appointed resident. When Obreskov's report reached Vorontsov, the vice-chancellor was stunned by this "daring and insolent" action but decided not to criticize Obreskov.

Vorontsov only demanded Obreskov's assurance that the Porte would indeed be pleased with his appointment. In the same letter from September 13, 1752, however, Vorontsov used the occasion to criticize certain of Obreskov's decisions concerning intelligence gathering.⁷⁰²

Therefore, Obreskov himself facilitated the acceptance by Elizabeth of the recommendation that the CFA finally made to the empress concerning appointment of Obreskov as Russian resident in Constantinople. The CFA supported its recommendation with several arguments. First, Obreskov had already been serving as *chargé d'affaires* for some time. Secondly, the CFA highlighted that Obreskov had served in Constantinople before for about ten years, under both the late residents Veshniakov and Nepliev, and was therefore well versed in local circumstances.⁷⁰³ The actual appointment order signed by Empress Elizabeth on November 16, 1752 stated briskly: "Because there is not our [Russian] resident at the Ottoman Porte, but we need to have one, we appoint Obreskov as resident...."⁷⁰⁴ Bestuzhev-Riumin was much more enthusiastic. He personally wrote a congratulatory letter to Obreskov on the same date. In his December 31, 1752 letter the chancellor congratulated Obreskov once again, adding with excitement: "I rejoice because of it [residential appointment] even more because a saying that I have reminded you before "The slower you go, the further you will get" has proven itself correct." The Porte welcomed Obreskov's submission of his new letters of credentials in

⁷⁰² Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 295. It is possible that Obreskov found it untenable to remain *chargé d'affaires* in the face of a change in the Ottoman government in June 1752 following the sultan's discovery of a plot in favor of his brother Osman, as a result of which the grand vizier was exiled. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 297.

⁷⁰³ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 373, 378.

⁷⁰⁴ 89.1.1751-1768.10, L. 398.

February 1753 with high honors, despite French attempts to draw attention to Obreskov's lower service rank.⁷⁰⁵

Taking into account Obreskov's earlier requests to be recalled, he might not have been too delighted to be returning back initially. However, the prospect of promotion and his personal circumstances—birth of his first child in 1752—must have made him interested in remaining at Constantinople. On the other hand, under the existing circumstances the needs of the Russian foreign affairs department were indeed best served not by some political appointee—for whatever motivation: promotion or banishment—but by an individual with experience and stamina to persevere in the face of many odds in the task of advancing Russian interests in the Ottoman Empire. Obreskov was therefore the first Russian resident in Constantinople who was appointed on the basis of his extensive experience and because no one else wanted the position. In short, Aleksei Obreskov became a professional diplomat by force of circumstances that privileged true expertise.

Initial Instructions: Surveying the Threats

The Russian government spelled out its expectations from Obreskov in its April 1751 instructions. In order to advance Russian interests Obreskov had to seek the favor of the grand vizier and to gain the trust of the *reis efendi* since the latter was the first point of contact with the Ottoman government. Matters of highest priority stemmed from the mutual peace treaty. Namely, Obreskov had to oversee the investigation, search, and release of Russian captives; negotiate mutual border grievances; protect Russian merchants; and advance Russian trade with

⁷⁰⁵ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 297-298. According to Demir, the Porte learned about it in March or April 1753. Uğur Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi (1755-1768)," Pd.D. Dissertation (Istanbul: Marmara University, 2012), p. 5, fn. 78.

the Ottoman Empire. Obreskov had to act in accordance with Russia's alliance obligations with Austria and England. On the other hand, he had to guard Russian interests against Swedish and French intrigues, which aimed at spoiling Russo-Ottoman relations. Namely, French diplomacy tried to convince the Porte that Russia planned to change the form of government in Sweden. In addition, France tried to bring the Porte into an alliance with the Prussian king. The Dutch minister was officially friendly towards the Russians but Obreskov was advised to assess, with the help of Penkler and Porter, how much the Dutch ambassador could be trusted in reality. Obreskov had to find out if it was true that, according to intelligence provided by Panin, the Swedes were secretly manufacturing field artillery for the Turks, to which the Porte had agreed after persistent Swedish appeals. Obreskov also had to be careful about Polish actions for it was known that the Crown Hetman and other pro-French Polish factions maintained correspondence with Turkey bypassing their own king and republic.⁷⁰⁶

Another area where Obreskov had to be on guard concerned border issues between the Russian and Ottoman empires, which inevitably involved the Crimean Tatars, Zaporozhian Cossacks, and other Caucasian peoples with shifting allegiances such as Kabardians. These matters necessitated Obreskov's continuing correspondence—as his predecessors had done—with Russian border commanders, such as the Kiev Governor-General Leontiev, commander of the fortress of St. Anna, and the Don atamans. Reportedly, the Ottomans were also strengthening border fortresses and building a new town in the Crimea—namely in Karasu, which lay in a sea bay. However, conflicts with the Tatars were not a purely bilateral issue for the French and Prussian governments were known to have been encouraging the Tatar Khan and the Budjak commander/*serasker* to make an attack on Russia. As early as 1750, the Russian government

⁷⁰⁶ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 3ob.-5ob., 40-42.

received intelligence about Tatar envoys being sent to Berlin and Warsaw.⁷⁰⁷ Various reports alleged that Frederick II concluded a treaty with the Crimean Khan and that the Tatars were preparing for an attack on Russia. The Polish King, on the other hand, was said to have appointed an envoy, Napolnoi strazhnik Slugacki, to the Crimean Khan. The Nogay Tatars in particular allegedly gathered in Budjak with the financial support of the Poles and the Wallachian hospodar.⁷⁰⁸ In addition to the situation in Europe, Obreskov also had to monitor Ottoman plans regarding Persia, where Russia was interested in keeping the Porte from interfering in Persian internal problems in the Caucasus.⁷⁰⁹

Sweden

Following these instructions, Obreskov's first years as *chargé d'affaires* and then resident were devoted to securing Russian interests against the most recent threats, which included Poland, Crimea, and Sweden. Neutralizing the threat of Ottoman interference in Russo-Swedish affairs proved to be relatively easy. Although the Swedes and the French continued to make secret representations to the Porte against Russian actions in the north of Europe, Penkler assured St. Petersburg that the Porte's reaction indicated that it did not assign too much significance to what had become usual anti-Russian rhetoric. In any case, Penkler made relevant counter-

⁷⁰⁷ Frederick II demonstratively treated Mustafa Ağa, the emissary of the Crimean khan Arslan Giray, better than the Russian representative in Berlin. This was one of the harbingers of a break in Prusso-Russian diplomatic relations in December 1750, when mutual representatives were recalled. Liechtenhan, *Rossia vkhodit v Evropu*, p. 222. Mustafa Ağa reportedly knew Russian, which he spoke during a meeting with the Russian diplomatic representative in Berlin.

⁷⁰⁸ Polish appeals to the Crimean Khan did not produce tangible results for the time being but the khan constantly kept abreast of Polish developments through his envoy to the Polish sejms. Thus, as early as the late 1740s the Poles asked the khan for military support. Namely, it was the faction of the Crown Hetman Potocki that tried to prevent August III's attempt to institute hereditary monarchy in the Polish Republic. The Russians received relevant intelligence from a secret informant in Jassy in December 1749. The Potockiis reportedly asked the khan for 6,000 Tatars to protect them in return for 20,000 chervonnye. The khan declined in the absence of an order from the Porte, but sent his enjoy to Warsaw to attend the Sejm. 90.1.338.1751, LL. 77-78.

⁷⁰⁹ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 6-8, 12-12ob., 25ob.-31, 32ob., 44-77, 95-102ob.

representations to the dragoman of the Porte on Russia's behalf.⁷¹⁰ Therefore, the Swedish problem—connected to the Porte's potential opposition to Russia's military threat if the Swedish king acted to strengthen the monarchy—was for the most part settled relatively smoothly by Penkler, Pini, and Shokurov even before Obreskov arrived at the Porte.⁷¹¹

Poland-Lithuania

Poland presented a bigger problem. Mobilization of France and a section of Polish elites against Augustus III's attempts to proclaim his son as the future heir to the Polish throne led to a flurry of Polish diplomatic activity in Crimea and the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹² Austria and Russia supported Augustus III's plans and therefore came into intense competition with France, which did not shun exaggerations and misinformation in order to achieve the Porte's intervention in Polish affairs. The Porte, as is shown by Demir, indeed followed Polish developments with interest, although at a distance. Namely, it preferred to task its border agents—the Crimean khan, Wallachian and Moldavian *voyvodas*, and the Hotin Pasha—with sending their representatives to Warsaw to attend general sejms every two years. The Porte was particularly active during the 1752 and 1754 Polish sejms, when its proxy agents—officially agents of the Crimean khan and

⁷¹⁰ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 154-157ob.

⁷¹¹ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 158-161, 163, 166. Russian historian Maksim Anisimov writes that in 1740-1751 Russian diplomacy was fully successful in keeping the Porte from interfering in northern affairs. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 314.

⁷¹² Being the son-in-law of the deposed Polish king, Stanislaw Leszczyński, Louis XV carved a special role for Poland and starting in the mid-1740s instigated several unofficial Polish embassies to the Porte which aimed at forming an anti-Russian alliance, a goal supported by a large section of the Polish political elite. Rumiana Mikhneva, *Rossiiia I Osmanskaia imperiia v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh v seredine XVIII veka, 1739-1756* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 101-102. Incidentally, *secret du roi* had its origins in Poland in 1745, when Louis XV secretly supported the candidacy of his relative, Prince de Conti, to the Polish throne. Conti was invited by a party of Polish noblemen who sought a potential successor to the ailing Augustus III, who would not be beholden to Russia or maintain foreign residence as King Augustus III did by virtue of being the Elector of Saxony. The clandestine plot became Louis XV's pet project, giving rise to a secret network of agents and ambassadors in Eastern Europe who reported on the matter to Conti and the king, but not to the ministry of foreign affairs: see Orville T. Murphy, *Charles Gravier Comte de Vergennes, French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution 1719-1787* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 55.

Moldavian hospodar—followed the sejms and held meetings with the Polish government and Hetmans Potocki and Branicki. Both sejms were dissolved because of lack of unanimity, thereby sabotaging Augustus III’s plans, to the Porte’s satisfaction.⁷¹³

The international reverberations of Poland’s domestic politics were justifiably troubling for Russia. In 1753, for example, Obreskov was able to procure secret suggestions of the French ambassador to form a Franco-Prusso-Ottoman alliance for the freedom of Poland. The Porte did not completely believe French propaganda and did not fully respond to French appeals concerning Poland but Obreskov’s ability to find out about enemy intrigues and denounce them in a timely manner played an important role in his ability to keep the Porte calm. It also helped that the Porte was not interested in engaging in military conflicts at the time. However, much of the stability in Ottoman attitudes depended on Obreskov’s good rapport with sensible Ottoman statesmen and, in view of frequent turnaround of personnel, Obreskov periodically found himself losing valuable partners, such as Naili Abdullah Paşa, who was promoted to the position of *defterdar* on October 17, 1753. Obreskov characterized Naili Abdullah Paşa as one of the most experienced Ottoman diplomats and a proponent of good neighborly relations with Russia.⁷¹⁴ His replacement was El-Hâc Abdi Efendi—former first *tezkereci*,⁷¹⁵ which position Obreskov compared with the position of procurator. Obreskov described Abdi Efendi as a rude, ignorant, fanatical Muslim, although he could otherwise be fair, incorruptible, and vigilant. The sultan asked Abdullah Paşa to mentor the new *reis efendi*, which initially contributed to continuity in

⁷¹³ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 296, 298-299; Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” pp. 14-18.

⁷¹⁴ Naili Abdulla Paşa was appointed *reis efendi* in 1747. He would later also serve as grand vizier under Osman III, albeit only for three months.

⁷¹⁵ This was the secretary of the Imperial council, according to a historian of the sixteenth century. Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 214. Findley translates this position in the context of the eighteenth century as a “memorandum officer whose duty it was to read the petitions submitted to the Divan.” Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1822* (Princeton University Press, 1780), p. 73.

policy. However, the latter departed from the philosophy of his experienced predecessor and created a major problem for Obreskov in 1754 because of the construction by Russia of the fortress of St. Elizabeth, which will be discussed later.⁷¹⁶

Similarly, Abdi Efendi chose to become more involved in Polish affairs. In August 1754, for example, the CFA criticized Obreskov for having written earlier—in May 1753—that the Porte was not interested in engaging in Polish affairs. The CFA thought that Obreskov's secret sources had let him down because according to the Russian resident in Rzecz Pospolita Gross and secretary Rzyczewski, the Porte did send three agents to the 1754 Polish sejm. Namely, they were an envoy from the Crimean Khan and emissaries from the Moldavian Prince and the Pasha of Hotin. The Tatar and Moldavian remained in Poland to await the Sejm. These agents declared that they had been sent on express orders from the Porte, following French suggestions. The Russian court was very upset about this fact because it preferred the Porte to confine its support of the French designs in Poland to oral representations. Even the latter scenario was harmful to Russian interests, however.⁷¹⁷ The CFA evidently did not take into account that Obreskov's report from May 1753 could not explain developments more than a year later, especially given the change in *reis efendis*.

Crimea

Relations with Crimea presented another threat, which was all the more disconcerting because Russia did not have an opportunity to maintain its representative in Bahçesaray. As a result, the Russian government had to rely on occasional intelligence from special agents. This

⁷¹⁶ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 300.

⁷¹⁷ 89.1.33.1742-1759, L. 28.

information often was anecdotal and therefore of dubious value.⁷¹⁸ It is unsurprising, therefore, that Russia wanted to have an official agent at the court of the khan. This had been attempted as early as 1741, but without success.⁷¹⁹ Now Obreskov renewed this matter in March 1752 during a meeting with the grand vizier and the *reis efendi*. Obreskov asked for permission for Russia to send its “officer” to Bahçesaray. Despite the fact that Obreskov avoided calling this officer consul, both Ottoman ministers announced that this action was unnecessary.⁷²⁰

The Porte’s solution to the issue was to first secure the shared border. Namely, in 1752 the grand vizier Mehmet Paşa⁷²¹ suggested establishing patrols against haidamaks⁷²² and

⁷¹⁸ For example, intelligence collected by Cossack spies in Bahçesaray (“Baktsysarai”) and Perekop in early 1751 indicated the possibility of a Tatar attack. The spies visited a Tatar coffee house where they heard conversations about the movement of Polish and Tatar troops towards Russian borders. In Perekop they observed how a young boy ran up to his father who was selling his horse and complained that the father had promised him “to go on Barabash, i.e. to Russia,” and bring a “marushka” (a girl?) for his son, so the latter could not understand why his father was selling his horse. Russian spies in Polish territories also brought news of an impending Tatar attack on Malaia Rossiia; the Tatars were expected to behave well and only take provisions from the villagers, who were admonished to keep this a secret. In another Polish town, the spies heard that the Poles were planning to appeal to the Turks, or Tatars, and Swedes for help in spring.

As an illustration of the dubious nature of such reports, one should point out intelligence regarding Poland: The Poles were reported to be against the succession of the king’s son, which was supported by the Russians. Instead, the Poles desired the Prussian king for the latter “had in the past been blessed by the Pope in Rome.” 90.1.338.1751, LL. 78ob.-80ob., 81ob.-86ob.

⁷¹⁹ In 1741 the Kiev governor-general, Mikhail Leontiev, began to advocate sending agents to Crimea. In particular, he wanted to select some Cossacks who knew the Tatar language and send them as “consuls” or agents there. Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 25-26. Resident Nepliev once again brought up this matter in 1747, but the Porte responded that this was an internal affair of the Crimean Khan. Vasilii Smirnov and Svetlana Oreshkova, *Krymskoe khanstvo pod verkhovenstvom Otomanskoi Porty* (Moscow: Rubezhi XXI, 2005), p. 68.

⁷²⁰ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 296-297. Smirnov notes that Obreskov suggested that both sides appoint an officer to Crimea and to the Zaporozhian Sech, correspondingly, in order to put an end to constant conflicts between the Tatars and the Zaporozhian Cossacks. However, the grand vizier and the *reis efendi* objected that conflicts occurred in the steppe, which would render resident officers useless. Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, pp. 71-72, fn. 1 on p. 73.

⁷²¹ Divitdar Mehmet Emin Paşa, grand vizier from January 1750 to July 1752.

⁷²² Later, in August 1756 the Porte made an inquiry about the haidamaks, asking both Obreskov and extraordinary Polish envoy Mniszek to explain their origins and allegiances. The Porte wanted to know this in order to decide if it could bring three captured haidamaks from Moldavia to Constantinople for eternal slavery. Obreskov and Mniszek submitted compatible responses, saying that the haidamaks were bandits with origins in various nations, who attacked all neighboring states in equal measure. Mniszek said that this matter was not his responsibility but added that the haidamaks mostly came from Russian regions along the Polish border. The Polish army followed the policy of immediately killing or hanging those haidamaks it was able to catch. In a recent episode, several haidamaks crossed into Moldavia while fleeing from Polish troops. Mniszek suggested that the Moldavian hospodar ask Polish commanders about the territory of origin of the captured haidamaks and hand them back according to peace treaty terms. Obreskov called the haidamaks simply robbers who gathered in the steppes between Dnieper and Dniester, from where they robbed and committed banditry in the Russian, Ottoman, and Polish territories. Haidamaks,

itinerants. The Porte forced the Crimean Khan, who was highly opposed to the idea, to comply in 1754. However, the khan devised ways to undermine the project and even ordered his subjects to harm Russians who traveled to the Ottoman Empire with passports. He eventually took down his patrols, while the Russians kept theirs. In early 1756 Obreskov's secret agents suggested to him that the Porte would not be against a Russian consul in Crimea, but Obreskov sensed that it was best first to settle the issue of border patrols. Accordingly, he brought up the subject with Mehmed Said Paşa in March.⁷²³

Despite the diplomatic revolutions and the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, by the end of the year Obreskov's relationship with the Porte was noticeably constructive, thanks to the friendly disposition of the new khan, Halim Giray. In spring, through the scribes of the *reis efendi's* secretary, Obreskov learned that the new khan saw the need in maintaining border patrols. Consequently, Obreskov also resumed broaching the subject of appointing an authorized Russian diplomatic representative to Crimea.⁷²⁴ St. Petersburg recognized an urgency to establish a consulate in light of worrisome French intrigues in Crimea. Accordingly, Obreskov reminded

according to Obreskov, were comprised of different nationalities, being subjects of the Russian Empire, the Polish Commonwealth, and the Ottoman Empire. Russia and Poland sent punitive squadrons against them from time to time, but the haidamaks usually crossed into Ottoman territory, where Russian and Polish forces could not pursue them. As a result, Russia had many times asked the Ochakov Pasha to crack down on the bandits. And ideally the Porte should have ordered the Ochakov Pasha not to let the haidamaks in when Zaporozhian Cossacks were pursuing them. Obreskov also suggested that if a Russian subject was found among the captured haidamaks, Ottoman authorities should send him to the main Russian border commander. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 258-259, 264-264ob.

⁷²³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 53-65. The identity of the two informants is unclear in the documents. They are denoted by letters X and M, which are absent in the document with the full list of informants. (89.1.33.1742-1759). But they were Ottomans with connections in the government. Agent M, for example, was an old friend of the former *reis efendi* who at the time served as the grand vizier's kahya. Agent X was the chief dragoman Kallimaki, as I have determined from information in Iu.P. Anshakov, "Chernogorskii mitropolit Vasilii Petrovich I Rossiia," in K.V. Nikiforov, ed., *Chernogortsy v Rossii* (Moscow, Indrik, 2011), p. 44. There is a mention of agent M in Obreskov's report from September 7, 1756, in which he wrote that M exhibited goodwill and faithfully helped to spread or insinuate any necessary information for Obreskov. In return, Obreskov paid him 100 Dutch chervonnye, or 366 levki, on June 17: 90.1.375.1756, L. 274. I suspect that, following the analogy of X denoting a Christian dragoman, M must have referred to a Muslim mullah. One should remember that Veshniakov and Nepluev had cooperated with a mullah in the 1740s. However, that mullah was leaving for Bursa in 1748 and it is unclear whether he resumed his relationship with the Russian mission. Obreskov's description of M's services as consisting of the spread and insinuation of information fits well with this theory.

⁷²⁴ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 89ob., 94ob.

the *reis efendi* that Russia had a greater need for a resident in Crimea than France. Russian-Ottoman border issues required continued attention and would be best served by a permanent Russian representative at the Khan's court. By contrast, the French had no business in the Crimea. Instead, the French consul at Bahçesaray worked only to muddle the situation and add fuel to the fire. The *reis efendi* asked Obreskov to explain everything in detail on paper and promised to support Obreskov's arguments before the grand vizier. The Russian resident was also hopeful that the *kahya* would assist him in bringing the matter to a speedy resolution.⁷²⁵

In the fall of 1756 St. Petersburg reminded Obreskov about the need for a Russian resident in Crimea. Given the delicate diplomatic situation, Obreskov began to approach the subject subtly, by probing the *reis efendi*'s disposition through his *kesedar*. The *reis efendi* wanted to see a written petition, but Obreskov hesitated to put his request on paper until he was sure of the grand vizier's favorable outlook on the matter. On September 23 Kallimaki notified Obreskov that the *reis efendi* had prepared the ground. Obreskov's formal petition was then sent to the Crimean Khan together with a letter from the grand vizier on October 20. The *reis efendi* also wrote to the khan and, as the khan's personal agent at the Porte, used his influence to persuade the khan to cooperate. Obreskov was highly satisfied by the Porte's handling of this question: "This proves," he wrote, "that the Porte is willing and flexible [to cooperate] on border issues; I also praise the khan, for he has not once complained to the Porte [about Russia]."⁷²⁶

However, the khan, Halim Giray, continued to resist Russian efforts to establish a consul.⁷²⁷ Obreskov made a final attempt in spring 1767 to achieve the right for Russia to open a consulate in Crimea, but the Porte cited the khan's report that, while the khan was not against the idea, the Crimean elders were opposed to it. Obreskov felt that he could attain his goal by bribing

⁷²⁵ 90.1.375.1756, L. 95.

⁷²⁶ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 361ob.-362.

⁷²⁷ Fisher, p. 25.

the *reis efendi* who was in the camp of the grand vizier. As a result, the *reis efendi* made several representations on this matter to the grand vizier Koca Ragıb Paşa, and the latter also submitted a relevant report to the sultan. However, Ragıb Paşa was of the opinion that a Russian consulate in Crimea carried both advantages and disadvantages for the Porte. The sultan also decided to support the khan's position and soon also replaced the *reis efendi* with a new one, Bekir Efendi, who Obreskov characterized as being hostile to Russia. Still, Obreskov attempted to come up with a viable alternative: he turned attention to the Russian merchant in Crimea, Aleksei Shestakov, who could become Russian commercial agent there. A Putivl native, Shestakov was a friend of one of the khan's sons, had a calm character, and spoke Turkish and Tatar. The Kiev governor's chancellery had recommended him as early as 1754 for the position. Now, following Obreskov's reminder and Halim Giray's approval, the CFA indeed sent letters of credentials to Shestakov and the latter presented them to the khan in July 1758. However, that year a change in khans took place, following which Kırım Giray refused to recognize Shestakov as an official Russian representative in Crimea.⁷²⁸ Consequently, the matter remained unresolved until 1763, when Kırım Giray approved the presence of the first Russian consul in Bahçesaray. That story was more complicated and the residency proved unsuccessful, which will be discussed below.

Border Defenses

Russia was also concerned about reports of domestic instability in the Ottoman Empire, which could lead the Porte to initiate a foreign war, specifically because the janissaries were rumored to have been yearning for it. Numerous reports reached the CFA in 1750, indicating a possible outbreak of war the following spring. Constantinople was said to be on the verge of a

⁷²⁸ Maksim Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina I rossiiskaia diplomatiia v 1756-1763 gg.* (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2014), pp. 344-345, 346-347, 357-358, 363.

crisis: the janissaries were asking for war but the sultan refused. In this connection, Obreskov had to keep an eye on the condition of Ottoman border fortresses. For example, in 1749 secret sources had reported to St. Petersburg that the Porte was sending provisions to its critical border fortresses, such as İsakçı, İsmail, Kilya, and Ochakov. It also sent additional janissary units to Ochakov and the newly built fortress of Harabat, as well as to Crimea.⁷²⁹

Indeed, Russia knew that the Porte had recently constructed several new fortresses and border towns. In summer 1750 secret reports described the Porte's establishment of a new town in Kuban, called Kapıl, which was built with earth but fortified with stone. An Ottoman two-horse-tail pasha came to administer the town. The Don Cossacks reported about the construction of new fortresses in Crimea—Arbatok and Eniçke—and fortress Achinskaia in Kuban. All Crimean inhabitants reportedly were bringing stones for the construction of towns Enikole and Arbatok, while Constantinople sent 800 specialists.⁷³⁰ A Greek merchant from Kharkov, Nikolai Rumenskii,⁷³¹ who traveled to Constantinople in early 1750 and returned in summer, confirmed these reports. He noted that 400 Wallachians, 2,000 Tatars, and specialists from Constantinople were working on the construction of the new city. More ominously, he described various preparations around Ochakov, where he sighted three ships with artillery, one with gunpowder, and another one with dry biscuits. The Porte also repaired the fortresses of Ochakov and Kinburn.⁷³²

⁷²⁹ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 77-78, 133, 135.

⁷³⁰ 90.1.338.1751, LL. 119-120, 121, 124-125.

⁷³¹ Possibly not Greek but Bulgarian.

⁷³² During his trip Nikolai visited Ochakov, Varna, Constantinople, and because of contrary winds sailed back through Amasra (Amasra) to the towns of Kozlov (Evpatoriia) and Perekop in Crimea. Nikolai also shared various rumors he had heard in the Ottoman Empire. In Constantinople he witnessed talks on the streets about an impending military campaign. People were discussing the Russian troops' entrance into Poland where they allegedly planned to cause destruction in areas that formerly belonged to Turkey. This news roused the Janissaries to threaten to depose the sultan if he did not start a war against Russia in summer 1751. Nikolai personally heard the same from a tefterdar—and thus member of the Porte's chancellery—who stopped by a stall of a bakali merchant. Then in Amasra Nikolai heard some Turks discuss the arrival of Poles in Bendery, from where they were said to be

Chapter 8. Circumspection and Concessions

The afore-mentioned threats were fairly disconcerting. Except for the Swedish problem, they continued to be the main problems in Russo-Ottoman relations for the next two decades. But, as mentioned earlier, these problems became secondary to the European alliance struggles of the 1750s. It does not mean that these threats disappeared. More precisely, Russia chose to make compromises on certain issues in order to remove tensions from mutual relations. On the other hand, the Porte skillfully took advantage of the situation by demanding satisfaction in various matters, but without really intending to go to war over them.

The following three examples illustrate this point, while highlighting that foreign policy decision-making in Russia was a complicated and multi-sided process. At the end of the day, the Russian government chose to make concessions to the Porte in order to prevent the Ottoman Empire from taking the Prussian side.

Between Two Fires: The St. Elizabeth Fortress

Obreskov's early years as resident were not devoid of problems, despite his experience. In early 1755 he earned the wrath of the Russian grand chancellor himself—a person who recommended him for the position of resident in the first place. Obreskov found himself in a precarious position, in which his understanding of how to guard Russia's interests at the Porte conflicted with the chancellor's treatment of the Ottoman Empire as a subordinate, albeit important, factor in his scheme of Russian foreign policy. Obreskov's position was complicated

traveling to Constantinople in order to complain about Russia and the Zaporozhian Cossacks' attacks on their towns. 90.1.338.1751, LL. 125-125ob.

by the fact that St. Petersburg was divided in opinion about how to proceed in the matter of construction of a new fortress on the Russian southern border when it met Ottoman opposition.

As we saw above, the Ottomans were also building new fortresses in the border regions. However, once the Porte felt that almost all European nations were vying for its friendship in preparation for an anticipated European conflict, it chose to take advantage of the situation by demanding that Russia stop the construction of the recently-founded fortress of St. Elizabeth. The Russian government became split on the problem, with the grand chancellor, Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin, calling for extreme circumspection lest the Porte join Prussia, and his deputy, Mikhail Vorontsov, insisting on Russia's right to continue the construction works.

The entire episode highlighted the domineering posture of the sexagenarian grand chancellor, who managed to dampen the resolve of the young resident Obreskov. Bestuzhev-Riumin's close familiarity with Russian foreign policy of the entire first half of the eighteenth century gave him an undeniable air of authority and endowed him with ability to make informed, poignant arguments supporting his views and defeating those of other people, whether a subordinate or the empress herself. To be precise, however, Bestuzhev's vitriolic reaction to Obreskov's actions should be understood in the context of his embattled position at the Russian court, which resulted, since the late 1740s, in his effective opposition to the work of the CFA led by his former ally, vice-chancellor Vorontsov.⁷³³ As a result, Obreskov was caught between two feuding parties. And yet, the Russian resident also followed his own instincts in choosing to defend Russia's right to continue the construction.

⁷³³ Bain noted the words of the English ambassador at St. Petersburg at the time. Guy Dickens wrote that since 1753 "the rage of parties at the Russian court was never carried further" than it was in the mid-1750s. "All kinds of intrigues and artifices are being employed on each side to ruin, crush and destroy one another." Bestuzhev's own irritable temper was also to blame. Bain writes that "The long possession of almost unlimited power had made him masterful and dictatorial; his paroxysms of anger became more frequent and more violent. . . ." Robert Nisbet Bain, *The Daughter of Peter the Great. A History of Russian Diplomacy and of the Russian Court under the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna 1741-1762* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1900), p. 168. This characterization is helpful for understanding Bestuzhev's criticism of Obreskov over the St. Elizabeth fortress.

The fortress at the upper reaches of the River Ingul, at the point where its small tributary, Tura, flowed in, was designed to protect new settlements of Serbian colonists that appeared in Russia in the early 1750s, as well as to prevent the haidamak banditry that plagued Russia's southern borderlands.⁷³⁴ Obreskov personally announced the future construction of a fortress to the west of Dnieper in the form of a note to the Porte on August 21, 1752. Initially, the Porte did not protest against the project. However, in reality suspicious elements in the Ottoman government were disconcerted by this news. Namely, following the grand dragoman's report from September 29, 1752, Ottoman officials believed that Russia was building the fortress of St. Elizabeth as an advance base for its attack on Poland. The latter, the dragoman explained, would occur upon the death of Augustus III, when both Russia and Austria would enforce—according to their secret 1746 alliance agreement—the Saxon heir's accession to the Polish throne. In addition, it was rumored that Russia would use the new fortress against the Ottomans as well. This concern was based on intelligence coming from the Wallachian *voyvoda*, who forwarded a piece of news from Austria to the Porte. A news article in an Austrian newspaper stated that Russia sent up to 100,000 troops to the border in order to prepare to assist Austria in case of a war with the Ottomans. The fortress of St. Elizabeth, it was said, would accommodate part of these forces.⁷³⁵

⁷³⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 48; John P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 300-301; Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 97-100. Harvey L. Dyck provides an overview of the St. Elizabeth issue from an Austrian perspective. The Serb settlers from the Austrian military border, which was undergoing restructuring in 1751, appealed to the Russian government for permission to settle in Russia. Besides the unsettling consequences of the border restructuring process, as early as 1749 the Serbian *Grentzer* were also dissatisfied with the Catholic pressure to convert to the Uniate rite. Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin,—brother of the grand chancellor, but an important detractor nevertheless—who was serving as Russian ambassador in Vienna, strongly supported this project in 1751-1752. Dyck, "New Serbia and the Origins of the Eastern Question, 1751-55—A Habsburg Perspective," *The Russian Review*, Vol. 40, no. 1 (1981), pp. 2-3.

⁷³⁵ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 4.

At the end of the day, in 1752 the Porte chose to eschew any active opposition that could cause a break in relations. However, by 1754 rumors of Russian construction works were circulating around Constantinople. The problem was that the actual work on the fortress began only in late spring 1754 and Obreskov was not informed about it in advance. In early February 1754 he reported that the Ottoman public was spreading rumors about Russia's construction of a fortress on the River Ingul and Obreskov hurried to disprove these rumors.⁷³⁶ Obreskov claimed that the Porte did not pay attention to them. Consequently, he found himself in a difficult situation when he learned of the actual start in construction.⁷³⁷ In early June 1754 Obreskov felt it was best to officially notify the Porte in order to avoid the concerns and suspicions the Ottomans would likely feel if they found out about it from other sources. However, on June 26/July 7, 1754 Obreskov reported to St. Petersburg that the *reis efendi*'s reaction was negative and he accused the Russians of failing to uphold the articles of the peace treaty.⁷³⁸ Indeed, although the Porte chose not to take any threatening measures, the *reis efendi*, El-Hâc Abdi Efendi (in office from 28 October 1753 to 24 September 1755), pointed out that the construction went against the terms of the peace treaty. It turns out that the Porte had not blindly believed Obreskov's assurances in February. Apparently, the Porte ordered the *voivodas* of Wallachia and Moldavia to investigate the condition of the fortress. As a result, in his report from April 29, 1754 the Moldavian hospodar informed the Porte that despite Russian promises to stop the construction, works were being continued in certain of the fortress's sections and the Russian

⁷³⁶ On the other hand, the Austrian resident Baron Penkler first mentioned the issue only in his July 1754 report. Dyck, "New Serbia," p. 11.

⁷³⁷ Russian sources claim that the construction did not begin until late spring 1754, so it is unclear where the rumors came from. English ambassador Porter wrote to London in June that in April the Russian government informed Obreskov that it had not placed a single stone near the Ottoman border. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 6, fn. 84. It is possible that throughout the winter of 1753-1754 the Russians were bringing supplies to the area, in preparation for construction works in summer.

⁷³⁸ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatia*, p. 301.

government continued to send troops there.⁷³⁹ The Porte's other agent visited the location and swore upon return that the fortress was located at a distance of merely fourteen hours from the Ottoman border, which allegedly contradicted the terms of the peace treaty.⁷⁴⁰

Obreskov maintained that the site chosen for the fortress in no way contradicted the treaty. The fortress would be located within the borders of the Russian empire, thirty hours, or more than sixty six miles, away from the Ottoman border. Moreover, an already-existing Russian fortress, Arkhangel'skoe, was located much closer to Ottoman territory. He assured the *reis efendi* that Russia would likewise not protest if the Porte wanted to build a fortress within its own territory. Obreskov also stressed that he notified the Porte about the matter as a courtesy and to prevent false rumors by parties unfriendly to Russia, and not in order to receive its permission, for it was Russia's domestic question.⁷⁴¹ Abdi Efendi, however, "quick-tempered by nature and distrustful of everything," remained adamant that according to Ottoman maps the fortress was too close to the border. The sultan himself, reportedly, became concerned and ordered to examine the matter very carefully. The grand vizier called a council and invited one Mehmed Efendi, a distinguished expert on geography, to examine the map. Mehmed Efendi concluded that the location of the fortress went against the peace treaty.⁷⁴² Obreskov could not act through the dragoman of the Porte because the latter was afraid of incurring the *reis efendi*'s ferocity and cruelty, as the latter had already threatened to cut off the dragoman's head if it turned out that the Russians were indeed building a fortress.

Obreskov suspected that the exaggerated reaction was the result of French disinformation about serious internal disorders in Russia, which pushed the Russian government to wage an

⁷³⁹ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 4-5.

⁷⁴⁰ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 301

⁷⁴¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 48.

⁷⁴² Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, p. 229.

external war as a distraction. Bestuzhev-Riumin rightfully noted that the Ottomans' claims were quite surprising, given that Russia had never protested against the fortification of Turkish fortresses in the steppes of the northern Black Sea shore. The chancellor also correctly pointed out that Russia had informed Constantinople about its plans to build the fortress already in 1752.⁷⁴³ But the fallout was a consequence of the change in *reis efendis* in 1753 and Obreskov had to scramble to find a peaceable solution.⁷⁴⁴ It was also true that the French ambassadors in Constantinople, first Comte des Alleurs and then Comte de Vergennes, stood behind the Porte's staunch opposition to the project of the fortress, even though Vergennes admitted in his memoir that it took him great efforts to convince the Porte that the fortress threatened Ottoman interests.⁷⁴⁵

The English ambassador to the Porte from 1747 to 1762, James Porter, left a note regarding these events in his account of the Ottoman Empire that he wrote during his retirement in the late 1760s. This is how he explained Ottoman opposition to the construction project, although his account suffers from chronological inconsistencies:

The Russians, after the Treaty of Pruth, were continually uneasy at the advantages the Turks had gained over them, and there is not the least doubt that the cause of the war which forced the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739, was that the Russians wanted to retrieve their military reputation, to reestablish the honour of their arms, and impress the Turks with awe and respect. They succeeded in their purpose: for, during the whole reign of Sultan Mahmud, not only the Russian arms, but their very name, were dreaded by the Turks, and the Court of Petersburg acted as if it had a right to demand. Fortresses were built with impunity on the Russian frontiers, and a considerable one at a small distance from the Turkish territory: but the Turks, although regarding this proceeding as a violation of the treaty, only made very gentle and friendly remonstrances to the Russians during that reign.

Upon Sultan Osman's accession to the throne, the Vizir endeavoured to keep his place by changing the pacific plan of his predecessor: *it is no longer Sultan Mahmud's reign* was then the language. He artfully began with the above-mentioned fortress, and made pressing applications to the Russian Resident, representing the unfair procedure of his Court, and at last expostulating with him on the basis of the treaty of Passarovitz, and the last that had been made at Belgrade with the

⁷⁴³ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 301-302.

⁷⁴⁴ See the relevant discussion above, p. 8. Demir does not mention the differences in approaches between Naili Abdullah Paşa and El-Hâc Abdi Efendi. Indeed, he does not mention Naili Abdullah Paşa at all.

⁷⁴⁵ France feared that Russia was moving closer to attaining access to the Black Sea. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 174. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 7-8.

Emperor of Germany; and he protested against the building of fortresses as a violation of the treaty subsisting between the two Powers. Debates therefore ran high between these Ministers, and the unsatisfactory answers received from the Resident caused great uneasiness in the Seraglio and at the Porte.⁷⁴⁶

Porter's account, clearly, is not very precise from a chronological point of view: Ottoman opposition to the fortress was palpable even before Osman III's ascension to the throne in 1755. Perhaps, this is a consequence of his writing this account more than a decade after the events. Be that as it may, Obreskov was lucky that the former *reis efendi*, Naili Abdullah Paşa, was present at the afore-mentioned meeting of the imperial council in his capacity as *defterdar*. Despite blushing several times during the heated discussions, as Obreskov learned from his secret informants, Naili Abdullah suggested to other members of the Divan to step back and investigate if the location of the fortress was really in contradiction to the peace treaty.⁷⁴⁷ Apparently, the careful examination of the maps was his achievement. Even though the Porte continued to maintain that the fortress's location went contrary to the peace treaty, his suggestion likely helped participating officials let out steam.

Demir argues that the Porte acted very astutely in the situation. Taking advantage of Austria and England's cautious attitude, it tried to advance its own agenda. Thus, in 1754 Austria and England, fearing the Porte's joining the opposite camp, threatened St. Petersburg that if it did not stop the construction of the fortress, they would not help it in case of a war with the Porte. The Porte closely followed these developments and, knowing that Austria was firmly opposed to the venture, it tried to solve some of its issues with Russia—mainly the problem of the St. Elizabeth fortress—with Austria's help.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁶ James Porter, *Turkey: Its History and Progress. From The Journals and Correspondence of Sir James Porter, Fifteen Years Ambassador at Constantinople*, Vol. I (London, 1854), pp. 310-311.

⁷⁴⁷ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 302.

⁷⁴⁸ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 4-5, 6, 7-8.

Indeed, the grand vizier decided to bypass Obreskov and seek the opinion of the English and Austrian ministers in Constantinople. Austrian Internuncio Penkler did not know what to reply and wanted to ask his court for instructions, but Obreskov persuaded him not to write to Vienna about this, as this action would undermine the rightfulness of Russia's actions and embolden the Porte. Penkler and Porter answered to the Porte that they did not think that the third article of the peace treaty precluded construction of new fortresses in border areas that were located far from Azov; in addition, both sides had a right to carry out such projects. However, the Porte insisted that the two ambassadors report about the matter to their respective courts and ask them to dissuade Russia from continuing the construction. Obreskov tried to prevent this by arguing to Porter and Penkler that if their courts failed to persuade Russia, the Porte would be disappointed with them and perhaps think that they did not make enough effort. But the ambassadors resolved to inform their courts. Obreskov had to argue against Penkler's objections to the Russian construction of the fortress, pointing out that the Ottomans had recently built the fortress Kharabat,⁷⁴⁹ which was closer to the Zaporozhian Sech than St. Elizabeth was to Ochakov.⁷⁵⁰ Overall, although Obreskov was satisfied with the friendly services of the allied ambassadors, he reported that they sincerely wished to get rid of this problem as soon as possible, fearing the Porte's possible gravitation towards France and Prussia.⁷⁵¹ Obreskov's language suggested that he felt that their fears were somewhat exaggerated.

⁷⁴⁹ This was not the only instance of a post-Belgrade fortress construction by the Ottomans. In the 1740s the Porte built a fortress on the Achu Island/Peninsula in the eastern Azov Sea. The stated purpose for the construction was to control the Kuban population, which kept carrying out attacks against the Russians. Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, p. 68. Interestingly, Harabat in Ottoman means "tavern." It is possible that Harabat was the fortress of Arabat as in one document it was referred to as Arbatok. However, the latter fortress was built in the seventeenth century. There is also a mention of fortress Rabat in Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, pp. 118/fn. 3, 121. Abazeh-Muhammed-Paşa was said to be the governor of Kafa and commander of Yenikale and Rabat in 1771, before the capture of Crimea by Russia.

⁷⁵⁰ Today's Kirovograd—formerly the fortress of St. Elizabeth and then Elizavetgrad—is located about 150 miles almost exactly north of Ochakov/Ochakiv.

⁷⁵¹ *AKV*, Vol. XXV, pp. 183-191; Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 302.

For some time Obreskov did not receive any news. But when Pini went to the Porte to demand greater safety for Russian couriers—as courier Lieutenant Solovkov had recently been fired at by robbers in the Balkans—the dragoman of the Porte told him that the case of the new fortress had become a serious stumbling block in mutual relations. The dragoman likened the fortress to a sore on a healthy body, from which Antonov fire [gangrene] could spread elsewhere. The dragoman appealed to existing friendship and to earlier successful conclusions of controversial issues. He hoped that such a minor matter would not cause a break in relations: “And is the cause of protecting ten Cossacks worth irritating an empire that always strove to uphold friendship?”⁷⁵²

At this juncture in Obreskov’s report, chancellor Bestuzhev could not wait any longer and commented on the margins, addressing himself to Empress Elizabeth: “This comment by the dragoman of the Porte is truly quite brazen, for it is not his business to discuss whether it is necessary or not to protect the newly-settled Russian subjects, and still less right he has to laugh at their small number.” Bestuzhev continued his remark by drawing attention to his original opposition to the idea of the new Serbian settlements.⁷⁵³ Bestuzhev also could not forget how he

⁷⁵² *AKV*, Vol. XXV, pp. 191-192.

⁷⁵³ Bestuzhev wrote: “When the Empress recalls the development of this Serbian case from its beginning until now, she will find that everything had to happen differently.” The Serbs had claimed that the Austrian court was eager to send them away, but it soon became clear that this was not the case. As a result, Russia had to face unpleasant coolness with the Austrian court. Even when this was not yet clear, Bestuzhev suggested settling the Serbs along the Volga since that area was greater in scope than in Ukraine and was no less fertile. Moreover the Volga border area needed to be settled in order to protect the Russian hinterland from attacks by the Kuban Tatars and Kirgis-Kaisaks. Most importantly, their settlement on the Volga in as many as twenty fortresses would not have caused any disputes. However, lamented Bestuzhev, the empress ordered the Senate to settle them behind the Dnieper, where many Malorossiiane became dispossessed—for several families were removed from the land to make way for one Serb—and moved to Poland. *AKV*, Vol. XXV, pp. 192-193.

Obreskov himself had proposed an alternative suggestion in 1752 on how to settle Ukraine: he offered to move runaway Old Believers, who lived in large numbers along the Polish border and lower on the Dniester, to the New Serbia. He reasoned it would be cheaper to settle them and to build defensive fortresses: Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, p. 153.

It is true that the settlement project caused Austrian displeasure. In 1751, Maria Theresa allowed the emigration of 300 Serbs to Kiev, but only because she believed this would be a lone episode. Therefore, Vienna became very concerned about the substantial drain of its human resources over the following years. Vienna was also worried that the project aimed at undermining the influence of the grand chancellor, whose firm anti-Prussian

had incurred—undeservedly—the wrath of the empress during a meeting at the court when he and the vice-chancellor insisted that the settlement should take place at least thirteen miles from the Polish border, while the Senate representatives misinterpreted this to mean within thirteen miles of the border and could not understand what border was being referred to.⁷⁵⁴

Bestuzhev then noted that the fortress issue had already begun to cause problems with the Turkish court, which were about to take dangerous proportions. At first the Porte did not believe reports from its border commanders and unfriendly foreign representatives, especially regarding the acceptance into the Russian Empire of its subjects—Wallachians, Moldavians, and others. But since then the Porte began to believe not only the proven rumors but fabricated claims. The least that could result from the Porte's growing irritation was her alliance with the Prussian king, which was the subject of fruitless intrigues for many years and which Russia would now unwittingly abet. The consequences of this scenario, especially in case of complications in Polish affairs, could be awful, stressed the chancellor. Therefore, the matter required mature deliberation and consideration. The empress with her enlightened sagacity knew, wrote Bestuzhev, what measures needed to be taken as soon as possible. These measures would

position was the foundation of close relations between Austria and Russia. Consequently, Maria Theresa accused Mikhail Bestuzhev of fostering a rebellion within her territories and of trying to cause a split between Austria and Russia for the benefit of Prussia. By summer 1752 Mikhail Bestuzhev was recalled, but the emigration flow continued, which made Austria apprehensive of Russia's unspoken assumption of the role of the protector of its Christian subjects. Given the additional Russian demands in 1754 to allow Montenegrin émigrés from the Ottoman Empire to pass through Austrian territory, Austria also became concerned that Russian actions would undermine the peaceful state of relations with the Porte, which was crucial to keep the Porte away from Prussia. Therefore, Vienna prohibited Montenegrins from passing through its territory and tried to stem their illegal emigration in disguise. (The transit requests persisted up to 1757, however). The question of the Porte's opposition to the new border fortress, however, was most disconcerting for Austria. It raised a threat of a three-front war for Austria—not only against the Ottoman Empire, but also likely France and Prussia. The issue was of highest importance, prompting Austria to reevaluate the benefits of its alliance with Russia in relation to its original goal: "Was the Russian alliance still a source of security for Austria in its relations with the Porte?" In answering this question for itself, Austria began to be wary of Russia's far-reaching ambitions and eventually distanced itself from the alliance in the 1760s-1770s. "Vienna's fateful decision to jettison the alliance was dictated partly by the lessons of New Serbia which defined the Eastern question as the neuralgic point of the relationship: union with St. Petersburg would entangle Austria in unproductive quarrels with the Porte; joint military action against Turkey would imperil Austria's very existence; and any encouragement to Russia's southward drive would help crystallize the feared Orthodox empire on Austria's Balkan doorstep." Dyck, "New Serbia," pp. 3-7, 9-15, 17-19.

⁷⁵⁴ AKV, Vol. XXV, pp. 192-193.

demonstrate to the Porte Russia's friendliness without the need to use mediation of allies who thereby could acquire more credit at the Porte than they deserved. However, in case of procrastination, the Porte would become very irritated and would not agree to any compromise. In that case, if Russia acceded to Ottoman demands, it would be interpreted as a sign of her fear and need, rather than noble desire to maintain peace.⁷⁵⁵

In the rest of Obreskov's report, the resident described continuing efforts at the Porte to achieve cessation of the construction. At one point, the dragoman of the Porte confided in Pinii that all relevant officials were informed about the matter but there were those who could learn about it only from hearsay—those people, including the common folk, were more belligerent. The only reason they have not yet exploded was the good intention and skill of the ruling officials. However, it might not be possible to withhold popular anger much longer, especially among the clergy as it was the most powerful corps. When the clergy found out about it, everything would go up in flames. Obreskov made sure to tell the dragoman of the Porte through Pinii that the Russian court was always working to cultivate mutual friendship, but the first maxim of St. Petersburg was not to scare anyone and not to be afraid of any threats, for the Russian government had the ability to protect the state and its rights, and to bring those who attacked it to feel remorse. And although the entire world knew that Russia had a formidable army in a state of readiness, Russian military forces were kept in order. The dragoman of the Porte clarified his earlier comment by saying that he did not mean for it to sound as a threat. He merely tried to make a friendly warning about possible consequences. Based on his knowledge of the local "constitution," he knew how greatly the issue of the fortress concerned the Porte, the

⁷⁵⁵ AKV, Vol. XXV, pp. 193-194.

people, and the clergy. The latter, in particular, were capable of causing great commotion if they found out about it.⁷⁵⁶

Obreskov stepped back and decided to wait for instructions from St. Petersburg. In the meantime, he informed his court that there existed an opinion among many in his circle that the Porte was not so much worried about the fortress but about a popular uprising it could cause when the news became public, for the sultan ordered to conclude the matter in the most agreeable way and to avoid further problems. Indeed, Mahmud I preferred not to escalate the conflict. He even sent an order to the Tatars to keep them in check. For now the Ottoman administration decided to wait for an answer from St. Petersburg. But if the Porte's demands were not satisfied, it would produce great coolness in relations, although the sultan was unlikely to declare war. It could be problematic, especially if the current *reis efendi* kept his position—the Ottomans could join the opposite camp and agree to French suggestions.⁷⁵⁷ Obreskov reported that besides the *reis efendi*, most other Ottoman officials, although equally upset about it, did not think the building of the fortress contravened the treaty, but simply hurt mutual friendship.⁷⁵⁸

Obreskov then offered his own thoughts on the matter, essentially advocating making a concession to the Porte. The more he contemplated the issue, the more he became convinced that it was of great significance. On the one hand, the honor of the empress did not permit to stop what had already begun in front of the eyes of neighboring peoples. On the other hand, continued construction could cause problems. The Porte could agree to the French proposition to ally with the Prussian king, but in addition it was impossible to guarantee that a complete break could be avoided. Despite the sultan's lack of predisposition for war, the wicked *reis efendi* managed to irritate people's spirits, bemoaned Obreskov. In case Abdi Efendi remained in his position and a

⁷⁵⁶ *AKV*, Vol. XXV, pp. 194-197.

⁷⁵⁷ *AKV*, Vol. XXV, pp. 197-198.

⁷⁵⁸ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, pp. 230-231.

new grand vizier would be of similar views—nothing in this empire was impossible—Russia could be facing a war in which it could not count on its allies, for they could object that Russia was responsible for triggering the conflict. Obreskov admitted that the Porte’s demands and concerns were groundless, but he believed it was better to satisfy them and stop the construction. If the outright concession was not feasible, Obreskov suggested requesting that the Porte make a friendly appeal to St. Petersburg without referring to the treaty, which had no relation to the matter. This step would not oblige Russia to anything completely but would give hope to the Porte. By that time the coming of fall would necessitate a halt in construction works, which could be seen as being done to satisfy the Porte. The matter could then be resumed in spring, perhaps with less difficulty.⁷⁵⁹

St. Petersburg chose to continue the construction, which highlighted the empress’s disregard for Bestuzhev-Riumin’s warnings. Obreskov had to inform the Porte about it with a note, but Penkler and Porter pleaded to wait. Obreskov agreed, and when the Porte inquired about St. Petersburg’s resolution, he replied that final decision had not yet been taken. Vice-Chancellor Vorontsov made a disapproving comment on the margins of Obreskov’s report: “...By choosing to wait, [Obreskov] caused himself more difficulty, while making the Turks more impatient; moreover, he could clearly see from our letter that our answer was final and one could not have expected it to change, therefore he should not have waited to present it in order to once and for all get rid of the Turkish demand not to build the fortress.” When Obreskov reported that Abdi Efendi had told Porter that the Ottomans would join the opposite camp, which could result in a war, if Russia replied with refusal, Vorontsov criticized the allied ministers: “In my opinion if these allied ministers acknowledged our right in building the fortress and responded to Turkish appeals more firmly in our defense, and did not receive Ottoman demands

⁷⁵⁹ *AKV*, Vol. XXV, pp. 198-199.

with such fearfulness and concern, then surely the Turkish ire and threats would have disappeared a long time ago.” Vorontsov suggested concluding the matter without the help of the allied ministers, which was in line with his anti-Bestuzhev stance. Obreskov wrote again that the fortress dispute could cause a break with the Porte sooner or later because the Turks considered it as important as Belgrade that had once been in Austrian hands. He asked Vorontsov if the benefits of the fortress would outweigh the harm it would bring. Vorontsov optimistically discounted the possibility: “A man can be mistaken in his thoughts, even more in his conjectures; unlike Obreskov I think that the construction of the fortress of St. Elizabeth will translate into a great advantage for Russia and will keep the Turks in check.” St. Petersburg, however, contemplated announcing a halt in construction until the matter was cleared and the Porte was assured that there was no threat to it.⁷⁶⁰

As Soloviev noted, Vorontsov was right at first: the matter was exaggerated by the *reis efendi* and the fearfulness of Penkler, Porter, and Obreskov. Demir also notes that the Porte was not intent on waging war but wanted to make the most out of the diplomatic situation that worked in its favor. Therefore, in fall 1754 it pressured Austria and England to take up the matter directly with St. Petersburg.⁷⁶¹ But the pro-construction party in the Russian government and Obreskov still thought that they could get away with being persistent. After all, the sultan himself resolved that the construction was taking place in Russia, in some distance from the Turkish borders, and should be left alone if it could not be prevented in a friendly way. Apart from Mahmud I’s peaceable intentions, Obreskov’s position was also improved with the death of des Alleurs on November 12, 1754. But Obreskov advised St. Petersburg to finish the

⁷⁶⁰ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, pp. 228-232.

⁷⁶¹ Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” pp. 9-10.

construction as soon as possible because the sultan was gravely ill and Ottoman plans could change following his death.⁷⁶²

This is exactly what happened: on December 2, 1754 the sultan died, being replaced by his brother Osman. By early 1755, therefore, the *reis efendi* gained the upper hand. This was a cause for concern for the Russian government. Even before the death of Mahmud I the *reis efendi* had begun to consult with the top clerics about ways to convince the sultan to take decisive actions against Russia. The *reis efendi* also requested the dragoman of the Porte to provide him with information about all European nations, and especially report if France could distract Austria in case of a Russo-Ottoman war. The dragoman, Ioannis Kallimaki, spoke highly of France but noted that France was forced to conclude peace in 1748 with Austria and England after Russia sent a 40,000-strong force against the French army.⁷⁶³

As expected, with the death of Mahmud I representatives of Austria and England became very concerned by the possible change in Ottoman disposition. Consequently, Penkler and Porter threatened Obreskov that the issue and the timing were extremely critical to announce the stop in construction; otherwise, Obreskov could set fire to entire Europe. Obreskov objected that if he told the Porte that the empress agreed to concede in the matter, the Ottomans, well known for their haughtiness, would go further in their demands and call for complete cessation of the construction and even destruction of the existing structure. English ambassador promised to apply all his influence to prevent this. As a result, in December 1754 St. Petersburg decided to promise to end the construction.⁷⁶⁴ On January 8, 1755, N.S., Obreskov submitted a memorandum to the Porte, in which he announced that, although the construction was not in

⁷⁶² Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 303-304.

⁷⁶³ Kallimaki thereby justified the pension he was receiving from the Russian government. See the chapter on intelligence gathering.

⁷⁶⁴ Soloviev, Book XII, Vol. 23, p. 253. Soloviev, however, did not shed light on the struggle between Bestuzhev-Riumin and Vorontsov concerning the construction. Also for an Austrian perspective, see Dyck, "New Serbia," pp. 14-15.

violation of the peace treaty, Empress Elizabeth decided to stop the works as a sign of her desire to preserve friendly relations with the Porte.⁷⁶⁵ The latter was satisfied with the news of a pause in construction, although it continued to collect information about the fortress.⁷⁶⁶ For the majority of 1755, despite frequent changes of officials under the new sultan, the Porte maintained friendly disposition towards Russia and even replaced the militant Crimean Khan, Aslan Giray, in October.⁷⁶⁷

Obreskov's continuing efforts to persuade St. Petersburg that it could go ahead with the project earned him the wrath of the chancellor. While Obreskov was not blind to the dangers that Bestuzhev perceived could come about if the construction continued, he tried, following a deep diplomatic instinct especially relevant in Constantinople, not to concede too easily. Vorontsov's pressure also played a major role. As a result, Obreskov angered the chancellor, who was adamantly against aggravating the Porte in any way. The short crisis in the relationship between Obreskov and Bestuzhev-Riumin grew out of the difference in scales on which each of them operated at a time of heightening tensions: Obreskov saw his mission in carrying out government orders, albeit not unthinkingly, with the highest efficacy, while Bestuzhev strove to realize his goals related to the larger place of Russia in Europe—a veritable chess board with rules that would soon change in the middle of the game and undermine Bestuzhev's influence.⁷⁶⁸

Bestuzhev believed that his understanding of Russian foreign policy was the most far-sighted in

⁷⁶⁵ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 10-11.

⁷⁶⁶ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 11.

⁷⁶⁷ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 305-307. Although constant replacement of officials—such as grand viziers and *reis efendis*—was disruptive, Obreskov found many of them to be quite reasonable and even admirable men. These included grand viziers Ali Paşa Hekimoğlu—"a refined politician and Turkish new Machiavelli"—and Naili Abdullah Paşa, described earlier, as well as several *reis efendis*, one of whom (in office until August 14/25, 1755—possibly El-Hac Abdi Efendi, see Recep Ahışalı, *Osmanlı devlet teşkilatında Reisülküttâblık: XVIII. Yüzyıl* (İstanbul: Tatav, 2001), p. 41) Obreskov characterized as a "firm and incorruptible person who observed treaties with sanctity" and the other one (in office from October 14/25, 1755—Mektubcu Hamza Hamid, see Ahışalı, p. 41)—"as a quite humble and kind old man." Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 305, 306, 307.

⁷⁶⁸ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 242-243.

the empire. There was little Obreskov could say to object to this sentiment, but he made sure not to estrange those who he knew did not necessarily agree with Bestuzhev.

Obreskov found himself in a particularly difficult position because it appears that Bestuzhev communicated his opinion to him in private, secret messages, expecting Obreskov to modify his behavior imperceptibly in favor of Bestuzhev's position. Indeed, Bestuzhev was known to have instituted, akin to the French "secret of the king," secret personal correspondence with Russian representatives abroad.⁷⁶⁹ In his cyphered message in February 1755⁷⁷⁰ Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin expressed his lasting respect for Obreskov's achievements but cautioned him against making professional mistakes. He used harsher terms to register his extreme displeasure with the fact that Obreskov seemed to have discounted his opinion on the matter of the construction of the St. Elizabeth fortress.⁷⁷¹ Bestuzhev was in favor of halting the construction in order to avoid any pretext for Ottoman belligerence against Russia, which could translate into an unnecessary military conflict or, perhaps worse, push the Porte into the hands of the opposing coalition of states: France, Sweden, and Prussia.⁷⁷²

Bestuzhev referred to Obreskov's letter N 42, from December 24,⁷⁷³ in which to Bestuzhev's great surprise, Obreskov's fervor went as far as criticizing the actions and

⁷⁶⁹ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 234.

⁷⁷⁰ The document in question was written, according to archival records, on February 3, 1754, although there seems to be a mistake in dating, and the correct date must have been 1755. The mistake appears even more probable if one takes into account that the archival document containing the letter refers to Bestuzhev as former chancellor and must have been found and deposited in the archive after the fact, during persecution of the deposed grand chancellor. The letter could, therefore, have been misdated. The month and date could also be imprecise.

⁷⁷¹ 89.8.22.1754. Kopia pis'ma 330oiuze330ru [Bestuzheva-Riumina] rezidentu v Konstantinopole Obrezkovu s vyrazheniem neodobreniia ego deiatel'nosti. 3 February 1754. This particular document was noted as belonging to the "old archive" and the heading of Bestuzhev-Riumin's letter listed him as former chancellor. There was another note about the letter being returned from the [Imperial] Conference on March 5, 1761. 89.8.22.1754, L. 1. Most likely this document was found and included in the archive later than regular correspondence, for Bestuzhev-Riumin served as chancellor only until 1758.

⁷⁷² Mikhneva, *Rossii I Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 109-111.

⁷⁷³ This is another reason to date Bestuzhev's letter to 1755, because pertinent correspondence between Obreskov and St. Petersburg did not intensify before summer 1754: see *AKV*, Vol. XXV, p. 183. For example, correspondence

resolutions of his own superiors, that is Bestuzhev himself. In the letter Obreskov reportedly notified his government of his independent decision to hold on to the letter he had received from St. Petersburg, which was written by the English ambassador in St. Petersburg Guy Dickens to the English ambassador in Constantinople Porter, in order to first assess the latest mood at the Porte regarding the St. Elizabeth fortress. Bestuzhev wrote that he did not object to Obreskov's initiative, he even found it praiseworthy. But he was personally insulted and appalled by the "unbridled ardor of expressions" used by Obreskov in his report. Bestuzhev could not feel but that Obreskov himself must have regretted his choice of words and tone. The resident, wrote Bestuzhev, "could have done the same thing in a commendable way" instead of filling his report with dread and trepidation, which scared the recipients at first look.⁷⁷⁴

Kesselbrenner has analyzed this letter and he explains that the chancellor was upset by Obreskov's lack of understanding that the continued construction of the fortress endangered peaceful relations between Russia and the Porte. According to Kesselbrenner, Bestuzhev-Riumin resorted to intrigue by asking the English ambassador in St. Petersburg "Gidikens" to announce that the Porte would declare war if Russia did not stop the construction. On the other hand, Mikhneva did not notice any tensions between Obreskov and Bestuzhev. Instead she wrote that in summer 1754 Obreskov himself recommended to his government to make some concessions because the Porte, encouraged by France and the Crimean Khan, was unduly alarmed at the news about the fortress, and mutual relations could indeed suffer as a result. Bestuzhev-Riumin supported this line of thinking on his own end, in St. Petersburg, trying to convince others, who did not necessarily agree with him, that undue rigidity in this matter was causing anxiety among Russia's allies, England and Austria, and could push the Porte towards opening friendly

of the English ambassador in St. Petersburg with his government at the end of 1753 gives no indication that the matter had been raised by then: see *SIRIO*, Vol. 148.

⁷⁷⁴ 89.8.22.1754, L. 2.

negotiations with Russia's and the other two powers' opponent, Prussia. At the end of 1754, according to Mikhneva, Obreskov declared to the Ottoman government that the construction works were stopped, which was confirmed by a special Ottoman commissar sent to investigate the location. As Mikhneva points out, this was a wise move on Russia's part because it eliminated the Porte's desire to negotiate with Frederick II's emissary in 1755.⁷⁷⁵ The first letter Mikhneva refers to indeed dates from June 1754⁷⁷⁶ but she appears to have missed the subsequent year of frenetic correspondence.

As becomes evident, the matter of construction of the St. Elizabeth fortress caused a rift within the Russian government. The archival document containing Bestuzhev's letter to Obreskov, in fact, contains detailed running commentary on the margins by his opponents, who found and examined it in the late 1750s-1761. Mikhail Vorontsov was the most likely author of the commentary.⁷⁷⁷ He noted that the former grand chancellor criticized Obreskov's lack of professional zeal because the resident exposed "bad intentions" of the chancellor and his accomplices. The author of the commentary noted that Obreskov had sent a report to the CFA from October 1, 1754, in which he exposed the intrigues of the allied courts and the Russian chancellor himself at the Porte regarding the fortress of St. Elizabeth. Obreskov's actions were defended in the said commentary, as he was found to have stayed true to his responsibility of carrying out imperial orders that tasked him with neutralizing the Porte's groundless demands to stop the construction. The chancellor, on the other hand, was accused of putting his own views above those of the empress.

⁷⁷⁵ Mikhneva, *Rossii I Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 109-111.

⁷⁷⁶ *AKV*, Vol. XXV, p. 183.

⁷⁷⁷ Alternatively, the commentary could have been authored by other members of the anti-Bestuzhev camp, who constituted the entire membership of the investigative commission. The latter was headed by Prince N. Trubetskoi and Counts A. Buturlin and I. Shuvalov. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 244.

Namely, as mentioned before, Bestuzhev was faulted for instructing Dickens to make a false announcement at the Russian court, saying that the Porte would announce war against Russia if the construction of the fortress was not stopped. Dickens's representation resulted in an imperial order to Obreskov announcing that Russia was stopping the construction in a gesture of friendship. But Obreskov responded on April 15, 1755,⁷⁷⁸ writing—essentially in opposition to his latest instruction—that he would surely keep the Porte within its bounds and that he was hopeful to resolve the matter according to earlier instructions. Moreover, he assured the St. Petersburg court that the Ottoman government never contemplated war and he could not understand why such a premature resolution had been taken on the matter. Obreskov also regretted that the resolution was announced in separate notes to Russia's allied ambassadors at Constantinople. Obreskov knew that they would certainly inform the Porte about it and, consequently, the Porte would have to persist in its demands even if it were intent on dropping them. With this in mind, Obreskov decided to retain the notes, as well as Dickens's letter to Porter, until he concluded negotiations in line with earlier imperial orders. According to the critical commentary of Bestuzhev's letter to Obreskov, Bestuzhev was criticizing the resident for undermining the latest resolution and exposing the truth about allied ministers.

The critic of Bestuzhev noted that it was worth highlighting that Obreskov's earlier firmness and fervor in the matter, which had borne impressive results, were irreversibly dampened thanks to Bestuzhev's obstruction. Indeed, Obreskov had managed to procure an order from none other than the sultan himself that instructed the Ottoman ministry to leave Russian plans regarding the fortress alone. But after Bestuzhev's letter, concluded the reviewer, "suddenly disappeared all his [Obreskov's] successes, fervor, and diligence, so that the matter

⁷⁷⁸ The date seems incorrect as well.

took a completely different form and course, and could not be concluded according to the intent of Her Imperial Majesty.”⁷⁷⁹

The above criticism fits well into the general picture of Bestuzhev’s downfall and persecution. The former grand chancellor was accused of numerous transgressions and barely escaped death, owing purely to Elizabeth’s avowal, made early in her reign, to end capital punishment. Some historians point out that the several imperial manifestos against Bestuzhev never specified concrete examples of his ill doings. For example, Kesselbrenner writes that charges against the former chancellor, who had been detained and dispossessed without proper judicial procedure, were never substantiated and later retracted under Catherine II. However, the case of the St. Elizabeth fortress could easily demonstrate the source of the following accusations: “meddling into issues that were not his business,” not carrying out imperial orders “when they did not agree with his partial and self-absorbed/*samoliubivye* wishes,” not reporting to the empress when he discovered harmful prospects for the interests of the empire, and, finally, “daring to treat his own orders as more important and valid than the imperial ones.”⁷⁸⁰

Bestuzhev-Riumin’s biographer, A. Presniakov, however, noted that accusations against the chancellor were based on well-known facts, evidence of which Bestuzhev managed to burn in time.⁷⁸¹

Bestuzhev’s letter to Obreskov clearly demonstrates that the chancellor took his own position as the wisest and most important for Russian diplomatic representatives abroad to follow. Not surprisingly, he was therefore livid that Obreskov did not follow his latest order. Bestuzhev wrote that he found it unprofessional and disloyal of Obreskov, who “in order to increase his own personal merit, ascribed to others offenses and bad intentions that were hardly

⁷⁷⁹ 89.8.22.1754, LL. 1ob-2ob.

⁷⁸⁰ Kesselbrenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 245, 243-248.

⁷⁸¹ Presniakov, “Bestuzhev-Riumin,” *RBS*, pp. 784-785.

proven and that could, moreover, produce negative consequences.”⁷⁸² He sternly disapproved of Obreskov’s report: “I do not know if you have considered or thought sufficiently about future consequences when you put all your efforts into showing that not only the ministers of our allied courts but those courts themselves were more partial to the Turks than to us in the matter of the St. Elizabeth fortress, but I clearly saw that you did not spare anything in order to exaggerate your own zeal.” In a key phrase that stressed the vast chasm between Bestuzhev and Obreskov, the chancellor proclaimed that he attributed Obreskov’s actions to his imperfect knowledge about general political affairs, realizing that Obreskov, “while concentrating on the little for which he was responsible, neglected all the rest which was the most significant.”⁷⁸³

Bestuzhev essentially trampled Obreskov’s good sense, good sense that suggested to the resident that the latest imperial order was dangerously concessive. To be sure, Bestuzhev was not an ignorant man and had a right to his opinions, strong and overbearing as they were. There is no better evidence for this than in the first part of his letter to Obreskov. Bestuzhev put Obreskov to shame for thinking that his opinion deserved much attention. The entire forty-decade long state and diplomatic career of Bestuzhev, coupled with his profound intellect, could squash Obreskov’s self-esteem in one paragraph. Indeed, Bestuzhev’s observation is central to the subject of this dissertation. He brought to light the amateurishness of Russian diplomats in Constantinople, which was a grave criticism that Obreskov could not ignore. Bestuzhev wrote:

I will confess to you that I have noticed in your reports an entirely special style that stands out among others and that has rooted itself in the chancellery of the Constantinople mission for more than twenty years, which contains in itself more empty talk/*plodorechie* and senselessness than sense, or even intended high-sounding style/*velerechie*, and even more discrepancies, so that in one hour peace is confirmed, a war is declared, tranquility is restored, and suddenly everything is in flames.

This style has been the cause of the glorious but quite harmful war with the Turks that began in 1737.⁷⁸⁴ It also rendered contemptuous, even today, the name of Mr. Veshniakov; and your

⁷⁸² 89.8.22.1754, L. 1ob.

⁷⁸³ 89.8.22.1754, L. 1ob.

⁷⁸⁴ The war began as early as 1735-1736.

predecessor, having followed in his [Veshniakov's] footsteps, did not aspire to anything rather than to act in others' interests */ne staralsia, kak tokmo na izhdivenii drugikh sebia pokazyvat'/*. I am saying this not to impress anyone */shtob komu sebia okazat' priiatstvoval/*, my position requires to praise and acknowledge real achievements, so that even more fervor is encouraged through reward, but here I see not a clear zeal to serve....⁷⁸⁵

Bestuzhev's appeal to recent history and Obreskov's predecessors was intelligent and served the chancellor's interests well. No resident would want to carry responsibility for single-handedly sparking a war, and Obreskov could not have liked the prospect of being compared with Veshniakov either. It was known that Nepliev had belonged to the Vorontsov faction that opposed Bestuzhev. Obreskov's appointment as resident, on the other hand, had been supported by Bestuzhev. In the latest letter, moreover, the chancellor mentioned the question of Obreskov's promotion, which had not yet been finalized and the outcome of which directly depended on Bestuzhev's recommendation. But Obreskov's allegiances could not be very pronounced since he was not a very prominent figure. Therefore, Obreskov was facing a difficult choice. Obreskov could not oppose his powerful superior, and eventually carried out the order to announce the stop in construction. His lack of fervor was noticed in hindsight by the commission that persecuted Bestuzhev, but at the time the change in Obreskov's behavior must have been puzzling since he was following secret orders from Bestuzhev.

In early 1755 Russia had couched its message concerning the suspension of construction works not as a compromise but as a temporary concession: in order not to let the Porte think that the construction was permanently stopped as a result of the latter's complaints, Obreskov declared that the presence of that fortress was ultimately in line with its own [Porte's] interests and that the Porte would eventually agree to it after a more balanced consideration of the matter.

⁷⁸⁵ 89.8.22.1754, LL. 1-1ob.

However, as a sign of her desire to maintain friendly relations with the Porte, announced Obreskov on January 8, Empress Elizabeth decided to abandon the project.⁷⁸⁶

The Porte accepted Obreskov's announcement, as well as Penkler's and Porter's letters of support, with satisfaction, but it continued to collect intelligence about actual developments at the border. The embassy to Russia in 1755 of Derviş Mehmed Efendi, for example, also had—besides its official goal of announcing Osman III's accession to the throne—the objective of ascertaining in person the latest condition of border fortresses. Derviş Mehmed Efendi's trip lasted from January until August and he reported that the Russians indeed desired to maintain mutual peace and ordered their border commanders to observe the terms of the treaty in everything.⁷⁸⁷ Admittedly, this was not a very valuable piece of intelligence, highlighting once again that ad hoc Ottoman embassies to Russia stood to gain little as a result of the Russians' careful staging, monitoring, and guiding of the Ottoman envoy's experiences while on Russian soil.

The situation continued to be dubious, however, not in the least because of the continuing French encouragement of the Porte and the polarization within the Russian ruling circle. We know that after the tensions subsided as a result of Obreskov's declaration, both the Austrians and the English recognized that the Porte's demands to stop the construction works were not completely legitimate, but admitted that Russia had to take a step back in order to preserve peace with the Ottoman empires. For example, on March 2, 1755 Porter received a letter from his king, in which the latter specified that after Russia had notified the Porte ahead of time about its plans to build the fortress the Ottomans asked Porter and Penkler for their opinions on whether this project contradicted the peace treaty. Despite Porter and Penkler's assurance that by building the

⁷⁸⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 48; Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 10-11.

⁷⁸⁷ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 11-12.

fortress Russia was not violating the treaty, however, the Porte chose to persist in its claims that the project was against the treaty. Consequently, wrote the king, the Austrian and English representatives, not being properly informed about the terms of the treaty, were forced to accept the Porte's position. Despite this, the king stressed that—whether contrary to the treaty or not—Russia had to abandon the project to keep peace with the Porte. The king sent a letter to this effect to Empress Elizabeth and the empress instructed her border officers to stop the construction. Consequently, on May 13 Porter repeated his earlier points to the Porte and suggested that if the latter was not convinced it could send a trusted agent to inspect the fortress.⁷⁸⁸

France, in its turn, also encouraged the Porte to conduct a detailed investigation, but for the opposite reason. Vergennes tried to convince the Porte that it would be endangered by the alliance of Austria, England, and Russia, which could be concluded very soon based on the close cooperation of the three countries. Therefore, the Porte could not trust Austria's and England's claims that they were pushing the Russians to demolish the fortress. Vergennes further advised that in order to strengthen its position and not to be caught unawares, the Porte had to make military preparations on the Russian and Polish borders.⁷⁸⁹

The Porte, therefore, remained on alert. After on May 5, 1755, N.S. Obreskov made another assurance of Russia's plans to abandon the project, the Porte did not wait and ordered the Hotin commander and the Crimean Khan to investigate the condition of the fortress. Their reports indicated that the Russians continued works to complete the construction project. In fact, the Russians began to refortify some sections that had earlier been demolished. In this connection, Vergennes wrote to his government that the sultan was very pleased with his

⁷⁸⁸ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 12.

⁷⁸⁹ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 12-13.

decision to send investigators. The news greatly concerned the sultan and the French now had a hope that he would act upon his fears. Indeed, the Ottomans now realized that Russia would not completely abandon the project, but was simply trying to gain time by making the assurances the Porte desired to hear.⁷⁹⁰

Developments that were taking place within the Russian government in the meantime explain the reappearance of the Porte's concerns about the fortress, for, after all, St. Petersburg had announced a stop in construction in early 1755. Unfortunately for Bestuzhev, however, his rivals at the CFA continued to pursue a diametrically opposite policy in Constantinople. In late spring 1755 Vorontsov and his supporters tried once again to reach out to Austria⁷⁹¹ and England for support. As a result, the matter reached a breaking point again in June 1755, when Bestuzhev wrote, or more precisely complained, to the empress about Obreskov's dangerous diletantism. Bestuzhev reported that the English ambassador Williams had notified him on June 20 that the English king became very concerned by the request of the Russian ambassador in London to instruct the English ambassador at the Porte to support Obreskov's demand that the Ottoman government recognize Russia's right to build a fortress in New Serbia.

Bestuzhev continued his letter by noting that King George II advised the Russian empress to postpone this matter. Accordingly, the chancellor assured Williams that there was no reason to worry: Russia had not yet decided to resume the construction and Obreskov had not yet been instructed to raise the matter; the request of the Russian ambassador in London, similar to the one his colleague made in Vienna, was made simply in advance, in order to assure the allies' future help regarding the new fortress. Bestuzhev shared the concern of the English that an

⁷⁹⁰ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 11, fn. 99; 13; 52, fn. 255.

⁷⁹¹ In May 1755 Russia's ambassador in Vienna asked Austria to support Russia's plans for the fortress at the Porte. Dyck, "New Serbia," p. 15.

untimely return to the subject could irritate the Porte and aid the efforts of Prussian and Polish agents in Constantinople, who acted in concert with the French and the Swedes, to incite the Ottoman Empire to a war against Russia. This possibility was barely escaped, continued Bestuzhev, only five months earlier when Obreskov finally announced the halt in construction. Reemerging insistence on continuing the works could only persuade the Porte that Russia deviously stopped the construction only to lull Ottoman vigilance and was therefore doubly risky.⁷⁹²

The problem was that Bestuzhev was faking confidence. He confessed to the empress that deep inside he felt very worried about the fate of Russo-Ottoman relations. He knew that the CFA had already sent an order to Obreskov authorizing him to resume representations concerning the fortress of St. Elizabeth even if the allied ministers did not back him up. Bestuzhev drew the empress's attention to the fact that he had sent a note to the CFA advising to avoid such hasty actions and instead better prepare the ground for the success of future measures. However, the CFA members did not listen to him and Bestuzhev was obliged to concede to their decision, which he did unwillingly. The chancellor apologized to the empress in advance for any detrimental consequences that could follow, for he could not overturn the collective decision of the CFA, which was led by the vice-chancellor Vorontsov. He further explained that he did not dare argue any further because he could not personally report to the empress on the matter but knew that Vorontsov had one-on-one meetings with her on a daily basis. Therefore, he feared objecting to Vorontsov and was virtually pressured to agree.⁷⁹³

Thus, to be sure, Bestuzhev's problem lay not only with Obreskov. By 1755, the grand chancellor had been struggling with his opponents for almost a decade and the issue of the St.

⁷⁹² *AKV*, Vol. IV, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁹³ *AKV*, Vol. IV, pp. 65-66.

Elizabeth fortress was only the latest in a series of controversies that divided the Russian government from within. The underlying difference of opinion stemmed from Bestuzhev's determined belief in the advantages of Russia's alliance with England, which Vorontsov and his allies had reasons to look at with distrust. Nevertheless, Bestuzhev chose to point out Obreskov's lack of experience as a problem that bothered him the most. The chancellor wrote that he never argued that he was against the construction of the fortress; he only feared that the time chosen for it was dangerous. Moreover, he was worried that the CFA entrusted such a serious issue—"a matter of war and peace, and so to say of the weal or woe of the state"—"to this still very young minister." Bestuzhev continued to explain how Obreskov's youth and inexperience rendered the latest decision of the CFA risky: there was no doubt that Obreskov was a loyal and diligent state servant, but it was imprudent to think that he had enough skill and ingenuity to handle the type of problem that could easily lead to a war. "For it could easily happen that, as a consequence of his lack of perception or more likely out of excessive endeavor to show himself and his merit off, he [Obreskov] would raise the matter at a time when it would be best to stay quiet, no matter how enticing external circumstances were."⁷⁹⁴

Bestuzhev-Riumin did not spare paper to demonstrate that his concerns had foundation. He wrote that he had noticed numerous times from Obreskov's reports that the young diplomat possessed an unbridled zeal and a great desire to ascribe everything to his credit, while criticizing others in order to highlight his own merit. "He tries to present every minor issue entrusted to him as so important as if there was nothing else like it in the world, and he does not care if his success in it would lead to the destruction of an entire system," continued to chafe the chancellor. It was difficult to judge, complained Bestuzhev, whether it was due to inexperience or some other intention of Obreskov, that his last-year reports depicted Russia's allies as suspicious and

⁷⁹⁴ AKV, Vol. IV, pp. 66-67.

thereby almost caused coldness in Russia's relations with them. After all, the chancellor stressed, the events proved that there was a great need for caution as the Turks almost declared a war.⁷⁹⁵

Finally, Bestuzhev returned to his primary criticism of his opponents by implying that Obreskov was but a pawn in their hands. "Who knows," he asked rhetorically, "if Obreskov was entrusted with this delicate and crucial issue in order [for someone] to start a game but then to falsely claim innocence and put the blame on Obreskov, who would in turn appear more pitiful than guilty." Bestuzhev again likened his enemies to the former chancellor Andrei Osterman who plunged Russia into a war with the Ottoman Empire, for "Osterman's policy had mainly consisted in sending ever-equivocal orders to [Russian] ministers [abroad] and then ascribing failures to their [ministers'] fault, while appropriating credit for any success."⁷⁹⁶

Bestuzhev warned that while Russia had been able to calm Ottoman concerns once before, it would be dangerous to think that the Turks would be easily appeased and satisfied by Russian promises once again. He therefore recommended that the CFA instruct Obreskov, in the hope that the resident had not yet acted on its previous order, not to bring up the matter at that time, and instead to wait for a more appropriate moment in the future. The chancellor had no other hope to influence the CFA than directly through the empress because he knew that the CFA discounted his suggestions. Bestuzhev, however, also added that the CFA was inconsistent in its actions, which revealed its members' prejudice and flexible interpretation of the empress's orders. Thus, he complained that the CFA at first disregarded the decision of a special conference, convened on the empress's order, to stop the construction, citing the fact that the empress did not yet return the conference protocol with her official approval on it. Bestuzhev was quite indignant that the CFA chose not to implement this decision and sent the relevant order

⁷⁹⁵ *AKV*, Vol. IV, p. 67.

⁷⁹⁶ *AKV*, Vol. IV, p. 67.

to Obreskov even though the empress made an oral instruction to comply with the decision of the conference. However, to Bestuzhev's dismay, the CFA then willfully interpreted the decision of the conference to mean that Russia would stop the construction only temporarily. Consequently, the CFA instructed Obreskov to resume insisting on Russia's right to construct the southern fortress, despite the fact that the empress still did not give her written approval. Bestuzhev therefore complained that members of the CFA skewed imperial will one way or another to fit their own desires.⁷⁹⁷

The crisis was therefore suspended in the air, as two different factions in St. Petersburg fought for their respective visions. The Porte continued to receive intelligence about the continuing construction works.⁷⁹⁸ On the other hand, allied ministers at the Porte once again tried to apply pressure on Russia and calm the Porte down.⁷⁹⁹ It was only after the Westminster Convention of January 1756—when Russia decided to oppose Prussia in an impending conflict—that St. Petersburg determined with greater resolve to promise to the Porte to stop the construction, although that too proved to be a temporary commitment.

Namely, on April 2/13, 1756, St. Petersburg instructed Obreskov to announce to the Porte that Russia was suspending the construction “until further consideration” because the government was persuaded by Obreskov's opinion of the danger of such step, even though it really wanted to continue the construction. The decision did not come easily to the empress. Following a heated debate between Bestuzhev-Riumin and Vorontsov, as well as the latter's

⁷⁹⁷ *AKV*, Vol. IV, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁹⁸ The construction works were indeed covertly resumed. Dyck, “New Serbia,” p. 15.

⁷⁹⁹ For example, in August 1755 Porter attempted to remove the Porte's concerns by repeating that the matter of the St. Elizabeth fortress—thanks to Austrian and English efforts to keep peace between the Ottoman and Russian empires—was solved, for the time being, to the benefit of the Porte. Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” pp. 13-14.

proponent Adam Vasilievich Olsufiev,⁸⁰⁰ at a meeting of the Imperial Conference the empress was finally convinced when Petr Shuvalov—one of the organizers of the Serb settlements—spoke out in favor of the need to stop the construction. This was a year of diplomatic revolutions and the Russian government had to prioritize peaceful relations with the Porte and keeping it out of the Prussian orbit. As a result, Obreskov was promoted twice that year thanks to Bestuzhev-Riumin: on May 3 he became a chancellery counselor (Rank 6) and on November 12—a state counselor (Rank 5).⁸⁰¹

St. Petersburg's decision came just in time to help Obreskov. On April 1, 1756 the sultan deposed Yirmisekizzade Mehmed Said Paşa quite suddenly and on March 22/April 2 Obreskov already predicted that the new grand vizier would likely become Mustafa Paşa, who had been among the chief opponents of the fortress in 1752-1754. Mustafa Paşa arrived in Constantinople on April 22 and the dragoman of the Porte mentioned in confidence to the Russians that continued construction would be a big problem. Obreskov answered that the works were stopped,⁸⁰² but it was clear that the new grand vizier would keep a close watch on Russia's actions.

However, the Russian government began to repair the fortress and concentrate troops in it after Prussia invaded Saxony in August 1756. These preparations intensified further after Russia acceded to the First Treaty of Versailles. The Crimean khan and other Ottoman border officials kept the Porte informed about these developments, and the Ottomans dispatched official agents to investigate the condition of the fortress. But for several years the issue did not come to a head.

⁸⁰⁰ It appears that Olsufiev used to be Vorontsov's candidate for the position of resident in Constantinople in 1751, if one is to believe the report of the English ambassador in St. Petersburg, Guy Dickens, who had referred to the candidate as "m-r Alsuius." *SIRIO*, Vol. 148, p. 173. Adam Olsufiev studied at the Noble Cadet Corps between 1732 and 1739. Luzanov, pp. 144-145. He must have known Obreskov personally. Olsufiev later became one of the first secretaries of Catherine II, in 1762-1764.

⁸⁰¹ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 308, 315; Herbert H. Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 60.

⁸⁰² 90.1.375.1756, L. 127ob.

Only in 1760 did the issue of the fortress again enter the agenda of Russo-Ottoman relations. In that year conflicts between Crimean Tatars and Zaporozhian Cossacks resulted in multiple complaints of the Crimean Khan to the Porte. The khan also added that Russia resumed its activities in border fortresses. Acting upon this information, the Porte tasked the Hotin commander with investigating the situation. The latter picked two of his trustworthy agents, who knew the region well and could speak Russian, to conduct the reconnaissance. These reported that they could see from outside the fortress that preparations were going on inside it. To ascertain the nature of these preparations, the Hotin commander sent two non-Muslims who procured a permission to travel within Russia by pretending to be merchants who were going to collect a debt from someone who lived in the St. Elizabeth fortress. Their mission was fraught with great risk because the Russians immediately sent away those who were suspected to be spies and, in general, Russian border regiments controlled the region very tightly. The agents managed to get inside the fortress but did not have access to the inner fortress, where the main activity was taking place. Having found a pretext for staying in a house in the fortress's suburb, the Ottoman agents used the time to reconnoiter the entire fortress. According to their findings, the two gates of the fortress had been completed a year earlier, in 1759. Moreover, there was a lot of ammunition and the town expected the arrival of many troops who would go to the front.

Consequently, the Porte sent Obreskov an ultimatum in June 1760, which reminded the Russian resident that his government had made promises concerning the fortress and threatened to take action. Demir notes that the Porte's stern position must have also stemmed from the ongoing negotiations between Prussia and the Ottomans for an alliance. By the end of summer,

however, the alliance negotiations fell through and the Porte stopped confronting Russia regarding the fortress for the time being.⁸⁰³

It is not easy to determine who was right and who was mistaken in regard to the fortress of St. Elizabeth. As we know, Bestuzhev lost everything in 1758. Even Catherine II eventually distanced him after recalling him from exile in 1762 and restoring his honors and property. But many of his judgments proved correct. He was right in fearing Prussian intrigues in Constantinople and the undesired prospect of the Porte's alliance with Frederick II: the chancellor's anti-fortress stance helped prevent this from happening in 1755. English efforts aimed at preventing a conflict between the Russian and Ottoman empires, in view of the Anglo-Russian negotiations for a subsidy convention in 1755, weighed heavily on St. Petersburg's decision to pause the construction.⁸⁰⁴ Moreover, Bestuzhev repeatedly stressed that he did not object to the project entirely but only to its inauspicious timing. And, finally, he was not completely wrong about the dubious long-term strategic significance of the fortress.⁸⁰⁵

On the other hand, perhaps Obreskov was correct in his assessment that although the construction of the fortress was potentially harmful to mutual interests, there was room to push the project through. After all, the Porte did not make very vocal objections to the fortress when the Russian government actively used it during the Seven Years' War. Moreover, in 1760 the

⁸⁰³ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 61-62, 103-105.

⁸⁰⁴ Murphy, pp. 87-88. Austria encouraged English participation in the matter because of its own serious fears of a potential war. Dyck, "New Serbia," p. 14.

⁸⁰⁵ According to some sources, city gates could not be closed, a drawbridge was missing, and moats were insufficiently deep. With time Elizavetgrad—the subsequent name of the town—became mostly a trade center. Lishtenan, pp. 358-359. Probably, this situation was a result of the start-and-stop construction works, resulting from Ottoman position.

Bestuzhev correctly predicted the little use that would come from the new settlements, which also carried several risks. Authors cite different numbers of initial colonists. Thus, Anshakov writes that the new military settlements of Serbs, Moldavians, Wallachians, as well as some Bulgarians and Greeks, grew in size so that by 1760 only Serb military settlers numbered at 26,000. Anshakov, p. 46. However, Polons'ka-Vasylenko noted that no more than 3,000-5,000 foreign settlers of various origins—Serbs, Montenegrins, Wallachians, and Greeks—entered the region in these years. N. D. Polons'ka-Vasylenko, "The Settlement of the Southern Ukraine (1750-1775)," *The Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S.* (Summer-Fall 1955), as quoted in Dyck, "New Serbia," p. 16. Most authors agree that the project failed.

Russian government envisioned another border fortress—now at the mouth of the River Don—and pressed through with its construction despite Ottoman objections being raised well into 1763.⁸⁰⁶

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in 1764—when Russian actions in Poland were causing tensions with the Porte—Obreskov suggested not to renew the fortification works, as was suggested at the time by the Panin brothers. Obreskov argued that the Porte had always looked at the St. Elizabeth fortress with animosity and, whenever it received intelligence of continuing construction works over the past nine years, the Porte always sent an agent to examine the situation from up close and then compared new drawings with the 1755 plan of the fortress, which showed the condition in which it had been abandoned. In view of persistent anti-Russian propaganda in Constantinople, Obreskov advised to postpone completing the fortress until a better time, when the Porte's attention would not be as focused on Russia. The empress agreed with Obreskov and all preparations at St. Elizabeth were suspended in November 1764.⁸⁰⁷ The following year, Catherine II admitted “inconvenience to state security and detrimental effects” of the settlement project initiated by Khorvat on the right bank of the Dnieper and made a decision to move the New Serbian settlement to the left bank of the Dnieper, leaving the former location as a steppe barrier zone.⁸⁰⁸

Yet, the overall lesson of the St. Elizabeth fortress for Obreskov likely consisted in vindicating his independent ability to analyze correctly a given situation and boosting his confidence in the need to defend his positions in the future, as we will see below. The downfall

⁸⁰⁶ On Catherine II's persistence in defending her right to build the fortress of St. Dimitrii, see *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 32, 39, 122, 224, 232, 380, 388, 426, 440, 527; Vol. 51, pp. 209.

⁸⁰⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 48-50, 59, 60; Vol. 51, p. 405. In view of the ensuing protracted diplomatic battle—the Porte did not recognize Stanislaw II August until summer 1766—the Russian government did not bring up the matter of the St. Elizabeth fortress for a long time. Of course, it did not help the matter that in 1763-1765 the Ottoman grand vizier in power was the same inimical Çorlulu Köse Bahir Mustafa Paşa, who had been the grand vizier during the start of the construction in 1754.

⁸⁰⁸ 89.8.1.374.1765, LL. 82-82ob.

of Bestuzhev was a clear sign that superiors could come and go but the interests of the Russian empire, closely defined by its geographic location in relation to the Ottoman domains, had their own logic, which Obreskov had a better chance to apprehend by keeping track of Ottoman moods and predilections from a close distance. Obreskov's position throughout the St. Elizabeth episode exhibited a good degree of balance, both against the more aggressive position of Vorontsov toward the Porte on one hand and the exceedingly cautious position of Bestuzhev on the other. One cannot accuse Obreskov of lack of professionalism. On the contrary, he behaved in his usual circumspect, measured, and nuanced way.

Handling Montenegrin Appeals for Russian Protection

Examples of Obreskov's caution can be found in other important matters. One of the areas in which the late resident Veshniakov had been too quick to form conclusions was the alleged readiness of Ottoman Orthodox subjects to raise their arms against the Ottoman government should Russia decide to start a war. It is true that such announcements came at various times from Greeks, Serbians, Montenegrins, and others. But a Russian diplomat at Constantinople had to be extremely careful about acting upon this information. Obreskov's handling of Montenegrin appeals for Russian help exhibits just this kind of circumspection. One also gets a sense that even though Obreskov's primary concern was not to aggravate the Porte in the context of an impending war in Europe, he was also personally skeptical about the value for Russia of coming out in defense of a fellow Orthodox nation. After all, Obreskov knew that the Montenegrins were extremely divided internally and their leaders were quite opportunistic about asking for outside help.

In the middle 1750s Montenegro was facing a severe threat of Ottoman reprisals for their rebellious activity. In this connection, St. Petersburg tasked Obreskov in early June 1756 with finding all possible ways to help the Montenegrins and to prevent Turkish attacks against them. The Russian government viewed Montenegrins as a people that required Russian aid due to their common faith and sympathies for Russia. However, Russian policies were very subtle. Obreskov had to be very careful in his actions and first he had to consult with one of the secret informants, one "X." This was none other than the chief dragoman of the Porte, an experienced and long-serving Ioannis Kallimaki.⁸⁰⁹

Over the month of July Obreskov made several steps to try to help the Montenegrin cause. First, he found a way to meet with Kallimaki in person, to whom Obreskov lamented the fact that the Porte had always persecuted Montenegrins and their supporters and it seemed that the Porte had decided to finally exterminate them. Obreskov appealed to the chief dragoman as his co-religionist to try to prevent this from happening. Further, in order to gauge Kallimaki's opinion on the matter, Obreskov confessed that if the Porte continued to massacre Montenegrins, the Russian empress would ask him, Obreskov, to officially request the Porte to forgive Montenegrins for their transgressions and to leave them in peace. The dragoman of the Porte replied that he could not involve himself in this matter without endangering himself, for the Porte had already firmly decided to punish and pacify the Montenegrins in response to their constant attacks against neighboring Turkish population. Moreover, Kallimaki advised Obreskov not to interfere in this problem because official Russian meddling would not only hasten the demise of

⁸⁰⁹ I had trouble identifying "X" from archival records, but Anshakov clarified that the person with whom Obreskov had the below-mentioned conversation was the chief dragoman. Anshakov perused the AVPRI collection/fond of Russian affairs with Serbia. He also quotes Soloviev on the imperial order that tasked Obreskov with consulting with the chief dragoman. Anshakov, p. 44. Ioannis Kallimaki served as the chief dragoman for about 15 years, first from 1741-1750 and then again from 1752-1758, making him the longest serving dragoman of the eighteenth century. His predecessor Alexander Ghika also served for an unusually long time, fourteen years (1727-1740). Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, p. 184.

the Montenegrins, but would also cause the descent of all other Orthodox peoples under Turkish yoke into greater tyranny and enslavement, for there was nothing more touchy for the Porte and more dangerous to the fellow Orthodox than if the Russian empress openly declared her patronage/*pokrovitelstvo* and protectorship of the latter. Kallimaki further claimed that such an act could awaken the Turk as a lion from his sleep.

Moreover, the chief dragoman, as a fellow Christian who harbored justified hatred for these “barbarians,” suggested that the best means to weaken and destroy the Turks consisted in not inciting them to war, for even if they lost in it, the military spirit that was the cornerstone of this strong empire would have become awakened, and the Turks would become as wrathful and fierce as before. On the other hand, while the Ottomans enjoyed quiet and safety, they were becoming weaker year after year because they ruled poorly and inadequately, not able to achieve order or necessary obedience. Kallimaki believed that in several years, if things continued in the same vein and no one awakened it from the outside, the Ottoman Empire, which used to threaten the entire world, would crack under its own weight and fall like a shaky edifice it was. Kallimaki allowed that his reasoning might have seemed strange to many because people, without considering its origins, judged the Ottoman Empire against European standards, according to which states usually became depleted by wars and regained order and strength during peacetime. However, Kallimaki maintained that the Turks should be judged in a diametrically opposite fashion, given their government constitution, for they grew invigorated by war and declined in peace. After all, weapon was the origin and foundation of the Ottoman Empire; once they laid it down, the Turks did not know what to take a hold of next, just as a fish did not know where to throw itself on land.⁸¹⁰

⁸¹⁰ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 245-246.

The chief dragoman's rhetoric was very typical: decades before Greek patriarchs used to advise Russian diplomats using similar arguments. Moreover, his Phanariot Greek identity came out very clearly in his palpable lack of sympathy towards Montenegrins. Obreskov tried to highlight the differences in the status of Greeks versus that of Montenegrins. He assured Kallimaki that he was fully cognizant of the potential harm that could come to Ottoman Orthodox subjects if the Russian empress directly interfered in their protection. Precisely for this reason Obreskov kept silent despite the disturbing trend of Catholic penetration into whole provinces of the Ottoman Empire. But, reasoned Obreskov, there was a substantial difference between Greeks and Montenegrins in that the first had been conquered but that latter were a free people who were not subject to the Porte and not dependent on it in any way.⁸¹¹

Obreskov should have known that such a comparison would not be received with pleasure. Indeed, Kallimaki immediately countered saying that Obreskov was mistaken because the Porte considered Montenegrins as its subjects. This was a justified position since Montenegro used to depend on the Serbian Kingdom; therefore, when the Ottoman Empire conquered that kingdom entirely, all of its former parts passed into Ottoman possession unless some other power had managed to claim them. Kallimaki maintained that Montenegro belonged to the Ottoman domain using a convenient metaphor: if one cut down a tree, one would come to own both the trunk which he directly cut and all of the tree's boughs, branches, and chips. Moreover, Montenegrins have not been mentioned in any of the treaties between the Ottoman Empire and other neighboring states. This fact proved that they were Ottoman subjects, a fact that was accepted by many Montenegrins who paid due taxes to Constantinople. Kallimaki discounted the rest of the Montenegrins as mountain rogues: they lived at the tops of unapproachable mountains and in places that were, if not impossible, then very difficult to climb to. The Porte considered

⁸¹¹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 246-246ob.

them as rebels/*otpadshie*, similar to numerous such outcasts in the Albanian mountains, Maniots/*Maniaty*, and some others. It often happened that the Porte used weapons against them, sometimes with success, other times resulting in disgraceful failure. But no one could argue that they were not subject to the Porte and claim them instead.⁸¹²

Obreskov responded to Kallimaki's counter-arguments by underscoring that Russia was not claiming Montenegrins for herself but simply trying, in view of their shared religion, to ease their plight. Kallimaki objected that this was impossible to do without grave consequences, for the Porte would interpret any softest intercession by Russia as a provocative interference in its domestic affairs. The dragoman skillfully applied a penetrating parallel: the Porte's negative reaction was unavoidable, he said, just as Russia would object if the Porte began to sympathize with some Muslim people living towards the east of the Russian Empire. Summing up, Kallimaki advised with all his conscience not to raise the issue with the Porte, for its resolution would not be easy. He left it up to Obreskov to decide whether to follow his advice or not, but the Greek declared that in offering such an advice he fulfilled his responsibility as a true Christian and a fully supportive and loyal friend.⁸¹³

It is likely that Obreskov used Kallimaki and his extensively quoted opinion in order to caution St. Petersburg not to cause trouble by interfering in Montenegrin affairs, all the more so because he felt the brewing tension caused by the diplomatic revolutions of that year. In parenthesis, Obreskov stated that he found Kallimaki's arguments substantial and reasonable. Moreover, he wrote that he personally thought that St. Petersburg's direct appeal on behalf of Montenegro would be quite novel and unexpected for the Porte. Therefore, he resolved not to raise the matter. Instead, he resorted to underhanded attempts to help them, but with great care,

⁸¹² 90.1.375.1756, LL. 246ob., 248ob.-249.

⁸¹³ 90.1.375.1756, L. 249.

for if his efforts were to be uncovered, they would make an unfavorable impression and perhaps require him to explain himself to the Porte, which he did not believe could be done advantageously. He could do nothing else than to hope that if the Turkish forces advanced on Montenegro, the Montenegrins would give them a good battle.⁸¹⁴

Obreskov nevertheless carried out St. Petersburg's order to communicate to the Venetian Senate, through the Venetian ambassador in Constantinople Cavalier Dona, that Russia expected Venice to prohibit its subjects and dependents from harming Montenegrins and their supporters. Dona assured Obreskov that the Venetian Republic did not oppress the Montenegrins; there was nothing to gain from them anyway because Montenegrins were a people living among rocks and in extreme need. On the contrary, they were a ferocious mountain folk that engaged in robberies and caused harm to Venetian subjects. Border commissars usually managed to solve conflicts peacefully. Nevertheless, Dona promised to communicate Obreskov's note to the Senate, but he also asked that the Russian Empress order the Montenegro Metropolitan to behave in a friendly way towards the Venetian Republic, instead of encouraging and approving Montenegrin banditry. Dona concluded his response by saying that Venice would not be able to help Montenegro for fear of Ottoman reprisals and would observe everything with indifference. The number of Venetian forces in Dalmatia had been increased as a precaution, in view of the movement of Ottoman troops in the area.⁸¹⁵

In his most secret report from August 8, 1756 Obreskov wrote to St. Petersburg that he would personally write to the metropolitan and ask him to rectify the wrongs done to Venetian subjects and to abstain from harmful actions in the future. In the meantime, he also shared Ambassador Dona's opinion on the status of Montenegro. When Obreskov told him that Russia

⁸¹⁴ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 249-249ob.

⁸¹⁵ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 249ob.-250ob.

considered them free people that did not depend on the Porte, Dona replied that there was no mention of Montenegro in the official treaty, and in any case whether they were free or not did not concern the republic. However, Dona said that he knew that many parts of Montenegro paid taxes to the Porte and several years ago the rest of Montenegro had not only recognized the Porte's authority but also promised to pay taxes.⁸¹⁶

In conclusion of his report, Obreskov attached his own description of Montenegro. He had been compiling information on it for a year following the Russian government's order from June 9, 1755.⁸¹⁷ The "Description of Montenegrins, their location, and condition" provided an extensive overview of this mountainous people, who gravitated towards Russia since the eighteenth century.⁸¹⁸ Obreskov described this "ancient Slavic people" as having escaped Ottoman conquest thanks to unapproachable mountains. Montenegro used to be ruled by its own line of princes, but when that line ended Montenegrin metropolitans became supreme rulers of the land. At the time of Obreskov's writing, Montenegro consisted of 1 *serdarstvo*, 11 *voevodstvos*, and 4 piedmont/*podgornye voevodstvos*. Obreskov noted that all Montenegrins who came to Constantinople declared to him that all of Montenegro did not recognize Turkish authority and did not pay taxes to anyone. However, the Turks considered them a conquered but rebellious/*otpadshii* people. Moreover, the four piedmont *voevodstvos*—namely, Piperskoe, Bratonoshskoe, Vasovicheskoe, and Ninshivskoe—paid taxes to the Turks. These four piedmont *voevodstvos* comprised as much population as all of the mountain ones taken together. All of Montenegro practiced Orthodox religion of Greek-Russian rite/*ispovedanie*, and spoke the Illyric

⁸¹⁶ 90.1.375.1756, L. 250ob.

⁸¹⁷ 90.1.375.1756, L. 250ob.

⁸¹⁸ Nikiforov, K.V., ed., *Chernogortsy v Rossii* (Moscow, Indrik, 2011). The book was published in celebration of the 300-year anniversary of state relations between Russia and Montenegro. One of the contributors, Anshakov, writes that Montenegrin clergy had always looked to Russia but starting in 1740, when Venice stopped giving money grants to Montenegro, secular leaders also began to look to distant St. Petersburg: Iu.P. Anshakov, "Chernogorskii mitropolit Vasilii Petrovich I Rossiia," pp. 36-37.

language. There were also three neighboring voevodstvos that were independent and which, taken together, were stronger militarily than all of Montenegro. They rarely agreed on anything with Montenegrins, except for rare instances, and mostly fought against Montenegro. These voevodstvos were the Kuchkoe, Klimentskoe, and Kastratskoe. The population of the first one was Orthodox; inhabitants of the other two spoke the same language as the first one but practiced mixed faiths, Catholic Christianity and Islam.⁸¹⁹

Obreskov then described the Montenegrins' relationship with the Ottoman government. When the Turks threatened to attack Montenegro, inhabitants of the valley retreated into the mountains with all their belongings. Overall, Montenegrins could mount as many as 15,000 troops, who possessed the advantage of knowing every little path in the mountains and, having captured every climb, bravely fought the invaders. However, they observed no order in fighting. They could be invincible in the mountains but if the Turks stayed long enough in the valley, the Montenegrins' cattle, being away from grazing grounds, would die from starvation and people would suffer from famine. This happened because Montenegro lacked its own seaports, depending on Castel Nuovo and other Venetian places in Dalmatia.⁸²⁰ Montenegrins needed the support of their Dalmatian neighbors, but the latter never helped them.⁸²¹

Obreskov concluded with a description of the Montenegrin character, in which he stayed true to his realistic worldview: "The character, qualities, and vices of this Montenegrin people are the same that are typical of other mountain peoples, that is bravery, honesty, and loyalty on

⁸¹⁹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 247-247ob.

⁸²⁰ The Montenegrin seaside passed into Venetian possession after the Peace of Passarowitz in 1718. Occasionally, Venice also prohibited Montenegrins access to seaside markets, leaving them without ability to buy goods, provisions, and gunpowder, as happened in the early 1740s and again in 1755. Anshakov, pp. 37, 45. The rest of the Montenegrin seaside belonged to the Ottoman Empire (Bar and Ul'tsin). Anshakov, p. 38.

⁸²¹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 247ob.-248.

the one hand, and ferocity, brutality, extreme vengefulness, and proclivity towards banditry on the other.”⁸²²

In order to understand the significance of Obreskov’s position on Montenegro, one needs to go back to Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich’s trip to Russia in 1752-1754. Vasilii Petrovich was dissatisfied with Metropolitan Savva—his uncle and the ruler of Montenegro—and the latter’s orientation towards Venice. In 1751 Vasilii Petrovich had already tried, unsuccessfully, to ask Austria for protection in return for Montenegro’s help in fighting the Turks and annexing more Balkan lands for the Habsburgs. After that, the only alternative left to him was Russia, which had for a long time sponsored Montenegro churches and clerical rulers. Vasilii Petrovich had personally written to Russian Grand Chancellor Bestuzhev-Riumin as early as 1746. While in Russia, Vasilii Petrovich not only asked for church subsidies and books, but also advocated Russian protectorate over Montenegro, which he claimed had always been independent, both from the Venetians and the Ottomans. He assured Russia that in the case of a Russo-Turkish war Montenegro and all the neighboring Slavic-Serbian peoples would come together under Russian protection. His definition of Montenegro’s geographical extent was also interesting. According to Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich’s geographical description of his homeland in 1753, he listed Montenegro and its 4 *nakhii* (regions), but also included other areas such as part of the seaside (Primorie), part of Herzegovina, all Brdo tribes, as well as northern Albanian Catholics (Khoti, Klimenti, Kastrati). Anshakov suggests that Vasilii Petrovich believed he would have more success in getting Russia interested in Montenegro if he exaggerated its size.⁸²³

As we can see, Obreskov possessed slightly different information. It is true that much of what he heard from Montenegrins coming to the Ottoman capital was similar to Vasilii

⁸²² 90.1.375.1756, L. 248.

⁸²³ Anshakov, pp. 38-41.

Petrovich's claims, but he also knew the other side of the story: the Ottoman perspective and even the position of the Phanariot Greeks. Moreover, he was in a unique position of being able to assess Montenegro's appeals in the context of Russia's larger goals and immediate diplomatic context of Constantinople. It is very possible that Obreskov was not against the idea of helping fellow Orthodox Christians in principle. After all, his personal opinion did not matter as much since his main role was to carry out imperial orders. But as we know Obreskov was an independent thinker who allowed himself discretion to postpone, modify, and even challenge the implementation of government instructions. His degree of resistance was very reasonably proportionate to how central a particular issue was to Russo-Ottoman relations.

In the case of Montenegro, Obreskov seems to have firmly believed that the Ottoman oppression of Montenegro and consequent Montenegrin appeals for Russian protection were a nuisance in comparison to much more critical Russian interests. Moreover, he thought that possible Russian interference in Montenegro would likely bring little gain and much trouble. He chose to quote the chief dragoman Ioannis Kallimaki's opinion in detail because he strongly agreed with it. As early as 1751, just after being appointed resident, Obreskov had received several requests for help from Montenegro, to which he replied with encouragement to have patience. When Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich raised the issue of establishing Russian protectorate over Montenegro, Obreskov confidently advised against it because he believed that the move would anger the Porte. In other words, he justified his position by the desire to protect the Montenegrins from even greater wrath of the Porte should the latter feel threatened by Russia's interest in the Ottoman Orthodox minorities.⁸²⁴

Obreskov personally helped correct the picture of Montenegrins as a free people that was prevalent in Russia—a picture that was painstakingly promoted by Vasilii Petrovich. Empress

⁸²⁴ Anshakov, pp. 39, 42.

Elizabeth had believed this latter version of Montenegro's history in 1754 but a year later she was already more careful and in the afore-mentioned rescript from June 9, 1755 asked Obreskov to clarify whether Montenegro had been or was still subject to an outside authority, whether Montenegrins paid taxes to the Turks, or whether they were free and independent as they claimed. Obreskov's "Description of Montenegrins" was the result of this order, although St. Petersburg had to repeat its request for information in June 1756.⁸²⁵

Following Vasilii Petrovich's incendiary rhetoric against the Ottomans upon his return in fall 1754, Montenegro came under threat of a punitive attack. Already in September 1755 Vasilii Petrovich informed Obreskov about the details of the sultan's *ferman* that ordered Bosnian and Rumelian military forces to destroy Montenegro. The Metropolitan of Montenegro—"of Montenegro, Skenderia, and Primoria, of the Ifron Pech Eparkhiia," to be exact—had appealed to Obreskov for help in a letter dated May 17, 1756.⁸²⁶ Vasilii Petrovich continued to correspond not only with Obreskov, but with the grand chancellor Bestuzhev-Riumin, vice-chancellor Vorontsov, and Empress Elizabeth herself. He even asked again for help from Vienna, whose ambassador in Constantinople he wanted to intercede together with Obreskov before the Porte in the interests of Montenegro's safety. By 1756, however, Russia was preparing for a war against Prussia and Empress Elizabeth instructed Obreskov to take only the most careful and secret measures to help protect Montenegrins from obliteration. Elizabeth explicitly asked Obreskov to

⁸²⁵ Anshakov, pp. 42, 61.

⁸²⁶ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 199-201. Ironically, Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich complained chiefly not about the Turkish "yoke", although he used this exact term in his writing, but about the suffering of Montenegrin bishops and people at the hands of the Greek hierarch of Pec, Gavriil. The latter had reportedly tasked a Greek named Grigorii with collecting alms in Russia in order to bribe the Turks for the purpose of expelling Serbs from Hilandar, a Serbian monastery on Mount Athos. Vasilii Petrovich asked the College of Foreign Affairs to notify the Synod about the situation and ask the latter to confiscate *khrisofoli* from the Greek and send him away. Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich also mentioned the potential threat from the Turks. According to his secret agent, Khusein Mandich of Podgoritse, who sent intelligence from Ottoman territory, Bosnian vizier Hacı Mehmed Paşa collected all Ottoman commanders of Bosnia and together they wrote a request to the Porte to allow them to either plunder or subjugate Montenegro. Anshakov, p. 43.

consult with Ioannis Kallimaki in order to gauge how to influence the Porte from within, but, as we saw, the Phanariot dragoman had little sympathy for Slavic Montenegrins whom he considered subjects of the Porte.⁸²⁷

On July 6, 1756 Obreskov reported in secret that he was helping the cause of Montenegrins in any way he could. Obreskov could not protect them openly, however, for this would have aggravated the Porte against Russia and, moreover, Obreskov had no grounds for speaking on behalf of the Montenegrins. Instead, he tried to use his secret friends in the Ottoman government to persuade the administration not to send punitive Bosnian regiment in response to the Montenegrins' disobedience. He advanced a roundabout argument that mobilization of Ottoman troops in Bosnia in peacetime would cause suspicion among the Austrians and the Venetians. However, his efforts were fruitless and he could only warn the Montenegrins with an anonymous letter to prepare themselves for anything.⁸²⁸

By fall, Obreskov was already reporting on the outcome of the Ottoman pacification campaign in Montenegro. The Porte ordered the Pasha of Bosnia to stop the fighting and disband his troops in the middle of September, at which point Montenegro had suffered only moderate harm. Obreskov also reported that the Venetian ambassador at Constantinople assured him that his republic did not persecute the Montenegrins. Moreover, Obreskov shared with St. Petersburg his intention to write a personal letter to the Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich to advise moderation, for, he noted, "as far as I can see, he does not behave with the same calmness of thought as his uncle, Sava Petrovich, had done."⁸²⁹ Ottoman persecution of Montenegro did not stop in September. In November 1756, shortly after Vasilii Petrovich fled Montenegro to seek safety in Austrian Dalmatia, Ottoman forces ravished the rebellious province falling short of capturing its

⁸²⁷ Anshakov, pp. 43-44, 61.

⁸²⁸ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 209-209ob.

⁸²⁹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 361-361ob.

capital, Cetinje. In early 1757 the two sides signed a mutually unsatisfactory peace agreement that reaffirmed Montenegro's obligation to pay taxes to the Porte.⁸³⁰

The Russian government had more sympathy than Obreskov towards Montenegro. Already in the early 1750s it had begun to consider settling Montenegrins, along with Austrian Serbs, in the Russian Empire for purposes of border defense. At the time, the plan to invite Montenegrins did not work. In 1756 Russia remembered about Montenegrins again. As with earlier Serbian immigration, however, the settlement of Montenegrins was rife with problems.⁸³¹ The chancellor Bestuzhev's concern about settling newcomers who were subjects of other empires, Habsburg or Ottoman, was essentially disregarded: the Russian government harbored the illusion of inviting "free" Montenegrins—who were not free in reality,—while ending up settling Austrian and Ottoman Serbs with subpar or non-existent military credentials. As a result, the project ended in disappointment. Moreover, Austria turned out to be not at all enthusiastic about it after all, and the potential irritation of Vienna and the Porte was risky under existing circumstances.

Thus, in time, Empress Elizabeth realized the risks of protecting the fiery Montenegrins. The Seven Years' War was the biggest obstacle for Metropolitan Vasilii Petrovich in getting real support from Russia when he visited it again in 1758. At the time, St. Petersburg and resident Obreskov were putting all their efforts into containing the militarism of the new sultan, Mustafa III.⁸³² As a result, in early November 1758 the Russian government decided to stop settling Ottoman subjects and ruled that Montenegrins could only immigrate independently if they

⁸³⁰ Anshakov, p. 45.

⁸³¹ N.I. Khitrova, "Chernogortsy v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVIII v.," in K.V. Nikiforov, ed., *Chernogortsy v Rossii* (Moscow, Indrik, 2011), p. 71; Anshakov, pp. 42, 46-56, 62.

⁸³² Anshakov, pp. 56-57.

wished to.⁸³³ Moreover, in 1759 lieutenant S.Iu. Puchkov was sent to Montenegro in order to gather more precise information. Puchkov submitted an unfavorable report to the Russian government, which for a long time dampened Russian interest in subsidizing the distant rocky country and in satisfying Montenegro's request for establishing official Russian protection or authority over it. Peaceful relations with the Porte and Venice were more valuable for Russia than any feeling of duty to protect a fellow Slavic, Orthodox people, torn by internecine strife and lawlessness.⁸³⁴

Therefore, Obreskov must be credited with having correctly assessed the situation even before the war, when many in Russia's government circles believed Vasilii Petrovich's claims that Montenegro was free and did not owe any taxes to the Ottomans.⁸³⁵ It is true that the Russian ambassador in Vienna, Count Keyserling, had also reported to St. Petersburg in 1754 that according to his special investigation Montenegrins were not free but dependent on the Porte and had to pay taxes and fight on the side of the Ottoman army.⁸³⁶ However, the measured and careful position of Obreskov was critical in not triggering the Porte's aggressive reaction in the mid-1750s.⁸³⁷ In this light, it is fair to speculate whether Russia would have been as successful in

⁸³³ Khitrova, p. 75.

⁸³⁴ The subsequent episode with the Montenegrin pretender Stepan Mal'yi who claimed to be the Russian Tsar Peter III hurt Empress Catherine II's impression of Montenegro even further. Anshakov, pp. 56-60. On Stepan Mal'yi, also see a detailed article by Michael Boro Petrovich, "Catherine II and a False Peter III in Montenegro," *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 14, no. 2 (1955), pp. 169-194.

⁸³⁵ Khitrova, pp. 69-70.

⁸³⁶ Khitrova, p. 69.

⁸³⁷ In the early years of Catherine II's reign Obreskov continued to share his skepticism with his government concerning renewed Montenegrin appeals for protection. In early 1763 the Montenegrin bishops complained about the oppression of Montenegro by the Venetian republic, which was allegedly Venice's vengeance for Montenegrins' devotion to Russia. Catherine II was very upset to receive such news and ordered Obreskov to appeal to the Constantinople Patriarch to help Montenegrins. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 325-326. However, Obreskov responded by cautioning St. Petersburg against believing everything Montenegrins were saying, especially Vasilii Petrovich, whose "agitated mind gave rise to different woes that plagued the small Slavic nation. Vasilii Petrovich could not leave in peace with neighboring powers." Obreskov shared that he had spoken to different people in Constantinople—Catholics, Orthodox, and Montenegrins themselves—and everyone highly praised His Grace Sava and greatly criticized Vasilii. If Sava died, everyone was concerned that Vasilii could bring Montenegro to complete ruin in a short time due to his scattered mind and disturbed spirit. Therefore, Obreskov approved the Russian government's response, in which the chancellor encouraged the metropolitans to live peacefully with all their

keeping the Ottomans out of the Seven Years' War if instead of Obreskov the post of the Russian resident at Constantinople had been occupied by a proto-Pan-Slavist such as the late Aleksei Veshniakov, who might have prematurely risked greater Russian interests for the sake of saving the people of Montenegro.

Cutting a Window onto the Black Sea: First Attempt

Another area, in which Obreskov proved to be very cautious, was the question of achieving the Ottoman permission for Russian merchant ships to navigate the Black Sea. Given the importance of this matter to the Russian government, Obreskov made a serious attempt to achieve its realization. However, similar to his predecessors, he felt that the Ottomans were staunchly opposed to any foreign presence on the Black Sea, especially to that of their “bogeyman”—Russia.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, this question for Russia was long-standing, dating at least to the last years of the seventeenth century. The most that the Ottoman government could permit at the time was for Russian merchants to transport their goods on ships belonging to Ottoman subjects—a right that was offered to Russia as an option as early as 1699 but due to Russia's loss of Azov in 1711 was finally granted only by the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739. The question was subsequently revived in the 1740s. Namely, in 1745 the president of the Commerce College, Prince B.G. Iusupov, proposed to open trade relations with the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. For this purpose, the Commerce College inquired with the Russian

neighbors. Obreskov encouraged similar reaction in the future. Obreskov promised to try to talk to His Holiness the Patriarch of Constantinople about Montenegro's plight but he doubted there would be any use from it because the patriarch's character and readiness to do anything for money rendered him a poor helper. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 150-150ob., 152-153.

resident in Constantinople, Veshniakov, about his opinion on the prospects of such trade.⁸³⁸

Iusupov's idea was essentially to position Russia as a transit route for English and Dutch trade with the east. Some Venetian merchants were also interested in opening direct trade links with Russia. The Russian government, however, confined itself first to researching trading possibilities with Venice and the Ottoman Empire, especially in view of the latter's position as a transit route for goods from Persia, India, and Africa. Iusupov was not in principle opposed to the use of Turkish ships in the Black Sea.⁸³⁹

However, in the 1740s both residents Veshniakov and Nepliev pointed out that the Porte jealously guarded its dominion over the Black Sea, to the point that during the 1735-1739 war it had not agreed to the French offer to help with the Porte with its lack of ships for transporting provisions and ammunition to Crimea. Moreover, Nepliev noted that many factors were prerequisites for establishing mutual trade, beginning with the Russian merchants' interest in it and ending with better safety for Black Sea shipping. Indeed, the trade could not take off as planned despite Obreskov's attempts in the early 1750s to advance the matter.⁸⁴⁰ Finally, after

⁸³⁸ Vladimir Ulianitskii's work provides the most extensive coverage of the commercial aspect of Russo-Ottoman relations. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 71-106, and appendices, pp. XXI-LXXXVIII.

⁸³⁹ At the time, Italian states conducted trade with Russia by way of English and Dutch merchant trading via the Baltic. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 71-73, XXIV.

⁸⁴⁰ In 1751, for example, the CFA instructed Obreskov about the case of a Venetian merchant Francesco Saraceno ["Frantsisko Saratseno/Sarachino"] who had appealed to resident Nepliev in 1748 with a request to open his trading house on the Don, in Cherkask, with express permission to trade within Russia. The Senate and the Commerce College approved this request and Obreskov had to reassure Saraceno that he would be allowed to trade within Russia, with the exception of certain goods whose import and export was prohibited to all foreign merchants. The CFA recommended referring Saraceno to merchant Savro who had been to Russia before and knew well what was permitted or not to foreign merchants. 90.1.338.1751, LL. 12ob.-13ob. The list of goods—mostly food and industrial products, as well as currency—whose import and/or export was prohibited in Russia by orders of Peter I and the College of Commerce is on LL. 38-39ob. Later, in 1762, Obreskov described Saraceno's project in more detail. Namely, Saraceno planned to recruit merchants in Venice to join their company, while his partners helped him in the Ottoman and Russian empires, respectively: Antoni Durazzo [Antonii Duratso] was to remain at the head of the Constantinople office and Apostol Stavro—most likely, the afore-mentioned Savro—was to serve as the chief agent in Cherkask. However, the plan came to naught primarily because of the death of Saraceno, who was the mastermind behind the plan. Moreover, Durazzo also died soon after and Stavro went bankrupt. 90.1.420.1762, L. 56. Also see Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 75.

In 1752, Obreskov forwarded and recommended favorably to St. Petersburg the proposition of three Constantinople merchants—A. Magrini, I. Bartolomeo, and Berman—to found a joint company with the Moscow

almost a decade of preparations, in 1757 St. Petersburg supported the establishment of the Temernik merchant company on the Don—the future site of the Rostov-on-Don,—for the express purpose of trading with Constantinople.⁸⁴¹

In the 1750s, the leading role of the government in taking up this issue indicated that Russia saw it less than a problem of unrealized commerce and more as a strategic issue. However, Ulianitskii's ascription of the chief goals as expressed by Panin in 1763—to prepare the ground for the future Russian navy in the Azov Sea—to the government's intentions in the 1750s was slightly misplaced.⁸⁴² Of course, since Peter I's times Russia harbored a desire to maintain a navy in the Black Sea. This was a long-term strategic goal. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Temernik trading company and detailed instructions to Obreskov exhibited a sincere interest in advancing Russian trade with the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁴³ To be even more

merchants for trading across the Black Sea. But the Moscow merchants completely opposed the project because they were suspicious about cooperating with unknown foreign merchants and because they believed that they could not compete with the Armenian and Greek merchants in Ukraine who already successfully traded in furs and other goods by using the land route. The President of the Commerce College Ia. Evreinov found these arguments “entirely nonsensical.” In reality, the Moscow merchants did not feel comfortable risking their limited capital on new adventurous projects. A.I. Iukht, *Torgovlia s vostochnymi stranami I vnutrennii rynek Rossii: 20-60-e gody XVIII veka*. Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1994), pp. 133-134.

⁸⁴¹ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 74-79; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 345-346; Iukht, pp. 131-148; Robert E. Jones, “Opening a Window on the South: Russia and the Black Sea 1695-1792,” in Maria Di Salvo and Lindsey Hughes, eds., *A Window on Russia. Papers from the V International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia. Gargnano, 1994* (Rome: La Fenice Edizioni, 1996), pp. 124-126.

On March 27/April 7, 1762 Peter III abolished the company and its monopoly on trade with the Ottoman Empire. G. Nebol'sin, “Azov,” *Entsiklopedicheskii leksikon Pliushara* (St. Petersburg, 1835), p. 292. Catherine II confirmed the abolition of the monopoly. Similar joint-stock companies—with particularly unremarkable results—were established for trading with the Persian Empire (1758) and Central Asia (1760). Iukht, pp. 102-127, 163-175, esp. pp. 173-175.

⁸⁴² Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 79-80. Panin personally commented that the goal of Elizabeth's government in 1757 was to lay the ground for future military presence on the Black Sea. However, he may have been ascribing the objectives of Catherine II's government to the earlier efforts. In any case, the purely commercial interest should not be discounted either.

⁸⁴³ This interest appears to have been reawakened with the Russian decision to fight against Prussia following the Westminster Convention. Namely, in spring 1756 the secret military council suggested to Empress Elizabeth to enter the war with the final goal of acquiring not only Courland, but also border areas of Poland, control over which could enable Russia to connect the trade of the Baltic and Black seas and become a predominant player in the Levant trade. St. Petersburg communicated its desire to annex Polish border areas to the Austrian ambassador at St. Petersburg on March 30, but explained it only as being necessary to stop constant border arguments with Poland. *AKV*, Vol. III, pp. 380, 388. The commercial aspect of Russia's interest in Poland was also completely missed by the biographer of Bestuzhev-Riumin: *RBS*, p. 783. John LeDonne has brought attention to Russia's dovetailing geopolitical and economic interests in the Black Sea and Poland in his “Geopolitics, Logistics, and Grain: Russia's

precise, the choice of time to raise this issue was somewhat accidental: St. Petersburg wanted to take advantage of the corruption at the Porte that had, most recently, helped the Danish representative Geller to achieve the conclusion of the treaty of commerce and friendship between Denmark and the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁴⁴

Indeed, the Danish-Ottoman commercial treaty was slightly irking to the Russian government. Here was a nation that did not have any borders or true commerce to speak of with the Ottoman Empire, concluding a treaty that allowed its ships to sail freely to the Ottoman capital.⁸⁴⁵ Moreover, according to Obreskov's report from September 1756, the Porte used the occasion of negotiations with Denmark to commission a map of the shores of both main gulfs of the Baltic Sea—the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia,—the Baltic Sea itself, all of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Prussian possessions in Germany and other places.⁸⁴⁶ Although the Russian government did not order Obreskov to oppose Geller's efforts,⁸⁴⁷ the whole issue must have reminded Russia of the past close Swedish-Ottoman relations directed against

Ambitions in the Black Sea Basin, 1737-1834.” *The International History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), pp. 1-41.

⁸⁴⁴ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. XLVII-XLIX.

⁸⁴⁵ Merchant ships of all foreign nations could carry cannons, with which they could reach as far as Constantinople, while military ships could sail up to the Dardanelles. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 80-81.

⁸⁴⁶ The map was prepared, but the Porte additionally inquired about all of those countries, and which ones had shared borders. The grand vizier even devoted the entire dinner with Dolgorukov during the latter's farewell audience with the sultan to questions about navigation in the Baltic Sea, passage through the Zunt, the size of the sea, and other similar matters, although the grand vizier made sure not to name any particular country. After the dinner, when Dolgorukov awaited to enter the audience chamber, dragoman Kallimaki continued to discuss the same questions with him. Obreskov expressed hope that Dolgorukov had already informed Elizabeth about his answers. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 259ob.-260. Obreskov was not present during that visit and therefore he did not know what Dolgorukov answered to the curious grand vizier and the chief dragoman. But it is possible that Obreskov was worried if Dolgorukov might have said too much, and wanted to make sure that St. Petersburg found out his exact answers.

⁸⁴⁷ It was France who was the most concerned about encroachments of other foreign nations on trade in the Ottoman Empire. France did not want anyone but itself to enjoy commercial privileges in the Ottoman Empire but it could not openly oppose the desires of its allies, Denmark and Prussia. Therefore, since 1755 Vergennes was trying to exhibit full support for the Danish and Prussian plans while trying to obstruct them as secretly as possible. Murphy, pp. 107-108, 111-113.

Russia.⁸⁴⁸ Moreover, the news of the conclusion of the treaty came too quickly: on September 26 Geller submitted letters from his king and already on October 6 he received a favorable reply and the signed treaty. Such swift development was unexpected and therefore unsettling because it indicated that the Porte had been negotiating with the Danes for some time behind closed doors.⁸⁴⁹ This latter circumstance, in particular, encouraged St. Petersburg to try to achieve what, like the Ottoman commercial treaty with Denmark, seemed unattainable under normal circumstances.⁸⁵⁰

Thus, on January 28, 1757, St. Petersburg tasked Obreskov with trying to procure Black Sea navigation rights for Russia in the same “diplomatic” way as Geller—through bribes.⁸⁵¹ Obreskov began to address this issue in his reports from April 8 and May 8, 1757, noting how challenging it would be to achieve. After all, England, France, and Holland also wanted to receive access to the Black Sea, but the Porte did not even let its ships in the Black Sea have foreign captains.⁸⁵² Nevertheless, Obreskov promised to make earnest efforts to advance this

⁸⁴⁸ The Porte concluded its first military alliance with a Christian state, Sweden, in 1740. Karl A. Roeder, *Austria's Eastern Question, 1700-1790* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 118. Sweden had already concluded a treaty of commerce and navigation with the Porte in 1737.

⁸⁴⁹ Obreskov noted that Geller had been in Constantinople since 1752 and that the Danish-Ottoman treaty was modeled on the Ottoman treaty with Naples signed in 1740. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 285-285ob. The treaty with Denmark concerned commercial relations but also included an article—number XIV—that provided the Danes in the Ottoman Empire with freedom to practice their religion without persecution, similar to other European nations. 90.1.375.1756, L. 373. Danish imports into the Ottoman Empire were guaranteed a standard, one-time duty of only three percent, as was the case with other European nations that had commercial treaties with the Porte. Denmark also received the right to maintain its minister at the Porte, and Danish consuls were freed from taxes. 90.1.375.1756, L. 393.

⁸⁵⁰ Obreskov reported in October that Ottoman divan—being irate with the First Versailles Treaty—chose to accept the friendship of the Danish King in order to demonstrate to foreign countries that the Porte did not any longer have erstwhile respect for them. An alliance with Denmark could bring results without causing any negative fallout. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 286-286ob. However, in November, Obreskov noted with satisfaction that the new Ottoman treaty with Denmark was causing a lot of discontent in the domestic public. Almost everyone looked at it with disapproval and cited exorbitant bribes that the Danish representative used to buy the Porte's cooperation. Obreskov wrote that Geller had spent at least 200,000 levki to forward the negotiations and achieve the results. Enemies of Osman Mullah and the grand vizier, however, alluded to an amount that was double this figure in order to whip up popular disapproval. Obreskov found this development beneficial because it meant that the grand vizier would have to be more careful in his plans to sign a treaty with Prussia, negotiations for which were also rumored to be going on behind closed doors. 90.1.375.1756, L. 360ob.

⁸⁵¹ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. XLVII-XLIX; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 343-344.

⁸⁵² Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 82.

goal. As a result, in his most secret report from September 8, 1757,⁸⁵³ he reported on his efforts to bribe a person from the sultan's circle. Obreskov stopped his choice on *Yazıcı Efendi*, or the secretary, of Osman III, who had been serving the sultan for a very long time, including the time of the latter's earlier confinement in the palace. As a result, Osman III had the most trust towards the secretary, and all the grand viziers invariably sought the *Yazıcı*'s friendship. In turn, the clever *Yazıcı* exploited the favor he enjoyed with great caution. Obreskov believed that there was no other person who was better able to help Russia achieve the sultan's permission in the matter of the Black Sea navigation.⁸⁵⁴

The *Yazıcı* was informed about Obreskov's offer and significant potential reward through the sultan's treasurer. *Yazıcı* was not against the idea but wanted to agree on the price first. Obreskov tried to avoid quoting an exact sum and simply assured the *Yazıcı* that the reward would please him.⁸⁵⁵ However, this did not work and Obreskov decided to ask *Yazıcı* how much money he expected for his services. *Yazıcı*'s requirement of not less than 100 sacks, or 30,000 rubles, seemed extremely immoderate to Obreskov. He knew that no matter how great *Yazıcı*'s help would prove to be, the Russian government would also have to incur other considerable

⁸⁵³ The Russian government accorded such importance to the matter that when Obreskov's report arrived in St. Petersburg on October 9, it was immediately copied and presented to the grand chancellor on October 10, who read it right away and returned the copy to the CFA the same day. 89.8.31.1757. Koppii reliatsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova Elizavete I o snosheniiakh Turtsii i Krymskogo khana s Pol'shei, o vzaimootnosheniiakh Turtsii s Avstriei i Venetsiei, ob otnoshenii Turtsii k Semiletnei voine, o ratifikatsii Turtsiei dogovora s Daniei, o predlozhenii Frantsiei Turtsii otnositel'no mediatsii mezhdru Frantsiei i Angliei, o politike Turtsii v Persii, o druzhestvennykh namereniiakh Turtsii v otnoshenii Rossii: peregovory otnositel'no zakliucheniiia torgovoro dogovora i predpisanii Krymskomu khanu otnositel'no sobliudeniia punktov mirnogo dogovora s Rossiei; o vstuplenii na prestol sultana Mustafy I o kharaktere novogo ministerstva i posla. August 9, 1757—December 10, 1757. Prilozheniia: kopi ukazov Porty Krymskomu khanu i Ochakovskomu i Belgradskomu pasham, donesenii Obrezkovu ot osvedomitelei i khana, gramoty sultana k Elizavete I vyderzhki iz "Konstantinopol'skikh Vedomostei" po ukazannym voprosam, LL. 40-40ob.

⁸⁵⁴ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 40ob., 41ob.-42ob.

⁸⁵⁵ This was a common strategy of foreign ministers at Constantinople. Vergennes followed the same practice. It was better to wait and see how valuable the promised help turned out to be than to commit oneself to a fixed amount that the Ottoman official could demand even if he did not carry out the task in full. Murphy, p. 95.

expenses. Finally, Obreskov did not yet know how much St. Petersburg was prepared to spend for this purpose, so he did not make any commitment to the *Yazıcı*.⁸⁵⁶

Therefore, Obreskov asked for further instructions. First, he wanted to know how much money he could safely offer. Also, for perspective, the resident reminded St. Petersburg that it had cost Naples in 1740 and Denmark in 1756 about 100,000 levki to achieve the signing of their respective commercial treaties with the Porte. Obreskov believed that Russia would have to spend about the same amount.⁸⁵⁷ Secondly, the resident asked his court to provide him with a list of Russian conditions for the commercial treaty: "...for it [the treaty of commerce] forms the foundation of the negotiations, while navigation rights would only come as its consequence." And, finally, Obreskov asked to send him full powers to negotiate this matter, but requested not to date the document. This would allow him to preserve secrecy and start the process only when the situation was ripe enough, which together constituted the key conditions for attaining any results at the Porte.⁸⁵⁸

Obreskov's professionalism was evident further when he provided St. Petersburg with copies of Ottoman commercial treaties with other European nations. These were to serve as examples for Russia, because the Russian government had never negotiated a commercial treaty with the Porte before. Obreskov was the first Russian resident to pay attention to the need to organize the collection of these documents in the central archive and at the mission. He had already sent a copy of the recent Danish-Ottoman commerce treaty with translations to St. Petersburg. He noted that the treaty with Denmark was almost exactly the same as Ottoman commercial treaties with Sweden and Naples. In addition, Obreskov found the texts of the

⁸⁵⁶ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 40ob.-41ob.

⁸⁵⁷ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 42-42ob. According to the 1756 exchange rate, 100,000 levki equaled about 60,000 rubles. Therefore, the *Yazıcı* was asking for half of what could be the total estimated cost of the undertaking, which also had to include other bribes.

⁸⁵⁸ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 42ob.-43.

Anglo-Ottoman and Dutch-Ottoman treaties of commerce, but only in their Ottoman Turkish versions.⁸⁵⁹ Lastly, Obreskov wrote that he was trying to obtain a copy of the 1740 Franco-Ottoman commercial treaty. He considered it the most advantageous treaty of all and therefore believed it to be the most useful basis for drafting a prospective Ottoman-Russian treaty. However, he could not find it as easily and requested the CFA to check its archive in St. Petersburg for a copy from 1740. Obreskov recollected that the late Count Rumiantsev, whom he accompanied during the 1740 embassy to Constantinople, must have received a copy of the treaty from the temporary Russian representatives at Constantinople, state counselors Cagnoni and Veshniakov. Obreskov was not completely sure but he remembered that during the embassy's approach to Bendery, Rumiantsev received correspondence from Constantinople, upon which the ambassador discussed various articles of the Franco-Ottoman commercial treaty.⁸⁶⁰

One can only admire Obreskov's sharp memory of events that had taken place seventeen years earlier. Obreskov also should be credited for taking an active role in preparing his government for potential commercial negotiations. Besides the copies of the other treaties, he also considered it necessary to procure copies of official *berats*, or patents, that the Porte granted to foreign consuls and translators. He wrote that he and his predecessors, Veshniakov and Nepliev, happened to mention the existence of such documents, but he was not sure if he or his late colleagues had ever supplied St. Petersburg with sample copies. Therefore, he attached copies of two *berats*—for a consul and a translator, respectively—that had been given to the

⁸⁵⁹ Moreover, he asked to provide him with the translations that would be made in St. Petersburg. The only person in the Russian capital who was capable of translating Ottoman was Iurii Khrizoskuleev, a former Ottoman Greek. For some reason, however, it took him almost two months to translate the two treaties. The CFA gave him the copies on October 9—the very day they arrived,—but Khrizoskuleev did not return them until December 6. 89.8.31.1757, L. 43ob. This goes to show that Obreskov did not really have a good translator from Ottoman into Russian from among his staff. Pini knew Ottoman well, but did not know Russian. On the other hand, native Russian translators and students of Oriental languages did not yet know Ottoman well enough to translate official documents.

⁸⁶⁰ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 43-44.

English ambassador, along with Italian- and Russian-language translations. He also noted that each *berat* was accompanied by a sultan's *ferman*, or an order, that had the same content, albeit with more details. Obreskov promised to provide a copy of such a *ferman* as well.⁸⁶¹

Despite Obreskov's concerted efforts, he failed to achieve the goal of Russia's commercial access to the Black Sea in 1757 because of St. Petersburg's preoccupation with the Seven Years' War. The CFA presented Obreskov's reports to the Imperial Conference several times, demanding resolution concerning the dispensation of necessary funds. Yet, the conference did not pay any attention and did not respond to Obreskov's reports, noting that the requested sum of money was so exorbitant that it was better to spend it on military operations against the Prussian king. As a result, the CFA could neither provide Obreskov with money, nor give him further instructions. Soon afterwards, the sultan died and his confidant fell from favor, which undermined the entire existing plan.⁸⁶²

Catherine II's government resumed the matter of the Black Sea trade and navigation in the early 1760s, which will be discussed below. However, this earlier experience convinced Obreskov even more that the navigation rights were an unattainable goal.

⁸⁶¹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 44ob.-45.

⁸⁶² 89.8.334.1763, LL. 86-87ob., 94-98.

Chapter 9. The Diplomatic Roller Coaster of the Seven Years' War

The diplomatic transformations of 1756 were surprising and shocking to most observers, even though those who prepared them had spent months—even years—laying the ground for these “revolutions.” Key figures in the diplomatic corps in Constantinople, as well as the Porte, gasped with surprise and scrambled for cogent reactions after learning both about the Westminster Convention of January 1756 and then the First Treaty of Versailles of May 1756. These transformations were particularly unsettling for the French ambassador, Comte de Vergennes, who had spent all of his residency—following his predecessor’s similar efforts—to incite the Porte against Russia and aid, albeit more ambiguously, Prussia in signing an alliance with the Porte.⁸⁶³ Obreskov, on the other hand, at first gloated at Vergennes’s loss for words and disoriented reactions. By the end of 1756, however, the Russian resident had to learn to overcome his distrust of the French ambassador because the Russian government, too, decided to ally with its traditional competitor on the Bosphorus.

The Russo-French Struggle at the Porte before 1756

In 1755 Vergennes had two sets of instructions, all of which, however, were directed against Russia. The French foreign ministry had tasked him to dissuade the new sultan, Osman III, from engaging in war with any of his neighbors. However, he was to advocate Ottoman interference if Russia made an aggressive move, especially in Poland. The secret instruction supplied by the king, on the other hand, in many ways went contrary to the official one. The king desired to conclude a treaty of friendship with the Porte, one article of which would have

⁸⁶³ Vergennes arrived in Constantinople in May 1755. For his appointment and arrival, see Murphy, pp. 55-58.

guaranteed Polish integrity. “The complex system of alliances, suggested by Louis’ secret diplomacy at the Porte, grew out of an attempt to draw together France, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, and the Porte to protect Poland from Russian aggression, and to prevent the court of Vienna from placing Prince Charles of Lorraine, the younger brother of the Emperor Francis I, on the Polish throne when it became vacant.”⁸⁶⁴

However, the grand vizier at the time, Naili Abdullah Paşa—whom Obreskov always found to be friendly and helpful⁸⁶⁵—surveyed existing Ottoman treaties with Russia and underscored that the Porte would indeed be concerned about a Russian threat to Poland, but only as it concerned that latter’s law and liberty, leaving out any mention of Polish territorial integrity. The grand vizier thereby avoided making any promises in response to the French secret offer to conclude the treaty of friendship. Vergennes could do little to convert the grand vizier, whom he described as a man of peace, to the king’s belligerent plans against Russia. “His peaceful inclinations were not the result of idealism, but were based on the disquieting fact that the Ottoman Empire was facing a dangerous economic and political crisis at home caused by inflation, famine, riots, and rebellion. It was not the time to embark on a military adventure that might bring a general collapse of the Sultan’s authority.”⁸⁶⁶

Vergennes’ efforts were repeatedly thwarted by English moves to preserve peace between St. Petersburg and Constantinople, as well as by the frequent change of grand viziers under Osman III. Vergennes attempted to reach his objective through the friendship of the *reis efendi* at the time—Abdi Efendi,—who was known to be inclined to a tougher policy against Russia and was, moreover, burdened by “immense” personal debts. However, this approach was

⁸⁶⁴ Murphy, pp. 58-61, 86.

⁸⁶⁵ See above in this chapter, p. 8.

⁸⁶⁶ Murphy, p. 87. Naili Abdullah Paşa served as the grand vizier only for three months, however: from May 8 to August 24, 1755.

not very effective either and soon the *reis efendi* was removed.⁸⁶⁷ Vergennes continued to experience a roller coaster of near-successes and failures. Thus, in October 1755 the sultan strangled his grand vizier and replaced him with an Ottoman official who was most familiar with France. Yirmisekizzade Mehmed Said Paşa had visited France first in 1720-1721, when he accompanied his father on an official embassy, and later in 1741-1742, when he served as ambassador himself. Moreover, the friendly *reis efendi* was promoted to the position of Kahya, and Osman III appeared to be more concerned with Russian actions, asking the Tatar Khan to report on the latest developments concerning Russian fortifications near the Ottoman border.⁸⁶⁸

Although Mehmed Said Paşa appeared to be extremely averse to exhibiting partiality to any nation in public,⁸⁶⁹ today it is known that Yirmisekizzade had prepared a draft of an Ottoman alliance treaty with France. Uğur Demir discovered the draft of the treaty in the archives, which he believes had been written during Mehmed Said's grand vizierate some time after the news of the English-Prussian treaty made the Ottomans closer to France. It contained a secret article regarding Poland: both states were said to have ancient rights to protect and defend Poland, its independence and laws. According to the draft, the two states promised not to interfere in the free elections of a king from among Poles and not to allow others to interfere either.⁸⁷⁰ However, Mehmed Said Paşa was deposed on April 1, 1756 and Vergennes' hopes to sign the treaty were dashed. Even before the downfall of Mehmed Said Paşa Vergennes's hopes were shattered in

⁸⁶⁷ On 24 September 1755—after almost two years in office.

⁸⁶⁸ Murphy, pp. 88-93. As we know, Yirmisekizzade Mehmed Said Paşa underwent diplomatic apprenticeship under his father during a trip to France earlier in the century and later served as Ottoman envoy to Russia, Sweden, Poland, and France. His term in office was relatively short for a person of his intelligence and experience—from October 1755 until April 1756.

⁸⁶⁹ Vergennes managed to arrange a private meeting with Mehmed Said Paşa immediately after his first official audience with the new grand vizier in January 1756. The French ambassador used the occasion to approach the grand vizier and whisper to him in French that Louis XV would reward him for cooperation. Although Mehmed Said Paşa responded favorably to Vergennes throughout the meeting, his answers were brief and exclusively in Turkish. Murphy, pp. 93-94; 90.1.375.1756, LL. 12, 69.

⁸⁷⁰ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 30-33.

early 1756 when the Kahya was promoted out of the chancery and the friendly Tatar Khan was deposed. Osman III's concerns about Russia were neutralized by England's generous gifts and success in persuading Russia to stop the construction of the St. Elizabeth fortress.⁸⁷¹

Of particular note in this context is Obreskov's characterization of Mehmed Said Paşa. On February 13/24, 1756 Obreskov wrote to St. Petersburg that Mehmed Said Paşa continued his responsibilities with general approbation and appeared to have no preference for a particular foreign nation, implying France. Obreskov found Mehmed Said's policy toward Russia both fair and reasonable, as well as conducive to a strengthening of mutual friendship. While it was difficult to guarantee anything in the future, Obreskov ventured to suggest that taking into account Mehmed Said Paşa's past experience and his well-known timidity and caution, it was possible to expect that under his leadership Russian interests would not be harmed in any way. However, Obreskov did not have great hope in being able to assure the grand vizier's greater favor towards Russia. Despite efforts, Obreskov could not overcome the fact that Mehmed Said Paşa was not accessible due to his high position and excessive personal caution. Obreskov judged that small amounts of money would surely be insufficient for the purpose, while sums proportionate to the grand vizier's position could remain fruitless if the latter was to be suddenly replaced and exiled.⁸⁷² Obreskov's instinct was accurate, based as it was on Osman III's propensity to shuffle his cadres with unusual frequency. Mehmed Said Paşa lost his post on April 1. Given that Obreskov wrote this characterization before the Westminster Convention affected the diplomatic situation in Constantinople, he was not incorrect in suggesting that

Yirmisekizzade's term was not on the whole threatening to Russia.

⁸⁷¹ The only consolation to Vergennes was that in late 1755 he—at the age of only thirty-six—already carried the rank not of envoy, which caused him great embarrassment when ambassadors of Venice, Holland, and England preceded him to official audiences at the Porte, but that of ambassador. His superiority in the diplomatic community in Constantinople boosted his own morale and increased the respect given to him by Ottoman officials, rendering Vergennes well poised to navigate the shaky ground of the following year. Murphy, pp. 93-96.

⁸⁷² 90.1.375.1756, L. 72.

Obreskov spent much of 1755 working to counter French intrigues at the Porte, which included French support to the mission of the Polish Lieutenant Karol' Malczewski, who was sent by the Crown Hetman Jan Klemens Branicki in spring 1755.⁸⁷³ Malczewski's instructions reflected the position of the pro-French Polish party and went contrary to the interests of the Polish king. France at the time pursued the agenda of strengthening the anti-Polish party in Poland in order to prevent the likely passage of Russian troops through Poland in case of a war in Europe, as had happened in the 1748.⁸⁷⁴ Malczewski had to persuade the Porte to help Poland against "one neighbor," that is Russia. When Augustus III found out about Malczewski's mission, he sent his own extraordinary envoy, Count Jan Mniszek, to Constantinople in order to thwart Branicki's designs because the Polish king feared upsetting Russia. Mnisz/Mniszech, or Mnishek in Obreskov's reports, was a distinguished representative of the commonwealth—he had a title of Lithuanian treasurer and the rank of cavalry lieutenant general,—although he was not an expert on the Ottomans or experienced as a diplomat in general.⁸⁷⁵ Unfortunately for Obreskov, Vergennes achieved the Porte's permission for Malczewski to remain, as well as the renewed *tayin*, because the grand vizier did not want to upset the Crown Hetman. However, Malczewski left only in August 1756 without achieving anything substantial.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷³ Grand hetmans of the Crown were responsible for overseeing Poland's relations with the Ottoman Empire, Crimea, Moldavia, and Wallachia. Their influence on Polish-Ottoman relations and Polish foreign policy in general was very high. To illustrate, almost one half of the Senate's expenditures on diplomacy under Augustus III—increasingly diminishing through they were—went to the two hetmans, Jozef Potocki and his successor Jan Klemens Branicki. Jozef Andrzej Gierowski, "Polish diplomatic service during the country's personal union with Saxony," in Gerald Labuda and Waldemar Michowicz, eds., *The History of Polish Diplomacy* (Warsaw: Sejm Publishing Office, 2005), pp. 248-264, here p. 263. Mikhneva, *Rossiia I Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 249-250, 262.

⁸⁷⁴ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 308; Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 19-23.

⁸⁷⁵ This stemmed from the peculiarity of Polish diplomatic service, in which "the assurance of loyalty rather than competence was more important to those who sent them." This is seen in a contemporary assessment of Mniszech as a person "not very experienced as far as the interest of the State is concerned, but be able only to stick to the letters of the instruction." Gierowski, p. 263. Mikhneva, *Rossiia I Osmanskaia imperiia*, pp. 102-103; 90.1.375.1756, LL. 26-29.

⁸⁷⁶ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 23; Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 309; 90.1.375.1756, LL. 29ob.-30ob., 45ob., 46, 65ob.-66.

Naturally, Obreskov kept a very close watch on Vergennes. He described in detail the latter's audience with the grand vizier in late January 1756, noting that Vergennes did not receive the honor that had been granted to Marquis de Villeneuve and late Count Rimiantsev. Namely, it was considered more respectful when during the procession to the Porte Chaush Basha walked ahead of a diplomat, rather than to the side. In the case of Vergennes, the *Çavuş Başı* walked to his right, which placed Vergennes on the diplomatically secondary left position. To remedy the situation, Vergennes took the central position by placing a *zaim* to his left, but due to the vast disparity between the ranks of *zaim* and *çavuş başı*, Vergennes had to give an assuaging gift to the *Çavuş Başı*. However, Obreskov also noted a less favorable fact: during the procession from the wharf to the Porte, the sultan approached Vergennes' suite incognito, although in a way calculated to reveal himself to everyone. The French also announced later that the sultan was present incognito during Vergennes' audience with the grand vizier. The Ottoman subjects criticized the sultan for this action, while the French bragged about it.

The French also received a special privilege when the grand vizier arranged their audience with the sultan for the next day, instead of waiting eight days as usual. Obreskov considered this gesture exceptional because the sultan's reception had to take place simultaneously with the distribution of salary to the janissaries, which was due in eight days. He speculated that the sultan's impatience and whim were the primary reasons for a change in protocol. The sultan was either impatient to receive Vergennes' gifts or tried to avoid embarrassment because he did not have enough money to pay the janissaries. The latter version seemed most probable to Obreskov because he knew about the extreme scarcity of the treasury and the bankruptcy of all the financiers. During the audience, Vergennes was clothed in a sable furcoat, Hungarian officer Tott and his son received cloth robes, and caftans were given to the

rest of the entourage. While the sable furcoat was an important distinction, Obreskov noted that the honors given to the French were not entirely first-rate because the first two members of a diplomatic entourage usually received ermine furcoats.⁸⁷⁷

Overall, Obreskov's activity in early 1756 had fairly routine nature, prompting him to abolish bi-monthly dispatches to St. Petersburg and replace them with monthly reports and a promise to send extraordinary news when warranted. He argued that bi-monthly dispatches through the Ottoman provinces were excessive and, moreover, caused unnecessary speculations.⁸⁷⁸

The Dilemmas of the Diplomatic Revolutions

The Westminster Convention

The Westminster Convention surprised both France and Russia. The Russian grand chancellor, Bestuzhev-Riumin, had worked hard to conclude a subsidy agreement with Britain on September 19/30, 1755. However, a week after ratifying the treaty on February 1/12, 1756, the Russian government learned of the January 16 Westminster Convention between Prussia and Britain.⁸⁷⁹ Obreskov learned of all these developments even later. Thus, on February 13/24, 1756

⁸⁷⁷ Obreskov was attentive to every little detail that could undermine the French position at the Porte. Thus, he noted with satisfaction that piercing sounds of a hunter's horn played by one of the servants of the French embassy angered the sultan. As a result, the grand vizier prohibited all foreign embassies from playing any pipes at night and in open air. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 68-70ob.

⁸⁷⁸ Obreskov complained, in addition, that it took Russian couriers twenty days instead of nine to travel from Hotin to Russia. Obreskov did not feel comfortable berating them in Constantinople, which could attract unfavorable attention, and wrote to the Kiev governor for help. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 67-67ob.

⁸⁷⁹ By February 8/19 the Russian government found out about the Prusso-British convention from its ambassador in London. On that day, St. Petersburg wrote to the latter, notifying him of the exchange of ratifications of the Anglo-Russian treaty in St. Petersburg on February 1/12. Bestuzhev still thought that Russia's treaty with London was important for the English king, believing that Frederick's duplicity was too well known for London to put its full trust in Prussia. The rest of the Russian government, however, was greatly concerned by the Anglo-Prussian treaty. As a result, Empress Elizabeth created a secret military council on March 14/25 that met twice a week to discuss and advise on the developing situation, mainly on how to limit Prussian power, which appeared threatening to Russia.

he did not yet know about all the details of the Anglo-Russian subsidy agreement.⁸⁸⁰ Further, he received the first government order of 1756, dated January 22/29,—which did not yet provide all the latest information,—only on February 25/March 7. Obreskov ended up learning about the treaty between Berlin and London from discussions in Constantinople by March 9/20. That day he reported that the formal defensive alliance between the Prussian and English kings caused a deadly blow to the French ambassador and his circle. The French found only one way to cope with the news: they denied such a possibility. The French, wrote Obreskov, preferred to believe that the treaty aimed at preventing the entry of the Russian auxiliary troops into Germany/Prussia, rendering the latter better able to carry out a surprise attack on England. But the Porte did not believe the French version of events. The Ottoman government received the news with untold surprise and, according to Obreskov, became more convinced of Prussia's reputation for perfidy. Those officials who opposed entering into obligations with the Prussians had a chance to highlight their good sense, which they claimed had saved the Porte from a grave danger. The Ottomans reasoned, quite logically, that if Frederick II betrayed his sincere friend France, the Prussian king would have had even less respect for the Porte.⁸⁸¹

Obreskov understood that the situation was unusually sensitive. In the absence of timely updates from St. Petersburg, which took four to six weeks to reach him in that time of the year,

AKV, Vol. III, pp. 333-336, 367, 373, 375-376, 536-537. The complicated European diplomacy of the mid-1750s is described in detail in Robert H. Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War*; Hamish M. Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern powers, 1756-1775* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Franz A. J. Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe 1756-1763* (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008).

⁸⁸⁰ Obreskov only knew about the Russo-British agreement from newspapers, which mentioned that Russia had committed 35,000 infantry troops, 15,000 cavalry, and 50 galleys to the defense of Britain. On February 15, in Schwachheim's presence, the Russian resident was questioned by the Venetian ambassador who, according to Obreskov, "was unarguably an oddball among his countrymen for his ignorance of political affairs." The Venetian asked Obreskov if it was true that the Porte had addressed the Russian resident in harsh terms regarding the Russian auxiliary troops' passage through Poland and warned that the Ottoman Empire could not close its eyes to it. Obreskov resolutely denied this false rumor, arguing that even if a Russian corps had passed through Poland, the Porte would have rethought the idea of making such an announcement several times for fear of angering the Russian Empress. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 75ob.-76.

⁸⁸¹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 77-78, 81-81ob.

he had the common sense to verify circulating information with his colleague from Vienna, since correspondence with the Austrian capital was much faster. On March 5 he asked Keyserling to share with him Vienna's reaction to the Anglo-Prussian treaty and any other pertinent information. Obreskov did not completely believe the English ambassador Porter's assurances that the treaty was signed with Russian approval, and rightly so. On his own initiative, Obreskov decided to take action in order to highlight the Prussian treachery. He wrote a secret memorandum and communicated it to the Porte with the help of secret agents: the scribes of the *reis efendi's* secretary, as well as unidentified agents X and M. He shared the memorandum only with Schwachheim and withheld it from Porter because he was unsure of the latter's reaction.⁸⁸²

In the midst of considerable confusion, the grand vizier behaved in the most admirable manner, reported Obreskov. However, his unworthy opponents lodged written denunciations against him, and it was feared that the grand vizier would be replaced because the sultan walked among the people incognito and heard rumblings against Mehmed Said Paşa. There was some hope, however, as the navigation season was beginning, which resulted in purer bread and cheaper products. On March 22/April 2, however, Obreskov had to report that Mehmed Said Paşa had been deposed and exiled to the island of Stanköy⁸⁸³ in the Archipelago. Obreskov noted that the reason was unknown but most likely the usual laundry list of accusations was applied: "disobeyed orders, took bribes, did not maintain order in the City." Be that as it may, the Russian resident predicted that the change of the grand vizier would likely be detrimental to Russian interests because the most probable candidate was the Pasha of Morea who had earlier served as the grand vizier, during which time he demonstrated his prejudice against all Christians.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸² 90.1.375.1756, LL. 78-78ob.

⁸⁸³ Today it is called Kos.

⁸⁸⁴ In his next dispatch, on April 5/16, Obreskov returned to the topic. He defended Yirmisekizzade Mehmed Said Paşa, claiming that the former grand vizier did not make any mistakes. On the contrary, he behaved reasonably,

Indeed, Çorlulu Köse Bahir Mustafa Paşa, the governor of Morea, was appointed the new grand vizier. Obreskov described him as a haughty, cunning, Christian-hating individual. To his credit, Mustafa Paşa had been successful in maintaining good order and bringing prosperity to Constantinople in his previous term—from 1752 to 1755. But the new grand vizier was corrupt and avaricious and had “robbed the Moreans to the last thread.” As a result, his appointment caused widespread criticism, with the exception only of the “senseless common folk.”⁸⁸⁵ However, in late May/early June Obreskov reported that the Ottoman government was peaceful and the grand vizier—not very powerful. Obreskov noted that people were predicting Mustafa Paşa’s downfall. Also, the scribes of the *reis efendi*’s secretary informed Obreskov that the grand vizier wished to keep peace with Russia and Austria in order to improve the domestic situation. The majority of Ottoman clergy held similar sentiments.⁸⁸⁶

As for the French maneuvering in the critical situation, Obreskov reported that on March 16 Vergennes had tried to arrange a secret audience with Mehmed Said Paşa, which Obreskov considered an impossible task. The Russian resident believed that the Frenchman was mistaken to compare the Porte with the courts of minor imperial princes, where such practice was current. Obreskov suspected that Vergennes could make a last-ditch effort to break up the new Anglo-Prussian alliance by convincing the Porte that Frederick II changed camps because he was upset about Ottoman lack of responsiveness to his calls for a mutual treaty—a development about

carefully, peacefully, humanely, and did not harm anyone. The sultan’s edict accused Mehmed Said only of being easily swayed (*uvalchivost*). The grand vizier could not be responsible for the black bread because he was appointed at the end of October when navigation of the seas halted. In Obreskov’s opinion, the sultan hurt himself by deposing Mehmed Paşa because the public began to hate him for the frequent changes of officials. Constant reshuffling brought the entire society to ruin because the entire hierarchy of officials had to present each new grand vizier with certain gifts. Before Osman III, grand viziers used to be replaced only every two-three years, and only rarely in a year. But the current sultan already appointed his sixth grand vizier after sixteen months of rule. Constantinople bankers were severely hurt by the frequent changes because every grand vizier borrowed money that was later confiscated by the government. As a result, the flow of money all but stopped and the merchant class was reduced to poverty. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 89, 92-93ob.

⁸⁸⁵ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 93ob.-94.

⁸⁸⁶ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 150, 165.

whose possibility the French had warned before. Consequently, Vergennes would argue that if only the Porte announced its agreement to an alliance with Prussia, Frederick II would make a step back and threaten England just as quickly as he had just turned against France. Obreskov reported that he heard rumors that Frederick II might have authorized the French to make another offer of a treaty to the Porte, which however could have been a French ploy to undermine the Anglo-Prussian treaty.⁸⁸⁷

It becomes clear, therefore, that events were unraveling swiftly, leaving the French and Russian diplomats temporarily in the dark about new developments at their courts. In the situation, Obreskov's instincts were correct: even before receiving an update from St. Petersburg, he realized that Prussia and England had betrayed Russian interests.⁸⁸⁸ France's position was more complicated: the government and Vergennes were scrambling to find a favorable way to interpret Prussian actions to the Porte. The only constant in Vergennes's world that was still true was the approaching conflict between France and England on the continent.⁸⁸⁹

Obreskov's observations of Vergennes' actions were accurate. Vergennes was deeply unsettled not only because the new alliance between England and Prussia, of which he learned from Rouille in the middle of February, put France in greater danger, but also because all of his efforts since his arrival in Constantinople now proved useless. He had worked, although half-heartedly—due to Louis XV's instructions,—to further negotiations for an alliance between Prussia and the Porte. He worked even harder and spent a lot of money to convince the Ottoman

⁸⁸⁷ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 119ob.-120, 106-106ob.

⁸⁸⁸ The Russian government took great affront at England for the Westminster Convention. Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War*, pp. 47-56, esp. p. 50.

⁸⁸⁹ Vergennes asked the Porte to prescribe an imaginary line in the sea, similar to what had been done in 1744, inside which English ships would be prohibited to harm the French navy. But the Porte declined to involve itself in the struggle of the two great powers. It announced to the English ambassador that it was concerned only with the safety of its own subjects. Porter also told Obreskov that Vergennes had approached the Porte with an offer to mediate peace between France and England. But the Ottoman government distanced itself from these talks. Instead, it tried to persuade France to return everything that it had captured against treaties. Obreskov naturally did not completely trust Porter so he began to research this matter through his secret agents. 90.1.375.1756, L. 120.

government to issue a stern warning to Russia regarding Poland, for the subsidy agreement between London and St. Petersburg signed in fall 1755 was directed against Prussia and the Russian troops were expected to pass through Poland. The Convention of Westminster undermined the value of Vergennes' painstaking work in the preceding year. A new course of action required that he make arguments in front of the Porte that went against his earlier rhetoric. The fact that the new grand vizier, Mustafa Paşa, was against the English but liked the French was upsetting rather than encouraging to Vergennes, because, if not for the new developments, he felt that he would have been close to achieving his initial objectives.

Vergennes was particularly worried that the shifts in alliances would require French cooperation with Russia, in which case all of his earlier vitriol against St. Petersburg would render him unable to explain the French position convincingly to the Porte. Therefore, Vergennes preferred to see Frederick II's actions in a more positive light. He wrote to Louis XV and to Rouille in early April that perhaps the Prussian king was sincere in stating that the Westminster Convention did not contradict Prussia's alliance obligations to France. Vergennes chose to wait in order to discover Frederick II's true intentions, or, as Obreskov noted, the French ambassador refused to believe the reality of what had happened, namely, that Berlin had committed treachery. Vergennes did report to his superiors, however, that the Porte's reaction was strictly negative: the Turks reproached Frederick's "duplicity and perfidy." Prussia seemed to have destroyed any chance it had of concluding an alliance treaty with the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁹⁰

The First Versailles Treaty

Vergennes' position became exponentially more difficult after the conclusion of the Versailles Treaty between Austria and France on May 1, 1756. The French first minister Rouille

⁸⁹⁰ Murphy, pp. 101-103.

eventually sent Vergennes a new set of instructions in which he fleshed out arguments that Vergennes could use to explain the new French position to the Porte. France's primary concern in concluding a treaty with Austria, counseled Rouille, was to preserve peace on the continent. Essentially, Vergennes could keep up a low-level rhetoric against Russian threat to Poland, but as soon as Russia approached France in order to conclude an alliance, Vergennes had to stop undermining Russia's position at the Porte. When the French influence would supersede the English one at St. Petersburg, Russia would no longer be seen as a threat to France.⁸⁹¹ Thus, on the one hand Vergennes had to placate Ottoman concerns about the unprecedented Austro-French alliance. On the other, the French ambassador also had to prepare for another radical shift—from France's usual anti-Russian position to that of the French-Russian cooperation against Prussia.

To gain back some of his earlier political capital, Vergennes decided to refocus his encounters with the Porte on something more constructive and even distracting: he brought up the question of a possible French-Ottoman formal alliance once again and asked Louis XV to send him money for gifts to Ottoman officials. After all, Vergennes had worked for a year to create preconditions for the realization of his king's secret instructions and he did not want to waste a propitious moment.⁸⁹² It proved difficult, however, to deceive the experienced grand vizier, Mustafa Paşa, and to overcome the concerted efforts of the Prussian and English representatives in Constantinople to drive Versailles and the Porte apart. Upon learning of the Treaty of Versailles, Mustafa Paşa immediately asked the most penetrating question: whether the Ottoman Empire was excluded from the terms of the agreement to aid each other in case of an attack by a third power. English ambassador Porter reported that upon hearing that the Ottoman

⁸⁹¹ Murphy, pp. 103-104.

⁸⁹² Murphy, p. 104.

Empire was not excluded from the terms of the defensive treaty⁸⁹³ the grand vizier lost all his composure, heaped insults on the French dragoman, and brandished texts of English treaties with Austria and Russia, which always excluded the Ottoman Empire from the terms of mutual defensive aid.⁸⁹⁴ The grand vizier next addressed the Austrian dragoman, showing him textual evidence of French intrigues against Austria during previous negotiations. He concluded by saying that he viewed the Treaty of Versailles as a French declaration of an alliance with Austria against the Porte. Vergennes' report from July 22, 1756 confirmed Porter's version of events. The French ambassador was in a dire situation, being the main focus of the heated Ottoman reactions to new realities.⁸⁹⁵

Very soon Vergennes faced his worst-case scenario: just as some Ottomans began to overlook the danger of the Treaty of Versailles because they saw Russia, and not Austria, as the chief enemy of the Porte, Vergennes received instructions in late June to stop attacking Russia because it was making friendly approaches towards France. Rouille informed him that the rapprochement had gone so far that the two states were about to exchange ambassadors for the first time since 1748 and Vergennes had to cultivate Obreskov as if the latter were a representative of a friendly power. Rouille expected that the Ottomans would likely be stunned by now the second completely unexpected and counterintuitive alliance of their traditionally most reliable partner, France. However, he believed that Vergennes could easily explain everything to the Porte. Thus, he suggested assuring the Ottomans that France's chief motivation was not to harm the Porte in any way but to isolate England from its allies. Russia also felt

⁸⁹³ Porter highlighted to the Ottoman government that France and Austria promised to help each other in case of a foreign attack. Thus, France pledged 24,000 French troops in case of an attack on Austria by a third power, not excluding the Ottoman Empire. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 40.

⁸⁹⁴ Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 311-312.

⁸⁹⁵ Murphy, pp. 104-105.

slighted by the Anglo-Prussian Convention of Westminster and chose to move into an alliance with France.⁸⁹⁶

First of all, this explanation was not completely sincere for the French *chargé d'affaires* at St. Petersburg, Alexander MacKenzie Douglas, agreed to a secret clause of the Russian accession to the Treaty of Versailles that committed France to aid Russia in case of a Turkish attack. Louis XV disavowed the secret clause as soon as he saw it, but the fact that it had been signed in the first place showed how much the French foreign ministry was prepared to sacrifice its relations with the Porte for the sake of strengthening its own positions against England. Secondly, Rouille's position and instructions were either extremely shortsighted or he realized the gravity of the situation and simply sought to prevent the Porte's negative reaction by persistent and sincere pledges of good faith. Nothing he or Vergennes could do or say, however, could erase new concerns at the Porte about being left completely alone if Russia, having defeated Prussia with the help of Austria and France, were to attack Ottoman territory, or even that of Poland.

Despite Vergennes' effusive assurances about the French-Russian alliance being based only on military and possibly commercial opposition to England, the grand vizier indicated that the Porte expected to see the newly found partners officially exclude the Ottoman Empire from the scope of their mutual cooperation. Vergennes thought that he was able to calm the Porte down and only regretted that the grand vizier did not show any interest in the treaty of friendship with France, with its secret article concerning Poland, as proposed secretly by Louis XV. But his position was more difficult than he thought. Mustafa Paşa decided to make a diplomatic reprisal in return for France's hurtful alliance with two of its most important enemies. The grand vizier asked Vergennes if France would be inconvenienced in any way if the Porte signed treaties of

⁸⁹⁶ Murphy, pp. 106-107.

friendship and commerce with Prussia and Denmark. Vergennes managed to maintain composure in response to the thorny question and in order to avoid contradicting his own arguments, he conceded that the Porte's intention could be a good idea, but unfortunately Frederick II's "principles" were too unstable. It would be better, Vergennes advised, to wait to observe consistency in the actions of the Prussian king before entering into any agreement with him. He also tried his best to link his response relative to Prussia with Denmark. The grand vizier was calm and thanked Vergennes for the advice but in as little as several weeks the Porte signed a commercial treaty with Denmark and began negotiations with Prussia, although the latter talks suffered from mutual mistrust.⁸⁹⁷

This was Vergennes's position at the Porte by late 1756. The Ottoman talks with Prussia, which began after the Prussian capture of Saxony in August 1756, indicated that the Porte was displeased with its usual allies. In this situation, Obreskov's position was less controversial from the Ottoman point of view. However, during the same period Obreskov had to adjust to the need to work alongside the French ambassador, which caused Obreskov considerable doubt and confusion. Importantly, the lag in communication with St. Petersburg added to Obreskov's sense of disorientation. The Russian government, moreover, did not reveal its entire plan to Obreskov but only gave him specific orders intended to keep the Porte calm.

For example, Obreskov first learned about the Treaty of Versailles through rumors.⁸⁹⁸ Namely, a rumor appeared in Constantinople by mid-June that the Habsburg court had begun negotiations with Versailles about marrying Archduke Joseph to the younger French "Madame." The plans entailed the French King's presenting Joseph with the province of Lorraine as the bride's dowry. Louis XV was also rumored to have guaranteed the Pragmatic Sanction and

⁸⁹⁷ Murphy, pp. 107-109, 111-113.

⁸⁹⁸ Indeed, the first rumors appeared in June and they were confused and contradictory. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 40.

promised to find ways to return Silesia from Prussia to Austria. Obreskov harbored deep distrust of this rumor, but he had a sense that perhaps such development of events was possible. He noted that ever since the conclusion of the Anglo-Prussian agreement, Vienna and France began to find a common language. Schwachheim, for example, became friendlier with the French ambassador and the Naples envoy. It was also noteworthy that Vergennes began to send his monthly mail through Vienna.⁸⁹⁹

Given the slowness with which news traveled back then, Obreskov did not yet know of the May 1, 1756 (April 20, O.S.) convention of neutrality and the treaty of friendship and alliance between Versailles and Vienna, which together formed the first Treaty of Versailles. However, it appears that St. Petersburg also was not in a rush to notify its resident in Constantinople about all of its plans. Thus, by April 20/May 1 Empress Elizabeth had already decided to join the projected Austrian-French agreement.⁹⁰⁰ Therefore, theoretically, Obreskov could have learned about his government's approval of the expected Austrian-French rapprochement by late May/early June. Yet, it was still unclear for Obreskov from the St. Petersburg order that he received on June 13/24 if the Russian government had given its approval for the Bourbon-Habsburg alliance. Namely, order N 11 simply instructed him to be friendly with the French ambassador and, if the Austrian representatives took umbrage at that, to explain to them the reasons for such new attitude towards France and to allay their concerns with sincere assurances of goodwill. The order further prescribed Obreskov to develop a more amicable relationship with the French ambassador, but, in doing so, to be careful not to estrange the English ambassador and avoid conveying an impression to the Porte that the Russian Empress

⁸⁹⁹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 164ob.-165.

⁹⁰⁰ Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War*, p. 59.

followed Vienna in abandoning England completely and entering into friendship with France.⁹⁰¹ This was in line with the decision that St. Petersburg had taken in April, namely to win French neutrality towards the planned Russo-Austrian struggle by mollifying Versailles and instructing all Russian representatives abroad to “treat the French affectionately.”⁹⁰²

One of the reasons for such piecemeal revelation of the government’s plans lay in Russia’s and its future allies’ desire to give as little advance warning to Prussia as possible before taking action against Frederick. After all, Russia first had to iron out the details of its joint action plan with Austria.⁹⁰³ As a result, representatives of Austria, France, and Russia did not start cooperating with each other as quickly as did their respective courts. The final confirmation of the April 20/May 1 Versailles Treaty reached Constantinople only in late June/early July via news from Vienna. Obreskov reported on July 6/17 that the English ambassador Porter received official notification from his court about the May 1 alliance between Vienna and Versailles on June 28/July 9. The same day Obreskov also received copies of the treaty from the Russian ambassadors in Vienna, Keyserling and Golitsyn. The following day Schwachheim visited Obreskov to announce the news and presented only copies of the agreement.

However, Obreskov was unsure how to reply and simply thanked Schwachheim for the notification. Obreskov also encouraged the Austrian representative to announce the news to the Porte before the English ambassador Porter. After meeting with the French ambassador three times in one day, Schwachheim agreed that Vergennes would be the first to notify the Porte. Obreskov supplied St. Petersburg with a copy of the French notification, in which Vergennes wrote that by entering into the alliance with Austria his king only desired to prevent a war in Europe and the treaty did not imply any umbrage to anyone. Essentially, noted Obreskov,

⁹⁰¹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 211-213.

⁹⁰² Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years’ War*, p. 55.

⁹⁰³ Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years’ War*, p. 55.

Vergennes tried to persuade the Porte that the new friendship between France and Austria was a positive development because it promoted friendship between Austria and the Porte. The Austrian resident Schwachheim, due to temporary lack of translators, sent his official announcement to the Porte only on July 1/12. Importantly, Vergennes and Schwachheim were not yet sharing everything with Obreskov.⁹⁰⁴

The Porte was aware of much that was taking place in Europe. Following the June rumors, the Porte secretly obtained copies of the treaty documents that arrived from Vienna on June 28/July 9, but the grand vizier ordered the *reis efendi* to receive expected notifications without surprise, disappointment, or satisfaction, but with complete indifference. The English ambassador Porter quickly acted to arouse the Porte's concerns by noting that the Austro-French defensive treaty obliged signatories to help each other with 24,000 troops in case of an attack by any third party, without exceptions. The dragoman of the Porte, on *reis efendi*'s orders, approached the Austrian translator and asked with acerbity about erstwhile Austrian admonitions against France as a treacherous, evil country that sought nothing else but to cause trouble and that could not be trusted. The French felt the Porte's resentment and hurried to assure it that France's friendship with the Ottoman Empire superseded any treaties with other states and that the new treaty obligation with Austria concerned only European countries, not the Ottomans.

⁹⁰⁴ The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s secretary secretly informed Obreskov that Schwachheim's note was longer but essentially of the same nature as the French one. The scribes could not provide its copy yet because the note was sent directly to the sultan and they did not have time to copy it. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 211-213.

In the meantime, Obreskov continued to feel the effects of traditional French opposition to Russian interests at the Porte. Thus, in June 1756 Obreskov reported that the Moldavian hospodar was implicated in French intrigues designed to foil Russian communication network. The hospodar's agents tried to persuade the Porte to prohibit Russian couriers from traveling from Kiev to Constantinople, and vice versa, through Moldavia, under the pretext of the Russians' forceful confiscation of horses, as a result of which official Ottoman correspondence was carried out with delays. At the same time, the Moldavian agents, complained Obreskov, made no mention of the French couriers who freely crossed Moldavia every month. The Porte, thankfully for Obreskov, was non-responsive to these requests. Moreover, Obreskov was confident that the Ottoman administration would duly reprimand the Moldavian hospodar for serving French interests. 90.1.375.1756, L. 163.

Naturally, the English ambassador Porter began to keep a distance from Obreskov. The Russian resident noted, for example, that Porter did not share his new instructions, claiming he did not receive anything other than copies of the treaty agreements and a new cipher. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 214-214ob.

However, the Porte disregarded these assurances and seemingly resolved to annoy the French by cultivating the English ambassador. Moreover, if its worst fears would be confirmed—namely, that the Russian Empress would respond to the Austrian Empress’s request favorably and enter into an alliance with France—the Porte seemed ready to make the plunge and immediately seek the Swedish envoy’s help to enter into an alliance with the Prussian king. The Porte presented its resolution to the sultan, but the latter did not yet approve it. In this situation, Obreskov felt obliged to act in a determined fashion, according to the plan he specified in his secret report.⁹⁰⁵

Namely, Obreskov tried to keep the Porte from becoming friendly with Prussia by using every occasion to highlight Frederick II’s deceitfulness. He felt certain uneasiness, however, after his latest meeting with the dragoman of the Porte. On June 26/July 7 the chief dragoman had asked Obreskov what the latter thought about rumors of the French-Austrian rapprochement. Obreskov said that he did not have any knowledge of that but noted that the rumor was probably an exaggeration of reality: if the two states were indeed negotiating something, it was most probably Austrian neutrality in the war between England and France. Moreover, the rumored marriage was hardly likely as the French princess was older than the Austrian prince. Even if the marriage would take place, kinship could hardly cement political ties, for one could remember how much harm came from Louis XIV to Spain despite the fact that he was both the son and husband of Spanish princesses, as well as all the damage done by the current Prussian King, who was a nephew of the King of England, to his uncle in the last German war. The dragoman of the Porte countered by saying that the kings of Prussia and England had recently become friends. Obreskov expected this response and launched into a tirade about Frederick’s lack of trustworthiness, although making sure to use terms that were fitting for a crowned head of state. However, Obreskov was highly disappointed and alarmed by the chief dragoman’s reaction: the

⁹⁰⁵ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 212-214.

latter was not listening to Obreskov as eagerly as on previous occasions. The dragoman admitted through his teeth the truth of Obreskov's reminders and quickly changed subjects. Obreskov felt that the dragoman's reaction could indicate that the Porte was irate and jealous about the new commitments between Austria and France and perhaps entertained the thought of becoming friends with the Prussian king, who could be useful to the Porte on certain occasions. Obreskov stressed that this was just a guess on his part, but latest developments indicated that his apprehensions were beginning to prove realistic.⁹⁰⁶

Obreskov had good cause for concern because the Porte was already informed of the Russian military preparations in border regions. Moreover, the Moldavian hospodar—the chief source of this information—continued to portray Russian actions in an ominous light. For example in July Obreskov reported that the hospodar “wickedly (*zlokhitro*)” characterized the movement of Russian troops in the south as presenting danger to Ottoman territory and claimed that the Russian government had promised the new settlers near the fortress of St. Elizabeth that it would not only complete the said fortress, but also build others, notwithstanding the danger of war with the Ottoman Empire. Thankfully, the *reis efendi* and the chief dragoman did not believe these rumors, however they did send an agent to Moldavia in order to investigate the latest intelligence. Obreskov assured St. Petersburg that he would do his best to calm the Porte down if its apprehensions were aroused again.⁹⁰⁷

In regard to the political situation in the Ottoman capital, Obreskov noted that the sultan, Osman III, was interested in maintaining peace with all his neighbors. However, the grand vizier,

⁹⁰⁶ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 207ob.-208.

⁹⁰⁷ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 195-197. When the Porte inquired about the construction works at the border, Obreskov highlighted that the recent relocation of troops from the south to the west of the Russian Empire was a sign of Russia's deep interest in peace with the Ottomans. In postscript, he ventured to suggest that any works going on near the border were probably simply restorations of old structures, not construction of anything new. Obreskov admitted in his report to St. Petersburg that he said this in order not to appear to have lied if additional information came to light. For the time being, the Russian resident was confident that he managed to assuage the Porte's concerns. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 218-219.

Mustafa Paşa, harbored different plans and tried to arouse public wrath against the sultan. Top officials and the clergy informed the sultan in time about the possible threat and Osman III warned the grand vizier with his personal *hatt-ı şerif* that it was the latter's responsibility to maintain order or else face punishment. In response the grand vizier poured out his entire wrath out on the common folk.⁹⁰⁸

Obreskov also reported about popular sentiments. He noted that the public could not understand how Vienna could commit such a blunder as to trust France. The situation could be compared to having entrusted a wolf with protecting sheep. Some people, including prominent Ottomans, according to secret informant "M,"⁹⁰⁹ even thought that a Russian-Ottoman alliance could make more sense than the Austrian-French one because at least the Russian empress, although a formidable opponent in war, still had a sense of measure—as was attested by former Ottoman prisoners of war,—and was a good neighbor in peacetime. On the contrary, France was a dangerous foe in war and an indomitable enemy of Vienna during peaceful times. Ottoman public believed that the Austrian court would soon regret its choice, but that it would be too late.⁹¹⁰

Many Ottomans believed that the war in Europe, on the whole, could work in their favor, because it would weaken the Porte's traditional enemies—Russia and Austria.⁹¹¹ However, the Porte and the Ottoman public were still very concerned by the diplomatic shake-ups in Europe.

⁹⁰⁸ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 209ob.-210. The public mood was already quite negative following a serious outbreak of plague and a fire that burned more than half of the city in June. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 204ob.-205.

⁹⁰⁹ Agent M was an old friend of the former *reis efendi* who at the time served as the grand vizier's kahya. There is a mention of agent M in Obreskov's later report from September 7, 1756, in which he wrote that M exhibited goodwill and faithfully helped to spread or insinuate any necessary information for Obreskov. In return, Obreskov paid him 100 Dutch chervonnye, or 366 levki, on June 17: 90.1.375.1756, L. 274. I suspect that, following that analogy of X denoting the Christian dragoman, M must have referred to a Muslim mullah. One must remember that Veshniakov and Nepliev had cooperated with a mullah in the 1740s. However, that mullah was leaving for Bursa in 1748 and it is unclear whether he resumed his relationship with the Russian mission later. Obreskov's description of M's services as consisting of the spread and insinuation of information fits well with this theory.

⁹¹⁰ 90.1.375.1756, L. 214.

⁹¹¹ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 45.

Over the following six years the government of Koca Mehmed Ragıb Paşa (1757-1763) tried to walk the fine line of keeping the empire at peace, while closely following events in Europe and trying to take diplomatic advantages from newly-opening opportunities.

Description of the State of the Ottoman Empire in 1756

The next orders from St. Petersburg, dated June 4/15, arrived in Constantinople on July 13/24. It is clear that the Russian government was concerned about the possible Ottoman reaction to a war in Europe: St. Petersburg commissioned Obreskov to collect information on the Ottoman army and naval forces, procedures for their mobilization and maintenance, as well as on annual budget figures.⁹¹² The resulting report represents a rare example of a comprehensive assessment of the state of the Ottoman Empire by a Russian diplomat. It came more than half a century after a similar description was compiled by resident Tolstoy in 1703.⁹¹³ Obreskov's report has never been brought to light before. Therefore, it will be discussed here in full.

Obreskov compiled his report, according to his own admission, by extracting information from the notes he had made of what knowledgeable and trustworthy informants had shared with him over time.⁹¹⁴ The rare nature of such reports becomes evident from the earliest paragraphs in

⁹¹² 90.1.375.1756, L. 251.

⁹¹³ The tradition of writing analytical accounts of the Ottoman Empire started centuries ago. The Venetian *baili* were the most rigorous observers of the Ottomans, sending periodical reports to the Senate as well as compiling one final report upon return from their post at Constantinople. For example, see Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). However, the Russian government did not require its diplomats abroad to write anything of the sort with regularity. Only occasionally did St. Petersburg request a comprehensive account of the Ottoman Empire, mostly for the purposes of assessing its military strength and capabilities, which was largely the main reason all other diplomats collected and put into writing the same information, albeit much more methodically. After reviewing archival collections for the entire eighteenth century, I can identify only three such reports: the one written by Peter Tolstoy in 1703, Aleksei Obreskov's account from 1756, and Viktor Kochubei's description from 1797. Nepliev and Veshniakov's reports have to be studied closer in this regard, but given their *a priori* negative view of the Ottomans, which contributed to the opening of hostilities in 1735, they appear to have been unduly skewed. On the other hand, Obreskov wrote at a time when Russia tried to maintain peace with Constantinople, and therefore his account is probably more realistic. His measured approach also adds value to his observations.

⁹¹⁴ 90.1.375.1756, L. 251.

Obreskov's report. The Russian resident had to start by stating the most basic information about the Ottoman army: that it was divided into cavalry and infantry corps, as was the case with any other army. Ottoman cavalry was called "Shpagi" and infantry—"Ianychare," of sipahis and janissaries. Obreskov noted that cavalry was recruited from and maintained in the provinces.⁹¹⁵

Obreskov then proceeded to describe the land structure of the Ottoman Empire, which also should have been basic knowledge. Thus, he noted that the entire Ottoman territory was divided into *zaims* and *timars*, which he tried to translate into Russian as counties/baronships (*grafstva/baronstva*) and gentry holdings (*dvorianstva*) respectively. A small portion of the land was, however, reserved for the *Seral'*, or *Dvorets*, meaning the Ottoman palace. The sultan granted, for a small fee, land holdings to military officers in return for their services or as a favor. Some officers owned their land temporarily, others—only until their death, and yet others—received the rights of heritage. However, the latter category was very small in Turkey because land holding was conditional in principle: it was based on a landholder's ability to provide soldiers for the army, which in turn depended on the overall profit from the land. Therefore, noted Obreskov, Ottoman landholdings were not simple territorial divisions but corresponded to various levels of profitability.⁹¹⁶ Soldiers had to bring their own food provisions. The sultan paid only for a modest share of provisions during military campaigns: a small portion of *sorochinskoe psheno* (rice) and meat during campaigns in summer season—Obreskov denoted

⁹¹⁵ 90.1.375.1756, L. 252.

⁹¹⁶ He listed ruble conversions of the required annual payments that landowners had to send to the imperial treasury: *timar* holders had to pay no less than 15 rubles and no more than 99 rubles 99 kopeks 1 denga; *zaim* owners had to pay between 100 and 499 rubles 99 kopeks 1 denga; *sancak*, or one-horse-tail, pashas had to pay between 500 and 4999 rubles 99 kopeks 1 denga; *beylerbeyis*, or two-horse-tail pashas, had to pay 5000 rubles and more. Thus, there were richer and poorer holdings and each owner had to provide a commensurate number of soldiers in war. For example, a *zaim*-owner had to provide one cavalry soldier for each 25 rubles of profit, plus tents and other necessities. Timariots were obliged to send one cavalry soldier for every 15 rubles of profit, together with picks, shovels, and baskets that were necessary for digging and carrying soil during the construction of trenches and batteries for sieges and for clearing roads.

it as a period bracketed by the church holidays of St. George and St. Dimitrii⁹¹⁷—and possibly an additional payment on the recommendation of each commanding pasha/general after the holiday of St. Dimitrii if the army was still on campaign.⁹¹⁸

Obreskov, however, could not yet provide the Russian government with the total number of *zaims* and *timars*, which he promised to find out later. It was likewise difficult for him to estimate the total number of soldiers that these various land units could muster because their profits were variable. He noted, however, that it was common for owners of *zaims* and *timars* to bribe military commanders in order to avoid bringing all the required manpower with them to war: sometimes they managed to bring less than half of the soldiers required. Obreskov further noted that the Turks never counted the number of soldiers who actually showed up for a campaign. Instead, the Ottoman government simply estimated their number on the basis of the existing number of *sancaks*, *zaims*, and *timars*. However, this did not prevent the Turks from thinking that their soldiers were of the best quality and from bragging that their army was as countless as sand in the sea. Obreskov knew, nevertheless, that knowledgeable and impartial observers had arrived at an approximate number of the performing army by finding a reasonable medium between quotas that had to be fulfilled by rich landholders versus poor ones. He often heard that the *zaim* and *timar* cavalry comprised about 90,000 to 100,000 people on campaigns. In addition, a separate Bosnian cavalry and recruits from regions bordering the Austrian Empire and Venice—Belgrade, Vidin, and others—amounted to another 10,000-60,000 people, whom the sultan also had to provide only with necessary food.⁹¹⁹

⁹¹⁷ St. George's Day is on April 23 and St. Dimitrii's Day is on October 26. The fact that Obreskov denoted the campaign season by reference to Christian holidays might mean that his intelligence came from a Christian subject of the Ottoman Empire. Alternatively, Obreskov was trying to translate the usual dates for campaign into terms familiar in Russia.

⁹¹⁸ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 252-252ob.

⁹¹⁹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 252ob.-253. Here Obreskov does not indicate in any way that the Porte had trouble in mobilizing the provincial cavalry during wars, and that private forces of provincial power-holders came to replace

According to Obreskov, the Ottoman cavalry also included a minority of *sipahis* who were maintained directly by the sultan. These used to be as dangerous to the Ottoman regime as janissaries were in more recent times. But the famous grand vizier clan of Köprülüs (“Kiuperli”)—a father and his son—managed to overcome and pacify them. At the time of Obreskov’s writing there were European and Asian branches of the centrally maintained *sipahis*, who could bring no more than 20,000-30,000 people to campaign, including servants. Each of these *sipahis* received 6 kopek per day, sometimes more in return for some accomplishments or recommendations: for example, some of them received as many as 60 kopeks per day. During campaigns, they were given not only food but also a one-time payment of 25 rubles.⁹²⁰ Therefore, the more realistic size of the Ottoman cavalry was between 110,000 to 170,000 troops, or around 150,000 on average.

The infantry consisted almost entirely of janissaries. This corps had acquired such fame and honor through its earlier brave deeds that every Turk, whether of notable or humble origins, desired to be included in the janissary roster. Obreskov wrote that it was safe to say that almost half of all Turks were considered janissaries and availed themselves of the privileges that had been granted to this corps. The sultan, however, paid regular salary only to the 80,000 janissaries who were considered the standing army.⁹²¹ These were divided into 160 *ortas*, or batallions, with 500 soldiers in each. Separate barracks had been built for each orta near the headquarters of the Janissary Ağa—the janissary commander,—which were located close to the Porte. Most of these

them. “By the end of the 17th century, only a small portion of the timariot army could actually be mobilized. Their place was taken by the private forces of governors and local strongmen, known as *kapu halkı*, or ‘troops of the gate.’” Gabor Agoston, “Military Transformation in the Ottoman Empire and Russia, 1500-1800,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (2011), pp. 281-319, here p. 308.

⁹²⁰ 90.1.375.1756, L. 53.

⁹²¹ This number appears close to reality: it is close to the late 1740s figure as recorded in Ottoman budget reports. Namely, in 1748 the central troops numbered 83,675, but after the next review, in 1761-1762, the number fell to 55,731. According to Agoston’s own calculations, the paper strength of the janissaries fell from 98,726 in 1729-1730 to 61,239 in 1775-1776. Agoston, “Military Transformation,” pp. 303-305.

janissaries were sent to border and internal garrisons, in quantities that depended on circumstances. About 20,000 of them always remained in Constantinople—“to guard the nest.” The number of unsalaried Janissaries was innumerable, however. Many of these lived in Constantinople or in garrisons as reserve soldiers awaiting new vacancies: they received only food from the government while engaging in trades to provide for themselves. Janissaries of the standing army each received from 2,5 to 60 kopeks per day, depending on experience. In addition, they got rice and meat, and a set of clothing every two years from the government. All of them had to go on campaigns except for *oturaki*, who were not obliged to fight but continued to receive salary. Obreskov noted that the number of these inactive janissaries eventually grew to include—in addition to the usual retirees and wounded veterans—officers’ children who not only had never encountered an adversary but also had not yet outgrown their cribs. Obreskov concluded his account of the janissary corps by stressing that the sultan could enlarge the number of his janissaries by as much as he wanted because of the innumerable reserve janissaries and new trainees, called *yamaks*, who were constantly recruited in the provinces. The only thing that was often missing, however, was money to do so.⁹²²

During campaigns, the Porte could also call on the Arnaut infantry, or the Albanians, who could provide up to 15,000 people. They were paid the same amount as janissaries in war, but nothing during peacetime. Obreskov described the Arnauts as exceeding janissaries in bravery; they were, moreover, tall, strong, and fierce like animals. In addition, the Ottoman army contained the corps of Bostancıs and Baltacıs. The first ones numbered 12,000 and were responsible for tending the gardens of the sultan and guarding his palaces in Constantinople and Edirne. The Baltacıs, 6,000 in number, were woodcutters. Obreskov noted that the latter were mostly domestic servants but part of them went on campaigns and, if the sultan personally

⁹²² 90.1.375.1756, LL. 253ob.-254.

accompanied the army, half of them participated as well. The bombardiers numbered 60 [?] people. There were also 2,000 cannonmen; 600 artillery locksmiths; 1,200 carpenters, woodworkers, and *furmanshchiks*. All of them were paid at the same rate as janissaries. The Ottoman army could also employ auxiliary forces that were maintained in the provinces with the addition of a salary from the sultan: if the sultan himself led the army into war, the Crimean Khan had to join him with 100,000 Tatars; when the grand vizier headed the army, the Khan had to send Nuradin Saltan with 40,000-50,000 Tatars. The Wallachian prince had to send 8,000 and Moldavian prince—5,000 soldiers.⁹²³

Therefore, Obreskov suggested that the total number of the Ottoman army could be 272,000 troops if only the minimum from every corps joined a campaign.⁹²⁴ Moreover, the sultan could call up the 20,000-strong army of the Egyptian kingdom. Finally, if the sultan joined the campaign, the total Ottoman force could comprise 385,000 soldiers. On one hand, the sultan could not expose his cities and provinces to attack by sending all of this army to the campaign, making the actual force in the field smaller than the total. On the other hand, the difference could be partially filled with the retinue of Ottoman generals, who were select fighters known to commit unusual feats of courage on the battlefield. Each three-horse-tail (*trekh-kodnyi*) pasha brought 2,000-3,000 retainers who he paid out of his own pocket, while two-horse-tail pashas each had 500-1,000 people in their service. In addition, the Ottoman army always attracted a horde of volunteers who, “like flies,” followed after the *Sancak Şerif*—the Mahommedan standard—not out of any deep religiousness, noted Obreskov, but in hopes of acquiring booty. The Ottomans provided food for the volunteers but no salary. However, the voluntary contingent

⁹²³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 254-254ob.

⁹²⁴ So, at a minimum Obreskov’s calculations came out to include around 110,000 cavalry and 160,000 infantry.

was unreliable, prone to fleeing the army after the first defeat.⁹²⁵ Therefore, one way or another, Obreskov estimated the total maximum number of a force that the sultan could realistically bring with him on a campaign to be above 350,000.

Next Obreskov shared an important observation about the system of incentives in the Ottoman army, which indirectly vindicated the point of view of the chief dragoman Kallimaki that war served only to invigorate the Ottoman Empire. Obreskov essentially argued that the Ottomans could be a formidable enemy not because of the proficiency of its army and fighting methods, but because of the sheer expendability of its soldiers. The Ottoman government in fact could end up profiting from the war financially. For example, if a Janissary who used to receive a salary of 20 kopeks a day died in battle, the government could hire two new recruits who would accept the lowest salary of 2.5 kopeks. Likewise, a dead *zaim* translated into income for the state treasury because another person had to buy the deceased owner's land, for which a new assessment was made that usually raised the amount of expected contribution in soldiers. Death of a pasha was also extremely lucrative. First, almost his entire property would pass into the sultan's hands. Secondly, an aspirant to the vacant position would have to pay for the appointment, for all posts in the Ottoman state except that of the grand vizier's, noted Obreskov, were for sale.⁹²⁶

Obreskov's description of the Ottoman navy in 1756 sheds light on subsequent events, such as the Ottoman naval disaster at Çeşme in 1770. Obreskov wrote that the navy was in the poorest possible condition. There were only eight military ships, some of which were quite old, as well as nine galleys. This was despite the fact that the Ottoman Admiralty had ample access to necessary timber—from the Black Sea shore in Trabzon and Sinop—and everything else. There

⁹²⁵ 90.1.375.1756, L. 254ob.

⁹²⁶ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 254ob.-255.

was no need to import any materials. Moreover, there was an abundance of sailors and the Admiralty could hire as many of them as it wanted because they were needed only for the actual campaign and even then the Admiralty did not pay them salaries: it only had to pay them a one-time amount of 60 levki and provide them with food. In general, very few people were on the Admiralty's payroll. Only several workmen/*masterovoi* received a salary. Naval commanders and others lived off of the islands of the Archipelago. The *Kapudan Paşa* distributed variable amounts of money to the commanders—depending on whether he felt measly or generous—during his trips to the Archipelago. As for the galleys, the sultan paid for their construction and then entrusted them to beys, who received 6,000 levki from the sultan in order to hire captives to man the galleys and get ready for a campaign. In addition to the core fleet, the sultan could draw on sixteen ships with 40-50 cannons that were called “Kairini,” or Egyptian, and were used for merchant shipping to Egypt in peacetime. In previous wars, African cantons—Tripoli and Algeria—also used to send ten military ships in support of the sultan, as well as naval officers, who were incomparably more skillful in navigation than the Turks. Finally, while the Ottoman military fleet was in poor condition, the Porte had a countless supply of small ships that ordinarily filled Ottoman seas carrying cargo and provisions.⁹²⁷

At the end of his description, Obreskov turned to the topic of money. The Porte's sources of income, he wrote, were twofold: public ones and sultan's personal ones. The total amount of annual income from public sources was 18,000,000 levki. Public sources consisted of the soul tax *haraç*, which totaled about 4,000,000 but could be increased if needed; customs dues that added up to 6,000,000 levki; *myty* and other minor taxes—2,000,000; land that the sultan assigned to tax farming—1,000,000; salt and fishing—3,000,000; certain official positions that rotated annually—1,500,000 levki; and 1,500,000 levki in food supplies brought to

⁹²⁷ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 255-255ob.

Constantinople.⁹²⁸ The Ottoman government relied on public income for paying for the maintenance of the palace and for all state expenditures, except for the cavalry that lived off of the provinces. However, it often happened that as a result of poor oversight, provincial income was insufficient for the cavalry's needs, and the government had to pay them from its public income. As for the sultan, his total income was unknown. The sultan owned the right to Egypt's annual payment of 600,000 levki, to the tribute from the Wallachian and Moldavian principalities, as well as those from Ragusa and Mingrelia. He also claimed the property of ranked Ottomans who died without heirs and those who fell out of favor. Naturally, this last source of income varied year to year.⁹²⁹

It is noteworthy that Obreskov's description is not entirely damning. He did note the poor condition of the navy and several limitations of the Ottoman army. However, he did not engage in speculations about the decline and potential demise of the Ottoman Empire, as did several of his predecessors and many other foreign diplomats over the centuries, starting with the Venetian *baili* as early as the sixteenth century—undeniably, a period of Ottoman flourishing. Obreskov's report was factual and to the point, providing answers to St. Petersburg about the total strength of the Ottoman military and the state budget, nothing more and nothing less. He did not discuss the ongoing dissolution of the *timar* system, petulance of the janissaries, devolution of Ottoman coinage, and many other fundamental problems that other Russian residents, such as Tolstoy and Veshniakov, covered with relish. Of course, he had already reported dragoman Kallimaki's gloomy forebodings of Ottoman demise and mentioned the venality and corruption in the government. Yet, it was not the time and not the place for him to express similar wishful thinking—he never seemed to have entertained such thoughts anyway—for he felt responsible

⁹²⁸ Admittedly, the total of income categories listed by Obreskov adds up to 19,000,000, not 18,000,000, levki.

⁹²⁹ 90.1.375.1756, L. 255ob.

for conveying accurate information about Ottoman capabilities knowing that the Russian government was on the brink of a war with Prussia and was thus in immediate need of precise and realistic intelligence. Obreskov's account is sober and his picture of the Ottomans is even mildly intimidating. Yes, the actual number of soldiers did not correspond to muster rolls and, yes, there were shortages in the treasury, but there was a steady source of income, a countless supply of volunteer manpower in the army and navy, easy access to timber and other resources, and the war could invigorate not only the Ottoman spirit but the Porte's treasury. Obreskov did not say anything that could arouse unrealistic expectations but everything that served to prepare Russia to match and exceed Ottoman forces if there ever were a need.

The French-Russian Misalliance: Poland-Lithuania

Following Obreskov's report, the Russian government could not but become more committed to keeping the Ottomans out of the war. However, in addition to the main challenge—to keep the Porte from entering into an alliance with Prussia—St. Petersburg, with Obreskov's help, first had to assure the full cooperation of the French. The main practical stumbling block in the rapprochement between Russia and France⁹³⁰ was the issue of Poland. Namely, although there was no way for Russia to help Austria militarily but by crossing Polish territory, the French still hoped either to avoid it entirely or to impose strict conditions on Russia.

Some historians judged the value of the Russian-French alliance during the Seven Years' War as dubious for France. After all, the alliance did not result in a workable military arrangement, did not produce, as hoped, any commercial benefits for France, left Poland vulnerable to Russian advances, and, lastly, endangered France's century-old friendly relations

⁹³⁰ The more theoretical stumbling block concerned Russia's desire that France not exclude the Ottoman Empire from *casus foederis* of the mutual defensive treaty. Although Russia insisted on this, it was highly unlikely that France would ever agree to that and actually take necessary steps even if it promised anything on paper.

with the Ottoman Empire.⁹³¹ Indeed, Vergennes and Obreskov had to work the hardest in order to overcome their traditional opposition to each other on the issue of Poland.

As of August 1756 Obreskov was still reporting on Vergennes' actions with suspicion. As we know, in reaction to the first news of the Versailles Treaty, Vergennes hoped to turn the new alliance in France's favor by encouraging a rapprochement between the Porte and Austria, and focusing Ottoman anger solely on Russia.⁹³² However, the following month Rouille instructed Vergennes to cultivate Obreskov.⁹³³ Obreskov's August report shows evidence of Vergennes's friendly approaches, but their novelty, as well as inconsistency, or rather convolutedness and contradictory nature, of French policy rendered such efforts ineffective. After all, Vergennes was still trying to implement Louis XV's plan of signing a Franco-Ottoman treaty of friendship that would, among other things, guarantee their joint protection of Poland against Russian designs. It was difficult to square this traditional stance with the newly expected rapprochement between Russia and France.

At the time, Obreskov was satisfied with the state of Ottoman-Russian relations as favorable to Russia. For example, the Porte did not bother Obreskov about usual matters concerning the border. Obreskov was also quite satisfied that the Crown-Hetman's envoy Malczewski was about to depart. The central problem faced by Obreskov, however, still had to do with Poland and the corresponding French intrigues at the Porte. It took a long time and 1,500 levki out of Mniszek's own pocket to finally overcome French backing of Malczewski and

⁹³¹ Murphy, p. 109; L. Jay Oliva, *Misalliance: A Study of French Policy in Russia during the Seven Years War* (New York: New York University Press, 1964); Maria Petrova, *Ekaterina II I Iosif II: Formirovanie rossiisko-avstriiskogo 403oiuze, 1780-1790* (Moscow: Nauka, 2011), p. 65.

⁹³² Vergennes was the first to learn of the alliance on June 14, whereupon he wrote back with his view of how to proceed. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 42-43.

⁹³³ Rouille wrote this order in late June, therefore Vergennes must have received it by late July. Murphy, pp. 106, 498.

persuade the Porte to send him away.⁹³⁴ However, all these efforts could still be in vain because Malczewski left behind him a member of his suite, one Koszewski, whom Crown Hetman Branicki immediately managed to accredit as his emissary at the Porte. Koszewski continued in Malczewski's footsteps, glorifying France and denigrating the Saxon rule in Poland, although his accreditation as Branicki's emissary was not publicized and he claimed to be only a translator of the Crown Hetman. Koszewski was a very young man, only 23 years of age, and Obreskov did not notice any sign of intelligence in him. However, Koszewski resided in the house of the French ambassador, ostensibly with the purpose of learning Turkish language, and Obreskov was confident that Koszewski would learn all the tricks of trade from Vergennes. To add insult to injury, when Mniszek's own mission came to an end in late July the Porte sent him a gift of two lame horses without any caparison.⁹³⁵

Consequently, Obreskov continued to distrust Vergennes. He wrote, for example, that in late June news arrived in Constantinople through Smyrna about the French capture of the Fortress of St. Philippe. This caused great rejoicing among the French who began to announce that the Russian court had a rapprochement with France. Obreskov felt an unusual—"more than necessary"—amount of attention from Vergennes, who began to visit him, come to dinner at the Russian mission, and invite Obreskov to dinner at the French embassy. Obreskov interpreted these advances as designed to trick the Porte into believing the French declarations of the new French-Russian friendship. Of course, we know that Vergennes was in an extremely difficult position, in which extra attention towards Russia did not increase Ottoman favor toward him but was simply necessary in view of the actual rapprochement that indeed was taking place.

Obreskov did not yet know about it. However, he knew very well that Vergennes was still

⁹³⁴ Anisimov, however, writes that Malczewski left only when Branicki officially recalled him in July 1756. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 309.

⁹³⁵ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 221-223.

following the old policy of the French court relative to Poland, cultivating further the Porte's impression that Russia continued to oppress Poland in every way. Obreskov's suspicion of Vergennes grew even sharper because of another inconsistency: the Berlin emissary Varennes was still living in the house of the French consul in Smyrna. This circumstance gave rise to a belief among many that the French were not so unhappy with the Prussian king as they tried to pretend.⁹³⁶

Obviously, Obreskov became very concerned when he heard from his secret informants that Vergennes had a conversation about Poland at the Porte. He decided to preempt negative consequences by communicating to the *reis efendi* that someone would try to persuade the Porte with false information on the eve of the impending General Sejm in Poland. Obreskov reminded the *reis efendi* that interference of emissaries from the Crimean Khan and the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia had already marred the previous Sejm, requiring the Porte to eventually disavow the actions of the Crimean emissary. Therefore, Obreskov asked the *reis efendi* to warn the Crimean Khan to prevent his emissary from starting new intrigues in Poland. The *reis efendi* wished to assure Obreskov that the Porte could not be easily swayed by false information: the Porte listened to everyone, the *reis efendi* said, but did what was most appropriate and convenient for itself. He added that Obreskov did not have to fear that the Porte would do something against the rules. Then the *reis efendi* smiled and said that he knew whom Obreskov was implying and for what purpose. Obreskov did not feel reassured by this two-faced reply and decided to seek help from a secret informant from the *reis efendi*'s circle. Obreskov asked the *kessedar* and confidant of the *reis efendi* to provide insider information on the Porte's plans. This

⁹³⁶ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 223-223ob. In reality, the French did not want to do anything with Varennes: Murphy, p. 114. Marquis Varennes tried to cooperate with the English ambassador but Porter said that the time was yet not right to talk about the Ottoman-Prussian friendship treaty. Varennes had to leave the Ottoman Empire, therefore, without ever visiting Constantinople: Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 38-39.

informant received 5 levki a day from Dolgorukov's tayin and therefore appeared friendly towards Obreskov. After several days, the *kesedar* informed Obreskov that Russian interests were not under threat. Obreskov rewarded him with a payment of 15 Dutch chervonnye, or 183 levki. The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s secretary also confirmed that the emissaries of the Khan and Moldavian hospodar were forbidden from meddling into Polish affairs. Obreskov planned to inform Russian representatives in Poland, Gross and Rzyzewski, but he did not feel completely confident that the emissaries would not defy the Porte's orders as they had done two years ago. Moreover, Obreskov had at his disposal a memorandum of the French ambassador to the Porte—supplied by the well-known scribes on July 20/31—in which Vergennes asked the Porte to reassure the Polish patriots through the Crimean and Moldavian emissaries to the upcoming Sejm that the Ottoman Empire would support them and their freedoms.⁹³⁷

By September 7/18, 1756 Obreskov had been informed about the rapprochement between France and Russia, however he reported on his relationship with Vergennes very briefly. Obreskov wrote that he was showing special attention to Vergennes who responded in kind. The French ambassador informed Obreskov that a Russian *chargé d'affaires* had arrived in Paris on August 27 and Obreskov showed particular joy at hearing the news.⁹³⁸ However, one cannot but notice extreme reserve in Obreskov's choice of phrases to describe his relationship with Vergennes. While he did not express his worries or even thoughts about the sudden turn of events, he was probably taking time to process the situation and prepare for upcoming developments. Obreskov planned to establish a direct correspondence with the Russian *chargé d'affaires* in Paris, court counselor Bekhteev.⁹³⁹

⁹³⁷ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 223ob.-225ob., 228-231ob., 276.

⁹³⁸ 90.1.375.1756, L. 260ob.

⁹³⁹ 90.1.375.1756, L. 284ob.

The new instructions presented Obreskov with a challenge. After the Prussian invasion of Saxony in August 1756, war in Europe was inescapable. As a result, the Porte became more and more concerned about the possibility that the Russian relief force would pass through the territory of Poland. France's long-standing lobbying at the Porte against Russian presence or influence in Poland could not but influence the Ottoman government's position that it had to guard against such a turn of events and that France would support this position. Indeed, for some time France still hoped that Augustus III would settle his conflict with Frederick II peacefully and not call on the help of Russian troops.⁹⁴⁰ As Russia and France were moving closer diplomatically, however, Vergennes had to give up his efforts concerning Poland. He did not do it right away, but Obreskov found him more reliable as time went by. The threat of a possible Ottoman alliance with Prussia brought the former opponents together. Still, Poland remained the major point of misalliance.⁹⁴¹

The Porte's anxieties prompted the dragoman of the Porte to visit all foreign representatives in late September-early October.⁹⁴² The main topic of conversation between Kallimaki and Obreskov on September 23/October 4 was Poland. Kallimaki suggested that Russia should abstain from sending its relief force through the republic's territory. Obreskov replied that Russia would abide by all of its treaty obligations. He also added, in confidentiality, that no one could prevent the Russian empress from carrying out her plans, and the Porte risked undermining its relationship with Russia if it continued to insist on this point. Obreskov reported that his reply caused the Porte to ponder its position and it seemed to have decided not to provoke Russia anymore with this request, especially because France had not yet entered into an

⁹⁴⁰ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 46-48.

⁹⁴¹ B. V. Nosov, *Ustanovlenie rossiiskogo gospodstva v Rechi Pospolitoi, 1756-1768 gg.* (Moscow: Indrik, 2004), pp. 17-22, 27-30, 38-42. On the inner tensions in French diplomacy towards Poland-Lithuania at this time, see Oliva, pp. 95-108, 155-159.

⁹⁴² On September 16/27 Kallimaki visited Vergennes and Porter. In a week, he had a meeting with Obreskov. Three days later, the dragoman visited Schwachheim and Celsing.

alliance with Russia. The Porte was also unfavorably impressed by the treachery of the Prussian king and his unscrupulous treatment of the Polish royal family. Therefore, the Ottoman government stopped pursuing the subject of Poland for the time being.⁹⁴³

On October 4/15 Obreskov was able to procure a copy of Kallimaki's latest report to the Porte on the positions of foreign representatives in Constantinople. The French ambassador Vergennes assured Kallimaki that Louis XV was resolved to continue to try to stem the conflict and to preserve Polish freedoms, but France would have to help Vienna against Prussia. Russia was going to help Austria as well, according to treaty obligations between Vienna and Russia, as well as between Saxony and Russia. Vergennes had to tell Kallimaki what the Porte did not like to hear: France desired Russia's participation in the Franco-Austrian alliance. The English ambassador Porter naturally stressed that the Porte should prevent Russian from sending its troops via Poland. Obreskov, according to Kallimaki, stressed that Russia also wished to preserve Polish freedom. When one nation sent relief forces to its ally, argued Obreskov, it did not present harm to anyone, especially because the Polish Republic was a free nation and did not depend on anyone. However, Obreskov had not heard anything about this from his court yet. He also noted that Russia had not entered into an alliance with France and he did not know if this would ever happen. The fact of the matter was that Russia and France simply had a friendly reciprocity.⁹⁴⁴

Kallimaki's personal take on the situation was discerning and forward thinking, as befitted this experienced Ottoman servitor. He believed that the war would spread across Europe

⁹⁴³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 285ob., 289ob.-290.

⁹⁴⁴ The Austrian resident Schwachheim noted that the passage of Russian troops through Poland would be done with the agreement of the Polish king and all regulations would be observed. The Porte should not be concerned about any harm to the Poles. Schwachheim also refuted any alliance between Austria and Russia except for friendly reciprocity. The Swedish resident Celsing said that he had heard that Russian troops were getting ready for a campaign against Prussia. However, Russia had not yet joined the Franco-Austrian alliance, and only maintained friendly correspondence with them. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 288-289ob.

and the Prussian king would lose. The Russian troops were about to be sent on campaign, although the Porte would try to prevent it. France and Austria were making all efforts to bring Russia into the new alliance, but it looked as if Russia was resolved to first determine where the events were heading.⁹⁴⁵

On November 7/18 Obreskov reported: “everything is quiet in Constantinople.” Among events worthy of note was the return of the Ottoman envoy, Derviş Mehmed Efendi, from Russia in the middle of September. Obreskov wrote that Derviş Mehmed Efendi spoke favorably of Russia.⁹⁴⁶ However, the intensity of events had begun to take its toll on the Russian resident: on October 25/November 6—three days after receiving new orders from St. Petersburg—Obreskov had experienced an attack of illness (*pripadok*).⁹⁴⁷ In his secret report from November Obreskov explained that he saw his main task in breaking the Porte’s resistance to the prospect of the Russian army’s passage through Poland. In addition to the arguments he presented through the dragoman Kallimaki, Obreskov asked the *reis efendi*’s *kesedar* also to convey to his superior that the Porte should not take offense at the Russian passage through Polish territory. Russia was not doing it to acquire new provinces, but only to help its allies as was required by earlier treaties. The Porte, moreover, should be thankful to Russia, because the latter did not want any harm to come to Poland. On the contrary, Russia was actively protecting Poland, which required substantial financial expenses. Thus, the Russian government paid for the release of the captured

⁹⁴⁵ 90.1.375.1756, L. 289ob.

⁹⁴⁶ Mehmed Efendi praised the kindness of the Russian empress. Obreskov found him to be a very circumspect person and in order to approach him successfully decided first to send him a gift of expensive furs: sable, ermine, and squirrel. Derviş Mehmed Efendi graciously thanked Obreskov. 90.1.375.1756, L. 339.

⁹⁴⁷ Obreskov also experienced sudden sickness on September 27/October 8. He had strong pains (*lom*) in his head and lower back, accompanied by fever (*likhoradka*) and frenetic colic. The latter caused extreme inflammation in his body and, as a result, his stomach could tolerate neither food, nor medicine. He wrote that it seemed that he was able to escape death thanks to numerous applications of bloodletting and other medicines. However, Obreskov continued to feel weak and could not send his reports. He finally gathered strength to write “most concisely” about only the most urgent news on October 10/21. 90.1.375.1756, L. 285. These episodes of illness were first in a long time, perhaps for the first time since he became *chargé d'affaires* in 1751. It is possible that they were a result of stress. One has to remember that for the first time in his life Obreskov was responsible for assisting his home country in what promised to be a major European war, and he was only thirty-eight years old.

Polish king. As a final argument, the skillful Obreskov used the most striking claim: if Russia did not protect Poland, the Prussian king would place his brother on the Polish throne, and the Porte would acquire a treacherous neighbor. After this response, the Porte stopped bothering Obreskov about Poland. In turn, Obreskov also did not raise the issue. He even decided not to communicate latest information from St. Petersburg in order not to create an impression that the Russian government was afraid of the Porte and was seeking preliminary advice. Obreskov wrote to his superiors that he deemed it sufficient to notify the Porte about the empress's manifesto only when the Russian troops would already cross into Poland.⁹⁴⁸ It was not the first time that Obreskov advised his government not to bow to the Porte's demands in any way. He knew that firmness was necessary in order to be respected.

As for his relationship with Vergennes, Obreskov noted that the French ambassador tried to keep the Porte's discontent with France secret from the wider public. Obreskov was very kind to Vergennes and hurried to prove his support by writing on October 20/31 to the Russian *chargé d'affaires* in France, Bekhteev, with a request to notify the French ministry about Obreskov's satisfaction with Vergennes' behavior.⁹⁴⁹ However, Obreskov noted that despite showing affability and sincerity when conversing about affairs of no importance, he continued to observe Vergennes' actions with great vigilance. For the time being, however, he did not implicate Vergennes in anything that went against the new formal friendliness between their respective courts.⁹⁵⁰

But in November Obreskov learned from St. Petersburg that the French minister in Warsaw, Durand, had been encouraging the Polish Primate to oppose the passage of the Russian

⁹⁴⁸ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 340, 341, 342-343ob.

⁹⁴⁹ Russian *chargé d'affaires* in Paris Bekhteev wrote to Obreskov on October 9/20 that he had requested the French court to send an order to Vergennes instructing him to maintain an intimate relationship with the Russian resident at Constantinople. 90.1.375.1756, L. 391ob.

⁹⁵⁰ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 360-360ob.

troops. The Russian government evidently asked Obreskov to notify Vergennes about the inappropriate actions of his colleague. But Obreskov decided to the contrary: after consulting with Schwachheim, he resolved not to mention anything to Vergennes. He believed that he could not achieve anything by telling Vergennes and perhaps could harm Russian interests because Vergennes could interpret Durand's behavior only as a result of instructions from the top. Consequently, the French ambassador could stop cooperating with Obreskov in expectation of new orders. Obreskov did not want to take such risk because up until that time he was very satisfied with Vergennes' collaboration: the French ambassador helped Obreskov persuade the Porte not to resist the free passage of the Russian army through Poland. Moreover, Obreskov felt that Vergennes personally was looking forward to that moment, judging by his responses and approaches.⁹⁵¹

This was a perspicacious analysis of the situation on Obreskov's part: French diplomacy in Poland-Lithuania was torn between the ministry's reconciliatory approach to Russia and the staunch belief of the agents of the king's secret in the need to counteract Russian influence in Poland.⁹⁵² Obreskov did not waiver in his vigilance, however. As a preventive measure, he asked Vergennes for help in deflecting potential complaints of the Poles or their supporters to the Porte. Vergennes agreed, but insinuated that it was the English ambassador who could try to lodge such complaints. In response, Obreskov immediately registered his lack of belief in such a possibility. England, he argued, did not have any partisans in Poland. Even the Prussian king, Obreskov added, hardly had any agents there due to Frederick's well-known stinginess.⁹⁵³ It is clear that Vergennes was trying to evade having to fulfill Obreskov's request, because he did not wish to

⁹⁵¹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 365-365ob.

⁹⁵² Oliva, pp. 95-108.

⁹⁵³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 390ob.-391.

compromise himself further with the Porte by asking publicly for things that went contrary to France's commitment to protect Polish interests.

Therefore, as late as December Obreskov was not completely confident in Vergennes. Fearing that the latter would not cooperate as closely if he learned about the contrary behavior of ambassador Durand, Obreskov withheld this information from Vergennes. He also concealed that Schwachheim had received a secret letter from Count Esterhazy, the Austrian ambassador at St. Petersburg, which revealed that Russia had not yet acceded to the Versailles Treaty. In response to the French ambassador's impatient inquiries, Obreskov offered his personal speculation that perhaps the matter was held up until the reciprocal arrival of respective ambassadors.⁹⁵⁴

The French position on Poland was complicated. It was true that Durand was supporting the Polish opposition to Augustus III and the latter's plans officially to ask for Russian help. For several reasons France did not desire the Russian army's passage through Poland. First, this could set a dangerous precedent for Russia's military presence and influence in Poland. Secondly, because of the Ottomans' own fears of Russia's intervention in Poland, the Porte could gravitate further away from France and toward the Anglo-Prussian coalition. But by 1757 France attempted to solve this dilemma for itself by continuing to position itself as a protector of Poland at the Porte. Namely, France agreed to the Russian passage only under certain strict conditions: Russia had to fully provide its troops with provisions or, instead, properly compensate Polish inhabitants; Russia could not use the passage as an excuse to interfere in Polish internal affairs; and the Russian military presence in Poland had to end as soon as possible. Consequently, Vergennes announced to the Porte that his government ensured that Russia agreed to certain

⁹⁵⁴ 90.1.375.1756, L. 391ob.

conditions, and if Russia did not respect them, the Porte would have a right to intervene.

Vergennes suggested that the Porte make a corresponding announcement to Obreskov.⁹⁵⁵

Countering the Prussian Influence at the Porte

Nevertheless, Obreskov, Vergennes, and Schwachheim gradually united their efforts at the Porte. France needed help in opposing the increasing influence of the Prussian and English ambassadors in Constantinople, who attempted to cause a clash between the Ottoman Empire on one hand and Austria and Russia on the other.⁹⁵⁶ All three states had to counter Prussian attempts to sign a defensive alliance with Constantinople. Their cooperation eventually was solidified when the Russian Empire acceded to the Franco-Austrian Treaty of Versailles on December 31, 1756/January 11, 1757.

Before that happened, however, Obreskov reported with concern on the Porte's tendency to seek solace in Prussia. In August, he wrote that as a result of its disappointment with the new European alliances, the Porte was determined to continue to respond to Prussian and other offers of friendship. Old proponents of this policy found the right time to remind the Porte that if European states could become friends even with their enemies, the Porte had no reason to shun an alliance that would bring it only advantages. It appeared that negotiations about a commercial treaty with Denmark were gaining traction as well, judging by frequent nighttime visits of the Danish envoy Geller's dragoman to the grand vizier and the residence of the *reis efendi*. Just in case, Obreskov tried to take measures that could prevent the signing of such a treaty. Pro-Prussia

⁹⁵⁵ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 52-53, 55-57; Sorel, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁵⁶ Murphy, pp. 108-109, 112; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 347-348.

proclivities in some Ottomans even combined, according to rumors, with a desire to overthrow the sultan.⁹⁵⁷

As of August, the secret Prussian agent Varennes—who still claimed to be a Swedish officer but was in fact a Prussian emissary and a representative of the Emden Company—was still living in Smyrna at the residence of the French consul and began to study Turkish language. Schwachheim shared with Obreskov that Prussian emissary Rettsen Gauden (Rexin) who had visited Constantinople the previous year in order to negotiate a treaty on behalf of Prussia, was heading back to the Porte.⁹⁵⁸ Obreskov surmised that Rexin would seek the help of the English ambassador and resolved to keep an eye on Porter.⁹⁵⁹ Baron Varennes also continued to live in Smyrna, although at the residence of the English consul. It was rumored and perhaps with some foundation, wrote Obreskov, that Varennes would soon come to Constantinople in order to start negotiations.⁹⁶⁰ But by October Rexin arrived in Constantinople and the Porte was known to be in negotiations with him. Geller's successful conclusion of the Danish-Ottoman commercial treaty raised concerns that Prussian talks would go just as well.⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁷ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 243-244, 259ob.-260.

⁹⁵⁸ The Prussian agent Rexin had tried, unsuccessfully, to sign a commercial treaty with the Porte in 1755. Rexin indeed returned in 1756. Frederick initially had chosen a Silesian such as Rexin to negotiate a commercial treaty with the Porte, because among other things Frederick was looking to acquire new markets for goods, especially textiles, manufactured in the Duchy of Silesia. Murphy writes that, like Geller, Rexin knew Turkish and Constantinople well and could easily challenge established diplomats such as Vergennes: Murphy, pp. 111-114. However, Virginia Aksan—on the basis of Beydilli's work—points out that Rexin, whose real name was Gottfried Fabian Hande, although he spoke some Turkish, was insufficiently prepared as a diplomat who could fit into the Istanbul diplomatic scene. However, she also notes that Rexin, or Hande, had previously worked in Istanbul, but for Austria, not Prussia. A Silesian by birth, he entered Frederick's service after the 1740 Prussian invasion of his homeland. Virginia H. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700-1783* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E. J. Brill, 1995), p. 62, fn. 75.; Murphy, p. 111. Elsewhere his full name is spelled as Gottfried Fabian Haude. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 23-24; Kemal Beydilli, *Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar: XVIII yüzyılda Osmanlı-Prusya müünasebetleri* (Istanbul: Güray Matbaacılık, 1985), pp. 25-32. If one is to trust a historical novel about Frederick the Great, Rexin had begun as a servant of a merchant in Breslau named Hübsch. Luise Mühlbach and Chapman Coleman, *Frederick the Great and His Family; An Historical Novel* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1893), Vol. 6, p. 459. Could it have been the same Hübsch, or his relative, who ran a major commercial and financial house in Constantinople?

⁹⁵⁹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 260-260ob.

⁹⁶⁰ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 359.

⁹⁶¹ 90.1.375.1756, L. 285ob.

Obreskov possessed a copy of the notes of a recent Divan meeting, which clarified the Porte's attitude towards European developments, especially the Treaty between France and Austria. Thanks to the scribes of the *reis efendi*'s chancellery, on September 28/October 9 he was able to learn that the Porte had been concerned for some time about a series of secret treaties and close alliances between various Christian rulers that went against Ottoman interests. The Turks were especially cross with France for having entered—without even notifying the Porte ahead of time—into an alliance with a state that always fought against the Ottoman Empire, under the pretext of trying to forestall possible disturbances in Europe. The Porte decided to conceal its discontent but it could not look past it, especially if there was a probability that other Christian states could join the said alliance. The Porte decided that its own interests required not postponing or declining friendship of Christian rulers.⁹⁶²

Next, members of the divan agreed that their foremost goal was to prevent Russia from sending its troops against Prussia. There were two reasons for this desire. First, the Porte did not want Russia to enter Polish territory. Secondly, through its opposition to Russia's attack on Prussia, which the Prussian king was bound to learn about, the Porte wanted to signal to Frederick II indirectly that it was interested in an alliance with him. In addition, the divan resolved to make sure that Christian states, especially neighboring ones, knew that the Porte was not indifferent to current developments. In order to forestall in a timely fashion these states' participation in the conflict, the Porte decided to announce to all foreign ministers accredited at Constantinople that the Porte desired to see the Franco-English conflict resolved and avoid the war spreading to other European countries. In addition, the Porte intended to require that the order and freedom of the Polish Commonwealth remain intact and hoped that other countries had the same objective. As a result, the Porte dispatched the dragoman of the Porte, Ioannis

⁹⁶² 90.1.375.1756, LL. 286-286ob.

Kallimaki, to visit the foreign ministers with the above message. After noting their responses, Kallimaki was instructed to announce the Porte's intention to enter into friendship with the Danish King. Lastly, Kallimaki had to try to find out if Russia would join the Franco-Austrian alliance. The Porte also planned to inform the Crimean Khan's emissary in Poland that the Porte did not agree to the potential entry of Russian troops into Poland.⁹⁶³

However, Obreskov informed his court that despite the strong rhetoric, the Porte would not start a war with the Russian empire under existing conditions. Therefore, if the Porte decided to position its troops at the border, the Russian government did not need to change its plans. However, even if the Ottoman government began to entertain "such a wondrous thought," Obreskov assured St. Petersburg that the Porte would need two years in order to complete mobilization, for it experienced complete shortages in everything it needed for the war.⁹⁶⁴ It must be noted here that Obreskov did not claim that the Porte was a weak military opponent and could be easily defeated. He only stated that it could not start a campaign as soon as it wished.

Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that the Porte sought revenge and negotiations with the Prussians were a convenient way to achieve it. On the surface the Porte continued to call Frederick a traitor, but everyone noticed that it received news of his victories with pleasure and trusted reports of the English ambassador more than those of other foreign ministers.⁹⁶⁵

Ambassador Porter was taking advantage of Ottoman receptiveness and after another delivery of

⁹⁶³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 286ob.-287.

⁹⁶⁴ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 290-290ob.

⁹⁶⁵ Porter was much more reserved towards Russia and Obreskov reported that the English ambassador treated him with respect and friendliness. Bestuzhev-Riumin highlighted this passage in his report to the empress, as he was still hoping to preserve the Anglo-Russian alliance. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 312. Obreskov was only stung by a comment that Porter had made to another person regarding the laughability of help that Russian troops could provide to Maria Theresa. Porter claimed to know through his own experience that the Russian army was said to fly but in reality it crept like a turtle. Obreskov could not reply to Porter's ridicule without revealing the identity of the person who reported on the English ambassador. However, Obreskov's pride was hurt and he could not wait to learn about the start of the Russian army's march west. When that happened, Obreskov desired to personally disabuse Porter of his beliefs regarding the Russian imperial army and remind him that a friendly minister was expected to speak differently. Obreskov also resented the fact that Porter benefitted from the advantageous situation by attaining various trading concessions (*komendamenti*) for the English. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 359ob.-360.

mail through Vienna he declared that the Prussians had completely defeated the Austrians on October 1. Porter further suggested that if Frederick were to score one more such victory, the city of Vienna would surely open its gates without any resistance because the Austrian court was out of strength. The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s chancellery also alerted Obreskov that in a conversation with one confidant, a prominent Turk, the grand vizier complained that the earlier ministers missed the opportunity to enter into an alliance with Prussia. Had they done so, believed Mustafa Paşa, the Porte's current enemies would have been in a dire situation.⁹⁶⁶

Obreskov suspected that the grand vizier could be pursuing one of two goals. First, he could hope to aggravate the sultan against France in order to obtain license to undermine French commerce in the empire out of spite. Secondly, he could intend to convince the sultan to conclude, if not an alliance—for it would hurt the Porte, then at least a commercial treaty with Prussia. It was hard to guess, and even harder to find out, the most likely outcome. Obreskov complained that the grand vizier transformed usual decision-making at the Porte, which relied on councils with old ministers and knowledgeable persons, into a one-man show. Mustafa Paşa “took everything out of his own head,” and only relied on the *reis efendi* to carry out his orders. Obreskov realized that the Porte felt trapped. It was extremely upset at France and greatly worried about the probability that Russia would join the Franco-Austrian alliance. The idea of being encircled by three of such great powers, while being away from other European potentates,

⁹⁶⁶ 90.1.375.1756, L. 344ob. The grand vizier ordered to find in the archive all French memoranda for the previous five years, in which France encouraged the Porte against Austria and advised to befriend Prussia. The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s chancellery informed Obreskov that the grand vizier discovered many French claims that Vienna was seriously arming itself for a surprise attack on the Porte and that Polish freedom was in danger because of the alliance between Vienna and St. Petersburg. Consequently, Mustafa Paşa was furious at France for suddenly pushing its ancient friendship with the Porte to the side by its alliance with Vienna. He could make but one conclusion: France was the most cunning nation that sought to deceive everyone else. Mustafa Paşa put his thoughts on the above contradiction on paper and, adding earlier French arguments for the Ottoman friendship with Prussia, resolved to present these to the sultan. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 343ob.-344. Later, The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s chancellery informed Obreskov that the grand vizier had used the excerpts from past French memoranda from the archive in order to try to hurt French commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire, and not in order to convince the sultan to conclude a treaty with Prussia. However, the sultan was not receptive to Mustafa Paşa's vitriol against France. Obreskov confirmed that Vergennes reported favorable treatment at the Porte. 90.1.375.1756, L. 392ob.

scared the Ottomans. The grand vizier's pride was further wounded by the prospect of the Porte's loss of credit in Poland, which had been earlier supported by France.⁹⁶⁷

However, Obreskov resisted carrying out St. Petersburg's order to attempt to remove Mustafa Paşa through bribes. In early September St. Petersburg had sent 10,000 chervonnye for orchestrating the removal of Mustafa Paşa from power—a novel measure that the Russian government took in view of its fears of the grand vizier's Prussian sympathies. Obreskov resisted carrying out this order from the start, arguing, on one hand, that Mustafa Paşa could soon be removed from power and, on the other, that “such an enterprise is dangerous and daring at any time,” but especially during the era of the breakdown of alliances in Europe. St. Petersburg gave justice to Obreskov's argument that such an undertaking could threaten the future of Russo-Ottoman relations and stopped asking for the deposition.⁹⁶⁸ Obreskov turned out to be correct: Mustafa Paşa lost his position on December 3/14.⁹⁶⁹

Obreskov also correctly analyzed the situation at the Porte more generally: everything depended on whether Frederick was victorious in war. So the best course of action was to back the Prussian king into a corner militarily. In addition, Obreskov repeated his earlier promise that even if the Porte decided to attack Russia, his government had nothing to fear from the Porte for at least two years. In fact, he could guarantee that the Ottomans would surely not be able to fight the following summer, with the exception of some unexpected “mischief” by the Tatars. Obreskov swore on his own head that the Ottomans were not only unprepared but have not started any preparations yet. Even if everything were ready and a different sultan came to power, the Ottomans would not be able to do anything against Russia because the army would not be

⁹⁶⁷ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 344-344ob.

⁹⁶⁸ In late August (early September, N.S.) 1756, the Russian government issued a most secret order for the issuance of 10,000 chervonnye or enough silver currency for the purchase of the said gold in order to finance “one necessary matter” in Constantinople. 89.1.1756.7. Delo o perevode v Konstantinopol' k Obreskovu 10,000 chervonnykh na chrezvyachainye raskhody. 28 August 1756, LL. 1-1ob.; Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 311.

⁹⁶⁹ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 341-342.

able to find provisions in border regions. Obreskov explained that in the past summer all bread from Bulgaria, Wallachia, Moldavia, Bessarabia, Budjak, and even Crimea, was almost entirely transported to the capital, with the exception of the minimum amount needed to feed provincial inhabitants. A new harvest was expected the following August, but the Ottoman army usually ended its campaigns on the day of St. Dimitri (October 26) even if the weather was still warm. All in all, he concluded, the Porte did not have time to prepare even if it decided to attack.⁹⁷⁰

On December 7/18 Obreskov reported with even more relief: “The Porte, having apparently become reassured that the war in Europe was due only to the Prussian king, begins to look at all the military actions in Europe with indifference and calmness, without calling on me or any other of the involved [foreign] ministers.” Obreskov noted that the Porte was still concerned about potential spread of war into Poland but only because it was afraid of being drawn into the conflict in that case. The *reis efendi* inquired with Vergennes if the Russian troops had already entered Polish territory and if they would pass through Warsaw. The *reis efendi* wanted to make sure that Poland would be untouched by the war because the Porte was concerned that disturbances in Poland could affect Ottoman territory, as had been the case during the time of the Swedish king Charles XII. Vergennes replied that the Russian troops would soon enter Poland, if they have not entered yet. He did not know, however, if they would pass through Warsaw. The Porte did not follow up on Vergennes’ response in any way. In this connection, Obreskov advised his government not to be astounded by the Porte’s newfound docility and good behavior, compared to September, “for the Turks always receive every new impression with the greatest fervor, which dissipates with time.” Moreover, the Porte’s interest was dampened by the report of Frederick’s failure to occupy Bohemia for the winter. In addition, Obreskov believed that his firm response in late September that the Russian Empress would not

⁹⁷⁰ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 359-359ob.

change her plans persuaded the Porte that it could not interfere in Polish matters any longer without running the risk of alienating the Russian court. Obreskov also kept up efforts to keep the Ottoman public informed about upcoming developments through appropriate channels, in order to forestall potential surprise and negative interpretations.⁹⁷¹

Obreskov could also report on the failure of the English and Prussian representatives to draw the Ottoman court to their side. Obreskov knew through his secret channels, for example, that ambassador Porter stopped advocating the Ottoman-Prussian friendship due to complete lack of a favorable response. Vergennes shared with Obreskov on December 2/13 that Porter had tried to approach the Porte about the subject, as the *reis efendi* personally informed Vergennes and the Swedish resident. However, the *reis efendi* assured Vergennes and Celsing that the Porte firmly declined the English suggestion because it could never be so unscrupulous as to take advantage of the difficult circumstances of its neighbors in such a way. Obreskov was not the one to believe such far-fetched oaths, suspecting that if the Porte decided not to ally with Prussia, it also did not truly plan to cooperate with any other nation. England's lack of success was apparent also in the departure in late November of the secret gentleman—rumored to be a Prussian agent—who had come in September to the English ambassador.⁹⁷² Obreskov reported that Sweden was not likely to help Frederick because it was as aggravated by Prussia as were other nations.⁹⁷³

Obreskov concluded his assessment of the existing diplomatic setting with an encouragement of his court: “You can see that the Porte will not hinder [our] backing the

⁹⁷¹ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 363-364.

⁹⁷² Agent Varennes had received a letter with a black seal from Constantinople, which Obreskov confirmed as belonging to the Swedish resident. The latter claimed that Varennes had sought his assistance but Celsing wrote back with a refusal. Resident Celsing was trying to avoid falling into the same trap. He had once received the strongest reprimand from his government in 1755 when he trusted the Prussian emissary von Regin's assurances that the Swedish government was fully cognizant and supportive of his secret mission at the Porte as Frederick's agent. Regin posed as a Swedish army officer and Celsing proceeded to present him and his project of the Ottoman-Prussian commercial treaty to the Porte assuming that his new instructions from Stockholm would confirm Regin's claims. Needless to say, the Swedish government was furious. Murphy, p. 113-114.

⁹⁷³ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 364-364ob. Sweden joined the anti-Prussian alliance in 1757.

Prussian king into a corner, especially since I, Vergennes, and Schwachheim all convey that the [Russian] relief force is going more in order to free the hereditary lands of His Polish Royal Majesty, whose plight the Porte sympathizes with. The allied diplomats also tried to convince the Porte that were the Prussian king to meet the Russian force on Polish territory and start a war there, St. Petersburg would provide the Porte with letters of the Polish king or at least several notable Polish magnates in which the Poles would formally ask Russia for help.⁹⁷⁴

The end of 1756 was very auspicious for Obreskov and Russian interests at the Porte. The situation at the border was calm. In addition, the Russian resident reported that since November 10/21 the grand vizier Mustafa Paşa was on the verge of being deposed—and all because of the public backlash against the Danish commercial treaty, which was rumored to have been a result of bribes.⁹⁷⁵ Luckily for Russia, the next grand vizier turned out to be one of the most erudite and respectable Ottoman statesmen of the eighteenth century, who worked hard to keep the Porte out of the war.⁹⁷⁶ Obreskov characterized him as “honest, good-natured, just, and incorruptible” and noted that there could not be a worthier and more fitting candidate for the post of grand vizier. It

⁹⁷⁴ 90.1.375.1756, LL. 392-392ob.

⁹⁷⁵ According to Obreskov, Çorlulu Mustafa Paşa lost all credit after November 10 when the sultan clamped down on select members of his close circle. Osman III had been walking around Constantinople incognito when he heard public criticism of the *Kazasker* of Rumelia and the sultan’s first chaplain Osman Mullah for authoring the treaty with Denmark. Osman Mullah was criticized for pocketing extravagant bribes from the Danes and for meddling in political affairs in the first place, which was a job not of a cleric but of the grand vizier and his ministers. Osman III sent Osman Mullah into exile to Egypt and almost also deposed the grand vizier, if not for the intercession of the *Mufti*. As a result, Mustafa Paşa lost all credit at the court: the sultan several times returned his reports without a resolution or with resolutions that were diametrically opposed to the grand vizier’s opinion. Therefore, ever since November 10 the entire Ottoman administration considered Mustafa Paşa de facto deposed, and the grand vizier himself was of the same opinion and decried his misfortune of becoming a grand vizier. Judging by public opinion, however, Obreskov was concerned that the chief opponent of Mustafa Paşa, *Nişancı* Abdi Efendi, who as *reis efendi* had fueled the conflict with Russia over the Fortress of St. Elizabeth, would become the next grand vizier. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 393-393ob.

⁹⁷⁶ Koca Ragıb had a wide range of experience: military service, work in the bureaucracy, provincial administration, and diplomatic representation. He had negotiated with the Russians at the unsuccessful congress at Nemirov in 1737 and served as *reis efendi* in 1741. Koca Ragıb served as the grand vizier for a substantial period—much longer than the majority of other grand viziers in the eighteenth century—from January 11, 1757 until his death from a protracted illness on April 7, 1763. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 7-9, 65, 67. See also Norman Itzkowitz’s dissertation: “Mehmed Raghib Pasha: The Making of an Ottoman Grand Vezir,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1959).

was especially important that during Ragıb Paşa's tenure as *reis efendi* in 1741-1744, he had opposed Prussian efforts to sign an alliance with the Porte.⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷⁷ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 342.

Chapter 10. Containing Mustafa III

The year 1756 ended in the triumph of the new anti-Prussian coalition in keeping the Porte away from becoming involved in the European war, either diplomatically or militarily. However, over the following six years, the Ottomans would vacillate between caution and military adventurism. Frederick II was consistent and enterprising in his attempts to ally with the Ottoman Empire. His arguments were crafty and convincing: the Porte could easily take back Hapsburg Hungary, or perhaps Russian Ukraine, because its neighbors left their borders unprotected. But arguments were insufficient. The careful and generally pacific grand vizier, Koca Ragıb Paşa, devised tactics to dampen the sultan's zeal for a military campaign. However, periodic Prussian losses on the battlefield were the loudest arguments against the alliance with Frederick. Indeed, Ottoman dispositions—that of the elite and of the Constantinople public—ebbed and flowed depending on the news of battle outcomes. As mentioned above, Obreskov knew it all along: the position of the Porte would be determined by Frederick's military performance. Therefore, over the undulating course of the Seven Years' War Obreskov had to work hard to sabotage Prussian plans in the Ottoman Empire, even though he felt that the Porte would not enter the war barring some impulsive decision.

It became especially important to be on guard after the death of Osman III in fall 1757. The new sultan, Mustafa III, entertained dreams of acquiring glory on the battlefield. Once again, Obreskov, Vergennes, Schwachheim, Celsing, as well as their opponents—Porter and Rexin—had to adapt and respond to the change in rulers. Initially, Obreskov was uniformly upbeat about the new sultan Mustafa III, his grand vizier Koca Ragıb Paşa, the new *reis efendi* Abdi Efendi, and even the Crimean Khan. It was a rare coincidence that all the main Ottoman policymakers on

whose disposition depended Russo-Ottoman relations appeared to Obreskov to be reasonable, pacific, and lacking hatred for the Russians or other Europeans. The Russian resident probably wished that his job would always be so easy. But Obreskov proved to be overconfident in this conclusion. There was more nuance to the Ottoman government's position, which closely followed and immediately reacted to new developments in the European war theater. On the surface, however, the Porte managed to create the image of utmost goodwill towards Russia and Austria.

Ottoman Commitment to Peace: Osman III, Koca Ragıb Paşa, and Abdi Efendi

Russia's accession to the Treaty of Versailles in January 1757 worried the Porte. The latter knew about the negotiations earlier thanks to the intelligence coming from the Wallachian *voyvoda*. A special council at the turn of 1757 could not quite decide how the Porte should react. But on January 12, 1757 Koca Ragıb Paşa became the new grand vizier. Due to his earlier service he knew the situation in Europe and in Ottoman provinces.⁹⁷⁸ Obreskov's initial positive assessment of the grand vizier was correct: Ragıb Paşa proved to be a distinctly conciliatory Ottoman statesman. During their first meeting on March 9/20, the grand vizier asked Obreskov to pass his request to the Russian government not to violate Polish freedoms during the passage of Russian troops through Poland. Following the audience Obreskov wrote to St. Petersburg that the Porte did not only not oppose the passage of Russian troops through Poland, but even recognized it to be necessary. Ragıb Paşa, in his turn, began to study latest documents in order to determine what his policy would be in relation to the new European war. According to the

⁹⁷⁸ Indeed, Mustafa Paşa had a long service record both in the central administration and in the provinces. Moreover, he was acknowledged as an able and enthusiastic administrator wherever he went. He had served as *reis efendi* in the early 1740s. Itzkowitz, "Mehmed Raghıb Pasha," pp. 157-160.

information supplied by the scribes in the *reis efendi*'s chancellery, Obreskov learned that Ragıb Paşa came to the conclusion that Frederick II was to blame for the outbreak of the war. As a result, the grand vizier felt sympathy for August III and had a lot of understanding for Russia's decision to enter into the conflict.⁹⁷⁹

Thus, Ragıb Paşa decided not to interfere in the war, which promised to weaken the Porte's rivals. However, this did not mean that he thought that the Porte should not prepare militarily. For example, in summer 1757 he appointed to the Bosnian command the former grand vizier Yirmisekizzade, who knew the European situation and the Ottoman-Austrian border, having fought in a war himself. Starting in April 1757, serious military preparations began in the regions bordering Austria.⁹⁸⁰ But on the whole these measures carried only a precautionary character. In summer 1757, therefore, the anti-Prussian coalition in Europe was stronger than ever. In March Sweden had acceded to the Franco-Austrian convention and Obreskov was therefore on friendly terms not only with Schwachheim and Vergennes, but also with Celsing. Over the course of 1757 Obreskov maintained an even relationship with the Ottoman administration. The position of the Porte was consistent: while it aspired to maintain friendship with its neighbors, it also insisted that it wanted to see the neighboring republic of Poland free from outside interference in its domestic affairs. The scribes from the *reis efendi*'s chancellery informed Obreskov that Branicki and his partisans constantly communicated to the Porte through the Crimean Khan and the pasha of Hotin that Poland was in great danger of being oppressed by Russia. Branicki reportedly lamented that he and all the Polish patriots were on the brink of death, and only Ottoman help could protect them.⁹⁸¹

⁹⁷⁹ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 342-342.

⁹⁸⁰ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 50-51, 58-59.

⁹⁸¹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 2-3ob.

Obreskov argued that the Porte was concerned not so much about Poland but about its own fate. It was already quite discomfited and confused by the last years' developments. In addition, it was worried about Frederick II's losses and the growth of the anti-Prussian coalition because it meant that the war could soon come to an end and render the Porte the next target of the two neighboring empires. Obreskov explained that the Porte was judging the situation on the basis of peculiarities of its own system, according to which a successful war was bound to excite the military spirit of a state's subjects and require the same state to find a further object for attack. Therefore, according to Obreskov's secret informants, the Porte's foremost hope was to ensure that its neighbors were exhausted by the current war. Moreover, the Porte felt obliged to placate in some way its general population, which, "out of vulgarity and hatred towards Christians," wished to start a war. These concerns stood behind the Porte's continuing interest in Poland. It resolved to order the Crimean khan to send a skillful person to reside in Poland, where he would observe all actions of the Russians. Moreover, the khan had to sustain frequent contacts with the Poles who were faithful to the Porte.⁹⁸² Consequently, Obreskov suggested to St. Petersburg that the sooner the war was over the better because the Ottomans could develop a deeper interest in Prussia if the Porte saw that three great European powers, acting together, could not subdue the Prussian king.⁹⁸³

Despite the Ottoman concerns, Obreskov felt certain that the Porte was not planning to break peace with its European neighbors. He was not even worried about the Porte's order to repair all its fortifications on the borders with Russia and Hungary. All these fortifications were indeed, believed Obreskov, in need of basic repairs after years of neglect. The Porte sent several provincial workers to each site but paid particular attention to Ochakov, where it ordered to send

⁹⁸² 89.8.31.1757, LL. 3ob.-4.

⁹⁸³ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 348.

220 people on two ships, as well as eight ships with military ammunition. However, Obreskov remained unperturbed. He knew that the restoration works could not achieve much due to the approaching fall season and the small number of workers. Moreover, he was aware that poor oversight and corruption would plague the works: he knew of innumerable examples when superintendents collected money from workers arriving to the site in the morning in order to disband them for the day. He also believed that the Porte could not send more ammunition than it sent every year. As a result, he concluded that the recent orders were nothing else but the result of the afore-mentioned Ottoman concern to placate its war-hungry populace. Moreover, he thought that the grand vizier, in particular, desired to appear proactive about the defense of the empire. The Porte was not capable of an attack because of the poor internal condition and the officials' preoccupation with doing everything to stay in office rather than risk being dismissed, which happened frequently.⁹⁸⁴

Obreskov was confident that the Porte did not harbor any aggressive plans because the sultan himself firmly wished to preserve peace and friendship with all states. The scribes from the *reis efendi's* chancellery informed Obreskov that Osman III emphasized this point more than anything in his orders to the grand vizier.⁹⁸⁵ The latter firmly encouraged the sultan to do everything to maintain peace. Indeed, according to secret reports of the *kahya's* secretary, Koca Ragıb Paşa sent orders to the Crimean Khan and border pashas in Ochakov and Belgrade to restrain their subjects and subordinates from acting against the terms of peace treaties, good neighborliness, and the sultan's desire to preserve quiet. Being assured of the Porte's peaceful intentions, Obreskov decided not to demand explanation from the Porte regarding the dispatch of workers and planned repairs of border fortifications. He felt that it could be counterproductive

⁹⁸⁴ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 5-5ob.

⁹⁸⁵ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voına*, p. 348.

because the Porte might have thought that Russia felt threatened by the slightest move on its part. He also knew that the Porte could easily counter his demand by saying that the fortresses were in dire need of basic repairs, which should not cause umbrage to anyone. However, Obreskov promised the CFA to bring up the issue when it became necessary.⁹⁸⁶

It so happened that Obreskov had to raise the issue merely two weeks later, following a change in *reis efendis*. On August 24/September 4, dragoman Kallimaki visited the Russian mission, on the surface simply because he was visiting Büyükdere at the time. During the conversation, Obreskov mentioned that the situation at the border was very reassuring: both the Russian commanders and the Crimean khan strove to preserve peace. When Kallimaki responded by saying that the Porte had ordered everyone to keep peace and wanted to maintain friendship, Obreskov could not avoid bringing up the issue of the repair and fortification of border fortresses. He said that he was confident about the Porte's desire to keep peace but his court would start doubting Ottoman intentions if it received one more time news regarding the hurried refortification efforts. Obreskov declared that he understood the need to repair fortresses from time to time but it remained unclear to him why all the fortresses—from Hotin to Yenikale—were being repaired at the same time. The Porte should not behave as if it was threatened, said Obreskov to Kallimaki, for Russia was committed to peace.⁹⁸⁷

The dragoman encouraged Obreskov not to pay attention to the repairs: they were being done out of sheer necessity for the fortresses had almost disintegrated. Moreover, Kallimaki reminded Obreskov that due to the late start the works would not really reach completion. Obreskov responded that he was of the same opinion but because of the distance involved news reached both St. Petersburg and him in an exaggerated form that caused suspicions and could

⁹⁸⁶ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 5ob.-6ob.. 9-12ob.

⁹⁸⁷ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 21-25ob.

require the Russian government to take appropriate measures. Most importantly, cautioned Obreskov, the sly Prussian king could use this fact in his favor by falsely disseminating in Europe that the Porte was fortifying borders in order to assist him in the war. Obreskov, therefore, encouraged the Porte not to allow Frederick to potentially blacken its sentiments, if not in front of Russian, then in front of other European nations. “Having quite quickly glanced into my [Obreskov’s] eyes,” Kallimaki asked the Russian resident to forget about such possibility and promised to report the matter to the Ottoman government. Indeed, on August 30 Kallimaki communicated the Porte’s answer to Obreskov through the Russian dragoman Pinii. Reportedly, the *reis efendi* was taken aback by Obreskov’s daring to discuss Ottoman fortifications, and rather sternly wondered if the Russian resident did not know that each state had to protect its borders, especially at the time when all other states had mobilized their armies. Abdi Efendi reminded Obreskov that if any other state found itself in the Porte’s shoes, it would have moved 40,000-50,000 troops to the border during the passage of the Russian army through Poland. However, the Porte limited its response to a mere recommendation not to harass the Poles. Abdi Efendi finished his response by saying that when done with firm and sincere intentions no repairs or preparations could cause any umbrage.⁹⁸⁸

However, Obreskov learned that Abdi Efendi did not harbor any aggressive plans but simply carried out his responsibilities to the letter, with dedication to his role as a gatekeeper of Ottoman state interests. Scribes of the *reis efendi*’s secretary secretly reported to the Russian resident that the *reis efendi* absolutely did not want to offend Russia. Moreover, upon taking the office Abdi Efendi openly disapproved the plans to repair border fortresses and transport military ammunition there. After Kallimaki reported Obreskov’s complaint, Abdi Efendi had a consultation with the grand vizier and the kahya. The following day the Porte cancelled the

⁹⁸⁸ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 23-24ob.

shipment of ammunition and ordered to return all provisions to warehouses. In addition, the Porte ordered all commanders to make sure that people did not speak of war, for the common folk had for some time greatly entertained itself with conversations and discussions about war. Therefore, Obreskov could easily conclude that the Porte's sentiments were peaceful. In an utmost demonstration of his confidence, Obreskov decided to go against St. Petersburg's order N 11 and not present the grand vizier with a bribe: "No expenditure can bring the affairs of Your Imperial Majesty in a better condition than they are in now."⁹⁸⁹

Indeed, Obreskov was initially concerned about Abdi Efendi's appointment as *reis efendi* in August 1756. After all, Abdi Efendi had served as *reis efendi* between 1753 and 1755, during which time he relentlessly complained about the fortress of St. Elizabeth. Moreover, Obreskov feared that Abdi Efendi could become the new grand vizier after Mustafa Paşa, which could likely harm Russian interests. However, on August 9/20, Obreskov wrote that although Abdi Efendi had been haughty and vicious during his previous term in office to the point that no one could expect any friendliness or softness from him, he was nevertheless always true to the letter of every peace treaty. Obreskov claimed that he had had no issue with Abdi Efendi except for the matter of the fortress of St. Elizabeth. It was difficult to predict how Abdi Efendi would behave under new circumstances, but Obreskov felt hopeful that he would be able to establish good rapport with the new *reis efendi*. Obreskov based his hopes on his deliberate cultivation of Abdi Efendi during the latter's exile and unemployment, for the Russian resident knew that Turks greatly valued any small token of attention given to them in such times. Former officials in such circumstances kept count of everything in order to repay it later. Thus, Obreskov had made various minor gifts to Abdi Efendi who appeared very grateful for being honored at the time

⁹⁸⁹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 25-25ob.

when he could not do anything for the Russian resident. Obreskov hoped, albeit he could not be sure, that the new *reis efendi* would remember his kindness.⁹⁹⁰

In any case, Obreskov closely monitored Ottoman reactions to developments in Europe. In September 1757, for example, he noted that the news of the Russian capture of the Prussian fortress Memel made a substantial impression at the Porte. Contrary to St. Petersburg's concerns, however, both the Ottoman ministry and public at large did not speak disapprovingly of it. Rather, everyone was impressed that the Russians managed to take what the Ottomans considered the strongest fortification in that area of Prussia in such a short amount of time.⁹⁹¹ Otherwise, reported Obreskov, there was no other notable talk regarding European affairs. The Porte did keep track of them through its agent in Poland.⁹⁹² According to the scribes of the *reis efendi*'s secretary, the Ottoman spy wrote from Poland about Frederick's withdrawal from Bohemia back into Saxony, where he lacked provisions and was surrounded by the Austrian army, which succeeded in entering Silesia and capturing the fortress of Zittau. The spy also reported that after capturing Prussian fortresses on the Baltic, Memel and Pillava, the Russian general announced that in return for Frederick's tyranny of the Saxonians the Russian army would also oppress the Prussians. Local inhabitants wrote a letter to the Russian general, signed by their leading representatives, declaring their humble submission to Russian rule and the general's command. However, noted the Ottoman agent, the Russian army was plagued by severe diarrhea.⁹⁹³

⁹⁹⁰ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 18-18ob.

⁹⁹¹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 20-20ob.

⁹⁹² Demir mentions the same spy: pp. 55, 56.

⁹⁹³ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 26, 28-29.

Ottoman Border and Provincial Troubles

But in the fall of 1757 the Porte was also preoccupied with instability on the empire's eastern borders and in its Arab provinces. In general, disorder and threats to Ottoman rule in distant provinces were frequent occurrences. But Persian developments attracted Obreskov's attention because they could influence Ottoman foreign policy and, moreover, interested the Russian government. Thus, on August 9/20 Obreskov reported that a Persian corps belonging to Mohammad Hasan Khan⁹⁹⁴ violated the Ottoman border near Kars and other border towns and captured much Turkish cattle and property. It was rumored that Mohammad Hasan Khan was supported by the Russian empress in his plan to capture the Iranian throne. The Porte ordered the Kars and other border pashas to investigate the matter carefully and to demand that Mohammad Hasan Khan return all the captured property. The border pashas were also advised not to allow anyone from Persia to cross into Ottoman territory.⁹⁹⁵

This incident makes clear that the Porte did not want to react in an extreme way to disturbances in the east so as not to repeat the exhausting war that had ended just a decade ago. The new Ottoman maxim in relation to Iran was not to meddle into its domestic affairs,⁹⁹⁶ even though the French government hoped that in this way the Porte would be distracted from Prussia.⁹⁹⁷

Indeed, in September 1757 Vergennes shared with Obreskov intelligence from a certain French bishop in Baghdad. The bishop described the Persian Empire as being divided into four parts and four parties. The Afghan-born Azad Khan controlled the area from Isfahan to Turkish

⁹⁹⁴ The father of Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar, the future founder of Iran's Qajar dynasty.

⁹⁹⁵ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 7-7ob., 13-14.

⁹⁹⁶ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 7ob.-8.

⁹⁹⁷ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 69-70.

borders. Ahmed Shah, also an Afghan, controlled the Kandahar and Mashhad kingdoms. Khorasan Karim Khan was a Persian who controlled Shiraz, Kerman, and all the Persian Gulf. Finally, Magomet Usein Khan was also a Persian and controlled Gilan and the Caspian Sea littoral. Magomet Usein Khan had been considered the least powerful of the four Persian commanders, but in late May he suddenly attacked the army of Azad Khan at Kasbik and defeated him. According to the bishop, the Porte allowed him to enter the service of the local Ottoman pasha and to stay in Baghdad as long as his affairs required it.⁹⁹⁸

In his report to St. Petersburg, Obreskov analyzed Ottoman actions in relation to Azad Khan. He wrote that the first thought that could come to one's mind was that the Porte was set on participating in Persia's internal affairs by supporting Azad Khan against the latter's rival. However, he explained that this was a superficial impression. Based on his close familiarity with the situation in Constantinople, Obreskov concluded that the Porte would not interfere in Persian affairs. First, the sultan was known for his love of peace, which was so steadfast that he never wavered in it, although he could change his resolutions on all other matters. Secondly, almost all of Ottoman Asia was severely devastated by the tyranny and corruption of the pashas. As a result, the provinces bordering Persia were experiencing a severe famine. Moreover, the Porte's reassuring message to Azad Khan was but the usual language. In reality, the Porte's help would boil down to its protection and maintenance of Azad Khan, first with distinction, and thereafter with contempt, as was the case with all the earlier co-religionist shahs and pretenders. The fact that Azad Khan was transferred to distant Babylon also prompted Obreskov to suspect that the Porte did not plan to help him militarily, because this would have required his transfer to Kars, Erzerum, Mosul, or Van. It was possible, although very much a conjecture, that Azad Khan could have had followers in the southern part of Persia and therefore himself sought to go to

⁹⁹⁸ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 27ob., 30-33ob.

Babylon, from where he could cross into Persia easier. Obreskov noted that the Porte maintained great secrecy around Azad Khan and, therefore, the Russian resident could not officially inquire about the matter without the risk of exposing his secret channels, namely the secretary of the kahya. He planned to raise the issue when he received monthly mail from the border.⁹⁹⁹

Obreskov's reports demonstrate that the Ottoman government took measures to disperse the potential for a confrontation with Persia as much as possible by removing Persian fugitive khans away from the border. It could not afford to open a Pandora box of warfare on its eastern frontier, especially while it continued to be concerned about Russian military presence in Poland, close to the Ottoman land border.

Likewise, the Porte was in no position to crack down on rebellious Arabs in its distant provinces. As a result, it had to effectively stand by when the Arabs attacked a large caravan of pilgrims returning from Mecca near Damascus, capturing rich treasures such as Indian goods and killing or dooming to hungry death in the steppe about 60,000 people. Obreskov reported on this incident on December 10/21, noting that the Porte was highly interested in keeping the news secret in fear of public disturbances in the capital, which could be especially dangerous upon Osman III's death. The Ottoman government learned of the attack just a few days before the sultan died on October 19/30 and managed to conceal it from the public until November 12/23. However, on that day the news became public because it was the holiday of Mevlid ("Mevlet"), or the prophet Muhammad's birthday, by which time 8,000 of the pilgrims who hailed from Constantinople were expected to have arrived. The Ottoman public learned that the Arabs managed to destroy the caravan completely in three days, despite the presence of a 12,000-strong

⁹⁹⁹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 34ob.-36. On November 10/21, Obreskov reported that in the middle of October Ottoman authorities learned that another Persian refugee khan crossed into Ottoman territory. Mirza Siam had escaped through Georgia and arrived in the town of Çıldır with approximately 1,000 soldiers. It was rumored that he was a son of "Tahmas Kuly Khan" and, therefore, a Safavid heir. The Porte ordered to transfer all of them to Sinop and treat them with appropriate regard. 89.8.31.1757, L. 54ob.

force of the Pasha of Damascus and the approach of a 4,000-strong force of the Pasha of Saida, who was bringing provisions for the pilgrims.¹⁰⁰⁰

The new sultan expressed unspeakable sorrow and vowed to avenge the deaths. The scribes of the *reis efendi*'s chancellery informed Obreskov that the first council of religious and military leaders at the Porte produced a general decision to respond with force by appointing four armies to attack the Arab bandits from Babylon, Damascus, Aleppo, and Egypt, respectively. The Ottoman troops had to eradicate the Arabs or at least to cut down the date groves, which served both as the Arabs' shelter and their staple food—they consumed dates instead of bread. However, members of the council subsequently considered wider circumstances such as the great distance of that province from the center; lack of inhabitants in nearby provinces; complete shortage of food and military provisions; endless steppes; total lack of water; peculiarity of the Arab's nomadic lifestyle which, together with the lightness of their horses, made them hard to pursue for the Turkish cavalry. As a result, they concluded that it was impossible to apply force in those circumstances. Instead, they devised a crafty solution: the Porte would instruct the pashas of Babylon, Damascus, Saida, and Aleppo to pretend to be making strong military preparations and to publicize them widely; in the meantime, the pashas had to persuade several sheikhs to cooperate with the government and to convince their followers to be obedient; each pasha would receive 70,000 levki for the task. Obreskov added that in his opinion the Porte chose the best possible solution that would hopefully allow it to reach its objective more easily.¹⁰⁰¹

¹⁰⁰⁰ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 79-80.

¹⁰⁰¹ He also reported that the Porte resorted to its usual tactic of dispelling public discontent by finding scapegoats. This time, the luck of the draw fell on the exiled *Kızlar Ağası*, who was taken off of the ship heading for Egypt in the Dardanelles, or the Hellespont watchtowers, and whose severed head was exhibited on November 15/26 in the first courtyard of the Topkapı Palace with the following note: "The one who puts his whimsies ahead of state interest will face similar retribution." The government accused him of orchestrating a replacement of the Damascus pasha, who was adept at preserving peaceful relations with the Arabs, with his own protégé, who turned out to be maladroit

Koca Ragıb Paşa's Influence on Mustafa III

On October 19/30 and October 23/November 3 1757, Obreskov sent special reports to St. Petersburg through Vienna. He reported that Sultan Osman III had died soon after midnight on October 19 and by the morning of the same day his successor, Mustafa III, assumed the throne.¹⁰⁰² Naturally, it was important to determine if the new sultan would keep to the pacific course or initiate a more aggressive policy. Obreskov's conclusion was comforting: the young sultan looked to his grand vizier, the same Koca Ragıb Paşa, for advice on foreign policy. Therefore, St. Petersburg could rest assured that the Porte would not violate mutual friendship, wrote Obreskov. The resident believed that the change in sultans would not influence the Porte's policy towards Europe.

and thoughtlessly irritated the Arabs. 89.8.31.1757, LL. 80-82ob. Itzkowitz describes this incident as an example of Koca Ragıb Paşa's skill in getting rid of his foremost rival, although the new governor of Damascus had indeed been a protégé of the deposed *Kızlar Ağası*. The new governor failed to pay customary bribes to the Bedouin tribal chiefs, in return for which the tribes abstained from plundering the pilgrim caravans for the entire first half of the eighteenth century. Itzkowitz, "Mehmed Raghıb Pasha," pp. 150-154.

¹⁰⁰² This is how Obreskov described Osman III's legacy and Mustafa III's assumption of power: Osman III was born in 1696 and spent almost his entire life in confinement, namely after 1703. On December 2, 1754 he ascended the throne, but in June 1757 he began to suffer with his stomach and despite some progress in treatment, he relapsed in early September as a result of eating prohibited foods. He managed to continue to appear in public on usual occasions, such as on October 16, when he observed from his tent the arrival of *Kapudan Paşa's* fleet from the Archipelago into the Constantinople port. Afterwards, however, he became so weak that he could not make an appearance the following Friday morning, on which days sultans were expected to attend mosques. Finally, he died right after midnight between October 18 and October 19. Obreskov characterized Osman III's rule as producing nothing worthy of notice. The late sultan had a fickle temperament but otherwise was a benevolent person who hated bloodshed. His actions indicated his great desire to provide his subjects with prosperous life, however he did not know how to achieve this goal. Moreover, because he violated the norms of behavior usually observed by Asian rulers, he incurred public contempt to the point that almost no one regretted his death.

Osman III's successor was Mustafa III, the eldest son of the late Ahmed III who had been deposed in 1730. Mustafa was born in late 1717, or in the month of Sefir 1129 of the Muslim calendar. (Conversion of Sefir/Safar 1129 into Julian calendar produces January 4-31, 1717, so Obreskov's dating of Mustafa's birth was slightly wrong, unless he missed the word "January.") He assumed the throne the very morning after Osman's death, at dawn on October 19, an hour before Osman's body was interred in the mosque complex where his predecessor, Mahmud I, was also resting. Mustafa's sultanate was announced in the city through cannon fire. On October 21, couriers departed the capital to announce his ascension to the throne to all provincial pashas. The same day Koca Ragıb Paşa received the seal containing the new sultan's signature. On October 23 the ceremony of the girding of the new sultan with the sword of the founder of the Ottoman dynasty took place. Obreskov had not yet seen the new sultan yet but he heard that the forty-year-old Mustafa was short in stature, skinny, delicate, asthenic, and his face color looked quite unhealthy, which prompted many to doubt whether Mustafa's life would be long. 89.8.31.1757, LL. 54, 64-64ob., 65ob. However, Mustafa III ruled for seventeen years.

By November 10/21, Obreskov concluded, however, that even if Mustafa III had hostile ambitions, he would not be able to realize them at least until 1759, for the same reasons that Obreskov had listed a year earlier. In addition, Obreskov had some time to observe the behavior of the new sultan and concluded, with satisfaction, that Mustafa III was smart, reasonable, and mild-tempered, which promised to render his reign quiet and peaceful. The Russian government carefully registered all of this information. Upon delivery on December 19, Obreskov's latest reports were immediately sent to the grand chancellor. Later, they were discussed at the meetings of the Imperial Conference, from where they were returned to the CFA on December 31, 1757. Members of the secret military council were also presented with a reminder of the contents of Obreskov's earlier report from November 1756, in which he had argued that the Porte needed at least two years to mobilize its army for war.¹⁰⁰³

Obreskov continued his description of Mustafa III with examples of the latter's peaceful disposition. Immediately after ascending the throne, the new sultan confirmed Koca Ragıb Paşa in his position as the grand vizier and sent him his personal orders, which made obvious the sultan's peaceful sentiments. Namely, in his first *hatt-ı şerifs*, or personal orders, Mustafa III ordered to pick good-natured and moderate individuals for the task of informing neighboring foreign courts about his assumption of the throne. He also ordered to send strict instructions to border governors and the Crimean Khan to keep good order on the borders with Christian nations. Mustafa III likewise charged the grand vizier with assuring all friendly powers, especially neighboring ones, that the new sultan intended to comply with the conditions of the peace treaties. The sultan also asked the grand vizier to report to him on the condition of border fortresses, as well as intentions, actions, condition, and qualities of neighboring countries, their disagreements and objectives. Finally, Mustafa III put a stop to any measures concerning Persian

¹⁰⁰³ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 52-52ob.

internal affairs. Instead, he cautioned the grand vizier to carefully observe Persian developments, make timely payments of salary to troops guarding the border, and to replace border governors with more skillful and worthy individuals if needed.¹⁰⁰⁴

Koca Ragıb Paşa soon presented the sultan with his analysis of the condition and sentiments of European nations and Persia. This example of Koca Ragıb’s political thinking demonstrates his astuteness and intelligence. In his description of each separate nation, Koca Ragıb usefully twisted facts so as to confirm the sultan in his intention to keep his empire out of the war. He started with the general picture: “Besides the conflict between France and England,” he wrote, “all Christian nations that were friendly to the Porte, excluding only the republics, were involved in a conflict with the Prussian king, a German elector. And because Christian rulers considered and respected the Prussian king as a skillful warrior, the French, Austrian, and Russian empires took measures to unite and recently concluded alliance treaties, which, they assured the Porte, contained nothing that was offensive to its interests.”¹⁰⁰⁵

Concerning France, Koca Ragıb noted that it was the oldest friend of the Porte and was respected by other Christian nations. Without any trace of the Porte’s resentment about the two Treaties of Versailles, Koca Ragıb proceeded to praise France’s constant sincere gestures aimed at increasing the glory and honor of the Porte. He concluded his characterization of France by highlighting that “The French court is friendly, and is a necessary instrument for settling affairs that happen between the Sublime Porte and its neighboring states.” The English, on the contrary, met with Koca Ragıb’s disapproval, but not for their alliance with Frederick. England was similarly respected among Christian nations and used to be a friend to the Porte. “However, it [the English court] did not refrain from uniting and signing articles of alliance with the Sublime

¹⁰⁰⁴ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 52ob., 58-59ob.

¹⁰⁰⁵ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 53, 60.

Porte's neighboring states." With subdued sarcasm and a glaring omission of France, Koca Ragıb explained that now that the Porte's neighboring states had recently united and signed an alliance treaty, the English became upset and started to desire friendship with the Porte and began to make greater efforts to prove and reassure the Ottoman government about its sincerity and consideration, which it promised to continue to show henceforth.¹⁰⁰⁶

The most ironic, in hindsight, characterization was applied by Koca Ragıb to Austria. He wrote that the Austrian court used to be considered a great Christian state, but for some time now it began to decline. At the moment, noted Koca Ragıb, Austria was devoting all its energies to protecting itself from an enemy force. The implication was that Austria's weakness rendered it peaceful and friendly towards the Ottoman Empire. Koca Ragıb underscored that Vienna carefully and diligently observed the peace treaty and acted respectfully on every occasion, asking the Porte to respect the treaty and continue living in mutual harmony. As for Russia, Koca Ragıb wrote: "The Russian court is now one of the great Christian states, but because it avidly desires to acquire greater regard and to be considered one of the greatest powers, it tries to increase its standing every day and acts haughtily and with little respect; however, due to the currently reigning empress's peace-loving sentiments and desire of tranquility, the aforementioned court has so far observed the articles concerning the sacred peace treaties, and always tried to settle issues that happened between the two empires." The grand vizier concluded by saying that the current state of relations with Russia was that of peace and accord.¹⁰⁰⁷

Next, Koca Ragıb turned his attention to the Polish Republic. His stance towards this northern neighbor is highly significant because it explained the Porte's view of its relationship with Poland as that of protector and protégé. Koca Ragıb wrote: "The Polish republic is under

¹⁰⁰⁶ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 60ob.-61.

¹⁰⁰⁷ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 61-62.

the protection of the Sublime Porte, and because all [Polish] noblemen know and are aware that the preservation of their freedom depends on the Sublime Porte, it [the republic] acts sincerely and loyally, making its best effort to coordinate [its actions] with the intention of the Sublime Porte, and also reliably complies with and observes articles of peace, and always seeks [Ottoman] help and continuation of the imperial protection.”¹⁰⁰⁸ The fact that Mustafa III early in his reign learned to think of Poland in Koca Ragib’s terms explains his later attitude to Polish affairs, which significantly contributed to the outbreak of war between the Porte and Russia in 1768.

And, lastly, Koca Ragib covered the state of the Persian Empire. He described it as being consumed by confusion and discord, plagued by different opinions and consequent dissension, which promised to ruin the state. True Sunnites gravitated significantly towards the Porte, while trying to assure and restore their state rights. Two leading khans had already fled to the Ottoman Empire in hopes of acquiring the protection of the Porte. Overall, Persians had diligently observed a respectful attitude towards the Porte until last year, when heretic commanders’ influence increased and they began to inflict harm on Ottoman lands. Koca Ragib concluded by noting that Ottoman border governors had orders to repel their attacks.¹⁰⁰⁹

Obreskov acquired a copy of the grand vizier’s memorandum from the scribes of the *reis efendi*’s chancellery and immediately sent its translation to St. Petersburg.¹⁰¹⁰ He expounded on Koca Ragib’s assessment of Russia by noting that although the grand vizier underscored Russia’s love of glory and haughtiness, ultimately the Ottoman statesman gave justice to the empress’s peace-loving sentiments and unfaltering efforts to observe treaties, as well as cooperation in settling border issues. Therefore, judged Obreskov, the grand vizier’s foremost

¹⁰⁰⁸ 89.8.31.1757, L. 62.

¹⁰⁰⁹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 62ob.-63.

¹⁰¹⁰ Uğur Demir, who has researched this period in Ottoman history, does not mention this report.

message to the sultan regarding Russia was to eschew antagonizing St. Petersburg. At the same time, Koca Ragıb assured Mustafa III that the Russian empress's known sentiments promised that the Porte was not in danger from its northern neighbor. Obreskov believed that this “intelligent and equally just” assessment of Russia by the grand vizier would leave due impression on the new and still clueless monarch, especially because it appeared that the sultan held the grand vizier's merit and prudence in high regard. Indeed, Mustafa III entrusted almost the entire power to administer state affairs to Koca Ragıb. In turn, the grand vizier—being a sensible man—acted so judiciously that he won universal praise and love.¹⁰¹¹

Obreskov concluded his secret report from November 10/21 with the latest Ottoman reactions to the progress of war in Europe. Obreskov shared that during the chief dragoman's visit, upon announcing the new sultan's accession to the throne, Kallimaki read out a note from the Porte, in which the Ottoman government asked for clarification regarding recent reports, brought by those who accompanied the last Russian couriers, that the Russian army had established winter quarters not only in the north and inside Poland but even near Kamenets Podolskii. Obreskov realized that the Porte was both mocking the latest retreat of the Russian army, which was exaggerated by the Prussian and English representatives, and also expressing concern about Russian positions in Poland being too close to Ottoman territory. Consequently, he explained to Kallimaki that the Russian army had returned to its headquarters and disproved the report of the establishment of winter quarters in Poland. His response was confirmed by news coming from various directions to the Porte that the entire Russian army had retreated to Semigallia.¹⁰¹²

¹⁰¹¹ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 53-54.

¹⁰¹² 89.8.31.1757, LL. 55ob.-56ob.

In the last report of the year, on December 10/21, Obreskov once again praised the sultan's behavior. Day by day, wrote Obreskov, the entire Ottoman society was growing more appreciative of the sultan's prudence and humanity. Some people thought that this was a result of the grand vizier's wise advice, but Obreskov could not feel certain about it until the grand vizier was replaced by someone else. The Russian resident noted, however, that if the sultan indeed followed the grand vizier's advice, the sultan must be credited as not devoid of virtue for having recognized his own lack of experience and knowledge and allowing himself to be led by a skillful, diligent, and reasonable minister. Obreskov declared complete confidence in the sultan's peaceful intentions towards Russia and other neighbors, based on firm assurances from the Porte and other signs, such as the sultan's personal order to the Crimean Khan to observe the conditions of the peace treaty and to assist Russian subjects in their trade and other matters. The Porte also instructed all border governors—those of Bender, Hotin, Kefe, Belgrade, Vidin, Bosnia, and others—to preserve peace. And, finally, Obreskov felt deeply convinced by Koca Ragıb's personal pledge, made during the Russian resident's official audience at the Porte, that the Ottoman government wholeheartedly believed in Russia's peaceful sentiments and the sultan sincerely wished to maintain friendship and observe the peace treaty. Koca Ragıb Paşa also complimented Obreskov for his astute behavior and diligent efforts, for which the flattered Obreskov thanked him.¹⁰¹³

Obreskov's assessment of Koca Ragıb Paşa's influence on the new sultan was correct. Koca Ragıb managed to rescue the grand vizierate from its long—half-a-century—dependence on the *Kızlar Ağas*. By April 1758, when he married the sultan's sister, Koca Ragıb made his

¹⁰¹³ 89.8.31.1757, LL. 82ob.-86. This was perhaps an exceptional instance of a grand vizier's praise of a Russian resident, for which Koca Ragıb Paşa might easily be called the most diplomatic grand vizier of the eighteenth century.

grand vizierate the true locus of power, as opposed to the palace.¹⁰¹⁴ This explains the grand vizier's later success in containing the sultan's war proclivities.

Mustafa III's Responsiveness to Prussian Intrigues

Obreskov's sense of calm about the Porte's peaceful intensions soon had to give way to vigilance, because it turned out that Mustafa III hoped to become famous for successful military exploits. Frederick II's persistent efforts to sign a defensive alliance with the Porte from 1757 to 1762 encouraged the sultan in his sentiments. As a result, towards the end of the war—in spring 1762—Mustafa III was ready to march to Edirne with the Janissaries. But the grand vizier Koca Ragıb opposed the war party in Istanbul until his death in April 1763 and denied that the Porte was about to declare war. Koca Ragıb Paşa became especially disinterested in Prussia after the Russian-Prussian rapprochement. Catherine II's coup in Russia only confirmed him in his position: by October 1762 Koca Ragıb rejected the alliance altogether.¹⁰¹⁵

But over the course of the war there were many moments when the grand vizier had trouble containing the military adventurism of Mustafa III and the Ottoman public. Whenever Austria experienced defeats by Prussia, the sultan's yearning for war reappeared. The unofficial Prussian representative Rexin encouraged the Porte to join in the war, with the goal of capturing Hungary.¹⁰¹⁶ Prussia also encouraged the Porte to mobilize the Tatars so as to threaten Russia. The English ambassador Porter also stressed that Austrian and Russian border defenses were

¹⁰¹⁴ Itzkowitz, "Mehmed Raghıb Pasha," pp. 154-156.

¹⁰¹⁵ Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰¹⁶ Frederick II forwarded very specific advice to the Porte through Rexin. He recommended making military preparations at Belgrade and Orşova. Temesvar could be conquered in fourteen days. If done in time, a campaign could also bring Varadin and Budin back into the Ottoman fold. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 67-69.

weakened and the Porte could attack one of them.¹⁰¹⁷ At the same time, Mustafa III began to express his poor opinion of the Hapsburg Empire, calling it “a cadaver that was kept alive only with France’s help.”¹⁰¹⁸

France, Austria, and Russia applied determined efforts to keep the Ottomans out of the war. But while in fall 1757 Prussian defeats kept the anti-war camp strong, Prussian victories in 1758 helped turn the Ottoman public opinion against the anti-Prussian alliance. Regin reported to his king that Constantinople coffeehouses were filled with cries “Brandenburg! Brandenburg!” The Porte began to discuss very secretively the possibility of taking part in the spring 1758 campaign. The grand vizier and *şeyhülislam* Mehmed Salih Efendi (January 26, 1758-June 30, 1761) were against the idea. They pointed out that the empire first had to extinguish rebellions in Anatolia and Arab provinces. Moreover, war against Austria or Russia also meant war with France and Sweden. Koca Ragıb Paşa resisted recognizing Regin as official Prussian representative and tried to conceal from other foreign ambassadors that the Porte had started talks about an alliance with Prussia. However, the Porte was still wary about joining Prussia, because it knew that all warring parties were preparing for a much more intense campaign in 1758.¹⁰¹⁹ Therefore, Obreskov had been right in 1756 and 1757 when he explained to St. Petersburg that the Porte was not ready for the war militarily and that it required at least two years to get ready.

¹⁰¹⁷ England would later abstain from trying to involve the Porte into the war but in early 1758 it wanted in this way to decrease the negative effect of the Prussian heavy loss to Austria near Prague in June 1757. Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” p. 69, fn. 291.

¹⁰¹⁸ Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” p. 69. It should be remembered—as noted above—that Koca Ragıb Paşa had described the Hapsburg Empire as a declining empire in his first report to the new sultan in fall 1757. 89.8.31.1757, LL. 61-62. Therefore, the sultan’s description of Austria was, in part or in whole, the result of the grand vizier’s influence. Importantly, this assessment was not too far removed from a modern historian’s description of the Habsburgs: “With its far-flung, exposed, and poorly integrated lands, by the eighteenth century the Habsburg empire was already Europe’s congenital hemophiliac.” Dyck, “New Serbia,” p. 17.

¹⁰¹⁹ Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” pp. 69-72.

However, in 1758 Mustafa III began active military preparations. Prussia's victories in spring 1758 encouraged the sultan: he ceaselessly issued orders to build and repair ships and drill the army. Fortresses on the borders with Austria and Russia also began to see preparations. Mustafa III sought religious legitimation to start a war, but the *şeyhülislam* declined. However, the sultan continued preparations anyway. This intense activity gradually petered out starting in August 1758. Ottoman sources do not provide a clear explanation but circumstantial evidence and various foreign diplomats' reports point to the grand vizier's success in distracting the sultan from the war by channeling the sultan's energies into public works and architecture projects in Constantinople, Edirne, and even the Izmit-Sapanca channel. Some of these projects were vital for the state: the threat of drought in Anatolia and, from March 1758, in Constantinople caused public dissatisfaction and required the sultan to attempt to find a solution, hence the channel project. All of these initiatives, however, were very costly and certainly distracted Mustafa III from foreign policy.

Thus, although at first members of the anti-Prussian alliance became very worried and Austria even sent part of its troops back to man the Ottoman border, by fall 1758 the Porte appeared pacific again. Some diplomats, such as the Venetian *bailo*, did not think from the start that these were preparations for war. Now, the Porte explained to the concerned diplomats that the earlier efforts merely had the goal of supplying the border region with essential provisions. Demir argues that the Porte was not ready to enter the war because it did not want to attack Austria or Russia while the latter were allied with France and Sweden. Moreover, England stopped to advocate the Ottoman entry into the war. And, finally, the Porte learned that the

belligerents had started peace talks, which would have rendered any Ottoman actions belated and risky.¹⁰²⁰

But when the Porte learned of the December 30, 1758 Treaty of Versailles, the grand vizier became very displeased with France. The Ottomans were particularly concerned about France's pledge to support Austria's right to retain all conquered territories, because Porter and Rexin convinced the Porte that this clause also concerned the border territory between Austria and the Ottoman Empire. The Porte, therefore, reopened alliance negotiations with Prussia, but the grand vizier wanted England to participate as well, or at least to be the guarantor of the alliance and to recognize Ottoman possession of Hungary if the Porte conquered the latter. England, however, could not put its commercial interests in Russia in danger and declined to be part of the alliance in any way. Frederick's defeat at Kunersdorf in August 1759 further sabotaged the talks.¹⁰²¹

The years 1760-1761 proved to be equally uncertain for the anti-Prussian alliance at the Porte. After Porter expressed England's interests in the Ottoman-Prussian alliance in February 1760, the sultan immediately called a consultative council at the grand vizier's residence, in order to discuss advantages and disadvantages of such an alliance. The general opinion was that the alliance would be useful to both Prussia and the Porte. However, the grand vizier tried to undermine negotiations with Prussia by pointing out that peace negotiations could be still going on in the Hague, as well as the fact that England did not wish to serve as the guarantor of the alliance with Prussia. Frederick II, however, was relentless in his efforts: he really wanted to sign the alliance before the summer of 1760. He argued that if Russia and Austria defeated Prussia again in summer 1760, this would be detrimental to the Porte, for Frederick did not in the least

¹⁰²⁰ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 72-80.

¹⁰²¹ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 80-85.

doubt that after Austria and Russia defeated him, they would turn their attention to the Ottoman Empire. The Porte and Prussia were close to signing the alliance in May 1760, but, once again, England's refusal to serve as the guarantor, and later Prussian military defeats in summer 1760 led the negotiations into a deadlock.¹⁰²²

It was the disastrous Prussian loss at Landeshut in January 1760, argues Demir, that influenced the Porte's position concerning the Prussian alliance proposal. The grand vizier and the *şeyhülislam*¹⁰²³ were the foremost opponents of the alliance. However, after Prussia prevailed at Liegnitz in August 1760, the Ottoman government changed its outlook once again. As a result, the Porte and Prussia opened negotiations for a treaty of trade and friendship. Even though the grand vizier still did not like the idea, increasing opposition, criticism, and even threats forced him to succumb to popular pressure. In fact, the sultan and many officials wanted to sign an alliance treaty, but the opposition of the grand vizier and the ulema prevented this. After both sides took all the necessary steps between April and July 1761, the Prusso-Ottoman treaty of trade and friendship came into force on July 27. Despite the fact that this treaty fell short of Frederick II's ambitions, Obreskov felt that its signing represented a negative development. Firstly, it strengthened Rexin's position, who was now officially recognized as Prussian representative. Secondly, Obreskov admitted that it was necessary for Russia to remain silent in order to forestall any further successes of Frederick's diplomacy in Constantinople. Otherwise, Russia's vocal opposition to the treaty could lead to a break in relations with the Porte. St.

¹⁰²² Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 93-94, 97-100, 102.

¹⁰²³ The same *şeyhülislam*, Veliyüddin Efendi, during his subsequent term in office would oppose—along with the grand vizier Muhsinzâde Mehmed Paşa—the Ottoman declaration of war against Russia in 1768. Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," p. 110, fn. 441.

Petersburg took Obreskov's opinion into consideration and remained silent in response to the news of the treaty.¹⁰²⁴

Indeed, Obreskov had been experiencing increasing challenges in relations with the Porte since early 1760, namely because of the escalation of tensions between the Tatars and the Cossacks. On the one hand, these issues had been long-standing and could be solved peacefully as before. On the other hand, Prussian intrigues threatened to turn the issue into a conflict between the two empires. The khan Kırım Giray complained that the Zaporozhian Cossacks attacked the Yedisian Nogay Tatars. In response, the Russian side accused the Porte of having recently settled these Tatars along the Dnieper, in close proximity to the Cossacks, therefore almost guaranteeing further conflicts between the two border peoples. In early 1760 Obreskov felt that he was successfully deflecting the khan's complaints, but the Porte remained suspicious and ordered the Hotin commander to investigate the border situation, including whether or not Russia had built anything new at the St. Elizabeth fortress. Ultimately, however, Obreskov was right in his assessment that the Porte did not want to escalate the conflict. The Ottoman government wanted both sides to settle the matter through a meeting between their representatives.¹⁰²⁵

But the disputes continued, and the following year the Kiev senior commander, Nikolai Chicherin, alerted Obreskov about the khan's appeals for the Russian government to cooperate with him in subduing the "Zaporozhian bandits." Chicherin also informed Obreskov about furtive Prussian activity in Crimea. However, Obreskov replied to Chicherin on September 2/13,

¹⁰²⁴ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 103-112.

¹⁰²⁵ Demir, "1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi," pp. 94-96; 89.8.39.1760. Kopii relitsii I vyderzhki iz relitsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova Elizavete I o postroiike stroeniia na Taganrogskoi zastava, o snosheniakh Turtsii s Damasskim I Egipetskim pashami I s Prussiei, o snosheniakh Krymskogo khana s Pol'shei I o zhalobe Krymskogo khana Porte na nabegi zaporozhskikh kazakov s prilozheniem vyderzhki iz "Konstantinopol'skikh vedomostei" ob otdache na otkup monastyrskikh dokhodov. February 7, 1760—November 3, year unknown. Arkhiv staryi, LL. 7-8, 13-13ob.; 90.1.414. 1761.

1761 that the Porte remained peacefully inclined. Obreskov disregarded as wishful thinking the talk of war among the Ottoman common folk following the Porte's order to send a small amount of some military ammunition to all border towns.¹⁰²⁶

Nevertheless, there was always a chance that the Porte would suddenly change its position. This much Obreskov had suggested in his report from February 5/16, 1760. At first, Obreskov assured St. Petersburg that the Ottoman government had not made any war preparations and appeared firmly intent on preserving peace with all its neighbors. In particular, the Porte was preoccupied with domestic issues and was not receptive to continuing Prussian attempts to incite it to war against Russia.¹⁰²⁷ As a result, the sultan issued an order that prohibited all Ottoman subjects from discussing state affairs or war under threat of capital punishment. Obreskov, with the *mufti*'s help, decided to capitalize on this order in order to remove Prussian agents from Constantinople, but obviously this effort proved unsuccessful.¹⁰²⁸ However, the death of the friendly *mufti* on February 5/16 presented a clear risk. According to Obreskov, the new *mufti*, Veli Efendi, was a furious hater of Christians, the main supporter of the sultan's military and other anti-Christian plans, as well as the chief enemy of the grand vizier. Obreskov had to warn St. Petersburg that the change of the *mufti* did not promise anything good.¹⁰²⁹

At the time of Empress Elizabeth's death in early 1762, Obreskov still faced the indomitable Prussian king's intrigues to involve the Porte in the war. Most importantly, Frederick aimed at using the Crimean khan to provoke a conflict between the Russian and

¹⁰²⁶ 90.1.414. 1761. Perepiska (s prilozheniem) rossiiskogo rezidenta v Konstantinopole A. M. Obreskova s Kievskim ober-komendantom N. Chicherinym o ego naznachenii ober-komendantom, o pogranichnykh delakh s Krymom I o denezhnykh raschetakh mezhdru kuptsami o peresylke korrespondentsii missii. Chast dokumentov shivrovana, LL. 2-6, 8-8ob., 11-11ob., 21.

¹⁰²⁷ In particular, the Porte faced insubordination from the new sheriff of Mecca. 89.8.39.1760, LL. 3-4.

¹⁰²⁸ 89.8.39.1760, LL. 4-5ob.

¹⁰²⁹ 89.8.39.1760, LL. 7-8. According to Demir, however, Veliyüddin Efendi opposed the war. Perhaps this accounts for Obreskov's positive prognosis in late 1761.

Ottoman Empires. Frederick also continuously reminded the Porte that its northern neighbor was a major threat to it. Thus, in December 1761 Frederick II once again suggested to sign an alliance treaty with the Porte, reminding the latter that the Austrian and Russian empires dreamed of creating an “Eastern Empire” with a center in Constantinople. He also encouraged Polish complaints against Russia. In response, France attempted to bring attention to border disputes between Poland and Crimea. Thereby, Versailles also hoped to distract the khan from making an attack on Russia.

Frederick countered by focusing his efforts on Crimea. Namely, upon Rexin’s advice, Frederick sent his representative, Boskamp,¹⁰³⁰ to Crimea in September 1761. Boskamp won influence with the khan and achieved the dispatch of the khan’s hairdresser, Mustafa Ağa, to Frederick. Mustafa Ağa met with Frederick in October and forwarded the khan’s offer. The khan said that if they could agree, the khan would help the king with 16,000 troops. The king was happy to accept it and sent Mustafa Ağa back, asking him to work with Boskamp. The king also sent one of his staff officers, a 22-year old Karl Alexander von der Goltz, to help the khan make military preparations. In December 1761 the khan sent his agent, Yakub Ağa, to Frederick, to express his interest in acting together and his being a fan of the king. The khan shared that in March 1762 he would attack Russia. To prepare the ground for the Porte’s support of his actions, the khan began to send complaints about Russia starting in October 1761. He again brought up the issue of the St. Elizabeth fortress, claiming that Russia had built new villages around it, which indicated that Russia wanted to spread its territory in the region. Rexin made corresponding announcements at the Porte.¹⁰³¹

¹⁰³⁰ The Prussian resident in Bahçesaray since 1761, Karol Boskamp used to serve as a courier of the Prussian envoy in Constantinople during the Seven Years War. Of Dutch or French origins, he later served the Polish Commonwealth as a diplomat in Constantinople.

¹⁰³¹ Demir, “1768 Savaşı Öncesi Osmanlı Diplomasisi,” pp. 124-137.

As a result, Crimea became a critical subject of Obreskov's reports. In this context, he must have been especially surprised by the change of foreign policy course in favor of Prussia under the new emperor, Peter III.

PART IV: Poland-Lithuania and Catherine II's First Ottoman War, 1762-74

The 1760s proved to be the most gripping period of Obreskov's residency. While on the whole the Russian resident felt in control of the situation, having become familiar with the Constantinople political scene, the ambitions of Russia's new rulers—first Peter III and then Catherine II—caused a fair amount of political upheaval in Russo-Ottoman relations and in the region as a whole. The end of the Seven Years' War was as revolutionary as its beginning: the unprecedented alliance between France and Austria gave way to an equally surprising rapprochement between Russia and Prussia. Obreskov's diplomatic activity was inseparable from the repercussions of this redrawing of the larger geopolitical map. As in 1756 with the French ambassador Vergennes, Obreskov found himself once again having to repair ties with his long-standing nemesis, the Prussian envoy Karl Adolf von Rexin. Similarly, Obreskov proceeded to do so in a very cautious fashion and remained consistently vigilant. But he had no other choice other than to learn to cooperate with his Prussian colleague, because the government of Catherine II chose the Prussian alliance for the sake of securing its dominant position in Poland-Lithuania. The latter project, however, brought Russia into a major conflict with the Ottoman Empire.

The conflict of interests over Poland-Lithuania was a direct result of mutual concerns about securing borderlands: subservient Poland-Lithuania represented a convenient buffer zone for Russia, which was cultivated since the time of Peter I, while the Porte was interested in an independent and, therefore, weak northern neighbor, in which neither Russia nor Austria would establish dominance. In the years following the death of the last Saxon king of Poland, August III, in October 1763 both the Russian and Ottoman governments made critical mistakes.

Catherine II and her ministers misread Polish political resolve and misjudged the value of the Prussian alliance. The strength of Ottoman resistance to the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski as the new king in 1764—the Porte did not recognize him for almost two years—should have warranted a more careful policy and, perhaps, further postponement of the dissidents' issue. Despite her utmost desire to avoid a conflict with the Ottoman Empire, Catherine's mounting heavy-handedness in Poland-Lithuania could not but raise deep concerns at the Porte. As a result, in 1768 aggressive elements in the Ottoman government, led by the sultan himself, succeeded in prevailing over the pacific party. By 1768 Obreskov lost a lot of political capital in Constantinople because Russian actions in Poland-Lithuania were contrary to the assurances he had given to the Ottoman government. He continued fighting to prevent the war but he was under no illusion that he would necessarily succeed.

On the other hand, the Porte made a mistake by readily agreeing by early 1764 to the Russian and Prussian argument that the future king of Poland had to be a native Pole and not a foreign candidate. This agreement was understandable in view of Ottoman fears that an Austrian candidate—or a pro-Austrian Saxon candidate—would skew regional power dynamics in Austria's favor. But many in the Ottoman government also realized the danger of a Russian client on the Polish throne. In this light, it would have been a wiser move not to come out in support of the Russo-Prussian position so early. This would have helped the Ottoman government avoid embarrassment and deep anger at the eventually obvious support of Poniatowski by the Russian troops in summer 1764.

The Ottoman statesmen's final major mistake came in the middle of 1768, when many of them concluded that they could acquire major gains by declaring war on Russia. Catherine's continuing pleas for patience and understanding and promises to withdraw troops from Poland-

Lithuania as soon as the Bar rebellion was over were interpreted as weakness in Constantinople. The war party, therefore, believed that Russia would not want to lead a two-front war and would therefore seek to start peace negotiations, through which the Ottoman Empire could acquire southern Poland. This assumption reflected lack of awareness of Catherine II's political ambitions and pride. The Ottoman declaration of war, far from scaring the Russian empress, prompted her to mobilize her inner and state resources for the unavoidable war, in which she set Russia's goals as high as possible. Catherine compared herself to a cat that had been woken up and would now successfully chase after mice, the mice being the Ottomans of course.¹⁰³²

Obreskov's role in all these events was that of a devoted and skillful state servant, who helped his empress avoid confrontation with the Ottoman Empire in 1763-1765, for which the empress praised him highly. However, Obreskov was growing uneasy at his post, which was extremely taxing for his deteriorating health. It is still unclear whether Obreskov really wanted to move with his Greek-English wife and four children back to Russia, but after St. Petersburg appointed Pavel Levashov as Obreskov's assistant in 1763, the resident began to ask for recall. Possibly upset by the lack of full trust from his government, or indeed burdened by debilitating attacks of gout, Obreskov also desired a promotion to the higher position of an envoy, instead of that of resident. He tried to convince Catherine that his receiving a higher diplomatic character would only aid Russian interests at the Porte, but the empress was not receptive at the time and only upgraded his service rank to that of secret counselor (Rank 3).

Because of continuous complications in Poland-Lithuania, Obreskov ended up staying in Constantinople until the outbreak of the war and endured very difficult captivity for several years after. He also lost his wife on November 15, 1767 to a death from what appears to be natural

¹⁰³² Soloviev, Book XIV, Vol. 28, p. 280.

causes.¹⁰³³ Thus, Obreskov's service in the Ottoman Empire exacted a high toll on both his personal and professional life. In particular, the empress and Panin used these reasons to explain Obreskov's unusual loss of firmness in responding to Ottoman demands concerning Poland-Lithuania in late 1767. However, subsequent events proved that Obreskov was far from having lost his presence of mind and diplomatic vision. His professional comeback during the peace negotiations in 1772-1773 was essential for laying the groundwork for the final peace treaty. Having introduced the period from 1762 to 1774, we turn now to the details.

¹⁰³³ In his fictionalized biography of Obreskov, Stegnii noted that Maria-Angelina died of medicine overdose. Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 18. Gounaris does not mention the cause of death, for which he provides the exact date: Gounaris, p. 677.

Chapter 11. Obreskov's Resistance to Peter III's Blind Alliance with Prussia

Peter III's policy towards the Porte was not very well thought-through. Obreskov certainly seems to have thought so. And he was not alone in this perception. In the last two months of Peter III's short reign, when the emperor decided to join Prussia in encouraging the Ottoman Empire to attack Austria, Chancellor Vorontsov and Aleksei Obreskov coordinated efforts to possibly block but at least to soften Peter's policy. Despite misgivings over Peter III's drastic reorientation towards Prussia, neither Obreskov nor Vorontsov could openly oppose the new emperor's policies. Instead they chose the strategy of prevarication and pointing out faults in the chosen policy course. Nevertheless, despite Obreskov's skillful maneuvering in early summer of 1762, Peter III's decision almost precipitated Ottoman entry into the Seven Years' War on the side of Prussia.

Peter III's reign in the Russian mission in Constantinople began on February 9/20, 1762, when Obreskov finally received the news of Elizabeth's death and the coming to power of her nephew.¹⁰³⁴ Personally, Obreskov benefitted under the new government: on March 9/20 Peter III promoted him to the rank of state counselor¹⁰³⁵—a rank of the fourth grade of the Table of Ranks, which rendered its receiver a hereditary noble. However, on the whole, much of the correspondence that did take place between the Russian government and Obreskov under Peter III was of a general nature, consisting of circular orders to all Russian diplomats stationed

¹⁰³⁴ Anisimov, *Semiletiaia voina*, p. 371.

¹⁰³⁵ 90.1.417.1762. Reskripty imperatora Petra III rezidentu v Konstantinopole A.M. Obrezkovu o vosshestvii na prestol Petra III I posylke k Sultanu chrezvychainogo poslannika kniazia M.I. Dashkova; o vzmianii poslin s inostrannykh predstavitelei; ob izmeneniakh v sostave russkikh predstavitelei pri inostrannykh dvorakh; ob okonchani voiny s Prussiei I zakliuchenii mira; o peremene shifrovatel'nogo kliucha; o delakh pogranychnykh. S prilozheniiami (v tom chisle kopii traktata, zakliuchennogo s korolem Prusskim 24 apreliia 1762). Chast' dokumentov shifrovana. Imeiutsia dokumenty na frantsuzskom I nemetskom iazykakh. January 28—June 18, 1762, L. 24.

abroad.¹⁰³⁶ In the same way, on April 26/May 7 all Russian representatives abroad were informed of the signing of the eternal treaty of peace and friendship between Mikhail Vorontsov and the Prussian plenipotentiary Wilhelm Bernhard von der Goltz on April 24/May 5. But they were instructed not to announce it until after the official ratification, which Vorontsov finally ordered to do on May 31/June 11. However, in the meantime the Russian diplomats could announce the treaty if they were confronted about the subject, but they had to avow that the treaty did not threaten any other state.¹⁰³⁷

The Prussian envoy Rexin, having evidently patiently waited for a period known to be necessary to transport a letter from the Neva to the Bosphorus, demanded a meeting with Obreskov on June 2/13 in order to announce the news from Prussia of the conclusion of the peace treaty. Rexin inquired whether Obreskov had received similar information from St. Petersburg and if the Russian government had instructed him to take a step at the Porte “that would crown all the efforts of the Prussian king with success.” Clearly, Obreskov lied: he replied with gratitude for the happy news and promised to inform Rexin when he received news from St. Petersburg.¹⁰³⁸

The special “crowning” step was a reference to the new secret order that Peter III ordered to be sent to Obreskov on April 28/May 9, very shortly after the circular, but which the chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov did not draft until May 2/13 and did not send until May 14/25.¹⁰³⁹ Peter III wanted to instruct Obreskov to inform secretly the Porte that Russia would not oppose an Ottoman attack on Austria. As noted by Anisimov, this move went in direct opposition to

¹⁰³⁶ For additional security, for example, on March 19/30 St. Petersburg changed the secret cypher used by its representatives abroad, particularly for the Russian and German languages. 90.1.417.1762, LL. 5, 8, 11.

¹⁰³⁷ 90.1.417.1762, LL. 34-44ob., 53-53ob.

¹⁰³⁸ 89.8.1.44.1762. Vyderzhki iz reliatsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova Petru III o snosheniakh Turtsii s Prussiei. June 23, 1762, LL. 1, 1ob.-2.

¹⁰³⁹ 90.1.417.1762, LL. 45-59ob. Anisimov, however, writes that Vorontsov prepared the second order, N 20, on May 14/25 and sent both orders on May 15/26. Anisimov, *Semiletiaia voina*, p. 480.

Russia's long-standing alliance with Austria, which dated as far back as 1726. Indeed, Vorontsov appears to have been trying to convince Peter III to correct the order and postponed sending the order drafted on May 2/13 almost by two weeks. Moreover, Vorontsov added a separate order to Obreskov, instructing him not to make the required announcement to the Porte because the Ottomans could use the occasion to attack not only Austria, but Russia as well. Only if Regin were to confirm that "the Porte would indeed conduct a diversion," Obreskov could ask Regin to make the Porte approach Obreskov concerning the possible war between the Ottoman Empire and Austria. In that case, Obreskov had to pronounce very succinctly that Russia would not interfere because it wished to remain at peace, and not to mention the fact that Russia was abrogating all its treaty obligations with Austria. Vorontsov replied in the same vein to the Prussian ambassador Goltz, when the latter inquired on May 11/22 if the chancellor had sent the special order to Obreskov. Moreover, Vorontsov added during this conversation that Russia had an "eternal" defensive treaty with Vienna against the Ottomans.¹⁰⁴⁰

It remains slightly unclear when Obreskov received these orders, which would a month later, under Catherine II, become known as the famous orders N 19 and N 20. Anisimov notes that Obreskov received them in approximately three weeks, which falls around June 5/16,¹⁰⁴¹ but in his report to St. Petersburg Obreskov wrote that he had received the two orders on "May 25"/June 5, 1762.¹⁰⁴² The confusion is rather problematic because it makes it unclear whether Obreskov was already following Vorontsov's instructions during his meeting with Regin—discussed below—on June 2/13, or not. Be that as it may, both Vorontsov and Obreskov tried to drag their feet as much as possible. Vorontsov's dispatch to Obreskov in the middle of May was

¹⁰⁴⁰ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 478-480.

¹⁰⁴¹ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 481.

¹⁰⁴² 89.8.1.44.1762, L. 1. Could some of Anisimov's dates be wrong? For example, it requires double-checking whether Vorontsov had dispatched the orders on May 4, rather than on May 15, the eleven-day difference being the difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The meeting with Goltz could have taken place on April 30, not May 11. In that case, the orders would actually have arrived in Constantinople by May 25/June 5.

accompanied by great secrecy. Instead of inviting other foreign ambassadors in St. Petersburg to send correspondence to their colleagues in Constantinople together with the monthly courier, Vorontsov sent the orders separately and did not announce the date to anyone. An accompanying note enjoined Obreskov to open the correspondence alone and personally decipher the message.¹⁰⁴³ Obreskov replied to St. Petersburg only on June 23/July 4.

Evidently, Vorontsov's message, containing a veiled criticism of Peter III's policy, was sufficient for Obreskov to realize that his own role in averting this potential policy mistake would be critical. In his response on June 23/July 4, Obreskov tried to convince Peter III of the inappropriateness of making the required announcement. He argued that the Porte was not interested in joining the war on the side of Prussia. For example, he reported that on May 20/31 the scribes of the reis efendi's secretary had informed him that the Ottoman imperial council had resolved unanimously that it was more beneficial to sign the alliance with Prussia "before the current system was completely abolished." However, the main condition of the Porte was that the alliance would enter into force only in the future, thus excluding the present war.¹⁰⁴⁴

In addition, Obreskov reported in detail his conversations with Regin in order to undermine Peter III's trust in Prussia. During their meeting on June 2/13 Obreskov asked Regin what kind of support the Prussian king expected from the Porte. Regin replied that Frederick hoped that the Porte would conduct a strong diversion against Austria as soon as Obreskov announced Peter III's note to the Porte. Obreskov's shrewdness in interpreting Regin's response and craftiness in formulating his own rejoinder were remarkable. He wrote to St. Petersburg that he wanted to disabuse Regin of his naïve trust in the Porte's empty stories and sly maneuvering. Obreskov assured Peter III that there was no indication that the Ottomans would attack Austria.

¹⁰⁴³ Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 480, 481.

¹⁰⁴⁴ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 1-1ob.

Therefore, in order allegedly to save Rexin from a potential blunder, and at the same time to demonstrate sincere collaboration and personal consideration, Obreskov told the Prussian envoy that there was little chance for the diversion and cautioned him to be more careful in analyzing the situation so as not to deserve the wrath of his king for disappointing his expectations. Obreskov mentioned several facts that proved that an Ottoman diversion was a futile hope. However, regretted Obreskov, “the envoy, being one of those people who take the desired for reality,” did not take any of Obreskov’s words into consideration. Instead, Rexin responded that Obreskov simply had to make the announcement to the Porte, and everything else Rexin would take on as his own responsibility. Obreskov promised to do as asked when he received relevant orders.¹⁰⁴⁵

In his letter to St. Petersburg, Obreskov further highlighted Rexin’s duplicity in some of his answers. For example, Obreskov asked Rexin during the same meeting about the reason for the recent visit of the chief dragoman to the Prussian mission. Rexin told Obreskov that the dragoman wanted to confirm the news of the Prussian victory over Field-Marshal Daun. However, the next morning the dragoman himself announced to the advisor of the Russian mission Pini that Rexin had personally called him in order to announce the peace treaty between Prussia and Russia. When the dragoman inquired if Obreskov had received any new instructions from St. Petersburg, the Russian resident said that he hoped to receive them soon.¹⁰⁴⁶ Once again, it remains unclear if Obreskov lied because he had received the orders on May 25/June 5, or he had not indeed received them until June 5/16. Judging by his answers, he had not yet received the new orders. In support of this theory, we can point to Rexin’s letter to Berlin from June 12/23, in which he noted that he had just learned from Obreskov about the arrival of a

¹⁰⁴⁵ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 2ob.-3ob.

¹⁰⁴⁶ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 3ob.-4.

Russian courier who also brought a letter for Rexin from Baron Goltz in St. Petersburg. Rexin noted that Goltz had written in his letter that the same courier also brought an order to Obreskov to make a declaration to the Porte about the Prusso-Russian treaty.¹⁰⁴⁷ These were the orders that Vorontsov had dispatched, according to Anisimov, on May 15/26. Their arrival in Constantinople around June 11/22, or even a week earlier, reflects the standard speed of delivery of correspondence in that time of the year. This means that during his meeting with Rexin on June 2/13, Obreskov was undermining Prussian—and Peter III’s—plans out of his own conviction that such a policy would be mistaken.

As mentioned, Obreskov informed Rexin of his receipt of new orders from St. Petersburg on June 11/22, when he asked Rexin for a meeting to discuss everything in private.¹⁰⁴⁸ The two met on June 13/24 and Rexin began by notifying Obreskov that the dragoman of the Porte had been visiting Rexin when the latter received Obreskov’s note two days ago. By coincidence, continued Rexin, the chief dragoman had come to him precisely to find out whether Obreskov had received instructions from his court to make some kind of an announcement to the Porte. Obreskov responded to the impatient Rexin with “friendly sincerity and recommendation to keep the confidential information secret, following instructions from the order N 20.”¹⁰⁴⁹ The Russian emperor, shared Obreskov, had ordered him to persuade the Porte that Peter III would not interfere, directly or indirectly, if the Ottoman government decided to attack Austria. However, Obreskov had first to coordinate his actions with Rexin in order to make sure that the Porte would indeed initiate a diversion on the Austrian border.¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁴⁷ 89.8.321.1762, LL. 33-33ob.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Does it mean that he received the orders on June 10 or 11 and immediately informed Rexin, or, as claimed by Anisimov, that Obreskov received them about a week earlier? In the latter case, Obreskov took the liberty to wait before acting on the orders.

¹⁰⁴⁹ This was the second order, containing Vorontsov’s modifications of Peter III’s original order.

¹⁰⁵⁰ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 4-5.

Rexin was excited to finally receive expected news and assured Obreskov that the diversion would undoubtedly take place after the Russian resident made the announcement to the Porte. Obreskov, however, asked Rexin to assist him by encouraging the Porte to make an inquiry with Obreskov. Obreskov argued that the dignity of mutual relations required such a step and noted that because the Porte appeared so eager to help the Prussian king, according to Rexin, and even sent the chief dragoman to find out about the sentiments of the Russian court on the matter, the Porte would not decline to approach Obreskov first. Rexin acknowledged that Obreskov's suggestion was reasonable and promised to make appropriate request at the Porte. However, Rexin also asked Obreskov what he would do if the Porte asked to present the matter in writing. To this, Obreskov resolutely responded in the negative: he was only prepared to make an oral presentation, and in highest secrecy.¹⁰⁵¹

There could have been another reason for why Obreskov contacted Rexin on June 11/22. It is possible that Frederick's intrigues at the Porte forced Obreskov to interfere. Namely, the Prussian king convinced the Crimean Khan to send his agent to Constantinople in order to convey to the Porte that it could attack Austria because Frederick would ensure Russian support. Moreover, Frederick promised to represent Ottoman demands to the Russian government, such as to sign a treaty that would return to the Porte the gains it had made with the Pruth Treaty, to demolish newly-constructed border fortresses, to return Azov and other fortresses captured from the Ottomans, and to resettle the Cossacks from within Ottoman territory into Russian territory. Frederick also claimed that Russia would ally with Ottoman allies and be enemies with Ottoman enemies if the Porte signed an alliance with him. The Porte forwarded this information to

¹⁰⁵¹ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 5-5ob.; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 481.

Obreskov on June 10/21 and inquired if it was true.¹⁰⁵² Therefore, this could have been the reason why Obreskov asked Rexin on June 11/22 to meet with him, even though he might have received the long expected orders earlier. Following their meeting on June 13/24, Obreskov informed the Porte on the same day that “the Russo-Prussian treaty had been concluded on conditions that did not present harm to any other state.”¹⁰⁵³

The following day, on June 14/25, Rexin sent a letter to Obreskov, notifying him of his meeting with the dragoman of the Porte, who declared that the Porte would only be satisfied by a written representation. Rexin strongly requested Obreskov to do as the Porte asked. Otherwise, he threatened, Obreskov alone would be responsible for harming the joint endeavor. However, Obreskov was only waiting for this information in order to prove his point to Peter III: the dragoman’s demand proved, wrote the resident to St. Petersburg, that he was right in his suspicion that the Porte was deceiving Rexin. Moreover, Rexin’s letter revealed that he was too open with the Porte, more than was warranted. Rexin should have been more careful in his conversations with the dragoman because the matter was very sensitive and confidential. Finally, it would have been more appropriate if Rexin sent the chief dragoman directly to Obreskov,

¹⁰⁵² Demir, p. 154. Several of Rexin’s letters to Frederick II were included in the latter’s orders to his representative in Russia, Baron von der Goltz. Consequently, St. Petersburg was able to procure copies of them. In his report from June 23, Rexin wrote that the grand vizier, upon the sultan’s order, called him to an audience at an imperial country house in Üsküdar, which lasted two hours. Rexin suspected that the invitation was a result of the arrival in Constantinople of a Divan Efendi and primary agent of the Crimean khan six days earlier. The khan reported that the Prussian king promised him to assure an end of quarrels with the Russians and a peaceful return of all territory that Russia had captured in the preceding decades contrary to the Prut Treaty of 1724. (This is an obvious mistake; the Pruth Treaty was signed in 1711.) The grand vizier informed Rexin that if the Prussian King would personally make such a promise in writing to the Porte, the grand vizier, according to an already-existing order of the sultan, would conclude and sign, with permission of the *mufiti* and all prominent officials, the defensive alliance against Austria. The Porte promised not to accept Penkler, who was about to arrive in Constantinople, to an official audience until it received a letter from the Prussian king. The Porte did not so much need the barren territory that had been captured by Russia. Rather, it needed Frederick’s letter in order to demonstrate to the Ottoman public, and especially the ulema, that in gratitude for the services offered by Prussia the Porte had to declare war against Austria on the Prussian side. However, the grand vizier wanted to receive a personal letter of the king with the afore-mentioned promise and refused Rexin’s suggestion to include this promise into the draft of the treaty. Rexin encouraged his king to write the required letter as soon as possible, so that the defensive alliance could be concluded already in the middle of August. 89.8.321.1762, LL. 31-33.

¹⁰⁵³ 89.8.1.44.1762, L. 10ob.

rather than personally discuss with the dragoman how the Russian resident would carry out his orders. Obreskov had to decline Rexin's request as completely impossible, especially as it was made in writing and Obreskov did not want to commit himself to anything in writing as well.¹⁰⁵⁴

On June 17/28 Obreskov received another letter from Rexin, in which the Prussian envoy requested to meet again and firmly insisted that Obreskov had to make a written presentation to the Porte. Obreskov based his actions on the order N 20, according to which he had to make an adroit response to Rexin orally. Obreskov refused to comply with Rexin's request since he did not have an exact order from St. Petersburg to that effect. Obreskov drew Rexin's attention to potential negative consequences of such an action. First, Obreskov made a far-fetched claim that, although the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires were bordering each other, the Porte had had sufficient successes against Vienna in various previous wars and therefore lost its erstwhile hostility towards Austria and even, on occasion, expressed its sympathy towards Vienna when the latter appeared exhausted. Therefore, by following Rexin's suggestion Obreskov ran the risk of pushing the Porte to inform Vienna, directly or in secret, about Russia's scheming, in order to prove its friendship and observance of the peace treaty and, on the other hand, in order to cause relentless hostility between Austria and Russia, which was in the Ottomans' interest.¹⁰⁵⁵

Obreskov continued his masterful dissimulation by making a second claim that was far from reality. He argued that his written note to the Porte could become public, in which case everyone would see that the Russian Emperor was deceiving everyone when he claimed that he sincerely wanted to restore general peace to Europe and that he was doing everything to bring parties engaged in the present bloody war to conclude a ceasefire, but in reality Peter III aimed at spreading the war even further by encouraging barbarians to take part in it. Obreskov declared

¹⁰⁵⁴ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 5ob.-6ob.; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 481.

¹⁰⁵⁵ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 6ob.-7ob.; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 482.

that such consequences were highly detrimental to the dignity and reputation of the Russian court.¹⁰⁵⁶ Moreover, Obreskov underscored that such negative fallout would be particularly regretful when the Prussian king would also not receive any benefit from such a note to the Porte.¹⁰⁵⁷

Finally, Obreskov appealed to Regin's reason: it was obvious that there was little indication that the Porte would enter the war on the side of Prussia. Regin should have known, argued Obreskov, that the Porte was in no condition to carry out the attack. Moreover, according to prevailing military maxims the Porte usually appointed a *serasker*—chief military commander—more than four months ahead of time and, therefore, it was already too late for Ottoman forces to gather in Edirne in preparation for a campaign that year. In addition, necessary provisions and stockpiles for the war were not readily available. Instead, the Belgrade garrison was receiving bread from Austrian Hungary. Considering all this, Regin could not continue assuring his king of an imminent attack by the Porte on Austria and, on the other hand, blaming Obreskov as the only reason that the diversion was not forthcoming.¹⁰⁵⁸

Regin countered, saying that the Porte could at first use Tatars for the diversion, for which purpose the Crimean khan already allegedly arrived in Budjak with 40,000 of his cavalry. Moreover, the Porte could assemble a special large corps for the war. Obreskov immediately invalidated both of these hopes. First, he corrected Regin that the khan had crossed the Dnieper only with 3,000-4,000 troops. Secondly, it was against the Porte's rules to gather large corps because the latter could easily rebel, as had happened in the past.¹⁰⁵⁹

¹⁰⁵⁶ Of course, Peter III in fact was pursuing war aims. He planned to attack Denmark and also dispatched an auxiliary regiment to aid Prussia against Austria. For this purpose, he signed an additional treaty with Prussia—a defensive alliance—in mid-June.

¹⁰⁵⁷ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 7ob.-8ob.; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 482.

¹⁰⁵⁸ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 8ob.-9.

¹⁰⁵⁹ 89.8.1.44.1762, L. 9. The khan came to Budjak by early summer with 6,000 Tatars, so Obreskov's estimate was closer to reality. Demir, p. 154.

Finally, Obreskov resorted to the most penetrating argument: he asked Rexin if the latter had already managed to sign an alliance with the Porte, because only in such case it was possible to hope that the Porte would make a diversion against Austrian forces. Otherwise, if the alliance treaty had not yet been concluded—and Obreskov knew that this was the case,—Obreskov believed that the Porte would not break peace with Austria just to please the Prussian king, without being assured of Prussia’s mutual obligations to help the Porte against Austria. Obreskov’s arguments produced but modest results. Obreskov was able to report to St. Petersburg that “the [Prussian] envoy, having heard all this, eventually admitted himself that the time was running out to conduct a diversion during the present campaign, but because the diversion could be helpful the following year if the peace was not signed, it was necessary to suggest to Baron Goltz¹⁰⁶⁰ to request that the Russian court order its resident [Obreskov] to deliver the note in written form, as demanded by the Porte.”¹⁰⁶¹ In other words, Obreskov’s skill was duly matched by Rexin’s stubbornness.

Obreskov left it up to Rexin to decide what to do next. Rexin, however, did not cease being persistent. He asked Obreskov whether he had informed the Porte about the conclusion of peace between Prussia and Russia, and when would Obreskov begin the practice of sincere communication with Rexin. The Prussian envoy indicated that Obreskov’s tardiness in carrying out these orders caused doubts at the Porte about Rexin’s assurances of the restoration of friendship between Berlin and St. Petersburg. Obreskov replied that he had noticed this as well, and as a result of the new orders from St. Petersburg, which overruled the previous instruction—in the order N 18—to observe silence,¹⁰⁶² as well as taking into account that the Porte had

¹⁰⁶⁰ Prussian plenipotentiary minister at St. Petersburg.

¹⁰⁶¹ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 9-9ob.

¹⁰⁶² This is a reference to the circular order N 18 from April 26/May 7, which was sent to all Russian representatives abroad to inform them of the signing of Prusso-Russian treaty of peace and friendship, warning them not to

already learned about the new peace treaty from outside sources as well as from the Prussian envoy, Obreskov ordered Pinii on June 13/24 to announce to the dragoman of the Porte that the Russo-Prussian treaty had been concluded on conditions that did not present harm to any other state. In effect, this announcement was in compliance with the circular order N 18, but not the orders N 19 and 20. When Rexin asked Obreskov if he was going to make additional presentations, the Russian resident replied that diplomatic practice did not require him to make an official declaration of the recent signing of the peace treaty to the Porte. He especially pointed out that the Porte had not previously informed the Russian court about its conclusion of a treaty of friendship and commerce with the Prussian king.¹⁰⁶³ Finally, Obreskov agreed to begin open communication with Rexin on June 24/July 5.¹⁰⁶⁴

The latter promise also seems to be the result of Obreskov's prevarication strategy. He claimed to be planning to start openly cooperating with Rexin because he sent his report to St. Petersburg on June 23/July 4. Obreskov postponed carrying out the orders and disclosing them to his Prussian counterpart—after being asked repeatedly—for as long as possible. He devised various excuses for this purpose. He was careful, however, to explain his actions as a natural consequence of his desire to protect Russian interests from negative consequences of supporting Prussia's unfounded hope of attracting the Ottoman Empire to enter into the war against Austria. Thus, instead of defying his orders, he painted himself as guarding state interests.

Even in the absence of Vorontsov's additional instructions, which undermined the letter and spirit of what Peter III intended for Obreskov to do, the latter's actions must have been informed also by his close familiarity with Constantinople politics. Obreskov always knew Rexin

publicize the fact unless someone approached them about it. Most importantly, they had to stress that the treaty did not threaten any other state. 90.1.417.1762, LL. 34-44ob.

¹⁰⁶³ Obreskov was referring to the 1761 treaty of commerce and friendship between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Obreskov could not for a long time learn of the contents of that treaty. Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 367-369.

¹⁰⁶⁴ 89.8.1.44.1762, LL. 10-10ob.

as an intriguer, who had been pursuing Frederick's secret goals at the Porte since 1755. The Russian resident must have been experiencing natural aversion to suddenly reversing his caution and vigilance against Rexin, just as he had been uncomfortable giving up his prejudice against Vergennes in 1756. Similar to how Vergennes had suddenly to turn pro-Russian in 1756 after having fought against Russia's interests at the Porte for a full year since the start of his mission, Obreskov was now expected by Peter III to make an about-face in relation to Prussia, whose lack of trustworthiness he had been preaching to the Ottoman government for the past six years. Obreskov's experience must have told him that he could not blindly follow orders that were blind to the reality that he could observe from up-close. He concluded that Rexin's claims and Peter III's instructions were a result of illusory hopes. Most importantly, Obreskov likely realized that the more obvious the Russo-Prussian cooperation would become, the more vigorously the French would resume their traditional policy of urging the Ottoman Empire to attack Russia.¹⁰⁶⁵

Even the ambassador of Prussia's ally during the war—England,—Porter, would register his praise of Obreskov upon returning to London the same year. In October 1762 A.R. Vorontsov notified Catherine II from the English capital that Porter “at every occasion gives justice to the knowledge and good behavior of your Imperial resident minister Obreskov.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Catherine herself, of course, was very grateful for Obreskov's prevarication. Although she could not immediately decide how to orient her foreign policy, she knew that she wanted to preserve peace and therefore had to undo her husband's designs of encouraging the Ottoman Empire to attack Austria. As a result, one of her first orders after assuming power on June 28/July 9, 1762 was to

¹⁰⁶⁵ Murphy, pp. 136-137.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 382.

prohibit Obreskov from acting upon the afore-mentioned orders NN 19 and 20.¹⁰⁶⁷ The empress dispatched this order on June 29/July 10, hoping it would arrive in time to disrupt Prussian plans.

It must have been nerve-wracking for her to wait another three weeks before receiving news from Obreskov. Even then, as we know, she received only his reports from June 23 that had been addressed to Peter III. Nevertheless, she was ecstatic to learn that Obreskov resisted carrying out the orders to incite the Porte to carry out a diversion in Hungary. “Through such a sensible action of yours,” she wrote on July 21/August 1, 1762, “you have not only preserved the honor and dignity of this court, but also proved even more your loyalty, thorough knowledge, and assiduous devotion to our direct and essential interests. And we did not want to leave you without this fair acknowledgment of our complete satisfaction.”¹⁰⁶⁸

Catherine was so elated with the evidence of Obreskov’s almost prophet-like foresight that on July 24/August 4 she granted Obreskov the Order of St. Anna and added another 1,000 rubles to Obreskov’s 5,000-ruble annual salary as a reward for his judiciousness and an encouragement to defend Russian interests with the same acumen, especially in relation to the latest argument about the St. Dimitrii fortress: “The more we considered the possible consequences that would doubtlessly have destroyed our useful, long-standing system with the Vienna court in regard to the Turks and therefore hurt our state and led to the death of Christian peoples, were you to have carried out the orders sent to you by the previous regime to incite the Turks to conduct a diversion in Hungary for the benefit of the Prussian king, the more we acknowledge now the significant service you have served to the fatherland through God’s providence.”¹⁰⁶⁹

¹⁰⁶⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶⁸ 89.8.321.1762, LL. 37-37ob.; *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 31.

¹⁰⁶⁹ 89.8.321.1762, LL. 38-39; *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 31-32.

The empress also instructed the resident to maintain normal relations with Regin but to resume allied sincerity in interactions with the Austrian internuncio. As an important expression of this sincerity, Obreskov had to share new information about treaty negotiations between Prussia and the Porte. Catherine was determined to prevent this alliance, which she saw as a potential “disaster.” She even empowered Obreskov to inform the Porte that Russia would have to come to Vienna’s aid if the Porte decided to attack Hungary.¹⁰⁷⁰

Catherine’s worries had a foundation. Since early in 1762 the Ottoman government was closer than ever to joining the war on Prussia’s side. In January, for example, imperial councils debated not whether to do so, but how to legitimize such a step. At first, it was easier to find a pretext to attack Russia, rather than Austria, because the Porte had maintained an undisturbed peace with Vienna for several decades. On the other hand, the Porte could cite such grievances against Russia as the construction of border fortresses and settlement of Cossacks inside Ottoman territory. The Porte would thereby also have a reason to attack Austria because the latter would have to aid Russia. Mustafa III planned to travel to Edirne under the pretext of hunting and began secret war preparations. The Porte even began to collect military intelligence about Austria and Russia.¹⁰⁷¹ But the grand vizier, Koca Ragıp Paşa, tried to moderate this

¹⁰⁷⁰ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 30. St. Petersburg forwarded to Obreskov three letters that concerned the defensive alliance between Prussia and the Porte directed against Austria. Frederick II had sent these letters to his representative in Russia, Baron von der Goltz, but Russian secret intelligence procured copies of them. Obreskov had to inform the Austrian ministers at the Porte in greatest secrecy about the state of negotiations between Berlin and Constantinople, because “Our interests are so connected to Austrian ones, that an attack of the Turkish court on Hungary and any enlargement of its power and possessions in Europe we have to consider as oppression and threat to all Christianity and to us personally.” 89.8.321.1762, LL. 25-26.

¹⁰⁷¹ This seems to be a rather late effort considering that the sultan already planned to enter the war. Moreover, the Porte had access only to outdated information about Russia. Namely, it asked the Swedish envoy Celsing to furnish intelligence on Russian military capabilities. Despite the fact that his country was allied with Russia, Celsing provided such information but it was a 1743 report of Marshal Lovendal, who had served for a long time in the Russian army and then entered French service. The report contained detailed information about Russia’s land and naval forces, as well as expenses. However, the Ottomans realized that this information was probably outdated. Moreover, the report described Russian forces in peacetime. During war, Ukrainian Cossacks would add substantial numbers to the Russian army. Demir, p. 141.

decision and likely was behind the announcement to Regin that if the course of the war changed the Porte would reconsider its decision.¹⁰⁷²

By March, however, the Prusso-Russian peace talks forced Frederick to seek Ottoman diversion only against Austria. The Prussian king also felt the urgency to achieve an alliance with the Porte because he knew that the latter could take offence at some provisions of the planned Prusso-Russian alliance. Now Frederick also hurriedly tried to prevent the Crimean Khan from attacking Russia and to redirect the Tatar attack towards Austria. But by late March the Porte became aware, thanks to Vergennes, of the changes in Russian foreign policy and in order to influence the sultan the grand vizier leaked to the French ambassador that the Porte was preparing for war. Ragıp Paşa also tried to undermine the alliance negotiations with Prussia by noting that the Porte did not have legitimate reasons to attack Austria and Frederick no longer wanted the Porte to attack Russia. French, Austrian, and Russian diplomats at the Porte were initially concerned about the Porte's rumored military preparations, but soon the French ambassador began to turn against Russia in view of the conclusion of the Prusso-Russian peace treaty on May 5, 1762.¹⁰⁷³

Several of the treaty's provisions greatly concerned the Porte, which saw it as a defensive alliance. First, Frederick promised to support any candidate to the Polish throne, which Russia chose. Secondly, Frederick promised to recognize all territorial acquisitions to be made by Russia, although he was careful to exclude any gains made at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, the Persian Empire, and the Tatars. Vergennes took advantage of these terms in order to actively encourage Ottoman fears of Russia: Peter III's chief aim was Poland and Russia could never be trusted. But the Ottoman government was divided: the grand vizier wanted to drop the

¹⁰⁷² Demir, pp. 139, 141.

¹⁰⁷³ Demir, pp. 142-152.

alliance negotiations with Prussia and focus on resisting Russia, while the sultan still wanted to ally with Prussia. Beginning in mid-May, Ragıp Paşa raised concerns about new Russian border fortresses, especially St. Anna on the Don River.¹⁰⁷⁴ He claimed that the fortress was built on the Ottoman border in violation of the peace treaty and threatened that the Porte would take measures if Obreskov did not redress the situation. However, at the same time the sultan was displeased with his grand vizier for turning against the Prussian alliance, and fires were set in various parts of the city to signify popular displeasure with Ragıp Paşa.¹⁰⁷⁵

Prussian actions only added to the confusion. Indomitable Frederick II was desperate to conclude the alliance with the Porte before he finalized the alliance treaty with Russia. The latter was signed on June 19, but on June 15 Frederick ordered Rexin to do everything to finalize the Prusso-Ottoman treaty, even if it required organizing a janissary uprising.¹⁰⁷⁶ Frederick also attempted to engineer the Tatars' attack on Austria, which he believed the Porte would feel obliged to follow. In May Kırım Giray with 6,000 Tatars left Bahçesaray for Budjak, where he was to meet with a Prussian plenipotentiary, Goltz, who had to help him plan an attack on Hungary. Indeed, Frederick even tried to turn the impending alliance with Russia to his advantage at the Porte. Thus, as mentioned above, in June the khan's agent came to Constantinople and shared with the Ottoman government that Frederick promised to support the Porte in its demands to Russia. As a result, the Porte promised to fulfill Prussian requests—to sign the alliance against Austria, not to welcome the new Austrian representative Penkler well, and to send 10,000 Tatars to directly assist Frederick—but on the condition that the Prussian

¹⁰⁷⁴ The Russian government planned to move the fortress to a better place, which was named the fortress of St. Dimitrii.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Demir, pp. 149-150, 152-153, 160-161.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Demir, p. 160.

king repeated his promises concerning Russia officially to the Porte and that the Russian emperor officially acknowledged them.¹⁰⁷⁷

Thus, by the time Catherine came to power, the Porte hesitated to commit itself to an alliance with Prussia both because of Frederick's initial timidity in guaranteeing his far-fetched claims directly to the Porte¹⁰⁷⁸ and because of Obreskov's stalwart evasion of cooperation with Rexin. Obreskov's position in June/early July played an important role: had he come out in support of Frederick's claims right away, Prussian glibness could have ultimately convinced the pro-war party in Constantinople.¹⁰⁷⁹ Yet, there remained reasons for the new empress to worry. On one hand, the Prusso-Ottoman alliance negotiations did not yet falter completely. On the other, it turned out that Catherine had praised Obreskov for not fulfilling Peter III's orders somewhat prematurely.

Obreskov's obstructionism was instrumental in winning Russia some time, because on June 23, one day before Obreskov submitted his non-committing reply, the Porte already returned the draft of the alliance treaty to Rexin with the corrections and amendments it saw necessary.¹⁰⁸⁰ It was not yet clear if the danger of the Ottoman-Prussian alliance had finally passed. After the khan's agent returned from the Porte, Kırım Giray slowed down his preparations, but the Porte was still making war preparations on the Austrian border and in July it began to fortify Bosnian fortresses and Vidin. To an astute observer, however, it could be clear

¹⁰⁷⁷ Demir, pp. 154-155.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Frederick once again promised orally—through Rexin—that Russia would not interfere if the Porte attacked Austria, and that Russia would recognize all Ottoman gains from that war against Austria. If the Porte doubted the Russian position, it could ask further, but Rexin pledged his guarantee in the name of his state. However, the Ottoman imperial council decided that the Porte could not sign the alliance without official Prussian and Russian guarantees. Demir, p. 156.

¹⁰⁷⁹ The Prussian official guarantee finally arrived in Constantinople in late August 1762, by which time it could not carry any significance. Frederick was in a hurry to send it because he was hearing some rumors about the overthrow of Peter III. Therefore, he wrote the guarantee letter on July 12, or 13, but it reached Constantinople too late. Kemal Beydilli, *Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar: XVIII yüzyılda Osmanlı-Prusya müunasebetleri* (Istanbul, 1985), p. 75.

¹⁰⁸⁰ On June 6, 1762 Rexin submitted a draft of the alliance treaty to the Porte, which consisted of four articles and one epilogue. As a result of corrections and amendments, the draft that the Porte returned to the Prussian envoy contained five additional articles. Demir, pp. 156-158.

that these preparations were insufficient for a serious campaign. Indeed, the grand vizier was still doing everything to postpone the start of the war.¹⁰⁸¹

Once again, the Ottoman government was divided and disoriented. On the one hand, the French ambassador tried to convince it that first Russia and Prussia would partition Poland, after which Russia would attack the Porte in order to retaliate for the Pruth disaster. Vergennes encouraged the Porte to appeal to the Pruth Treaty as giving it rights to protect Poland. Ottoman officials, however, consulted the treaties and realized this could not be done. Nevertheless, military preparations on the Austrian border continued and even intensified in July. With the change on the Russian throne, however, the Porte became concerned that the new empress would reverse her husband's foreign policy and attack the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the Ottoman government suddenly stopped all military preparations.¹⁰⁸²

This irresolute behavior of the Porte undoubtedly resulted from quickly changing circumstances, the consequences of which were not immediately clear. However, it was also a result of internal divisions in the Ottoman government. The latest study of Ottoman foreign policy in this period—by Uğur Demir—demonstrates that the Ottoman government did not have a single policy but wavered between the ambitious designs of the sultan and the very careful approach of the grand vizier and the *şeyhülislam*. The same sultan eagerly announced war against Russia in 1768, after getting rid of another set of a pro-peace grand vizier and *şeyhülislam*.¹⁰⁸³ But at the end of the Seven Years' War Mustafa III did not yet possess enough experience and was only learning how to navigate relations with other important statesmen.

¹⁰⁸¹ Demir, pp. 162, 164.

¹⁰⁸² Demir, pp. 165-166.

¹⁰⁸³ Demir notes that after Koca Ragıp Paşa's death in 1763, Mustafa III was much more adept at removing grand viziers and other leading figures who did not agree with him. Demir, p. 175. The *şeyhülislam*'s disapproval did not bother the sultan even though the cleric was old, wise, and loved by the public. In any case, the *şeyhülislam* conveniently died three weeks after the effective declaration of war. Demir, p. 296. Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa, the grand vizier who opposed the war in 1768, was also a wise statesman and was married to one of the sultan's sisters,

As will be discussed further below, Obreskov partly fulfilled Peter III's orders and in July the Prusso-Ottoman defensive and offensive treaty was signed in Constantinople. Earlier historians have overlooked this fact, which is surprising because this act was highly significant as it demonstrated the sultan's success in silencing the voices of opposition. Indeed, it appears that the Porte could indeed enter the war on Prussia's side in 1762. The sultan and those from his surrounding who wanted to trust Prussian promises could have indeed led the empire into the war if they had encountered less internal opposition and if events in Russia had developed differently. But in early summer close observers did not see this as likely. Neither the Austrian internuncio Schwachheim, nor Obreskov, perceived any signs that the Porte would attack Austria. They arrived at this conclusion by early summer 1762.¹⁰⁸⁴ However, energetic Prussian intrigues gave rise to heightened concerns in Vienna and St. Petersburg. As a result, the Austrian government even decided to replace Schwachheim with the more experienced Penkler in order to gauge the situation more precisely.¹⁰⁸⁵

Penkler reported on September 15 that neither the Porte, nor the Crimean khan, had any plans to attack Austria. He was so confident that the Ottomans would not sign an alliance with Prussia that he did not even spend any money for bribes.¹⁰⁸⁶ However, one must not forget that the Porte did start military preparations on the Austrian border in May, just at the time when Schwachheim assured his government that there had not been any. These preparations lasted into

just like Ragıp Paşa, but Mustafa III did not listen to him because he was too determined not to waste another chance for military glory.

¹⁰⁸⁴ In May 1762 Schwachheim reported that the Porte had made no military preparations and therefore no war could take place even if the sultan wished it. "In my opinion," he wrote to Kaunitz, "Your All-Highest's affairs at the Porte are today in as excellent condition as anyone could wish." Karl Roeder, *Austria's Eastern Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 106. Also, as we saw above, Obreskov—as part of his last attempt to convince Peter III not to trust Prussia—concluded in June-early July that the Porte was not planning a war.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Roeder, *Austria's Eastern Question*, pp. 106-108.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Roeder, *Austria's Eastern Question*, pp. 107-108.

August, having become particularly intense in July as a result of Prussian pressure.¹⁰⁸⁷ While Demir notes that the preparations that did take place were insufficient for a real campaign,¹⁰⁸⁸ the Porte could have continued with them if Peter III had not been deposed. Finally, heretofore-overlooked Russian sources show that the treaty between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire was indeed signed in July.¹⁰⁸⁹

The Ottoman government was closely attuned to events in Russia. Indeed, the grand vizier found the change on the Russian throne as the most convincing pretext for putting the alliance negotiations—to be more precise, ratification of the already-signed treaty—with Prussia on hold. Obreskov's explanation of Catherine II's foreign policy plans at his meeting with the chief dragoman on August 27¹⁰⁹⁰ was enough for the Porte to announce to Regin on September 1 that it did not see enough reasons to sign the alliance at that moment: it was postponed until Russian foreign policy direction would become clearer. Moreover, in September the Porte learned of the start of peace negotiations between France and England, which made the Prussian alliance even less appealing.¹⁰⁹¹ In light of these considerations, Penkler's conclusion in September reflected the realities of early fall. Had there been no coup d'état in Russia, events might have unfolded differently.

Indeed, Catherine's approach to the Ottoman Empire was highly vigilant and likely played a major role in dampening the sultan's desire to attack Austria. As we saw, the empress instructed Obreskov on July 21/August 1, 1762 to go as far as to announce to the Porte that Russia would protect its ally Austria, if the Porte decided to help Prussia by attacking Hungary. On August 2/13, she ordered Obreskov to do everything to achieve deposition of the Crimean

¹⁰⁸⁷ Demir, pp. 162, 166.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Demir, p. 164.

¹⁰⁸⁹ See discussion below.

¹⁰⁹⁰ See discussion below.

¹⁰⁹¹ Demir, pp. 170-172; Murphy, pp. 138-139.

Khan,¹⁰⁹² whose attack on Austria Catherine greatly feared. The khan was known to have reached Bendery, where he met with several Prussian officers, including one Goltz, a relative of the Prussian representative in St. Petersburg. The Russian government learned with concern that Goltz was tasked with helping the khan plan an attack on Hungary. Therefore, Obreskov was ordered to warn the Austrian internuncio about this threat and to make pro-Austrian representations at the Porte. However, Catherine cautioned Obreskov that he had to present his cooperation with the Austrian representatives in Constantinople as a result of Russia's friendship and sense of neighborliness, and not as a consequence of mutual treaties, so as not to commit Russia to anything.¹⁰⁹³

Being wary of Ottoman military intervention in the Seven Years' War, however, did not mean that Catherine was afraid of the Porte or was prepared to make compromises. As seen from her instructions concerning Kırım Giray, she chose an assertive policy. Moreover, she ordered Obreskov to insist at the Porte on Russia's right to construct the fortress of St. Dimitrii on the Don River. Obreskov could use bribes if necessary, but Catherine was adamant that Russia could build any fortress within its territory, be it at the mouth of Temernik or some other place. Besides, the chosen location was the only viable place to facilitate commerce from the river Don into the Black Sea, as well as to defend Russian subjects from Crimean Tatars.¹⁰⁹⁴

Most importantly, Catherine did not share Obreskov's sanguine assessment of the unlikelihood of the Prusso-Ottoman alliance. In view of the Porte's constant vacillation and

¹⁰⁹² She also believed that in this way Russia would get rid of a troublesome neighbor. In order to monitor the situation in Crimea better, the empress also suggested establishing a permanent Russian consul in Bahçesaray. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰⁹³ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 38-39, 43-44.

¹⁰⁹⁴ The new fortress was to replace the older one, named St. Anna, because the latter's location proved to be a very bad and unhealthy place, causing high mortality among its inhabitants. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 39-40. The debates in the first half of 1762 were summarized by the Russian chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov in his report to Catherine II in July 1762: *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 303-304. Vorontsov noted that the Tatar commissar who examined the new location found that it did not contradict the treaty, but the khan chose to report to the Porte to the contrary.

uncertainty, St. Petersburg feared that Prussia could succeed in procuring the treaty through bribes and promises—Catherine believed that the grand vizier and the *mufti* (*şeyhülislam*) were already on Frederick’s side,¹⁰⁹⁵—with the result that the Porte would quickly launch a diversion of Austrian forces. The empress reasoned that Ottoman dispositions depended on the particular mood of the sultan or his powerful grand vizier in a particular moment. She noted that many of the earlier treaties between the Porte and foreign nations, such as Sweden, Naples, Denmark, and finally Prussia, were concluded all of a sudden and against common expectations. The latter one—the 1761 treaty of commerce and friendship with Prussia,—moreover, was concluded at the moment when Obreskov was assuring St. Petersburg that it was not going to happen. Finally, the Russian government believed that the Porte did not greatly respect its treaties with Christian nations in general and did whatever it wanted. Therefore, although the empress concurred with Obreskov’s assessment that the Porte would not be able to mobilize for the war during the summer season, she was still apprehensive. Namely, her belief was that the Turks were very determined in war and began attacks along with mobilization; their border fortresses were well supplied over the preceding years with ammunition, troops, and provisions; bread storehouses could be quickly set up on the Danube; and the sultan must have had enough money in his private treasury. Moreover, the Russian empress believed that the sultan enjoyed unlimited power and could collect more money through confiscations and taxes. After prolonged peace there were many in the Ottoman Empire trained and willing to go to war. Even the single Bosnian corps was enough to attack poorly defended Hungary. Therefore, the empress could not

¹⁰⁹⁵ As Demir shows, this was not the case: Demir, pp. 139-173. But the Russian government could have gotten this impression because of the grand vizier’s and *şeyhülislam*’s opposition to the fortress of St. Dimitrii, as described in Demir, p. 152.

bring herself to believe Obreskov's assurances from June 23/July 4 that Turkey would not take advantage of Austria's weakness.¹⁰⁹⁶

The empress's worries were not unfounded. Indeed, it turned out that Catherine had praised Obreskov for his resistance to Peter III's orders prematurely. After all, Obreskov could not evade imperial orders completely. When Obreskov wrote about this in his report from July 24/August 4, 1762, he was still addressing himself to Peter III—Catherine's first orders had not yet reached him. As he had promised in his report from June 23/July 4, the following day Obreskov proceeded to make the announcement to the Porte about the recent alliance between Russia and Prussia. Apparently, he tried to downplay the message by conveying it not officially, but through one of his secret informants—a chancellery scribe.¹⁰⁹⁷ He reported that following his unofficial statement Rexin also told the Porte that Prussia was prepared to fight even for seven years in the interests of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, according to the chancellery scribes' report to Obreskov on July 10/21, the Porte had signed the alliance treaty with Prussia, but the two sides had not yet ratified it. The Porte was preparing to help Prussia against Austria but in reality hoped only to threaten Vienna with a diversion in order to trigger negotiations, during which the Ottoman government hoped to procure Temesvar and Petrovaradin without any fighting.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 40-42.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Beydilli also notes that Obreskov conveyed the message not in a written form, but orally, which signified his disapproval of Peter III's policies. Beydilli, *Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar*, p. 74. Anisimov gives a different interpretation. He writes that Obreskov still refused to follow the orders N 19 and N 20 and only conveyed to the scribe of the chief dragoman that Peter III had signed peace with Prussia but wished all European states to restore peace. Obreskov wrote to St. Petersburg on July 24/August 4 that by making this announcement he was only hinting to the Turks that Russia would not interfere in a prospective Ottoman-Austrian war. Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, p. 483.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 120; Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 483-484. St. Petersburg received this report at the very end of August/early September, because as late as August 28/September 8 the Russian government had not received any news from Obreskov. 89.8.321.1762, LL. 68-70ob. Catherine immediately forwarded this information to her representative in Berlin, Nikolai Repnin, on August 31/September 11, 1762. She ordered Repnin to convey to Frederick that Russia would not close its eyes on an Ottoman attack against Austria. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 113-114.

This mention of the signing of the Prusso-Ottoman alliance in July remains a lone one, and other foreign and Ottoman sources do not corroborate it.¹⁰⁹⁹ Still, it is possible that this was done in great secret, but in a matter of weeks the Porte had to abandon the idea when it learned of the imperial overthrow in Russia. Consequently, the treaty must have remained unratified, just as the Ottoman military preparations died down in August. There needs to be further research into this question, which will show whether the scribes from the reis efendi's chancellery had made a false announcement to Obreskov on July 10/21, or not.

Catherine was very upset by this news. In her order from September 4/15, 1762, she expressed regret that her first order to Obreskov did not reach him in time and, therefore, his announcement to the Porte likely served as a catalyst for the conclusion of the Prusso-Ottoman treaty. All she could do was to enjoin Obreskov to prevent the ratification of that treaty, but she primarily had in mind that the Austrian government would bear the brunt of these efforts, including expenditures for bribes. However, Catherine was quite gloomy in her prognosis: she believed that it was already late to prevent the ratification, especially because the Prussian king enjoyed great credit with the Ottoman government, but also because the Porte had already made a commitment to Prussia and began to anticipate territorial acquisitions. Therefore, Obreskov's main task was to prevent the actual Ottoman diversion against Austrian forces. He could also support representations of Austrian diplomats at the Porte and remind the latter once again that Russia had resumed friendly relations with Austria and in view of the "natural union" of interests in regard to the Ottoman Empire, Russia would protect Austria in case of an attack. However, Catherine still did not want Obreskov to mention any alliance obligations between Russia and

¹⁰⁹⁹ Neither Roeder, nor Demir, nor Beydilli mention this, despite the fact that they have perused Austrian, French, English, Prussian, and Ottoman sources. No Russian study has ever mentioned this correspondence until the recent work by Anisimov: Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 483-484. This, despite the fact that Catherine's response to this news was published in *SIRIO*. Aksan notes that "In June 1762, Rexin once more had a defensive alliance ready to be signed, when the news arrived in Istanbul in early August of Catherine II's coup in Russia." Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, p. 67.

Austria, because she was still trying to avoid making commitments in her foreign policy. Lastly, the empress wanted to acquire the copy of the Prusso-Ottoman treaty in order to check whether it contained any provisions directed against Russia.¹¹⁰⁰

Obreskov wrote his first reports to Catherine II on August 27/September 7, 1762.¹¹⁰¹ In a secret report, he explained that Catherine's accession to the throne was quite timely in that it prevented the Porte from carrying out aggressive plans against Austria, which it perceived as being completely isolated after Peter III had come to power in Russia. Catherine's assumption of power was a "deadly blow" to the Porte, wrote Obreskov. Simultaneously, the late emperor's dethronement and death put a strain on Prussia's relations with the Porte and undermined continuing negotiations for a Prusso-Ottoman treaty of alliance.¹¹⁰²

Obreskov reported on his two meetings with the chief dragoman. The first one took place on July 28/August 8, two days after Obreskov received news of Catherine II's accession to the throne. The dragoman asked him three main questions: what the present "political system" between Russia and Austria was; whether Russia would adhere to the recently concluded peace treaty with Prussia; and whether Russia would fight Denmark or resolve the mutual conflict peacefully. Obreskov wrote that in answering these questions he relied on the empress's latest orders, as well as on her manifesto, in which she criticized the Prussian king. Accordingly, Obreskov replied to the dragoman that the alliance with Austria would remain in force; that

¹¹⁰⁰ Catherine also wanted to know if perhaps the Porte had already started negotiations with Austria about acquiring Temesvar and Petrovaradin. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 120-121.

¹¹⁰¹ Given that Obreskov received Catherine II's first order from June 29/July 10 on July 26/August 6, it is unclear why he delayed his reply until August 27/September 7. (See 90.1.420.1762. Reliatsii (otpuski) rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova Ekaterine II. August 27-December 23, 1762. Prilozheniia na ital'ianskom i turetskom iazykakh, L. 1.) Was he exercising caution by waiting in silence for a month in order to assure himself of the permanence of the recent change on the Russian imperial throne? One explanation could be that because Obreskov wrote his last reports to Peter III on July 24, out of habit he did not plan to compose and send subsequent reports for another month. Be that as it may, Obreskov began his letter with a fawning congratulation. However, the empress might not have liked the form of address used by Obreskov—"Your Imperial Majesty and His Imperial Highness all-gracious/*vseliubeznyi* son and lawful heir to the throne,"—as it could have served as an unwanted reminder to the empress of some of her courtiers' plans before the coup to install Catherine only as regent.

¹¹⁰² 90.1.420.1762, LL. 5-8ob.

Russia would observe the peace treaty that had been signed with Prussia in April, unless the Prussian king did something in violation of the treaty; and that the empress would resolve the conflict with the King of Denmark peacefully. As proof of these intentions, Obreskov noted that the empress had recalled her troops from Germany, including the corps under the command of General Chernyshev that Peter III had dispatched to assist Prussia in fighting Austria.

Obreskov's other motivation for mentioning the latter fact was to indicate to the Porte that the Russian military was not engaged anywhere and therefore would be free to assist Austria if necessary.¹¹⁰³

On August 17/28 the dragoman of the Porte visited Vergennes and Obreskov to find out their views on the latest letter from Frederick, which Rexin had presented to the grand vizier on August 11/22. Frederick tried to assure the Porte that he enjoyed the same influence at the Russian court as during the reign of Peter III, but the Porte was not very trusting. Obreskov noted in his report that the French ambassador had in general been very helpful "on a daily basis" and in conversation with the dragoman also served the interests of his allies by discrediting Frederick's claims. Vergennes warned the Porte that Frederick was trying to draw the Ottoman Empire into his scheme, which could be dangerous for the Porte. The dragoman's conversation with Obreskov lasted two hours, during which the dragoman inquired: whether it was true, according to Rexin, that some time ago Obreskov had to make some kind of declaration in favor of the Prussian king; and whether the Prussian king enjoyed the same influence at the Russian court as before. Obreskov denied both points. He explained that Rexin had told him several months earlier that he would receive a new order from St. Petersburg to make a declaration to the Porte that would aid Rexin's efforts at the Porte. Rexin proceeded to announce this to everyone who was willing to listen. But Obreskov claimed that such an order never arrived. Obreskov

¹¹⁰³ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 5-5ob.

ventured to suggest that the Prussian King was so sure of his credit at the Russian court that he made the announcement without checking whether such an order had indeed been sent. Finally, Obreskov refuted Frederick's claims that he continued to wield influence at the Russian court. Using arguments that Catherine included in her manifesto, Obreskov argued that the king was simply tricking the Porte into adhering to his schemes. He also pointed out that Rexin's substantial money transfers to the Crimean Khan went against the Porte's own interests because the khan was recognized by everyone to be disobedient towards the Ottoman government.¹¹⁰⁴

In consequence of these developments, Obreskov remained sanguine about the Porte's resolve not to embroil itself into the European conflict, at least certainly not during that year. Indeed, he wrote that the dragoman of the Porte confessed to him that the Porte was tired and felt burdened by Rexin and his incessant appeals to attack Austria. To this, Obreskov suggested that the Porte could easily send Rexin away and thereby assist Europe in attaining general peace, just as the Russian empress for her part was trying to bring all the warring sides to the peace table. On the other hand, Obreskov revealed to Penkler all the latest developments, with which Penkler, according to Obreskov, remained very pleased. Obreskov wanted Penkler to notice his efforts to protect Austrian interests and the success of these efforts, for the Porte not only stopped all the war preparations but also despaired to achieve—through a “cunning” negotiation—the cession of Temesvar by Austria.

Obreskov's only remaining concern was that Rexin was continuing to negotiate with the grand vizier in secret, and he could not find out about the subject of this negotiation. One of Obreskov's secret informants claimed that the Porte now wished to conclude an alliance treaty with Prussia not only against Austria, but against Russia as well. Obreskov's intuition told him that if this was true, the Porte was taking such a step for two reasons. First, the Porte did not

¹¹⁰⁴ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 6-6ob., 7.

want to lose Prussian friendship. But, secondly, knowing that Frederick could not agree to this demand without violating the third article of his treaty with Russia, the Porte hoped to use this as a pretext to break the negotiations. Rexin tried to talk the Porte out of this demand, but had little success. Obreskov was worried, however, that Frederick, upon receiving news from Rexin, could agree to the Porte's demand because it was well known that he had little consideration even for the most solemn agreements. In this connection, Obreskov recommended his court to slow down the withdrawal of one of the corps returning to Russia until Frederick's intentions became clear.¹¹⁰⁵

On October 14/25, St. Petersburg followed up on Obreskov's first reports addressed to the new empress. St. Petersburg sighed with relief after learning that the change on the Russian throne had upset Prussian plans to engage the Ottomans in the war. Consequently, Catherine became hopeful that she could prevent the July Prusso-Ottoman treaty from being ratified. She was particularly interested in making sure that the treaty did not contain any provisions against Russia. For this purpose, the empress suggested that Obreskov remind the Porte about the third article of the latest Prusso-Russian treaty, which prohibited the Prussian king from engaging in any obligations against the Russian court. Catherine wrote that the Porte had to be alerted to the negative credit of the Prussian king among other European states. Consequently, if the Porte joined Prussia in an alliance, European states, and especially neighbors of the Ottoman Empire—including Russia,—would suspect the Porte's intentions. While the alliance could not truly serve Ottoman interests, the empress also pointed out that the Porte simply was not prepared for a diversion during the present campaign. Moreover, the likelihood of peace negotiations was growing day by day. The empress also instructed Obreskov to publicly demonstrate friendly relations with the Austrian mission, in view of Russia's close relationship with Austria, which,

¹¹⁰⁵ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 7-8ob.

unlike Prussia, was more cooperative in agreeing to start peace negotiations. Catherine also reminded Obreskov to renew his efforts to depose the Crimean Khan, whose close cooperation with and taking bribes from Prussia was not appropriate for the honor of the Ottoman state.¹¹⁰⁶

In his secret report from September 25/October 6, 1762 Obreskov informed the Russian government that his suspicions about the state of negotiations between the Porte and Prussia were correct. The scribes of the reis efendi's secretary confirmed his intuition that the Porte had offered Frederick to include all other states in the *casus foederis* of the treaty with Prussia precisely in order to lead the negotiation into an impasse. The Porte chose this strategy because it knew that to agree to this demand Frederick would have to violate the third article of his treaty with Russia, which he would not be able to do after all his announcements that he enjoyed great influence at the Russian court. Nevertheless, Obreskov advised caution, envisaging that the Prussian king could agree to the Porte's demand by claiming evasively as an excuse that the new formulation suggested by the Porte did not specify Russia by name.¹¹⁰⁷

In October, however, developments in Constantinople promised to put Catherine's mind at ease. Namely, on October 14 the Ottoman imperial council unanimously rejected Rexin's insistent offer of the alliance. This was the success of the grand vizier's position, versus that of the sultan.¹¹⁰⁸ Consequently, on October 25/November 5, 1762 Obreskov reported that Frederick replied to the Porte's counter-offer to include Russia into the *casus foederis* of the defensive agreement by insisting that he was willing to conclude an alliance only against Austria. As predicted by Obreskov, the Porte swiftly broke off negotiations. On October 3/14, the sultan approved this decision and on October 5/16 the dragoman of the Porte presented Rexin with a note that informed him that the Imperial council resolved that it was not suitable for the Porte to

¹¹⁰⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 151-153.

¹¹⁰⁷ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 29, 34-34ob.

¹¹⁰⁸ Demir, p. 173; Beydilli, *Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar*, pp. 76-78.

enter into an alliance against a neighboring state that did nothing to provoke a break in peaceful relations. Therefore, the Porte decided to postpone the negotiations but assured the Prussian king that it would be ready to consider a general defensive treaty upon the completion of the European war.¹¹⁰⁹ However, Obreskov believed that the Porte's stated openness to a general alliance with Prussia after the end of the European war was not sincere but simply "a gold-plated pill."¹¹¹⁰

Indeed, the threat of the Ottoman participation in the war effectively disappeared by fall 1762, although Frederick later vainly tried to resurrect the project, such as in late 1763 and then again in 1765. This episode brought to light Obreskov's good judgment, for which the new empress came to appreciate him and his diplomatic abilities. Catherine II herself also exhibited a measured and careful approach to foreign relations, and strove to avoid perpetuating conflicts. Nevertheless, she listened carefully to her advisors, and in relation to the Ottoman Empire, she preferred to exhibit friendly firmness. With an experienced diplomat such as Obreskov behind her, she felt confident in embarking upon her new diplomatic adventure in Eastern Europe.

¹¹⁰⁹ As a result, Rexin began to transfer back through Holland the substantial sum of money—200,000 levki—that he had received from Berlin in July and August. On the other hand, the khan became irate at the Prussian resident Boskamp and sent him away without any honors. The Porte was very pleased to receive this news. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 39ob.-40. In November the Constantinople public discussed rumors that the Crimean Khan parted ways with the Prussian king because the latter did not pay him the promised 50,000 chervonnye. The khan wrote a rude and insolent letter to Frederick. In addition, the khan attacked Boskamp for marrying a daughter of an Ottoman subject, one watch master Arlo, because, as it was rumored, the khan himself liked the woman. The khan abused Boskamp verbally and threatened to hang him if he did not depart in four hours with all the Prussian officers. He did not, however, provide any horses or guards to Boskamp, who ended up travelling to Jassy on hired carts and in great fear of being robbed by the Tatars. The Moldavian prince, although having orders from the Porte to receive Boskamp in a friendly way, did not dare to contradict the khan's order and did not allow the Prussians to stay longer than one day in Jassy, sending them on to Poland. 90.1.420.1762, L. 64ob.

¹¹¹⁰ 90.1.420.1762, L. 66.

Chapter 12. Obreskov and Catherine: Serving New Ambitions

Defining the New Foreign Policy Course

We have already received a glimpse into Catherine II's new diplomatic objectives. In this section, I will analyze the nature of Catherine's foreign policy in the first years of her reign, in order to highlight the new challenges that Obreskov faced in trying to assist his new sovereign in realizing her ambitions.

Catherine II's foremost initial concern was to legitimize her rule at home and abroad.¹¹¹¹ However, since the first weeks of her reign the new empress also took steps to delineate an original foreign policy: while she asked for advice from leading Russian statesmen, she distilled from their recommendations elements that fit with her developing vision of Russia's position in European and regional politics. Indeed, unlike her predecessors, Catherine refused to peruse

¹¹¹¹ Her first circular orders to Russian representatives abroad contain explanations and justifications of her accession to the throne. See *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 3, and 89.8.321.1762. Reskripty Obrezkovu...iesniami v sviazi s politikoi Turtsii v otnoshenii Rossii, peregovorakh mezhdou Prussiei i Turtsiei i pokhodom Krymskogo khana—a takzhe o merakh po ukrepleniiu turetskoi granitsy. Prilozheniia: manifesty Ekateriny II o vstuplenii na prestol i smerti Petra III; Kopii pisem rezidenta Reksina prusskomu koroliu i prusskogo korolia Velikomu Veziriu o soiuze Prussii i Turtsii. Na russkom, nemetskom, i frantsuzskom iazykakh. June 21—August 28, 1762, LL. 1ob.-2. (This archival document was evidently a copy, as it was misdated to July 21, 1762. However, at the end it was also noted that the original had been sent with the empress's personal signature on June 29, 1762.)

On July 6/17, 1762, for example, the new government published a printed attachment that was addressed to all representatives of the clerical, military, and civil service of Russia and painted a picture of Peter III as an unworthy ruler who attacked Orthodoxy in Russia, uprooted Peter the Great's legacy, and plotted to kill his wife and son. 89.8.321.1762, LL. 5-7ob.

After Obreskov received Catherine's first order from June 29/July 10 on July 26/August 6, the very next day, "early at dawn," he sent Pinii to the Porte, together with four lackeys in rich livery, to announce the event and to assure the Ottoman government of the empress's friendly intentions. Obreskov noted to the Porte that as a sign of her special esteem towards the sultan's friendship, the empress returned the envoy sent by Peter III and appointed her own envoy, with a higher rank. Obreskov reported that the grand vizier and the entire Ottoman ministry heard about the change of rulers in Russia with surprise because they had not received any news that indicated such a possibility. The grand vizier inquired about the reasons for the change on the Russian throne and then remarked that "every ruler who assails law and religion [*do zakonu i very kasaiushchimsia*] usually meets such an end." At the same time, Obreskov sent translator Melnikov to inform the diplomatic corps in Constantinople about the event. The French ambassador, as well as Swedish and Danish envoys, hurried to make reciprocal visits to Obreskov the same day, while the other foreign ministers began to visit the Russian mission the following day. On July 28, Obreskov gathered all members of the mission and they collectively pledged an oath of allegiance to the new empress. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 1-2ob.

mere excerpts from reports of Russian diplomats stationed abroad, which were usually compiled for her by the chancellor or other CFA members. Instead, she demanded to see complete originals, actively read all the reports, and personally ordered necessary instructions.¹¹¹²

As part of her hands-on approach to foreign policy, Catherine asked her circle of advisers for recommendations on the pressing foreign policy issues. Some of them warned her against maintaining further military presence in Poland-Lithuania. In particular, in August 1762 Ivan Nepliev, the former resident in Constantinople, recommended to the empress not to leave the Russian army in Poland because it would be expensive and cause suspicion in neighboring states. Nepliev was the only one, however, who spoke in favor of withdrawing Russian forces from Poland.¹¹¹³ It is doubtless that Nepliev drew on his experience at the Porte when he offered the above advice. Catherine II ignored this minority opinion. On the other hand, she asked her chancellor, Mikhail Vorontsov, to provide her with an analysis of Russia's foreign affairs. In a well-known report from July 1762 chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov presented the new empress with a description of Russia's relations with foreign countries during the reign of Elizabeth I.¹¹¹⁴ In fact, however, this report was not much different from the one Vorontsov had prepared for Peter III in January 1762.¹¹¹⁵ Consequently, Catherine had reasons to approach this report as

¹¹¹² Only after closely shepherding foreign relations for several years did Catherine finally feel comfortable with trusting the CFA more in directing foreign affairs. After 1764 she admitted that she could not personally read all the reports and instructed the CFA to respond to Russian diplomats abroad in a way that agreed with the empress's known views. Thus, after 1764 and especially 1765 Panin's and then Osterman's orders acquired leading importance. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. IV-V. It appears that Catherine felt that she could refocus on domestic affairs after she succeeded in installing Stanislaw Poniatowski as the king of Poland.

A marked difference observable in Obreskov's reports was increased secrecy of correspondence: in the early years of Catherine's reign Obreskov scripted his reports almost completely.

¹¹¹³ Soloviev, Book XIII, Vol. 25, p. 158; Stegnii, *Razdely*, p. 85. It should also be noted that Nepliev was part of Nikita Panin's familial network because Nepliev was married to Panin's sister. John P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 26.

¹¹¹⁴ *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 272-312.

¹¹¹⁵ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 141, fn. 3; *AKV*, Vol. VII, pp. 532-533.

potentially useful from a factual point of view, but ultimately limited in its value as it represented the opinion of only one statesman, whom the empress did not take very seriously after all.¹¹¹⁶

Still, Vorontsov's report is worth noting because it provided an overview of several decades of relations with various foreign states and suggested future measures to advance Russian interests and contain strategic threats. Catherine ended up heavily relying on this information in the first year or two of her reign, as becomes evident from her approach to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, in relation to the Porte, Vorontsov noted that despite losing control of Azov and the mouth of the Don the Ottoman Empire continued to threaten Russia in three ways. First, the Porte took part in Polish affairs, in which it had great influence. Secondly, the Porte could decide to expand at the expense of the Persian Empire, especially towards the Caspian Sea. And, thirdly, the Porte could order the Crimean khans to attack Russian territory.¹¹¹⁷ Vorontsov was right on point in assigning Polish affairs the first place in the list of main problems in Russo-Ottoman relations. He knew that a succession crisis in Poland was a question of when, not if. Augustus III had been suffering from ailing health for a decade and Vorontsov foresaw the problem of advancing Russian interests in Poland in the face of not only other European nations, such as France, but also the Ottoman Empire. Given that Poland became the main foreign policy preoccupation of Catherine II in the 1760s, the empress could not ignore her Turkish neighbor. This early analysis by Vorontsov dictated Catherine's painstaking efforts to forestall Ottoman intervention against her designs for Poland.

¹¹¹⁶ Catherine did not have particular respect for Vorontsov, and in the middle of August 1763 the chancellor ended up leaving his duties at the CFA in order to tour Europe. This left Bestuzhev-Riumin and Panin to compete with each other for influence at the court. In the end, it was Panin who won, being appointed the first/senior member of the CFA in October 1763, shortly after the death of Augustus III of Poland. See Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 188, 189; David Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 102-117.; Griffiths, "The Rise and Fall," pp. 549-550; Brian L. Davies, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768-1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 1-3, 15-16.

¹¹¹⁷ *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 300, 305.

Catherine's orders to Obreskov in 1762-1763 demonstrate that she founded her policy towards the Ottoman Empire on Vorontsov's assessment. Namely, he described the Ottomans as a declining empire, which was largely a result of a descent into a life of decadence and luxury coupled with widespread internal disorders. However, he underscored that the Ottoman Empire could still mobilize its resources effectively if a reasonable ruler chose to use his "despotic, or limitless" power to take advantage of the empire's abundant resources and more than sufficient finances to establish internal order again and thereby once again become a source of threat for "its neighbors and for Christianity as a whole."¹¹¹⁸ Given our knowledge of Obreskov's 1756 report on the state of the Ottoman Empire, it becomes obvious that Vorontsov relied on that report: his assessment of Ottoman military strength and total budget came straight from Obreskov's account. Vorontsov also borrowed from Obreskov's reports—from the chief dragoman's revelations, to be more precise—the understanding that the Ottoman vigor depended on warfare. Therefore, the Porte always represented a threat because "due to the very nature of its government it is forced from time to time to violate peace with its neighbors."¹¹¹⁹ Vorontsov noted that the Porte could start a war also in order to get rid of useless and disruptive elements in its society, all the while benefitting from new conquests, which were most promising on the border with Venice and Austria. Indeed, he explained the fifteen-year-long peace in the Ottoman Empire—since the end of the Persian war—only as a result of the great unpopularity of the reigning sultans, Mahmud I and Osman III, who feared that a large gathering of their subjects would lead to their deposition, and any prospect of failure in war was a sure recipe for losing the

¹¹¹⁸ *AKV*, Vol. 25, p. 306.

¹¹¹⁹ *AKV*, Vol. 25, p. 306.

throne. By contrast, Mustafa III was eager to fight and was restrained only by the grand vizier.¹¹²⁰

It is crucial that Vorontsov highlighted that the only tool Russia had for pressuring the Ottomans, when it could become necessary, was its secret or obvious help to Ottoman Orthodox minorities, because the latter looked up to and were ready to cooperate with Russia.¹¹²¹ Catherine took heed of this advice, as seen from her approval starting in 1763 of various clandestine missions to the Balkans, masterminded by her favorite Grigorii Orlov.¹¹²² Following Vorontsov's logic, these attempts to build connections with the disgruntled Orthodox peoples of the Ottoman Empire were of a preemptive-defensive nature.

Overall, it was clear to Vorontsov that the Ottomans represented a threat to their neighbors, including Russia, which was particularly vulnerable from the Crimean side. Consequently, for a long-term defensive strategy the chancellor suggested that Russia should strive to acquire Crimea or the mouth of the Don, or some other place that would serve as a convenient naval base on the Black Sea, which would help Russia contain the Turks and the Tatars, including Constantinople itself, as well as allow Russia to spread its commerce via the Black Sea to the south of Europe.¹¹²³ As we know, this program found partial fulfillment in 1774, and was completely realized in 1783 with the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Empire.

However, Russia won the 1768-1774 war against the Ottomans without the help of Austria. In this respect, Catherine's subsequent diplomacy veered off the beaten track. Thus, in his report Vorontsov pointed out that a close alliance with Austria had been an important part of

¹¹²⁰ *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 307-308.

¹¹²¹ *AKV*, Vol. 25, p. 301.

¹¹²² Smilianskaia et al., pp. 29-86.

¹¹²³ *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 302, 308.

Russia's security system in relation to the Porte.¹¹²⁴ In a different report to the empress on July 30/August 10, 1762, Vorontsov once again called Austria a state, whose interests were “naturally” allied with those of Russia.¹¹²⁵ This reminder informed Catherine's attempts in the first year and a half of her reign to maintain friendly relations with Austria. However, she abstained from renewing the alliance even though Vorontsov had suggested it. Increasing importance for Russia of Prussian cooperation in Polish affairs pushed Austria and Russia further apart, and Catherine eventually abandoned her aspiration to maintain the Austrian system in relation to the Ottoman Empire.

Challenges of the New “Peace” Diplomacy

It is true that Catherine II desired peaceful foreign relations in order to solidify her grip on power domestically. Yet, her ambition and confidence in Russia's ability to play a leading role in European affairs led her to pursue quite an active foreign policy. As Michael T. Florinsky has noted, “The pressure of events, combined with her own longing for a dominating position in Europe and for military glory, made Catherine forget these dreams of her youth [about the peaceful foreign policy].”¹¹²⁶ One of her first goals was to assure that Poland-Lithuania would remain under Russian influence after the death of Augustus III. As a result, her diplomacy became highly interventionist in Poland, with large amounts of money and significant troop concentrations on the border of and inside Poland-Lithuania ensuring that her candidate for the throne, former favorite and member of the pro-Russian party of Polish nobles Stanislaw Poniatowski, would win the crown in 1764. Russia had played a dominant role in Poland ever

¹¹²⁴ *AKV*, Vol. 25, pp. 302-303.

¹¹²⁵ *AKV*, Vol. 25, p. 339.

¹¹²⁶ Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 514.

since the turn of the eighteenth century, but Catherine's personal preoccupation with the Polish question turned her into a dictator by force of arms and intrigue. Indeed, this question consumed her since the early months of her reign.

As a result, Russia's relations with other foreign nations became secondary in importance, and even subservient to the Polish issue. This was especially true in Russia's relations with the Ottoman Empire, which St. Petersburg feared would take an active role in Polish affairs and oppose Russian plans. Yet, Catherine also did not forget about traditional Russian interests at the Porte. Obreskov's responsibilities, therefore, increased exponentially over the following years. Not only did he have to keep the Ottomans from interfering in Poland-Lithuania or even declaring war on Russia, he also had to advance and protect Russian interests in the region, such as security from Crimean attacks, peaceful resolution of border disputes, defense of the legitimacy of Russian new border fortresses, and, once again, the question of Russia's right of navigation on the Black Sea. Concomitantly, Obreskov was also forced to readjust his traditional diplomatic alliances at the Porte in favor of Prussia and to the detriment of Austria, which was a highly risky and bold endeavor on the part of St. Petersburg. It is unsurprising, therefore, that from time to time Obreskov pushed back on certain issues, in an effort to contribute a measure of realism to Catherine's far-flung ambitions.

“Russian Navigation of the Black Sea Is Impossible”

The most crucial information conveyed by Obreskov to his court on February 15/26, 1763 was completely scripted. In his report N 6 Obreskov responded to the imperial order N 33 from December 19/30, 1762, in which St. Petersburg reminded him to pursue the cause first formulated under Empress Elizabeth—in the imperial order N 6 from 1757,—namely, “to

receive the Porte's permission to allow Russian subjects the right of navigation on the Black Sea on their own ships." In her December 1762 letter to Obreskov, Catherine II had expressed her dissatisfaction with the resident's lack of success in this matter, despite Obreskov's own promise in his report N 8 from 1757 to do everything to realize the goal set before him. Moreover, she reproached Obreskov for dropping the matter altogether, since he had not mentioned it in any of his subsequent reports. On February 19/March 2, 1763, Obreskov wrote in his own defense:

...but, my all-merciful sovereign/*gosudarynia*, I have, due to my all-submissive/*vsepoddanneishii* servile duty and diligence to serve, have made appropriate efforts, as described in my report N 8, and have even succeeded in finding a suitable individual who undertook to bring the task to a successful conclusion. However, I needed a lot of money, regarding which I reported on September 8, 1757 in report N 22, in which I also asked for further instructions. But I have not received any response, which made me think that the Highest Imperial Majesty's Court lost the desire to pursue this matter, or postponed it due to being greatly preoccupied with the German war. I therefore decided to expect future instructions. Thereafter, sultan Osman III died and the above-mentioned individual fell from favor. I lost all hope to succeed in the task and kept silence.¹¹²⁷

Resident Obreskov further explained that he did not believe that St. Petersburg's desire to achieve rights of navigation for Russian subjects on their own ships could be realized. It had been a difficult task back in 1757, as Obreskov had explained in his reports N 8 and N 12 from that year, because sultan Osman III's rule was very unstable and grand viziers were replaced almost every third of each year, with the result that the administration of the empire was always changing hands. Subsequently, sultan Mustafa III came to power and, according to Obreskov, wisely gave up administration of affairs that did not concern him, giving the grand vizier, whom the sultan held in high esteem, full power to govern the empire. However, it was still completely impossible to achieve navigation rights for Russian subjects. Obreskov underscored that he saw this goal as "IM-possible" due to the following reasons:

¹¹²⁷ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 90-91ob. To buttress his own defense against the accusation of having ignored imperial orders, Obreskov attached copies of his report N 22 from September 8, 1757, in which he had described his attempts to secure the cooperation of the sultan's secretary. He also attached the copies of the Ottoman-English and Ottoman-Dutch commercial treaties, whose translations the empress ordered the CFA to present to her personally. 89.8.334.1763, L. 86.

...the demand of the Highest Imperial Majesty's Court for a permission for Russian subjects to enjoy navigation rights on their own ships does not promise the Porte any advantages that could compel it to sacrifice its perceived sense of security stemming from the prohibition of [foreign] navigation on the Black Sea, as guaranteed by the solemn [peace] treaty, because everything that can be imported from your [Russian] Empire, such as bread, iron, copper, and timber, is abundant in its [Ottoman] provinces on the Black and White [Mediterranean] seas, so that if there was good order [in the Ottoman Empire] everything could be procured very cheaply.

Likewise, the Porte will not find at all compelling the argument that such [Russian] commerce would greatly benefit mutual subjects, which is moreover impossible due to the first principle of [Ottoman] government, which is martial in nature and gets by as much as possible with what is presently available, while thinking little about the future, which is evidenced by its provinces, which [despite] being extremely fertile are in a state of desolation and destitution.¹¹²⁸

Moreover, [my] all-merciful sovereign, it will be impossible to achieve desired results through bribes under the current grand vizier because he exhibits diligence and extreme caution in order not to attract any criticism, and because his supreme power is so extensive that no treasure can impress him.¹¹²⁹

Lastly, Obreskov politely expressed his unfavorable assessment of another part of Catherine II's instruction. Namely, she had asked him to gauge the Porte's opinion regarding the intention of the Russian government to conclude a commercial treaty with the Venetian Republic, which would be based on trade of goods via the Bosphorus and the Black Sea on ships belonging to Ottoman subjects.

With servile reverence I take the liberty to all-submissively report to Your Imperial Majesty that according to my weak-witted reasoning I do not see any benefit from such gauging, moreover I am afraid that it could raise [the Porte's] concerns about Russia's increasing settlement of the border area around the Azov Sea, from where such trade with Venice would have to be carried out, and therefore easily trigger some sudden suspicion or complaint from the Porte....

Obreskov continued to argue against the idea, pointing out that such a Russo-Venetian commercial treaty would alert the Porte especially in light of close cooperation between the two states against the Porte during the early part of Peter the Great's reign. As a result, Obreskov warned that the Ottoman government could not only refuse to provide ships of its subjects for maritime trade between Russia and Venice, but could also reverse its favorable attitude towards the construction of the fortress of St. Dimitrii. Therefore, Obreskov asked the empress—"all-

¹¹²⁸ Most likely, under the influence of statements like this nineteenth-century historian Vladimir Ulianitskii concluded that the Porte did not recognize the importance of trade for the state. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 37, fn. 1; pp. 39, 87, 102.

¹¹²⁹ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 91ob.-93.

submissively”—to postpone addressing the issue of the Russo-Venetian commercial treaty at least until the successful conclusion of the fortress case.¹¹³⁰

¹¹³⁰ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 93-93ob. Catherine became involved in the idea of establishing closer commercial links with Venice—through the Black Sea—since the early months of her reign, following renewed approaches of Venetian ambassadors abroad regarding this matter. As a result, on September 4/15, 1762, she ordered Obreskov to share his opinion about the prospect of opening Russia’s trade with Venice through the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Catherine felt that the Porte had no right to forbid it. *SIRIO*, Vol. 49, pp. 79, 121-122.

To this Obreskov replied on October 25/5 that he found the suggestion, expressed by the Venetian extraordinary ambassador in London Morosini to the Russian plenipotentiary minister in England Count Vorontsov, commendable but he did not believe that it would be possible for Russia and Venice to sign such a commerce treaty. “The main obstacle lies in the excessive prejudice of the Porte against any foreign ships in the Black Sea and from which no treasures would be sufficient to heal it.” Obreskov referred the empress to his earlier report on the matter—from April 8/19, 1757. Consequently, Venetian ships would not be able to enter the Black Sea and trading on Turkish ships would be inconvenient and risky. Moreover, Obreskov warned St. Petersburg that if such a treaty was signed anyway and the Porte found out about it, the Porte would attempt to obstruct any commerce with the Russian regions that bordered Ottoman territory, due to the equally great prejudice of the Porte against the prospect of an increase in Russian population in those border regions, which would be an inevitable result of commerce. The Porte would have tools to obstruct this trade because captains and crew of ships would all be Ottoman subjects. Therefore, Obreskov recommended to St. Petersburg to postpone opening commercial negotiations with Venice until better times, “when God/*vsevyshnii* will present a chance to agree on conditions for navigating the Black Sea that will be more favorable to Your Empire.”

Obreskov offered alternative suggestions, which were quite detailed. Namely, Russia and Venice could agree on extending the same treatment to mutual merchants as that enjoyed by other friendly nations. St. Petersburg could offer Venetian merchants to open trade offices in the southern Russian borderlands, similar to the existing practice in the Baltic ports. Moreover, to make trade in the south more appealing St. Petersburg could suggest that Venetian merchants could establish a general office in Constantinople and trade with Russian merchants on the basis of collective responsibility [*artel’nyi* (cooperative) *torg*]. However, Obreskov did not truly believe in the viability of the latter option. On one hand, he viewed Russian merchants as not ready for such commerce with foreigners. On the other hand, Venetian merchants were universally recognized as cunning and wily. Lastly, Obreskov listed Venetian products that could be imported to Russia with mutual benefit. These included all kinds of Italian silks, Corfu olive oil, various dry vegetables, Lebanese wines bought in the Archipelago (for Italian wines did not withstand transport by sea), and cotton cloth bought in Smyrna and Salonika. Obreskov then listed Russian exports that could be most profitable: furs, rhubarb, pressed/*paiusnaia* and salted caviar, wax, raw and processed leather, yuft, as well as the best quality iron and copper. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 55-56.

Yet, Catherine persisted in her efforts. On November 28/December 9, 1762, she asked Obreskov if he deemed it viable to gauge the Porte’s attitude toward a prospective Russo-Venetian commercial treaty, if the trade was carried only on Turkish ships. She also expressed her wish to sign a commercial treaty with the Porte. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 28-29.

However, Obreskov’s prediction was correct in that Venice was also afraid of the Porte’s reaction and for the longest time declined to send its official diplomatic representative to St. Petersburg, even though the Russian government continuously asked for it as a precondition for starting trade negotiations. Finally, Russia itself made the first move—it appointed Marquis Pano Marucci, a Venetian subject of Greek origin who came from a wealthy clan of bankers at Corfu, as Russian *chargé d’affaires* in Venice and other Italian states in 1768. Indeed, Venice tried to make Russia unilaterally negotiate necessary permissions with the Porte. Thus, on April 29/May 10, 1766 ambassador Golitsyn reported from Vienna that the Venetian ambassador agreed to conclude the commercial treaty, but in view of the fear that many in the Venetian government felt about possible reactions of the Porte, he asked: 1) that Russia itself achieve permission from the Porte to allow passage of Russo-Venetian goods through the Black Sea (Panin noted here: “Wouldn’t they say that Mr. ambassador is charging us with a formidable task.”), take on the entire negotiation, and agree on the size of Ottoman duties on both Venetian and Russian products; 2) that Russia had to announce to Venice that it sought nothing but the commercial treaty; 3) and to sign the two main articles in Vienna before Venice would have to send its official minister to St. Petersburg to conclude the treaty. When Golitsyn said that first Venice had to send its negotiator to St. Petersburg, the Venetian ambassador insisted on first

Empress Catherine II took heed of Obreskov's advice. She personally commented on his report, instructing the CFA to postpone the matter until the resolution of the case of the fortress. However, she ordered the CFA to prepare everything necessary in order to be ready to take advantage of a propitious moment when it came.¹¹³¹

The CFA—most likely the chancellor Vorontsov himself—prepared a special remark on Obreskov's report from February 15/26, evidently to provide Catherine II with more information. For the most part, Obreskov's efforts and actions were characterized with approval. But what was most significant is that the CFA's remark unambiguously identified the main goal of the Russian government in pursuing such a treaty: it was only a pretext for slipping in one article that would allow Russian subjects to trade in Ottoman territories on their own ships, which in turn would lay the foundation for achieving Russia's ultimate goal of organizing a military fleet on the Azov Sea. The author of the report noted that given the importance of the matter, the CFA had presented Obreskov's reports to the Imperial Conference several times, demanding resolution concerning the dispensation of necessary funds. Yet, in the context of the Seven Years' War the conference did not pay any attention and did not respond to Obreskov's reports, noting that the requested sum of money was so exorbitant that it was better to spend it on military operations against the Prussian king. As a result of such neglect of the issue by the imperial conference, the CFA could neither provide Obreskov with money, nor give him further instructions. Soon afterwards, the sultan died and his confidant fell from favor, which undermined the entire existing plan. However, most likely not to embarrass the empress for her earlier criticism of Obreskov, the CFA still interpreted the resident's silence on the matter after

signing the three articles in Vienna. Panin commented that the entire proposal was quite Italian in everything, and that the Venetian government was using political charlatantry. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 188, 190; Vol. 57, p. 525; Vol. 87, pp. 42, 44.

¹¹³¹ She also ordered to send Obreskov's opinion concerning the project of a Russo-Venetian commercial treaty to Count A.R. Vorontsov in London. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 93, 93ob. Aleksandr Vorontsov was the chancellor's nephew and served as plenipotentiary minister in London from 1762 to 1764.

the death of Osman III and lack of attempts to find a close associate of the new sultan who could cooperate in advancing Russia's objectives as a failure, because "he had been expressly instructed about the matter, which was so essential and important, that he [Obreskov] should never have let it out of sight or forgotten about it."¹¹³²

In other words, the author of the CFA report helped Obreskov defend himself against mostly unjust accusations. Still, even in 1763 Obreskov did not have faith in the possibility for Russia of achieving rights of commercial navigation on the Black Sea. His silence on the matter after Osman III's death, therefore, most likely stemmed not only from lack of response from St. Petersburg, but also from his own caution not to aggravate the situation in the context of the Seven Years' War and, last but not least, from his deep skepticism concerning the feasibility of attaining the stated objective. He was so confident in his doubts that he presented them extensively in the above-mentioned letter to the empress. It is difficult to imagine that Obreskov could not see how important the matter was to St. Petersburg, but he seems to have firmly believed that at least under the then-ruling Ottoman administration the task was impossible to realize.

Catherine obviously listened to her resident because she temporarily stopped attempting to raise the issue of the Black Sea navigation with the Ottoman government. However, in late spring 1763 Catherine took advantage of a favorable period in relations with the Porte and the khan to remind Obreskov to find a convenient occasion to secure the Porte's permission for Russian merchant ships to navigate the Black Sea. Catherine expected Obreskov to make utmost efforts and not to spare any money for gifts in order to achieve this goal.¹¹³³

¹¹³² 89.8.334.1763, LL. 86-87ob., 94-98.

¹¹³³ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 177, 177ob.

It is noteworthy that the empress was revisiting a matter that had just recently been discussed: just a month earlier she had read Obreskov's explanation of why the Russian commercial navigation on the Black Sea was an impossible goal. To her credit, Catherine made the reminder very politely. She did not even draw attention to the fact that she was resuming her insistence on the matter due to the death of the grand vizier, although she had a right to expect Obreskov to initiate necessary efforts on his own, considering his belief that the goal of commercial navigation was unattainable specifically under Koca Ragıp Paşa. Most likely, Catherine realized that Obreskov had too much on his plate. Precisely for this reason, the issue of commercial navigation was almost entirely dropped from the agenda¹¹³⁴—not to reappear until the outbreak of the 1768-1774 war, when it was finally solved by military means.

Taming Crimea through Diplomacy

Relations with Crimea, as before, were a constant source of problems in Russo-Ottoman relations. We saw above that Catherine's solution was to try to depose Kırım Giray, who had been reigning in Crimea since 1758. At the same time, she attempted finally to succeed in introducing a permanent Russian diplomatic representative at the khan's capital, Bahçesaray. Even though she was encouraged in these plans by the Porte's own dissatisfaction with Kırım Giray, it proved to be a protracted challenge. The Porte managed to depose the troublesome khan

¹¹³⁴ Panin hoped to make some progress on this issue after making a break with Austria. Even before the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski, in summer 1764 Panin suggested to Catherine to instruct Obreskov to raise the issue of navigation as soon as he was confident that the Porte had peaceful intentions and saw the advantage of Russia's break with Austria. 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 126-126ob. Subsequent events made it impossible. However, on June 2/13, 1765 Catherine II once again reminded Obreskov not to forget about the goal of achieving for Russia the right of commercial navigation on the Black Sea, but it was an obvious afterthought at the end of a long letter concerning relations with Poland. 89.8.1.374.1765, L. 83ob. Consequently, on October 9/20, 1765 Obreskov responded in a similarly brief manner: "As for the attainment of the desired object, namely the permission for our ships to sail on the Black Sea, I have reported in detail in my various reports beginning from early 1757 about all the insurmountable impediments, or better to say the complete impossibility, to which [reports] I am referring you again." 90.1.526.1765, L. 11ob.

only in fall 1764. Moreover, despite initial success in introducing a consul in Crimea in 1763, in view of the consul's unwise attempt to rescue one of his servants who turned Muslim, St. Petersburg had to close down its mission in Crimea in 1765. Despite repeated efforts to reestablish the consulate, Russia did not succeed in this desire. As a result, French consular agents began to wield disproportionate influence on the khans. This circumstance turned to Russia's particular disadvantage in 1768, when the French consul Baron de Tott, with Kırım Giray's help, provoked the Russian side to commit an atrocity in order to ignite popular demands for war in Constantinople.

The friendly disposition of the Crimean Khan was very important for Russia, because a hostile khan could easily spoil relations between the two empires. Overall, however, Obreskov found understanding in the Ottoman government concerning Kırım Giray, whom the Porte itself wanted to depose for willful behavior but could not yet find a safe way to do so. As a result, Obreskov argued that deposition was not the solution. Already by fall 1762, the Porte was concerned about the khan's defiant posture in relation to the sultan. Kırım Giray felt in complete control over his territories and imagined that he could even threaten his suzerain. Indeed, admitted Obreskov, through the firm allegiance of all nomadic Tatars the khan could completely control all the provinces east of the Danube as well as the mouth of that river. Consequently, he had in his power, whenever he wished, to starve Constantinople and therefore imperil the central regime. Therefore, Obreskov did not consider St. Petersburg's order to bribe the Porte to depose the khan realistic. The Porte was afraid of the khan and endured all his insolence, preferring to keep him in check through flattery and gifts, although even these measures often failed to make the khan cooperative.¹¹³⁵

¹¹³⁵ 90.1.420.1762, L. 31.

The Porte became very annoyed when it learned that the khan had entered into much more extensive obligations with the Prussian King than it previously ascertained and that the khan was about to attack Hungary. The Porte immediately forced most of Crimean sultans and the most distinguished murzas at the khan's court to promise that the khan would not undertake anything without the Porte's orders. But this revelation finally compelled the Porte to seriously consider replacing the khan through usual intrigue. While continuing its flattery of the khan, the Porte sought to convince the "Sherim"¹¹³⁶ Murzas and others in Crimea to lodge a collective complaint against the khan. It turned out, however, that all the Tatars, except perhaps the Budjak ones, were quite satisfied with the khan despite his capricious character. Through bribes and promises the Porte was finally able to receive such a complaint and recalled the former khan, Arslan Giray,¹¹³⁷ from his exile on the island of Chios. The latter, being well versed in the affairs of the Tatars, began to advise the Porte on the best way to depose Kırım Gray. Obreskov learned through his secret agents that Arslan Giray suggested secretly taking firm control over the border fortresses of Hotin, Bendery, and Ochakov in preparation for tackling the khan. However, Obreskov doubted that the Porte would be able to depose Kırım Giray, because "while the Porte is cunning, on the other hand the khan is farsighted and enterprising, and he would now be even more so because, since the second half of the previous year, he has accrued about 500,000 levki through the benevolence of His Royal Majesty of Prussia."¹¹³⁸

¹¹³⁶ Shirin.

¹¹³⁷ 1748-1756.

¹¹³⁸ Obreskov reported that, according to the French ambassador in Constantinople, Frederick was upset about the futile expenditure and angry at the envoy Rexin and resident Boskamp for not warning him that the khan would not commit even a small part of his forces against another state without the Porte's permission. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 31-32.

- The St. Dimitrii Fortress

The Crimean khans, especially Kırım Giray, traditionally oversaw Ottoman northern borders. They were the ones who alerted Constantinople about new Russian fortresses. As with the fortress of St. Elizabeth in the 1750s, the Porte became uneasy with every new Russian fortress near the mutual border. In the 1760s, these included the fortress of St. Dimitrii at the mouth of the Don River and the Mozdok fortification in the Caucasus. These were significant issues but secondary in importance to other major problems in mutual relations. Almost always, negative reports of the khan were the primary reason of the Porte's involvement in these matters. As a result, Obreskov approached this problem as an extension of Russo-Crimean tensions.

For example, in fall 1762 he chose to postpone discussion of the St. Dimitrii fortress until the following month, because he wanted to see the Porte become further committed to a peaceful policy, especially if it went ahead with the deposition of Kırım Giray.¹¹³⁹ However, because of the khan's exaggerated complaints,¹¹⁴⁰ the dragoman of the Porte confronted Obreskov about the border issues just as Obreskov was about to send his reports to Russia. Overall, Obreskov was not worried about the effect of the khan's complaints. However, Obreskov allowed for the possibility that the khan, having despaired about the prospect of engaging his forces against Austria, decided to redirect the Porte's attention towards Russia. In this connection Obreskov suggested to his government to improve the defenses on the Russo-Ottoman border.¹¹⁴¹

Obreskov's official note to the Porte concerning the fortress received favorable reception: "It had such a success," admitted Obreskov, "that I even could not have expected." The scribes of the reis efendi's secretary informed Obreskov that all the Ottoman officials who discussed his

¹¹³⁹ He also expected that the return of part of Russian troops from Prussia to Ukraine would force the Porte to be more moderate in its objections. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 33-33ob.

¹¹⁴⁰ The khan complained about the Zaporozhian settlements on the border and about the settlement of Russian subjects on the barrier zone and the Kuban territory.

¹¹⁴¹ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 36-36ob.

note at a meeting on October 2/13—the grand vizier, *mufti*, grand vizier's *kahya*, and reis efendi—found all of Obreskov's arguments convincing and became completely assured that the khan had no other goal but to sow conflict between the Russian and Ottoman empires. As a result, the Porte resolved that the sultan would send an unequivocal *hatt-ı şerif*, or an imperial edict, to the khan concerning the sultan's intention to keep peace with Russia. During Obreskov's meeting with the sultan, which included almost all the leading Ottoman courtiers, the Ottoman sovereign approved the idea of sending a *hatt-ı şerif* to the khan.¹¹⁴²

Moreover, on October 6/17 the grand vizier called Pinii and told him in a friendly manner that, according to Obreskov's suggestion, the Porte decided to send a commissar to examine the border situation because the Porte could not take Tatar claims at face value, for the Tatars were famous for exaggerating everything. The Porte resolved to send a commissar after receiving the khan's reply to the *hatt-ı şerif*. The grand vizier added in a loud voice that he was personally committed to preserving peaceful relations with Russia. Obreskov noted in his report to St. Petersburg that such a declaration by a grand vizier was unexpected and out of the ordinary. Obreskov suspected there could be several reasons for such a friendly pronouncement. First, Obreskov had mentioned to the dragoman of the Porte in late September/early October that the Porte did not have to believe the khan but could declare him a rebellious vassal and replace him. The dragoman of the Porte subsequently told Obreskov that this suggestion made a good impression at the Porte. Secondly, Obreskov claimed that upon reading his note the Ottoman ministry admitted, with embarrassment, that the khan's complaints about Zaporozhian settlements on Ottoman territory were unfair. Thirdly, the Porte could have been affected by Obreskov's warning that if the Ottoman government did not put a stop to these false rumors, it

¹¹⁴² Indeed, on October 7/18 the Ottoman court dispatched the imperial order to Crimea. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 37-37ob.

would soon face the need to satisfy popular petitions—*arz-mazar*—to act against Russia.¹¹⁴³

Obreskov made the latter warning in order to discredit the khan and because he had learned that on September 24/October 5 the Porte decided not to replace the khan but to wait for an answer from Russia concerning the fortress of St. Dimitrii. In case of an unfavorable reply from St. Petersburg, the Porte was prepared to order the khan to act against Russia. Therefore, Obreskov wanted to signify to the Porte that Russia would hold it responsible for any aggressive action of the khan. Consequently, Obreskov thought that the grand vizier's pronounced declaration of friendship was a means to soothe potential tension.¹¹⁴⁴

Obreskov had no doubt that the Porte wanted to keep peace with Russia but the unruly behavior of the khan was becoming more and more worrisome. The Porte experienced difficulties in its attempts to replace him. Therefore, Obreskov suggested to St. Petersburg to continue measures to guard the Russo-Ottoman border. For his part, Obreskov decided to put an end to the khan's complaints about Zaporozhian settlements by writing to the Kiev governor-general Glebov that he had to demand that the khan send a commissar who would observe the removal of the Zaporozhians from Ottoman territory. Otherwise, argued Obreskov, there was no way to remove the Cossacks without the help of the khan because even ten Russian soldiers sent for the purpose of removing the Zaporozhians would cause the Tatars to protest that thousands of Russian troops with coats of arms and cannons violated Crimean territory.¹¹⁴⁵

¹¹⁴³ Such popular sentiment, provoked by French intrigues, was precisely the reason behind the Ottoman declaration of war against Russia in 1768.

¹¹⁴⁴ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 37ob.-39, 49-52.

¹¹⁴⁵ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 39-39ob., 51ob., 73-73ob. In mid-December Obreskov also submitted a note to the Porte, in which he claimed that the Cossacks were not living on the Kuban but merely went fishing there, which was not prohibited by the peace treaty. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 85-85ob.

In January 1763 the khan alleged that the Russian empress planned to travel to Kiev and that a considerable number of Russian troops approached the Bug near the Serbian settlements. Obreskov wrote a note to the Porte assuring that he did not possess such information. Even if it was true that the empress planned to visit Kiev, it would be done for the purpose of visiting holy places—just as pilgrims came to Jerusalem in the Ottoman Empire—and the new empress was in fact following the example of the late Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, whom Catherine II resolved to imitate in all matters. Regarding the troop movements near the border, Obreskov explained that the troops, after

In order to assure the Porte's cooperation in the matter, Obreskov made gifts of sable furs to the grand vizier's *kahya* and reis efendi and promised further rewards—1,000 and 5,000 chervonnye *findiks*, respectively—when the matter reached its final resolution. The intermediaries who carried Obreskov's messages to the afore-mentioned Ottoman officials also received 160 chervonnye *zincirlis*. If the issue ended propitiously for Russia, Obreskov also suggested to gift sable fur of the best quality to the grand vizier. In the meantime, according to intelligence provided by the scribes of the reis efendi's secretary, the grand vizier's *kahya* and the reis efendi came in support of arguments that Obreskov expressed in his note to the Porte concerning the fortress of St. Dimitrii. Obreskov defended Russia's right, according to the border convention of 1741, to build new fortresses outside of the barrier zone and requested the Porte to acknowledge this right and in general to resolve the matter in a friendly way. Obreskov reported to St. Petersburg that the amicable tone of his message and the support of the *kahya* and the reis efendi produced desired effect at the Porte. The latter still had to await the khan's advice on the subject, which the sultan had requested, but the Ottoman government appeared inclined to satisfy Russian demand in order to remain in a position, in turn, to demand something for Crimea.¹¹⁴⁶

The following month, Obreskov learned from his secret informants that the Ottoman government had frequent discussions about this matter and, after all, remained inclined to acknowledge Russia's right to build the fortress. The decision was not a difficult one because the Porte realized that the new fortress would not threaten Ottoman territory as much as the one it was replacing—the unambiguously military and almost unapproachable fortress of St. Anna. Moreover, the Porte must have found solace in the fact that Russia could not maintain a navy and

being stationed for several years in the north, where majority of them were no longer needed, were being relocated proportionally to other provinces in order to lift the burden from the north. The next morning Obreskov received correspondence from St. Petersburg, which did not mention any preparations in Kiev. Obreskov informed the Porte about it and noted that the Ottoman government calmed down a little bit as a result. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 15-16, 22.

¹¹⁴⁶ 89.8.2303.1762, LL. 34, 38; 90.1.420.1762, LL. 57-58, 61-62.

send ships to the Azov Sea. Still, Obreskov could not say anything with confidence because the Porte's intentions were known to change easily. In addition, Obreskov had reason to remain concerned about the Crimean khan who managed not only to foil the Porte's attempts to replace him with Arslan Giray, but also complained that all the Tatars would revolt if they heard about Arslan Giray. Obreskov noted that the Porte exhibited "unexplainable cowardice" in confirming Kırım Giray in his position and in placing limits on Arslan Giray's freedom to maintain relations with influential individuals.¹¹⁴⁷

The khan, in the meantime, continued to argue that the Porte had to oppose the construction of the fortress of St. Dimitrii. On November 20/December 1, 1762 the Porte received the khan's reply, in which he underscored that in time Russia would fortify the said fortress, which will be filled with inhabitants who would then wish to settle on the barrier land. These Russian subjects would thus effectively appropriate the barrier zone and spread Russian border further to the south. The khan deferred the final decision to the Porte and the sultan. The scribes of the reis efendi's chancellery informed Obreskov about the khan's letter and all the subsequent developments. Thus, Obreskov knew that despite the khan's letter the Porte still wanted to satisfy Russia and on November 27/December 8 requested the sultan's approval. But the sultan was impressed by the khan's point of view and at first sent an order to the Porte to the effect that it was better to break peace than to provide states that could come into war with the Porte with tools that could be dangerous to the Ottoman Empire. The Porte, however, was able to convince the sultan to reverse his decision. The grand vizier held special conferences at the Porte, with the *mufti* and other clerical and lay officials, until December 7/18. On that day the Porte presented its report to the sultan, in which all counselors expressed their unanimous position that the matter of the fortress of St. Dimitrii had to be resolved in a friendly way. The

¹¹⁴⁷ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 63-63ob.

Porte especially underscored that an outbreak of war, as it was known from experience, frequently hurt the ones who initiated it. The Porte further exhorted the sultan to respect the interests of his empire and his subjects, and to save the Muslim people from potential harm, expenses, hunger, and other calamities. The Porte also reminded the sultan about the accepted resolution to observe peace unless a neighbor made an adversarial move. The same month the sultan finally approved the Porte's resolution.¹¹⁴⁸

The grand vizier Koca Ragıp Paşa stood behind the Porte's conciliatory policies. He did everything to prevent the deterioration in mutual relations because of the fortress of St. Dimitrii.¹¹⁴⁹ Even though the matter remained unresolved in late 1762, Obreskov took heart in the fact that the incident "revealed the Porte's direct sentiments concerning peace, which were beyond doubt."¹¹⁵⁰

His assessment proved correct, for in the first several months of 1763 the Porte not only approved the Russian request to appoint a consul to Crimea, but also agreed to the construction of the fortress of St. Dimitrii.¹¹⁵¹ On March 1/12, Obreskov wrote to St. Petersburg that the dragoman of the Porte informed him secretly that the Porte did not plan on sending its commissars to the border in order to inspect the site of the construction. Instead, the Porte hoped to settle the matter through the Crimean Khan and the newly expected Russian consul.¹¹⁵² St. Petersburg was very pleased to learn this. Chancellor Vorontsov found that the fact that the Porte

¹¹⁴⁸ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 51ob.-52, 71-72, 74-76.

¹¹⁴⁹ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 75ob., 79.

¹¹⁵⁰ 90.1.420.1762, L. 73.

¹¹⁵¹ On the site of today's Rostov-na-Donu, although the fortress was demolished in the middle of the nineteenth century.

¹¹⁵² 89.8.334.1763, LL. 120-120ob.

and the khan declined to send their representatives to the Don would serve in the future as evidence of Russia's right to have constructed it at the chosen location.¹¹⁵³

On May 22/June 2, 1763, the Porte officially announced to Obreskov, through the dragoman of the Porte, that in essence it agreed to the construction of the fortress of St. Dimitrii and that it was not planning to send any commissars to the site. In describing this notification in his June 27/July 8 report, Obreskov noted that the "Asian haughtiness" did not allow the Porte to express its agreement with necessary clarity but the matter finally could be considered resolved, especially after secret informants confirmed to Obreskov that the Porte had ordered the khan to settle the matter peacefully together with Glebov. Obreskov sent the promised gifts to the *kahya* and reis efendi for their help. After a year and a half of constant changes and demanding challenges, and despite the change of the grand viziers, Obreskov could finally declare that "Everything here is well and the peaceful system is unshakable."¹¹⁵⁴

- The Mozdok Fortress

The other new border project that the khan protested against was Mozdok in the Caucasus, which was established in 1759 as a settlement of fugitive Kabardians who adopted Christianity, but began to turn into a real fortress in 1763.¹¹⁵⁵ The khan complained that the Russian settlement of Mozdok threatened the Kabardas, the North Caucasian polities that used to be subject to the Crimean Khan, but had been guaranteed independence by the Treaty of

¹¹⁵³ 89.8.243.1763, LL. 5-5ob., 9ob., 15; *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 388-389. In June 1763 the two sides, nevertheless, appointed commissars to inspect the fortress. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 527.

¹¹⁵⁴ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 63-63ob.

¹¹⁵⁵ Sean Pollock traces the early history of the establishment of Mozdok, noting that the Russian government decided to take advantage of the settlement of Kabardian converts on its border territory in order to improve the border security. The plan was put forward by the Senate and approved by Catherine II in fall 1762, after which the Russian government planned to build a fortress at some point, but not right away. Sean Pollock, "Empire by Invitation? Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II," Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University, 2006), pp. 91-106.

Belgrade.¹¹⁵⁶ Consequently, starting in 1760 the khan began to actively interfere in Kabardian affairs in order to prevent the spread of Russian influence there.¹¹⁵⁷ St. Petersburg had alerted Obreskov about the khan's invitations for the Kabardians to resettle into Ottoman territory in late 1760, as well as twice in 1761. In February 1763, the Russian government alerted Obreskov that the previous fall the khan had appealed to the Kabardians to become Crimean subjects once again, in return for which the Prussian king would assist them in gaining back territory from Russia, as per the Pruth Treaty.¹¹⁵⁸

The Russian government wanted Obreskov to raise the matter with the Porte, so it would rein in the khan. The resident could argue that there was a threat that the khan's actions would lead to spontaneous retaliations by Russian subjects, such as the Kalmyks and the Don Cossacks.¹¹⁵⁹ In response, however, Obreskov noted that the Porte had not yet approached him for an explanation, either because it was not interested or perhaps because it was awaiting more detailed intelligence. Even though he was hearing about the Mozdok settlement for the first time, Obreskov believed that he could easily disprove the khan's claim that a new fortress was being constructed there. Besides, Obreskov believed that the Porte would not make much noise

¹¹⁵⁶ According to the Treaty of Belgrade, both the Lesser Kabarda, which bordered Russia, and the Greater Kabarda, which bordered the Kuban region of the Crimean Khanate, were granted independence in order to form a buffer zone between the two empires. However, the Lesser Kabarda rulers began to experience attacks from the Greater Kabarda and increasingly sought Russian protection. In 1758 one Lesser Kabarda ruler suggested to settle his tribe closer to the Russian border in the hope of gaining more safety, but the Russian government did not see this as a reasonable solution because any help for the Lesser Kabarda would have entailed crossing into its territory. Therefore, in 1759 another Lesser Kabarda ruler, Kargoka Kanchokin, came to the Russian border fortress of Kizlyar and declared that he wanted to adopt Christianity and settle in Russia further up the River Terek. The Russian government gave him its permission because it welcomed adoption of Christianity by the mountaineer peoples of the North Caucasus. Kargoka chose a place called Mozdok for settlement with his tribe. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 30-33.

¹¹⁵⁷ The policy of accusing Russia of meddling in Kabarda had place as early as 1750, when the then Crimean Khan complained to the Porte that a Russian officer was recruiting volunteers in Kabarda to join the Russian army in a war against Turkey. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p. 287.

The Kabardians were known as an enterprising, stubborn, and martial people. This is why all Crimean khans wanted to have them on their side in order to control the rest of the North Caucasus. The fact that many Lesser Kabarda rulers began to follow Kargoka Kanchokin's example, created a risk for Russia that the Greater Kabarda rulers would seek the khan's help against the Lesser Kabarda and Russia. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 33.

¹¹⁵⁸ 90.1.450.1763, LL. 21-21ob.

¹¹⁵⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 335-340.

because of a renegade Kabarda ruler: "...At least I do not see that it has enough right to do so."¹¹⁶⁰

Considering the favorable attitude of the Crimean Khan towards Russia and the Porte's attempts to prevent any troubles on the Ukrainian border, Obreskov advised St. Petersburg not to pay attention to the khan's letter to the Kabarda rulers. Obreskov explained that the khan's claims were nothing else but the result of earlier Prussian intrigues: "And this did not happen thanks to His Holy mercy towards your subjects through the raising of Your Imperial Majesty by His divine right hand/*desnitsa* to your imperial legitimate Russian throne." Therefore, Obreskov recommended not bothering the Porte with complaints against the khan in order not to remind it of its negotiations with the Prussian king, which had been an outrageous choice that went contrary to the mutual peace treaty and good friendship.¹¹⁶¹

The Russian government was not entirely convinced, however. In fall 1763 St. Petersburg instructed him to respond to possible Ottoman protests regarding the Kabardas by pointing out that the khan's attempts to subjugate the Kabardas went against the peace treaty. Obreskov also had to assure the Porte that the Russian government did not intend to build a fortress at Mozdok, although in reality St. Petersburg thought that such a fortress would be very useful but decided to postpone it in order not to provoke the Ottomans.¹¹⁶² Soon, however, the Mozdok fortress became a reality.

¹¹⁶⁰ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 126.

¹¹⁶¹ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 176-177ob.

¹¹⁶² *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 33-34. This was the first time Obreskov heard of the Mozdok settlement. 90.1.454.1763, LL. 126.

- The Russian Consulate in Crimea

Catherine also showed persistence in achieving the right to maintain a consul in Crimea.

For this purpose, the Kiev governor-general, Ivan Glebov, sent a trusted officer, Lieutenant Bastevik,¹¹⁶³ to Crimea to negotiate with the khan. While St. Petersburg cited many reasons for the consulate, many historians point out that the Russian government primarily wanted to keep a close watch on the khan and be better informed about local developments. One author even suggests that the consulate was in effect an attempt to establish an intelligence network in Crimea with the intent of preparing the future conquest of the peninsula.¹¹⁶⁴ But the more immediate reason was to preclude Crimean intrigues at the Porte aimed against Russian plans for Poland-Lithuania.¹¹⁶⁵

¹¹⁶³ He had also been called Bostavik, and even Bastovik, but his most well known name as a future secret agent of the Kiev governor-general was Bastevik. Bastevik was first mentioned in Russian sources in 1756 as a confidant of an Orthodox Albanian from Jassy, Dervet-Basha-Ivan-Khadzha Mokripul'es/Mokripulzes, who requested to be accepted into Russian service together with his family and 1,500 other Albanians. Anshakov, pp. 48, 62. At first, his mission on behalf of Mokripulzes caused suspicion at St. Petersburg. The Russian government attached a Kiev interpreter who, under the guise of courier, had to accompany Bostavik from Kiev into the Ottoman Empire and secretly observe his actions there. AKV, Vol. 3, p. 392. In September 1756 Obreskov reported that Bastovik, a warrant officer of the Hussar Regiments, Greek by origin, arrived in Constantinople and adamantly requested an Ottoman edict that would assure Bastovik's safety on the way to Mount Athos and other Greek monasteries, where he intended to travel as a pilgrim with one other friend. Obreskov wanted to decline the request because he was worried that Bastovik would take advantage of the edict in an inappropriate way. However, Obreskov was also concerned that if Bastovik's mission failed, St. Petersburg would hold him, the resident, responsible for it. Therefore, he procured the Ottoman edict for Bastovik's safe passage in both directions, in which he claimed Bastovik to be under his personal protection. The edict also freed Bastovik from payment of any *haraç*, duties, or fees. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 338-338ob.

This suspicion later disappeared and Bastevik became one of the leading secret agents of the Kiev governor-general, who sent him not only to Ottoman borderlands, but even to the Tatar and Bashkir territories of the Russian Empire.

¹¹⁶⁴ Kudriavtsev writes that it was the chancellor, Mikhail Vorontsov, who suggested in 1762 to attract the khan to the Russian side. In doing this, Vorontsov was following the advice of the Prussian ambassador in Russia, Baron Wilhelm von der Goltz, who had suggested that the Prussian consul in Crimea, Boskamp, could assist a specially dispatched Russian agent in achieving the khan's permission to open a Russian consulate at his court. N.A. Kudriavtsev, *Gosudarevo oko. Tainaia diplomatiia i razvedka na sluzhbe Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Neva; Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), pp. 358-359. However, Prussian help was no longer realistic by late fall 1762, because Kırım Giray sent Boskamp away and broke relations with Frederick. Moreover, Vorontsov did not need Prussian advice in this matter: St. Petersburg and the Kiev provincial governor had been attempting to establish a permanent representative since the 1740s. Indeed, in early 1763 Obreskov concluded, judging by lieutenant Bastevik's report to Glebov from November 16/27, 1762, that the khan was not so inimical to Russia as the Prussian resident Boskamp had tried to portray him. 89.8.334.1763, L. 104ob.

¹¹⁶⁵ Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, p. 82.

Lieutenant Bastevik proved to be very successful in his negotiations, to such an extent that St. Petersburg even made a point of emphasizing to Obreskov that the khan's agreement to accept a Russian consul was not his achievement, but that of Bastevik. Thus, in February 1763 Obreskov reported that in order to advance the task of appointing a Russian consul in Crimea, he contacted the khan's agent in Constantinople, named Atsız Efendi, and convinced him about the mutual advantages and especially benefits for the khan of having a Russian representative at his court. Atsız Efendi promised Obreskov to persuade the khan to agree to the proposition. Obreskov reported that either due to Atsız Efendi's efforts, or thanks to the khan's interpreter Yakub Ağa and harem doctor Mustafa Efendi, who had promised to help Bastevik, the Crimean khan began to write to the Porte that an authorized Russian representative in Bahçesaray could remedy the slowness in administering relations with Russia. After consulting with Obreskov, the Porte approved the initiative. Obreskov advised his government to hurry to take advantage of the khan's unusual cooperativeness. Obreskov recommended St. Petersburg to send lieutenant Bastevik to immediately to Crimea again, under the pretext of some border issues. But Obreskov strongly cautioned not to reveal to the khan that Russia knew of the Porte's approval for the idea "for his haughtiness makes him dread that the entire world would know that he could not do anything without the Porte's permission."¹¹⁶⁶

In St. Petersburg, the CFA commented on Obreskov's report that it had already ordered Glebov to send Bastevik to the khan with a formal request to establish Russian consulate in Crimea.¹¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, because St. Petersburg had not yet known of the Porte's approval, there was no risk of angering the khan by mentioning that the Porte agreed to the idea. In addition, however, the Russian government highlighted that it was not Obreskov alone who deserved

¹¹⁶⁶ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 104ob.-106ob.

¹¹⁶⁷ 89.8.334.1763, L. 106ob.

credit for the long-desired progress in this question. Rather, St. Petersburg drew attention to the mission of lieutenant Bastevik to Căușeni as a significant factor in changing the disposition of the Crimean Khan. This was said likely not to dishearten Obreskov, but to encourage him to work harder to facilitate the establishment of the Russian consulate in Crimea through the khan's agent in Constantinople. St. Petersburg recognized Obreskov's success in drawing the khan's agent to the Russian side in this matter, but the Russian government thought that the agent had not contributed anything substantial to the recent decision of the Crimean Khan to agree to the Russian request. However, the Russian government hoped that Obreskov would double his efforts to convince the khan's agent to help procure the Porte's ratification of a future written agreement between the future Russian consul and the Crimean Khan on Russia's right to a consulate and on Russian trade in Crimea.¹¹⁶⁸

St. Petersburg's concerns were misplaced, however. Obreskov began to work to procure the Porte's written approval even before he received the afore-mentioned instructions. Through the chief dragoman, Obreskov procured the official note on February 19/March 2, in which the Porte expressed its agreement to the presence of a resident on behalf of the Kiev governor-general in Crimea.¹¹⁶⁹ As a result, wrote Obreskov with palpable excitement, "what was desired

¹¹⁶⁸ 89.8.243.1763, LL. 6-7ob., and *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 439-440.

¹¹⁶⁹ Obreskov explained to his court that the Porte referred to the future Russian representative in Crimea as resident probably because of some mistake in the khan's formulation. It meant nothing else, he assured St. Petersburg, than a person with powers to negotiate various border issues, similar to a *chargé d'affaires*, rather than to an actual resident. Obreskov did not believe that a difference in terms would result in the khan's refusal to receive anyone other than in the rank of resident. Obreskov considered that the most appropriate designation for a Russian authorized representative in Crimea was neither resident, not *chargé d'affaires*, but consul with powers not only to protect Russian merchants but to administer all border affairs. Obreskov promised to assure the right of permanent residence in Crimea for the future Russian consul through obtaining a *berat*, or patent, from the Porte, which it granted to all consuls of foreign nations in the Ottoman Empire.

Obreskov also suggested ignoring the reference in the Porte's note to the Russian consul as a representative of the Kiev governor-general. Instead, the Russian consul had to be authorized directly by the Russian court because the Porte gave its permission for a Russian representative in the Crimean region, rather than at the specific khan's court. Therefore, the Russian consul had to be authorized not by a temporary border commander but by the Russian imperial government. Otherwise, the consul was to be subordinate to the Kiev governor-general only in the sense of dealing with border issues that fell into the scope of the territory administered by the governor-general. If the consul

from the Porte for the entire nineteen years has finally been realized, and the hoped-for benefits depend only on the choice of a skilled person.” He underscored that presence of a Russian consul in Crimea would eradicate the long-standing Tatar hatred towards Russia, instill mutual understanding, so that both the khan and the inhabitants of Crimea would see the new consulate’s undeniable benefits. The Russian government, likewise, realized how much depended on the choice of a fitting individual for the position. A CFA representative noted on the margins of Obreskov’s report: “It is exactly in this choice that the entire difficulty lies.” And Catherine II herself added: “For God’s sake, do not waste time.” She had already inquired after Obreskov’s February reports if one Alfimov wished to take the position. If not, the empress ordered the CFA to choose a good candidate and present him to her immediately.¹¹⁷⁰

Obreskov strongly cautioned that the new consul had to abstain absolutely from meddling into internal Crimean affairs and from extending protection to anyone except Russian subjects. The consul, believed Obreskov, had to be very careful and tactful even in the matter of releasing

were to be authorized directly by St. Petersburg, he would enjoy greater respect in Crimea, believed Obreskov. To overcome possible opposition from the khan, Obreskov advised either to gauge his opinion in advance or, in order not to waste time, to send the chosen consul with letters of credentials both from the Kiev governor-general and from the chancellor of the Russian Empire, so that the consul could accredit himself no matter what. However, Obreskov suggested to stroke the khan’s narcissism and haughtiness by underscoring that accreditation of the Russian consul by the imperial government was much more commensurate with the khan’s distinguished pedigree and décor. Moreover, a consul authorized by St. Petersburg was better equipped to administer mutual border problems because not all border matters lay in the purview of the Kiev governor-general: there were also other border commanders, such as the Don Ataman and the Astrakhan governor. Finally, in case of stubborn opposition of the khan, Obreskov reasoned that it was most important for the new Russian consul to be allowed to reside in Crimea. With time, the consul could bribe necessary people in the Crimean government hierarchy in order to secure his position even better. 89.8.334.1763, L. 116ob.-118ob.

St. Petersburg, however, viewed patents as a poor guarantee because each consul had to receive his individual patent anew, which could be difficult depending on the circumstances of mutual relations at the time. Instead, a written agreement with the khan ratified by the Porte would have lasting value. Therefore, St. Petersburg ordered Obreskov to seek, through a bribe, the help of the khan’s agent in Constantinople, or the friendly dragoman of the Porte, or some other member of the Ottoman ministry. The Russian government viewed the option of legalizing its consul’s presence in Crimea with a patent as a last resort. 89.8.243.1763, LL. 9-13ob., and *SIRIO*, pp. 440-443.

¹¹⁷⁰ She had already inquired after Obreskov’s February reports if one Alfimov wished to take the position. If not, the empress ordered the CFA to choose a good candidate and present him to her immediately. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 106ob., 115-116ob., 123-131. On April 9/20, she ordered the CFA to make an immediate choice between Prime-Major Nikiforov, who had been to Constantinople and Crimea many times before, and one Cherniavskii, a secretary of the Kiev provincial chancellery. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 436. By late April, Catherine was pleading with the CFA—“for God’s sake”—to send the consul as soon as possible. 89.8.334.1763, L. 177.

Russian slaves from Crimean captivity. Finally, it was very critical for the Russian government to instruct all border commanders to pay particular attention to resolving more quickly than usual border issues administered by the consul in Crimea. As a result, hoped Obreskov, “the same will happen to the Tatars as what has happened to the Porte, which had not been able to stand [the idea of] the presence of your [Russian imperial] ministers, and now cannot do without them.”¹¹⁷¹

St. Petersburg did not doubt, unlike Obreskov, that the khan would accept Russia’s authorized representative at his court. On the contrary, the Russian government thought that the khan sought and would be pleased by the fame and honor that the arrival of a Russian consul would bestow on him. The CFA chose Prime-Major Aleksandr Nikiforov as the Russian consul to Crimea.¹¹⁷² Nikiforov had traveled to Crimea many times before and therefore knew about local politics and circumstances. The Russian government gave Nikiforov many furs and other gifts that he had to present to the Crimean khan in secret. The first reason for this was that Russia wanted to avoid setting an official precedent for the future and, secondly, St. Petersburg wanted to avoid irritating the Porte because it was well-known that Russian envoys, except during extraordinary embassies, did not bring any gifts to Constantinople, just as the Porte did not send gifts with its ordinary missions to Russia.¹¹⁷³

¹¹⁷¹ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 119-119ob. Obreskov singled out the dragoman of the Porte for his help in attaining desired results. Therefore, the Russian resident urgently asked St. Petersburg to send him money to reward the dragoman and make other important gifts to solidify success. Thus, because the dragoman did not want to accept payment in furs, Obreskov planned to give him 200 chervonnye *findiks*, or 440 rubles, as well as 50 chervonnye *zincirlis* to the dragoman’s secretary. Likewise, Obreskov felt the need to pay, mostly in advance for expected assistance, 100 chervonnye *zincirlis*, or 150 rubles, to the khan’s agent Atsız Efendi. Catherine II immediately approved the dispensation of the necessary sum of money. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 120-121.

¹¹⁷² Nikiforov had carried out several missions in Constantinople (possibly, as a special courier) and Crimea in the 1740s and 1750s. For example, he was present at the Constantinople mission in 1745, at the time of Veshniakov’s death. Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 76. He had also been one of the candidates for the projected consulate in Crimea in the 1740s. Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 25.

¹¹⁷³ 89.8.243.1763, LL. 14-24ob.

On November 12/23, 1763, however, St. Petersburg had to inform Obreskov with regret that the khan did not want to recognize Nikiforov unless the latter agreed to his conditions.¹¹⁷⁴ The khan, likewise, did not appear interested in concluding a written agreement that would guarantee Russia's permanent right to maintain a consul in Crimea. Therefore, the Russian government encouraged Obreskov to at least procure the necessary patent from the Porte in Nikiforov's name.¹¹⁷⁵

Thereby, St. Petersburg won a temporary victory that allowed it to maintain a consul in Crimea for a little more than a year. When, however, the khan demanded that Nikiforov leave

¹¹⁷⁴ It turned out that the khan was willing to accept a consul from Russia only in order to achieve certain concessions for himself. Namely, Kırım Giray put forward three conditions: to allow Tatars to graze their cattle in the empty Azov land, just as fishing and hunting was permitted to Russian subjects in Ottoman territory; to prohibit Russian merchants from transporting goods via Dnieper, but to follow the old route by land through Perekop to Kozlov; and to resolve border conflicts directly through the consul, without the need to correspond with St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg was concerned that allowing fishing and hunting around Azov would leave to even more clashes with the Zaporozhian Cossacks who usually fished and hunted there, but the khan could be conceded the right for Tatars to graze their cattle there, in order to avoid angering him, as he could send the consul away. The other two points could be more easily agreed upon. In particular, it turned out there were not too many Russian merchants who traded via the Dnieper; on the contrary, they wanted to trade by land through Perekop but to Kefe. The Russian government also found the third point compatible with Russian intentions. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 84. However, St. Petersburg was not very happy about these demands and instructed Nikiforov to use secret channels to talk the khan out of his insistence on the points regarding the Azov pastures and the Russian merchants' rights. If the khan persisted, Nikiforov had to attempt to persuade the khan to reciprocate Russia's friendly gesture by removing Edichkul Tatars from such close proximity to the Zaporozhian Cossacks. To the empress's disappointment, Nikiforov simply announced to the khan and to his secret channels that he was ordered to deny these two demands. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 256-257.

¹¹⁷⁵ During the time when the patent was not yet ready, in early 1764, the khan already threatened to send Nikiforov away. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 259-260.

On December 17/28, 1763 St. Petersburg also instructed Obreskov to procure a medico/*lekar'* for Nikiforov from among Constantinople Greeks or foreigners because it was too expensive to find one in St. Petersburg and to send him and various medicines to Crimea. The *lekar'* had to be experienced but one who would be satisfied with a mediocre salary—not more than 180 rubles a year paid to the Russian mission's medico Stefaneli. It would be better if the *lekar'* were Greek and could gather useful intelligence in Crimea. 90.1.450.1763, LL. 71-71ob., 77-77ob.

The project of the agreement, as desired by the Russian side, had included such interesting provisions as: the right to maintain a church for free religious practice, which was seen as necessary for keeping the Greeks and other local Christians favorably impressed and helpful to the Russian court, as well as for maintaining the honor and greatness of the Russian court. The written agreement would also have guaranteed a consul's right to procure the khan's *berats* for non-Muslim subjects who would be in the consul's protection. This was informed by the recognized right of foreign ministers to maintain up to twelve Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and other non-Muslims in their circle, although the real number could be as great as thirty, depending on the status of the diplomat. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 507-508.

due to an incident that offended local religious sensibilities,¹¹⁷⁶ the Russian government had to struggle anew to achieve permission to send another consul. At the least, it aimed at preventing other foreign nations, in particular the French, from meddling in Crimea through their consuls.¹¹⁷⁷ The new khan, Selim Giray III, however, explained to the Porte that he would not allow Russia to send a new consul, because Nikiforov's actions had angered his constituents.¹¹⁷⁸ In his response to Russia in July 1766, however, Selim Giray noted that it was Mustafa III who was firmly opposed to the idea.¹¹⁷⁹

¹¹⁷⁶ Documents published in *SIRIO* cover Nikiforov's activities in Crimea and the reason behind his recall in detail: Vol. 48, p. 605; Vol. 51, pp. 209, 482, 485; Vol. 57, pp. 51, 52, 60, 138, 148.

The khan and the Bahçesaray elders complained to the Porte against Nikiforov for kidnapping his former serf, Mikhaila Andreev, who had adopted Islam. But Obreskov reported on November 19 that the Porte sent a very reasonable instruction to the khan and asked Obreskov to find another excuse for recalling Nikiforov. Catherine was very pleased with the Porte's wise conduct in this incident. At the start of 1765 St. Petersburg willingly recalled Nikiforov. However, it asked Obreskov to ensure that Russia could soon send a replacement, according to the earlier agreement about maintaining Russian consul in Crimea. If the Porte resisted and Nikiforov were not to succeed in getting the khan and the Bahçesaray elders to present to the Porte the need to continue the consulate, St. Petersburg instructed Obreskov to strongly demand to forbid other nations' consuls from staying in Crimea. Otherwise, unfriendly nations would do everything to cause a conflict between Russia and the Porte by means of Crimea, which was already being pursued by the French *chargé d'affaires* in Crimea, Fornetti, who met with the khan in Căuşeni and tried to incite the latter against Russia.

In a letter to Nikiforov from January 10/21, 1765, St. Petersburg expressed surprise that despite close familiarity with local customs, Nikiforov made such a blunder. He should have known that any person who voluntarily accepted Islam could not be forcefully taken back. This fact was so well known that when someone happened to flee and accept Islam no one looked for him, considering him dead, because everyone knew that the "barbarians, blindly infected with their false faith," would sacrifice their lives to protect the renegade. Unfortunately, Obreskov did not believe that Russia could henceforth maintain a consul in Crimea, unless Nikiforov appealed to the most influential elders and admitted that his reaction and petition had been thoughtless, and convinced them to advocate to the Porte the continuing presence of a Russian consul in Crimea.

If Andreev really wanted to flee Tatars, Nikiforov could give him some money in order for Andreev independently to flee on his own. St. Petersburg assured Nikiforov that deep inside Tatars and Turks looked down upon such renegades and did not make efforts to provide for them. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 147-151.

¹¹⁷⁷ 89.8.1.374.1765. Reskripty rezidentu v Konstantinopole Obrezkovu i poverennomu v delakh Levashovu s rasporyazheniiami v sviazi s pol'skimi delami, s politikoi Avstrii v Turtsii, pretenziiami Kabardinskikh vladetelei na Mozdok i uchrezhdeniem russkogo konsul'stva v Krymu i Kadikse. Prilozheniia: perevod rechi angliiskogo korolia v Parlamente, kopii dogovora s inostrantsami, zhelaiushchimi poselit'sia v Rossii, i prosheniia Kabardinskikh vladetelei po ukazannym voprosam. Na russkom, turetskom, i tatarskom iazykakh. January 10—June 30, 1765, LL. 2-3ob.

¹¹⁷⁸ Members of the Bahçesaray ulema were the most vociferous opponents of the Russian consulate in Crimea. It is obvious that Selim Giray III personally was also not much friendlier towards Russia than Kırım Giray, as he was particularly active in inciting the Porte to interfere in Polish affairs during his visit to Constantinople in summer 1765. Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, pp. 88-91.

¹¹⁷⁹ Demir, p. 252.

Nevertheless, Nikiforov's primary objective had been to collect and update existing Russian intelligence in Crimea, and he was probably able to collect some information during his short posting. Maintaining ties with two particular secret informants at the khan's court became the focus of his later activity.¹¹⁸⁰ His short residency in Crimea also allowed Russia to keep a close watch on the khan's activity during the critical period of the royal elections in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. St. Petersburg tried to win the khan to its side or, if these efforts were to fail, to collect information that could undermine the khan's position at the Porte, which partly helped Obreskov in the task of achieving the removal of Kırım Giray from the Crimean throne.

- The Deposition of Kırım Giray

Kırım Giray's willful behavior and Obreskov's consistent pressure resulted in the Porte's deposition of the khan in fall 1764. The Porte had been frustrated with the khan for some time. After more than a year of staying in Căușeni, he finally agreed to return to Bahçesaray only in summer 1763.¹¹⁸¹ Before he had a chance to interfere in the Polish issues, the khan began to

¹¹⁸⁰ Nikiforov's instruction from May 13/24, 1765 noted that Russia already had sufficient information about various aspects of the Crimean Khanate and Nikiforov simply had to provide updates, if there were any. However, the range of the intelligence-gathering agenda was extremely comprehensive, showing that St. Petersburg aimed at arriving at the fullest picture possible. *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 494-500, especially pp. 498-500.

The exact value of Nikiforov's intelligence, however, is dubious, because it turned out that he was not a very skillful diplomat. He made several serious mistakes in carrying out orders from the government. For example, on March 31/April 11, 1764 St. Petersburg berated Nikiforov for misunderstanding the subtleties of his orders. For one, Nikiforov made a significant mistake by initiating a conversation with the khan about the reasons why the latter should abstain from interfering in Poland. Through this action, Nikiforov went beyond his orders, which instructed him to prevent the khan's interference when any signs or precursors of it appeared. It was counter-productive to dissuade the khan from something he had not yet done, thus giving him an idea he perhaps had not thought of. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 257-259.

Yet, the CFA did not deem his various mistakes to have been very serious. As a result, after being recalled from Crimea in early 1765, in fall of the same year St. Petersburg sent him to Kiev, from where he had to maintain contacts with Crimea, especially with the khan's translator Yakub, who had been Nikiforov's primary source of information since late 1763. The CFA even recommended promoting Nikiforov from the rank of prime-major to that of state counselor. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 365-366.

¹¹⁸¹ 90.1.454.1763, L. 70.

complain about the Zaporozhian Cossacks. Namely, he alerted the Porte to the fact that Russia was planning to resettle the Cossacks to a place further up the Dnieper—and thus further away from the Crimean border—where St. Petersburg would also build a new fortress. The Porte, however, decided to ask Obreskov for an explanation and on August 4/15 Obreskov explained to the dragoman of the Porte that this measure was not only harmless to the Porte but was even beneficial because the Russian government decided to distance the Zaporozhian Cossacks from the recent settlements of Edichkul Tatars along the Dnieper, whom the Khan refused to remove to their previous place of abode. Consequently, the Porte could be thankful that Russia was taking upon itself to organize and pay for the resettlement of the Cossacks.¹¹⁸²

The Porte, according to Obreskov, was greatly relieved by his clarification. As Obreskov learned from his secret informants, on August 17/28 the Porte sent a new *hatt-ı şerif* to the khan, enjoining the latter to keep peace with Russia.¹¹⁸³ The khan, however, maintained that, according to the plan of the fortress, it would not be a simple town but a great fortress, which would threaten Crimean security. He was concerned that the new Cossack settlement would in effect be closer to Perekop than the old one. Consequently, the Porte sent a protest letter to Obreskov on October 9/20, in which it used the same arguments that it had brought in 1752 against the fortress of St. Elizabeth. Namely, it demanded that the new construction had to be prevented, as it would disturb the peace of mutual subjects. Obreskov reported to his government that he could have

¹¹⁸² St. Petersburg planned to move the Zaporozhians from their current settlement following their own requests. It was only twenty-eight years ago that they had moved there from their ancient territory on the western bank of the Dnieper in a place called Kadak. The new location was closer to the Ottoman border and there were other reasons why the Cossacks were not satisfied with it. St. Petersburg, on the other hand, was only happy to fulfill their petition because it would solve the problem of constant conflicts between the Cossacks and the neighboring Tatars. Therefore, the Russian government decided to move them to a place also located on the western bank of the Dnieper, near the barge crossing/*perevoz* Nikitin, which lay across from an old factory called Kamennoi Zaton on the eastern bank of the Dnieper. This newly appointed location stood at a distance of five hours of travelling by land—and even further away if travelling by water—from the Cossacks' latest settlement. Obreskov also added that the Russian government would have to construct a fortress at the new location in order to keep the headstrong Cossacks in check, just as it had built a fortress at the previous site. 90.1.454.1763, LL. 84, 84ob., 87.

¹¹⁸³ 90.1.454.1763, L. 84ob.

easily countered the Porte's demand, especially in view of the Porte's non-cooperation in the matter of the settlement of the Edichkul Tatars along the Dnieper. However, Obreskov chose not to antagonize the Porte in view of the upcoming challenges related to Poland. He simply reiterated his lack of knowledge whether the new settlement would indeed be constructed and provided a detailed map, which showed the relative location of the current and projected Cossack settlements in relation to Crimea and Ochakov. Obreskov stressed that the new location would be further away from Ochakov and other sections of Ottoman borders, and the River Dnieper and the Bay of Konskie Vody would continue to constitute a barrier between the Cossacks and Crimea. The khan, nevertheless, persisted in his protests. He complained to the Porte that the new fortress of St. Dimitrii Rostovskii had been completed and was being supplied with military provisions, while the fortress of St. Anna, which the former was meant to replace, still stood untouched. Obreskov noted, however, that the Porte did not pay attention to these complaints.¹¹⁸⁴

The khan then began to threaten to send the new Russian consul, Nikiforov, away from Crimea, just as he had sent away the Prussian consul Boskamp. Obreskov decided to report on this to the Porte in secret and to remind in this connection that the Prussian king did not express his displeasure due to great distance between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire, however the Russian court would be much more insulted if the khan decided to act upon his threat. Obreskov also reminded that the Porte needed to provide a written *berat* ("barat") to Nikiforov. Luckily for Obreskov, the Porte was more on the side of Russia than on the khan's side. The Ottoman government was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the obstinate khan.¹¹⁸⁵

¹¹⁸⁴ 90.1.454.1763, L. 105.

¹¹⁸⁵ 89.8.1.357.1764. Reliatsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova i poverennogo v delakh Levashova Ekaterine II o politike Turtsii v otnoshenii pol'skikh del, intrigakh frantsuzskogo posla v Turtsii protiv Rossii, gotoviyashchemsia pokhode Krymskogo khana na Kuban', i politike khana v Kabarde, peregovorakh Turtsii s Prussiei i o merakh po ukrepleniiu turetskoi granitsy. Prilozheniia: kopii noty Obrezkova Porte, pisem prusskogo poslannika Velikomu Veziriu i pol'skogo primasa Porte po ukazannym voprosam, a takzhe plan ulitsy Pery. Chast'iu shifrovannye. Na russskom, ital'ianskom, i turetskom iazykakh. January 29—March 6, 1764, LL. 15-16ob.

On February 28/March 10, 1764 Obreskov reported that the Porte was completely satisfied by his explanations concerning Russian actions in the border region. The sultan ordered to issue the official *berat* for Nikiforov and left it up to Russia to decide whether it wanted to allow the khan to pass through Kuban. In addition, the grand vizier also handed an official announcement to the Russian dragoman Pinii about the Porte's dispatch of troops from the Rumelia and Ochakov provinces in order to repair the Ochakov fortress. Obreskov explained that this action of the grand vizier was similar to the previous year's, when the reis efendi announced to the Austrian and Venetian dragomans that the Porte was planning to repair a fortress in Bosnia. First of all, Obreskov assured St. Petersburg that the number of troops sent to repair Ochakov was not a cause for concern at all and he did not suspect that the Porte had ulterior motives against Russia. On the other hand, Obreskov also received secret intelligence from the scribes of the reis efendi's secretary that the Porte could be interested in deposing the Crimean Khan. The Ochakov restoration could have been only a pretext for introducing Ottoman troops into the area. Reportedly, the Porte could not stand the khan any longer because of his frenetic/*neistovyi* and volatile/*nepostoiannyi* behavior. The scribes had this feeling because they remembered that the political notes of the former grand vizier Ragıp Paşa contained a suggestion that the best and safest way to depose a khan was to send a certain number of troops to repair Ochakov. However, the khan frequently reminded the Porte about the need to repair Ochakov but always demanded to be put in charge of the works. The scribes, therefore, thought that the Porte

The Khan continued to aggravate the Porte against Russia. Throughout the winter of 1763-1764 the khan complained about Russian penetration of the Kabardas, which the peace treaty made independent, attempts to spread Christianity there, and construction of a fortress on the River Terek, which lay within the Kabardian territory. The khan also alerted the Porte to the increase in Russian troops in border fortresses from Azov to the River Dnieper, as well as towards the Bug. Obreskov managed to prevent the Porte from lodging a request for Prussian help in mediating this issue with Russia. Instead, the resident assured that the khan's intelligence was unproven and that the Porte was welcome to investigate the matter calmly through its own agents.¹¹⁸⁵ On February 28/March 9, 1764 Obreskov and Levashov reported that the Porte was completely satisfied with their explanations concerning Russian actions in the border region. The sultan ordered to issue the official *berat* for Nikiforov 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 38-52, 70.

could once again cancel the dispatch of troops if the khan learned in time about the Porte's intentions.¹¹⁸⁶

St. Petersburg tried its best to capitalize on the Porte's disapproval of the khan to depose the latter, but Obreskov advised great caution in the matter. Thus, the Russian government wanted Obreskov to share with the Porte information concerning a conversation that the khan had had with the Russian translator Rubanov. The khan had bragged to Rubanov that he, the khan, depended on the Porte only to a small extent and could completely disregard it when he wished. Obreskov opined that such a conversation could indeed take place, for it reflected the khan's crazy behavior in general. The Porte, wrote Obreskov, had also known about the khan's thoughts on the subject and his adventurous nature for a long time. But it proved difficult for the Porte to bring the khan to obey it by force. Therefore, the Ottoman government had to reconcile itself with having to endure the khan's insults until it could find a convenient occasion to get rid of him. The Ottoman divan, in fact, held very frequent councils on this matter. Therefore, Obreskov suggested that it was not a good idea to report the khan's conversation with Rubanov to the Porte, because it could be perceived as a Russian attempt to sow disagreement between the Porte and the khan. In response, in view of its inability to control him and desire to withhold him from contrary actions, the Porte could decide to report this fact back to the khan and thus turn his attention against Russia, for "it seems that she [the Porte] could not have overlooked the fact that as much as the khans sought to become independent from her, they would not be completely successful in that without some help from Your Highest side." Therefore, explained Obreskov, the Porte was interested in keeping the khans always somewhat irritated against Russia. Through

¹¹⁸⁶ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 70-73ob.

their constant complaints and fabricated lies, the khans essentially observed the same attitude and tried to demonstrate to the Porte that they were not friendly with but rather annoyed at Russia.¹¹⁸⁷

This particular exchange demonstrates Obreskov's nuanced understanding of the Ottoman-Crimean relationship. Obreskov realized that the khans were frequently unruly and that the Porte could not always constrain them as much as it wanted to.¹¹⁸⁸ As a consequence, it frequently happened that the Ottoman government preferred to mark time, all the while trying to redirect the khan's attention against Russia. Therefore, he advised St. Petersburg not to force events, but to allow the Porte to solve the problem by itself.

Was Obreskov correct in his analysis? Ottoman sources provide a conflicting picture. Ahmed Resmi Efendi later wrote that preparations at Ochakov were really aimed at deposing Kırım Giray, just as Obreskov's secret informants had suggested. On the other hand, however, the Porte was concerned about the reported Russian military preparations at the border and as a result started preparations at Ochakov and surrounding fortresses in April 1764, which lasted long after the khan was removed, namely until April 1765. A large provision depot was constructed between Ochakov and Akkerman.¹¹⁸⁹ The Bender fortress was subjected to similar

¹¹⁸⁷ Panin, however, was not entirely convinced by the resident's arguments. He noted in pencil on Obreskov's report that it was surprising—in view of Obreskov's assurances—that the Porte had agreed to the presence of a Russian consul in Crimea. 89.8.356.1764, LL. 8ob.-9.

¹¹⁸⁸ Obreskov also noted that there were differences of opinion within the Ottoman government in relation to the khan. The sultan did not seem to be so critical of the khan as the grand vizier and other officials. 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 117ob., 118ob.

¹¹⁸⁹ Possibly, the site of future Odessa. As is known, Odessa was founded at the site of a former Tatar settlement Hacıbey, which dated to the fifteenth century. But Russian archival sources reveal that the site's strategic importance in the eighteenth century was recognized first not by the Russians, but by the Ottoman government itself. Thus, in summer 1765 the Russian government learned that the Ottomans had begun to construct a fortress near Ochakov, in the direction of Belgrade, in a place called Khodzhi-Bey, on the shore of the Black Sea. The fortress was named "Enidun'ia"/Yenidünya, or New World. It was said to be a small repair project of an old castle plus a lighthouse tower, but St. Petersburg was very concerned about the new construction and in 1766 sent secret agents to investigate it. Moreover, the Russian government agreed with Obreskov's suggestions that it was better to treat this matter with complete silence, thereby avoiding any arguments and also gaining a right to build a Russian fortress in the area. In late summer 1766 Obreskov reported that Russian merchants who had passed by the newly constructed wharf between Ochakov and Belyi Gorod—"called Khadzhiia-Bey or Kuchuk-Bey,"—reported on various details of the construction, but essentially it was not clear if it was meant to be a fortress or a low-key

measures. As a result, Vergennes became hopeful and Obreskov became worried, as rumors began to circulate in Constantinople about an impending Ottoman campaign against Russia. But Obreskov's official inquiry with the Porte dispelled the tension, and six days later Kırım Giray was deposed. The Porte firmly cautioned the new khan, Selim Giray III, to keep peace with neighboring states. Therefore, Demir concludes that Kırım Giray's deposition was the result of both Obreskov's pressure and the Porte's desire to demonstrate friendly disposition towards Russia.¹¹⁹⁰

settlement. The empress remarked on the margins that in view of this news the Porte had no right to grumble about the construction of Mozdok. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 465; Vol. 67, pp. 104, 259.

¹¹⁹⁰ On September 14 Obreskov reported to the Porte that his government became quite worried about military preparations that were going on at Ochakov and the dispatch of troops to Hotin, Bender, and Ochakov. It was also rumored that the khan sped up preparations and was about to move to Căușeni. As a result, Russian border troops went on alert and such atmosphere was conducive to the overblowing of some small incident into a large conflict. Demir, pp. 219-221. The nineteenth-century Russian specialist on Crimean history, Vasili Smirnov, essentially provides the same perspective: that the Porte deposed the khan because it felt threatened by his insubordination and because it did not wish to become involved in a conflict with Russia over Poland, which the khan was encouraging. Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, pp. 83-87.

Chapter 13. Sharing the Spotlight: *Chargé d’Affaires* Pavel Levashov

In the 1760s Obreskov became more open with his government about his desire to leave his post. The attacks of gout indeed appear to have bothered him with greater frequency and severity. However, his appeals for a recall also coincided with his requests for promotion and increase in salary. In particular, Obreskov appeared especially dissatisfied after Catherine II appointed a *chargé d’affaires* to the Constantinople mission.

In 1763 Catherine appointed Pavel Levashov to Constantinople, where she expected him to serve as *chargé d’affaires* and shadow Obreskov until a point when Levashev could replace the old resident. The reasons for this appointment are not entirely clear. On the one hand, Catherine might have begun to realize that her representative in Constantinople was of an independent mindset, which did not always lead him to see things the way she saw them. Obreskov’s usage of the word “impossible” in relation to the prospects of opening the Black Sea to Russian navigation, even if he implied a finite period of time, could not have pleased the ambitious empress. Of course, she could not afford to recall and replace Obreskov altogether. The expected Polish succession crisis required Obreskov’s skill, experience, and contacts in order to calm the Porte. The other reason was reported serious health problems of Obreskov, which the empress could not ignore in view of the critical importance of the Constantinople residency in ensuring her freedom of action in Poland.¹¹⁹¹

¹¹⁹¹ In its October 10/21, 1763 order to Obreskov, the CFA instructed him to prevent the Porte from interfering in Polish affairs and added a note concerning Levashov: “...And so that your burden can become lighter as soon as possible and for you to get help in view of your frequent grave illnesses and attacks at the time of current disturbing events, we have ordered our chancellery counselor Levashov, who is already on his way, to hurry with his arrival to your place, whom you can use in all our affairs without exception, and to act in agreement with him, so that he would know and understand as much as you do.” Tellingly, only vice-chancellor Golitsyn signed this order, which confirms a special patronage relationship between Golitsyn and Levashov. (*SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 204, 551, 560, 575, 583; Vol. 51, pp. 24, 178. On Golitsyn’s place in the court faction struggle in St. Petersburg, see Ransel, p. 114.) However, we also have evidence of a direct relationship between Obreskov and Golitsyn. For example, the vice-

Constantinople was notorious for a difficult climate, which led to many a request for recall. Obreskov indeed had been suffering from symptoms of gout for some time. Thus, we know that Obreskov wrote in June 1761 that he had been feeling extreme weakness for several months. His illness persisted and he reminded St. Petersburg about it from time to time.¹¹⁹² A reminder of Obreskov's problematic health came in May 1763 when he informed the empress that his gout kept him bed-ridden since April 27/May 8, as a result of which he could not respond to imperial orders. Moreover, as a result, Obreskov could not attend his first audience with the new grand vizier. On June 27/July 8 Obreskov wrote that his health condition was quite distressing to observe, both for his family and for outside acquaintances. He wrote that he had been suffering from the internal illness and muscle aches (*lomy*) for the past two months and finally became so weak that he lost ability to move his hands and had to be fed by others. Therefore, Obreskov could not reply to imperial orders in detail. Likewise, he could not take part in official audiences together with the envoy Dolgorukov. Obreskov could not say for sure when he would feel better because the great heat of Constantinople affected his condition negatively, and especially rendered him unable to use his hands.¹¹⁹³

The report from Constantinople of the extraordinary envoy Prince Aleksandr Sergeevich Dolgorukov,¹¹⁹⁴ whom Catherine II dispatched to the Porte to announce her accession to the

chancellor sent a letter to Obreskov in late September 1762, promising support. 89.8.1.326.1762. Depesha vitse-kantslera Golitsyna rezidentu v Konstantinopole Obrezkovu s pozdravleniem po povodu vosshestviia na prestol Ekateriny II i obeshchaniem podderzhki. September 26, 1762.

¹¹⁹² 90.1.450.1763, L. 52; Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 381, 384.

¹¹⁹³ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 61, 61ob., 64, 71ob.

¹¹⁹⁴ *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar'* has no entry on Aleksandr Sergeevich as he does not seem to have distinguished himself during his lifetime. But there is a mention of Aleksandr Sergeevich Dolgorukov as a graduate of the Noble Cadet Corps in December 1740, who later continued his education (training?) at the College of Commerce and became an Engineer-Major in 1761. Luzanov, p. 159. It seems likely that this was the same person as the Russian envoy to the Ottoman Empire in 1763-1764. We know, for example, that his father had served at the College of Commerce. *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar'*, p. 565. If this is indeed the same person, then it is fairly certain that Obreskov had personally known Aleksandr during his student days at the Corps. Aleksandr Dolgorukov entered the Corps in 1737, but he was one of the richest students there, who as a group formed a sliver of the overall student

throne,¹¹⁹⁵ could not but compound concerns in St. Petersburg. In June 1763 Dolgorukov reported that Obreskov was sick but his condition was improving steadily. However, Obreskov's illness deteriorated further: "The condition of the resident causes concern about his life, however it is possible that he will get better." Dolgorukov proceeded to contemplate potential consequences of Obreskov's death and pleaded Golitsyn to spare him, Dolgorukov, from potential appointment as Obreskov's successor. He praised Obreskov's service and wrote that the resident's death would be a great sorrow for the Russian state because Obreskov had always carried out his responsibilities with diligence and had earned friendship and respect of all people who knew him. However, although Dolgorukov was ready to serve the empress wherever she needed him, he confessed that the position of resident in Constantinople was *neskhodstvenno*/unsuitable for him in all respects.¹¹⁹⁶ In his correspondence with Golitsyn during his return trip to Russia, Dolgorukov used the opportune occasion to recommended his relative, who was also part of his embassy entourage—Prince Menshikov,—to the position of Russian resident in Constantinople.¹¹⁹⁷

Upon receiving Dolgorukov's letter in late July/early August, Catherine made the decision immediately to attach an additional person to the Constantinople mission "who could get used to the situation and, if necessary, take the position of resident."¹¹⁹⁸

body at the Corps. Dolgorukov was listed as owning 2,500 male souls, while the cut off for being categorized as truly rich in Russia—less than one percent of the nobility—was 1,000 male souls. Fedyukin, "Learning to Be Nobles," pp. 138-139, 224-226.

¹¹⁹⁵ The English representative in St. Petersburg Robert Keith, however, was under the impression, that Prince Dolgorukov would "relieve Mr. Obreskoff." (July 12/23, 1762). *SIRIO*, Vol. 12, p. 26.

¹¹⁹⁶ 89.8.347.1763. Depeshi chrezvychainogo poslannika v Konstantinopole kniazia Dolgorukova vitse-kantsleru kniazii Golitsynu o vozlozhennoi na nego missii, a takzhe po lichnym delam. Na russkom i frantsuzskom iazykakh. March 11-November 29, 1763, LL. 8-11, 12-12ob. Dolgorukov's letters were translated into Russian at the CFA.

¹¹⁹⁷ 89.8.372.1764. Depesha chrezvychainogo poslannika v Konstantinopole Kniazia Dolgorukova vitse-kantsleru Kniazii Golitsynu o svoem obratnom puti iz Turtsii. Na frantsuzskom iazyke s russkim perevodom. March 5, 1764, L. 3.

¹¹⁹⁸ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 399.

However, Obreskov did not seem to have been actively seeking recall or replacement before Levashov's appointment. In fact, in 1761-1762 he had finally managed to arrange his long-time relationship with the Constantinople native of Greek-English extraction and therefore hardly felt the need to leave the Ottoman capital, where he and his wife's family were already raising several children.¹¹⁹⁹ There exists possible proof that Obreskov and his wife were not

¹¹⁹⁹ On October 1, 1761 Obreskov addressed a petition to Empress Elizabeth, asking to approve his marriage to a Constantinople native, daughter of a respected English merchant. Obreskov felt the need to justify his decision to remarry. He mournfully recounted the failure of his first marriage. In 1740 he had entered into a lawful marriage, but three weeks later state service required his trip to Turkey. Since then he had always been away from "Your empire," and as a result spent altogether only six days with his wife, divided between his two stays in Russia. Upon being appointed resident, he thought about requesting to bring his wife to Turkey but considering his modest financial allowance, he feared that together with his wife he would only accrue debts and lead a poor existence. At the end of 1760 his wife died and Obreskov became a widower. Obreskov related that his lonely—*samopustynnicheskaiia*, or lonely-hermit, life had become unbearable. In addition, the previous winter he had suffered from a serious bout of hypochondria. Finally, he did not know when the empress would recall him from his post and therefore did not want to forego his hope of producing heirs. As a result, he decided to marry a young woman of Greek-Russian faith, who was honorable and of good nature, and had had good upbringing, in which he himself took part. More crucially, Obreskov's bride had a considerable dowry—namely 30,000 levki, or 18,000 rubles,—which meant that she would be able to maintain herself in the marriage as well as even provide comfortably for the offspring. Her father, Abbott, was the treasurer of the Levant Company. Obreskov assured the empress that his bride's father had a coat of arms, as well as seals and documents proving his noble origins. The bride's mother was Greek, and even though it was impossible to ascertain nobility since the Turks had wiped away all of its remnants, it was known that for three generations her family was noble and well off. "So the origins of my bride are in no way contrary to my own and my position," concluded Obreskov. He underscored that he was not following love blindly, which was impossible at his advanced age. Rather, Obreskov found the bride to be an advantageous prospect. In turn, the bride and her family approved of her marriage to Obreskov because the two shared a religion. It was especially the bride's mother who was eager to realize the marriage, as she wished to "free her daughter from this barbaric country." Obreskov assured the empress that his marriage would not interfere with his service to the state. Shortly after this Empress Elizabeth died and the CFA itself must have approved the marriage. Kessel'brenner adds that Abbott was also a banker who cooperated with the Russian embassy in Constantinople. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 374-375. George Abbott, a brother of Obreskov's wife, served as the treasurer of the Levant Company in the early 1770s and assisted Obreskov financially and otherwise during the latter's captivity. 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 28-29ob.

It has to be noted here that Obreskov concealed the entire truth. It is obvious that he maintained an unofficial relationship with Lady Abbott since 1751 and already had children from her: their first son Peter—future secret counselor and Russian senator—had been born in Constantinople in 1752. They later had two more sons and one daughter together, or four children in total. Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 18. Obreskov's claim that he had been a self-proclaimed hermit in his personal life was therefore disingenuous. In fact, his informal relationship with a local woman was similar to the French Ambassador Vergennes' secret relationship with a Constantinople widow, Anne Viviers. Vergennes concealed their liaison for as long as possible, but finally decided to legalize their two sons, ages six and two, in 1767 through a mutual signing of a marriage contract, for which he did not dare ask Louis XV's permission because Viviers was a commoner and had a not-so-proper reputation in Constantinople. See Murphy, pp. 165-171. Obreskov's decision to keep his relationship with Abbott secret most likely stemmed from the fact that his marriage to his first wife had never been annulled. Therefore, it was only when his first wife died in 1760 that Obreskov received an opportunity to legalize his relationship with the mother of his children. Unfortunately, Obreskov's second wife died in fall 1767.

Stegnii notes that Obreskov's wife was a daughter of an English father and a Greek mother, the latter having origins in the Ottoman province of Karaman. Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 18. Gounaris proposes that Maria-

planning to leave Constantinople. Namely, on March 21/April 1, 1762 Peter III's government approved Obreskov's registration of a building belonging to the Russian mission "in the name of an Englishwoman Abbott (*Abotsha*)."¹²⁰⁰

Pavel Artemevich Levashov came from a gentry family of the Ryazan province. He had fought in the 1735-1739 Russo-Turkish war.¹²⁰¹ More than a decade later, Levashov exchanged military service for a diplomatic career. Thus, in 1750 the CFA sent Levashov to Stockholm and Copenhagen as a courier. He stayed at the Russian mission in Copenhagen in the capacity of a chancellery scribe. In 1752 the CFA sent Levashov to Dresden, where he worked under Count Keyserling, whom he followed to Vienna in 1753 in the position of embassy noble.¹²⁰² More recently—from April 1761 to May 1762, he had served as Russian diplomatic representative at the German Imperial Council in Regensburg.

But in 1762 he was back in Russia without any position. For some reason, Catherine tried several times to assure him a new posting. Thus, in early December 1762 she contemplated appointing him to Warsaw instead of Rzyzewski, whom she considered "unintelligent and useless." In February 1763 Catherine prepared the necessary order but then retracted it.¹²⁰³ In July 1763 she suggested reappointing Levashov back to Regensburg. Indeed, on July 23/August

Cannella Abbott therefore should have been Greek Orthodox by faith, "but this should not be taken for granted." Significantly, Gounaries notes that Obreskov did not receive any dowry but went into business with his wife's brother George Abbott. Gounaris, p. 677.

¹²⁰⁰ I presume that most likely this was Obreskov's wife. 90.1.417.1762, L. 19.

¹²⁰¹ According to Levashov's service autobiography, written in 1754, he entered military service in 1736 when he was nine years old: "I am 27 years old." RGADA, F. 248, Op. 1/102, D. 8122, part 2, LL. 720-720ob. (http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/Russ/XVIII/1740-1760/Skaski_elizavet_rossii/41-60/44.phtml). Of course, there might be a typo in the copy of the document that I have consulted, and Levashov could have been 18 years old at the start of his service. However, Levashov wrote that he did not know how many serfs his father owned because he was away from home since his early years. So it is possible that he was nine years old when he entered the army during the war.

¹²⁰² RGADA, 248.1/102.8122.2, LL. 720-720ob. Levashov's acquaintance with both Panin and Keyserling might explain his appointment to Constantinople at a time when Catherine's main preoccupation was to carry through her project for Poland, which she was doing precisely with Panin's and Keyserling's help.

¹²⁰³ Quoted from F.VKD.1762-1763.D.820.L.71 in Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 401.

3 the empress signed an official letter to the Prince of Thurn and Taxis, announcing Levashov's appointment. However, the letter was never sent, apparently because Levashov could not be given high enough rank in order to be equal in standing with the French and English representatives in Regensburg. Possibly under the influence of news of Obreskov's bad health, on August 19/30 Catherine decided to send Levashov to Constantinople. Kesselbrenner suggests that Catherine was not very sure about this appointment either. Two days after signing it, she inquired—quite presciently—with the CFA about potential problems of accrediting two diplomats from the same country at the Porte. Catherine suggested that if the Ottoman government expressed reservations, Levashov would remain in Constantinople in the capacity of a “cavalier of the embassy” in order to get used to the situation.¹²⁰⁴

On September 2/13, the Russian government informed Obreskov that it had appointed chancellery counselor Pavel Levashov to assist Obreskov in Constantinople, where Levashov had to be accredited as *chargé d'affaires*. Therefore, Obreskov had to find out if the Porte had ever simultaneously accredited two individuals who represented the same country. In its turn, the Russian government recalled that there had been before two Swedish ministers at the Porte at once—Hoepken and Carlson,—who were in the same character when they negotiated a defensive alliance with the Ottoman government. Otherwise, if formal accreditation of Levashov as a second Russian representative was not possible, Levashov had to stay in Constantinople in the capacity of embassy noble. Levashov had to get used to the situation and could even send reports in his own name if Obreskov was ill. St. Petersburg requested that Obreskov share all the information with Levashov. Obreskov had to be sincere with Levashov and to share with him all correspondence from the Russian court. All employees of the mission had to respect Levashov's

¹²⁰⁴ Quoted from F.VKD.1762-1763.D.820, L. 103 in Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 401.

orders. Obreskov also had to allocate decent quarters to Levashov both in the mission's house in Pera and at the countryside residence. Levashov's salary was to be 4,000 rubles, which was an exception because this salary remained after Levashov's previous appointment at Regensburg.¹²⁰⁵

Admittedly, Catherine was too naïve in thinking that such an arrangement could be without drawbacks or that the only problem could come from the Porte's resistance to accrediting two diplomats from Russia simultaneously. Indeed, her second representative in Constantinople spent most of his energy on nagging about Obreskov's continuing presence, which ran contrary to Levashov's ambition to replace Obreskov as resident as soon as possible. Levashov's arrival was in some way counterproductive as it caused Obreskov to feel unwanted and prompted him to apply for a recall based on health reasons.

Levashov's status and purpose of his presence in Constantinople were problematic from the start. Foreign envoys at St. Petersburg were apparently uninformed and confused about the exact reason for Levashov's appointment. Thus, the French *chargé d'affaires* at St. Petersburg, Laurent Berenger, reported to Duc de Praslin on October 11/22, 1763 that "it was said that Levashov was departing for a commission at the khan's court, after which he would replace Obreskov in Constantinople."¹²⁰⁶ Obreskov's first reaction to Levashov's appointment was to object to the idea of simultaneous accreditation. He wrote on October 31/November 11, 1763 that it would be simply impossible to accredit Levashov as *chargé d'affaires*. "I thank you for Levashov," wrote Obreskov to St. Petersburg. But Obreskov pointed out that the Porte had never before accredited two diplomats from the same country at once. He noted that Aleksei Veshniakov, who had come to assist Ivan Neplieuv "for the same reasons as now"—in view of

¹²⁰⁵ 90.1.450.1763, LL. 52-53.

¹²⁰⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 140, p. 247.

health problems,—was not accredited at the Porte officially, even though everyone knew that Veshniakov would succeed Nepliuev. The same arrangement existed between the former Neapolitan envoy Bailo Massi and his successor, the latter having assisted Massi for many years in the capacity of embassy cavalier. The Austrian internuncio Baron Penkler also arrived with one Brognar (*Bruniar*), who was said to be groomed as Penkler's successor, but Bruniar had the official position of secretary of the embassy. Therefore, Obreskov stressed that he could not predict the Porte's reaction to the unusual request of the Russian government to accredit two diplomats at the same time. Obreskov further objected to St. Petersburg's reliance on the precedent set by Sweden, which at one time had sent two envoys to Constantinople. Obreskov explained that the two Swedish diplomats had the same character and were accredited at the same time, which was in accordance with the right of every nation to appoint as many diplomats of equal character as it deemed necessary.¹²⁰⁷

In the same letter Obreskov reported that his health condition had gradually improved and it was only paralysis in his hands that continued to plague him. Unfortunately, despite all the efforts of local doctors, none of the remedies were helping. Obreskov's last hope was to recuperate at the mineral springs of Bursa (*Brusa*). Therefore, he asked for St. Petersburg's permission to visit Bursa for a month in spring. This did not mean, however, that he wanted to take a complete break from his diplomatic responsibilities. Bursa could be reached from Constantinople by sea in twenty-four hours. Therefore, Obreskov stressed that it would only take two days for either Levashov or embassy counselor Pini to reach him in Bursa in person and take his responses and advice back to Constantinople.¹²⁰⁸

¹²⁰⁷ 90.1.454.1763, L. 118.

¹²⁰⁸ 90.1.454.1763, L. 118ob.

In response to Obreskov's arguments, on January 7/18, 1764 Panin suggested that Levashov could remain in Constantinople without official accreditation, but Obreskov was still expected to act in concert with Levashov in all matters. In order to demonstrate to Obreskov potential benefit from having an assistant, Panin announced that he approved Obreskov's request to visit mineral springs for one month during the upcoming spring because Levashov would be able to temporarily fulfill Obreskov's functions in the Ottoman capital.¹²⁰⁹ It does not seem, however, that Obreskov was interested in relinquishing his responsibilities to a novice, even temporarily.

Levashov arrived in Constantinople on January 15/26. "I am sincerely trying to candidly communicate with him [about everything]," wrote Obreskov subsequently. The dragoman of the Porte communicated the Ottoman government's appreciation of Russian efforts to avoid any break in representation in case of Obreskov's illness or recall, in which case Levashov could present his credentials to the grand vizier.¹²¹⁰ Moreover, on February 28/March 10, Obreskov thanked Panin for the permission to visit mineral springs and indicated a desire to do so at the end of May. Until that time he hoped to assure Levashov's accreditation at the Porte. Obreskov also expressed his sincere interest in informing Levashov about all the aspects of Russia's relations with the Porte and about local customs in conducting political affairs. "I open to him [everything] with all sincerity and without the smallest omission." It was not just Obreskov's personal diligence in service that dictated his actions, however. Obreskov admitted that he was also pursuing "my own comfort, for the sooner he [Levashov] will be able to administer [affairs] alone, the easier I hope to achieve permission to return, for due to the difficulty of climate and

¹²⁰⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 178.

¹²¹⁰ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 22.

constant enormous worries in protecting the interests of Your Highest Imperial Majesty I have exhausted my health almost completely.”¹²¹¹

This was a change of tone on Obreskov’s part. As a result, on April 20/May 1, 1764 Panin openly suggested to Catherine that probably Obreskov indicated his desire to leave for Russia because he was inwardly dissatisfied with his position after the arrival of Levashov. Panin recommended assuaging and encouraging the resident, whose presence in Constantinople was needed more than ever. Panin even offered to gratify Obreskov by approving his plan to buy an additional house for the Russian residence in Constantinople. Catherine left Panin’s latter suggestion without any comment but asked to communicate to Obreskov that she personally found it necessary for him to remain at his post.¹²¹² The empress’s response seems to have produced an effect, for on May 30/June 10, 1764 Obreskov wrote to St. Petersburg that he decided not to go to Bursa because his absence “would not have been appropriate in view of my duty and diligence in service, as well as my gratitude for the imperial mercy.” In another letter from the same day Obreskov also drew attention to his presence in Constantinople as being indispensable. Thus, he stressed that he was successful in warding off the khan’s intrigues at the Porte by capitalizing on his convincing track record: he encouraged his secret agents to remind the Porte that it had to trust Obreskov because he had always been honest throughout his long service.¹²¹³

Levashov became unhappy in this situation. As a result, less than a year since Levashov’s appointment Catherine already had reasons to regret her decision. On May 17/28, 1764 she personally left a disapproving remark on Levashov’s letter to Golitsyn from March 31/April 11.

¹²¹¹ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 63-63ob.

¹²¹² *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 304. Obreskov proposed to purchase a neighboring property in order to safeguard the embassy staff from fires and to assure a reliable source of drinking water. 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 161-162. These were very essential needs that Obreskov naturally thought about not only as a diplomat in charge of the mission and its staff but as a husband and father of several children.

¹²¹³ 89.8.1.356.1764, L. 115-115ob., 118ob.-119.

Levashov, blinded with careerist ambition, wrote that he could become resident “in view of the lack of very important affairs here at the Porte, which would necessitate Obreskov’s continuing stay here, moreover due to the successful resolution of Polish affairs...” Catherine, who was so keenly attuned to the delicate state of affairs in Poland, could not contain herself from commenting: “But it seems to me that there was never a matter as important as the present one.”¹²¹⁴ There is no doubt that at that moment she must have realized how poorly Levashov understood Russia’s foreign policy situation. From this moment on, Catherine made an effort to intervene several times in the problematic relationship between Obreskov and Levashov, but always with the purpose of ensuring that Obreskov would continue in his position.

Thus, on July 16/27, 1764 Catherine commented on another of Levashov’s numerous letters to his patron, Golitsyn. Levashov had expressed regret that Obreskov’s request to return to Russia had not been accepted by St. Petersburg. Levashov was disappointed that he therefore was unable to become Russian resident in Constantinople—a position he believed he could fill not worse than Obreskov. In this connection, Catherine noted: “It is very regretful that there appeared a certain jealousy between Levashov and Obreskov, instead of them acting in concert for one single goal of service to the empire; and, indeed, Levashov could learn from Obreskov.”¹²¹⁵ On July 18/29, Catherine addressed herself to Golitsyn, asking him to “Please calm down Levashov and assure him that his diligence will be needed, but now there is greater need in Obreskov there, for the Turks trust him greatly.”¹²¹⁶

As a result, Golitsyn could no longer ignore the disconcerting flow of Levashov’s grievances. Having kept silence in response to Levashov’s letters from March 31/April 11, April 19/30, May 28/June 8, May 30/June 10, and June 4/15—all of them filled with complaints about

¹²¹⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 357.

¹²¹⁵ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 418.

¹²¹⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 419.

Levashov's uncertain position at the Porte and Obreskov's lack of desire to give up his responsibilities,—after the empress's explicit request Golitsyn finally had to respond. On July 19/30, 1764 he wrote to Levashov that he could not reply earlier because he was visiting his sick father in Moscow. Golitsyn reminded Levashov that he had already been accredited at the Porte and that was a reason to be satisfied. Golitsyn desired to appease Levashov's ambition but also to remind firmly that St. Petersburg valued Obreskov's expertise and expected Levashov to learn from his colleague with as much humility, patience, and self-control as possible. Golitsyn wrote that he realized that Levashov, who had already occupied a ministerial post abroad, could not so easily reconcile himself with the need to serve only as an assistant. However, this was not a reason, in Golitsyn's eyes, to complain about Obreskov's decision not to leave Constantinople for the healing springs, even though the Russian government had approved this trip. Golitsyn highlighted that Obreskov's choice demonstrated his dedication, which could only be applauded. Golitsyn tried to express himself in the least uncertain but still respectful terms:

...If, on the other hand, you take into account the great difference in ministerial practices in your [new] place and the importance of current affairs, I do not find anything that should upset you, and the longer the resident stays there, the better you will be able to prepare yourself for replacing him. I do not doubt either your ability to do this, or your knowledge of the general picture of local affairs... However, in order to learn about various means and channels for carrying affairs there, about the distinctive manner of behavior and thinking at the local ministry or among the leading local statesmen, as well as grasp each person's weaknesses and flaws, and therefore be able to administer affairs independently, there is not a better way for you to acquire all the necessary knowledge and insight than by working side by the side with the resident. In these circumstances, you need to exhibit lenience, moderation, and forbearance, by means of which you can acquire [the resident's] full sincerely and trust, which cannot come about as fully in response to an order from above as out of special and genuine feeling of friendship towards you.

Golitsyn once again assured Levashov that the empress held him in favor and encouraged him to continue to gather intelligence at his new post.¹²¹⁷

¹²¹⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 519; 89.8.1.362.1764. Otpuski depesh vitse-kantslera Kniazia Golitsyna poverennomu v delakh v Konstantinopole Levashovu s porucheniem priniat' vse mery k vyiasneniiu politiki Turtsii v otnoshenii Rossii. July 29—November 17, 1764, LL. 1-2.

Golitsyn continued to encourage Levashov from time to time, usually responding after having received several letters from him. On August 21/September 1, 1764, for example, Golitsyn congratulated Levashov with his final accreditation at the Porte, which had taken place on June 30/July 11, 1764.¹²¹⁸ On November 17/28, 1764 Golitsyn thanked Levashov for his letters, which concerned Polish developments, and assured him that St. Petersburg attributed part of the success in assuring the Porte's composure throughout the Polish interregnum and recent elections personally to Levashov.¹²¹⁹ Levashov sent Golitsyn occasional letters with information about local developments, although the news turned out to be rather insignificant.¹²²⁰

On July 5/16, 1764 Obreskov reported on Levashov's accreditation at the Porte. However, he added that he still hoped to be able to leave his post, at least temporarily, for health reasons. Namely, Obreskov wanted to heal his "sorrow":

I do not know if this [Levashov's accreditation] would help me leave this place as soon as possible, but Her Imperial Majesty did not approve my earlier request and wished for me to stay. Indeed I can myself see that in the current state of Polish affairs I cannot in all justice insist too much on this [Obreskov's desire to leave] in front of the highest court, and I will stay here with patience until the resolution of these affairs. But when everything ends, I report to Your Illustrious Highness that my further stay here would be unbearable, and will surely bring the years of my life

¹²¹⁸ Quoted from F.90.1764.D.355.LL.55 in Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 403.

¹²¹⁹ 89.8.1.362.1764, LL. 3, 4.

¹²²⁰ For example, in early 1765 Levashov described various news that were, however, more secondary and miscellaneous in nature. On the whole Levashov seems to have been most interested in the life of the diplomatic corps in Constantinople. Thus, he commented on the reception of the new Venetian ambassador Cavalier Ruzini and an incident involving the dragoman of the Neapolitan mission. Namely, the Armenian dragoman of the Naples envoy was imprisoned for talking rudely to the reis efendi. Levashov spoke disapprovingly of the Naples envoy for not defending his dragoman, who had served the Naples' mission for more than twenty-five years. It was unfortunate, commented Levashov, that the envoy did not come to rescue because he was jealous of the good credit that the dragoman enjoyed at the Porte. Most importantly, Levashov utilized the occasion to draw an unfavorable contrast between Ottoman and Russian societies. He wrote that the dragoman was a rich man and therefore everyone expected him to pay his way out of the prison. In the meantime, however, the dragoman's house on the Bosphorus was ordered to be auctioned, and the house's value was set at mere 8,000 levki—much less than its real value of more than 30,000 levki. "But regardless of the low price no Turk has yet bought it [the house] and no one intends to buy it, reasoning that the matter [of the dragoman] was somewhat unjust because the dragoman did not commit treason or disloyalty to the sultan—no one is buying the house in order not to incur God's wrath. This magnanimous example can serve as a certain model for Christians themselves." 89.8.390.1765. Kopia depehi poverennogo v delakh v Konstantinople Levashova vitse-kantsleru Kniazuiu Golitsynu o polozhenii pol'skikh del, o prieme sultanom i vizirem venetsianskogo posla i priinatii magometanstva prusskim ofitserom. January 26, 1765, LL. 1-3. Undoubtedly, Levashov was referring to the widespread practice in Russia of imperial confiscation of property of statesmen who fell from favor, which was then granted to other up-and-coming favorites.

to an end, for I distinctly see that due to the nature of my illness, which stems from intense bile attacks on veins, I cannot attain healing other than through letting my spirit rest, without any worries, at least for a while, and by removing occasions that cause the irritation of the said bile, which are unavoidable here due to the manner in which business is done here.¹²²¹

It is obvious that Obreskov was not only plagued by a physical illness but was psychologically exhausted after more than a decade of grueling responsibilities.

Still, Obreskov evidently was not against the idea of Levashov leaving. He was not completely interested in abandoning his position and, in fact, in 1764 he renewed his request—first voiced to Empress Elizabeth in November 1757—to be given the character of an envoy instead of resident. Catherine declined to give a higher diplomatic title to Obreskov, although she could have been motivated by reasons other than her opinion of the resident. Instead, she promoted him to the rank of secret counselor.¹²²² On March 5/16, 1765 Obreskov thanked both Panin and Vorontsov for helping him receive the promotion, as a result of which he decided to stay at his post.¹²²³ However, in both letters Obreskov requested help in attaining a higher diplomatic rank. Thus, he noted that he was sacrificing his desire to return to Russia because of the empress's wish, but Obreskov in turn wished to be appointed an envoy at the Porte. “And because Your High Excellency can recall that already twice this character had to be mine in all

¹²²¹ 90.1.490.1764. Pis'mo rezidenta v Konstantinopole A.M. Obreskova kantsleru o naznachenii Levashova poverennym v delakh, o naznachenii Dervish-Efendiiia chrezvychainym poslom dlia vstrechi s Kniazem Dolgorukovym i o pol'skikh “proiskakh” pri Porte, LL. 1ob.-2ob.

¹²²² Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 385. In the meantime, in early 1765 St. Petersburg expressed regret that Obreskov wanted to leave his post because of health problems and asked him—if he finally decided to leave—to try his best first to finalize the Polish issue, namely the recognition by the Porte of the new Polish king. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 153-155.

¹²²³ When Catherine learned of Obreskov's decision in May 1765, she expressed her happiness about the fact, “especially given a new development in mutual relations.” The empress appreciated Obreskov's skill and diligence and could discern when a certain accident was not the fault of any individual who tried or was expected to prevent it. Thus, the empress could not blame Obreskov for a change in the Ottoman administration (change of grand viziers) and was confident that Obreskov could achieve everything to correct the situation save for something completely impossible. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 246.

fairness, but despite your generous and passionate advocacy it [the character] passed me by, due to my bad fate, I ask you to help me again.”¹²²⁴

To Panin, Obreskov confessed: “Instead of feeling joy at my promotion to [the rank of] secret counselor, I feel great shame and open remorse in my heart.” Obreskov was grateful to Panin for advocating on his behalf before the empress and agreed to stay in Constantinople for some more time because the empress expressed her need in him remaining there. However, Obreskov reminded that his disease could deplete him again, even though he was feeling better at the moment. Obreskov also pointed out that his salary was not enough for him to keep up appearances commensurate with his new status. In fact, he was barely surviving on his wage. More importantly, Obreskov found it inappropriate that despite carrying a higher rank and representing such a great empire, he had to concede precedence to other ministers who did not have such rank but only carried a higher diplomatic character. Therefore, Obreskov petitioned the empress once again to give him the title of an envoy. He argued that this would be not only commensurate with his new rank but also useful to the interests of the empress. Obreskov requested Panin to support his petition.¹²²⁵

The rest of Obreskov’s letter to Panin from March 5/16, 1765 leaves no doubt that Obreskov did not wish to leave Constantinople. He portrayed himself as absolutely indispensable at the Porte. In fact, he claimed that the Porte would be pleased by his assumption of the character of an envoy.

This ministry [the Porte] has gotten used to me so much that my departure would displease it, and several months ago the grand vizier himself notified me through the dragoman of the Porte that I should not even think about leaving while he was in power, and that he would not agree to it, and the reis efendi in his turn has confirmed this many times to Pini. And when I informed him [the grand vizier?] about my new rank, the grand vizier repeated the above and added that if I were to be recalled the Porte would send a courier to the Russian court to request to reverse this

¹²²⁴ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 42-43. It should be noted that a higher diplomatic rank was also accompanied by a higher salary. Could this have been the reason for Obreskov’s repeated demands? The answer is in the next paragraph.

¹²²⁵ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 37-39.

resolution, because my continuing presence is indispensable for placing current friendship on a good and solid foundation, and especially because His Sultanic Majesty puts special trust in me. Perhaps, these circumstances will appear to you as doubtful or full of clumsy conceit and empty self-praise, but Pinii, as a person under oath, would testify to you about more than my modesty (and danger of instability in local dispositions) limits me to.

Obreskov's goal in informing his court about the Porte's favorable attitude toward him was to suggest that St. Petersburg could take advantage of this moment and present the Porte with an ultimatum: if the Porte would not introduce a firm rule that secured Russian diplomats' precedence over all other envoys, except for the Austrian internuncio, the Russian court would recall Obreskov.¹²²⁶ Obreskov believed that the Porte would choose to satisfy Russia's demand rather than risk his departure. Obreskov further insisted that maintenance of a diplomat in the character of an envoy was not only commensurate with the dignity of the Russian court but also essential for implementing Russian policies in Turkey. He noted that the Austrian court also used to maintain simply residents at the Porte, but then began to send diplomats in the character of internuncio and plenipotentiary minister. There was no indication, wrote Obreskov, that the Porte paid less honors to the Austrian court as a result of this change.¹²²⁷ It was probably detrimental to Obreskov's argument that the grand vizier in question was executed two weeks later.

On June 22/July 3, 1765 Obreskov wrote several other letters concerning his status at the Porte. Thus, he personally thanked Chancellor Vorontsov for the promotion in rank that was granted to him on May 9/20, 1765. Obreskov expressed regret about Vorontsov's removal from office and congratulated the former chancellor with his achievements and the well-deserved retirement.¹²²⁸ On the same day Obreskov also reminded Panin about his request to help him

¹²²⁶ The treaty of Küçük Kaynarca would guarantee Russia such a right: to maintain an ambassador of second rank, that is envoy, who would follow immediately after the Austrian internuncio in all ceremonial matters. This was done to avoid having to give precedence to the Swedish envoy, which was seen as an affront to Russian imperial honor. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 165-166.

¹²²⁷ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 39ob.-40ob.

¹²²⁸ 89.8.385.1765. Depesha rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova Kantsleru Grafu Vorontsovu s pros'boi iskhodataistvovat' emu chin poslannika i s blagodarnost'iu za okazannuiu uslugu. June 22, 1765, March—July 1765, L. 2.

attain a higher ministerial position at the Porte. In August Panin responded with a promise to apply all his efforts to procure the empress's permission to promote Obreskov to the position of envoy, although first Panin had to make sure that this step would not undermine Russia's prestige in view of the accepted rules of observing equality among crowned rulers. Namely, Panin was worried about the exact place of Russian diplomats in the order of precedence observed at Constantinople and whether the Russian envoy would have to follow the Austrian internuncio according to that order.¹²²⁹

On October 9/20, 1765 Obreskov replied that the Austrian internuncio indeed had the right of precedence over all other foreign ministers in the same character, but Obreskov noted that he decided to withdraw his request for a promotion to the envoy's rank. He explained that he had made this request earlier because he hoped to take advantage of the favorable attitude of the *reis efendi* who was then in power in order to overturn Austria's right of precedence in favor of Russia, capitalizing on the resistance of some other foreign powers to accepting the precedence of Austrian ministers. However, the situation was no longer conducive to this plan. "Moreover, I am so tired," wrote Obreskov, "and although my health is not as weak as before, but I experience quite frequent attacks [of gout], so that great honors do not gratify me anymore, and I still cannot fully function and there is a danger that this illness could become incurable if it progresses too long." Therefore, Obreskov requested Panin to procure the empress's permission for him to return to Russia, in the hope that the disease of his hands would diminish through the journey and change of climate. If that would not be enough, Obreskov planned to visit some mineral springs for further treatment.¹²³⁰ As we know, St. Petersburg did not give its permission for Obreskov to leave.

¹²²⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 328.

¹²³⁰ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 12ob.-13.

In the meantime, Levashov's position continued to remain uncertain and, similarly, there was little indication that his dissatisfaction was abating. In 1765 the Porte requested that St. Petersburg recall Levashov because Russia's enemies convinced the Ottoman government that Levashov was about to replace Obreskov and announce Russia's break with the Porte. Obreskov informed Panin in secret in his report from July 30/August 10, 1765 that on March 26/April 6 the Porte approached him with a request to convince his court to recall Levashov. This occurred because on March 19/30 the sultan replaced his grand vizier and the Porte announced that Levashov's audience and recognition, which had taken place under the old grand vizier, were no longer valid because the sultan had been against it from the start. Obreskov wrote that he was surprised by this strange and unfair demand and tried to reverse this decision of the Porte. However, he met with a wall of silence. The Porte did not wish to discuss its decision and simply declared that this was the sultan's order. The Nişancı Paşa, who used to be reis efendi, suggested to Obreskov that it was the fault of Russia's enemies, and perhaps even its putative friends,¹²³¹ who painted Levashov in darkest colors to the sultan. Moreover, if Obreskov resisted reporting this demand to his government, the Porte would notify St. Petersburg directly, which would undermine Obreskov's credit and lead to his recall. As a result, Obreskov resisted for fifteen days but finally had to give in and promise to report the demand to St. Petersburg. However, he promised to report not directly to his court, but unofficially, and asked the Porte to wait patiently. In truth, Obreskov hoped that the Porte would reverse its decision or forget about the matter entirely.¹²³²

However, on May 8/19 Russian representatives had to appear at an audience with the grand vizier and the Porte refused to provide a stool for Levashov. At first, Obreskov refused to

¹²³¹ Was this a veiled reference to Prussia?

¹²³² 90.1.526.1765, LL. 6-6ob.

attend but the friendly Ottoman minister advised against pulling the string so tight, because Obreskov ran the risk of being expelled like the Genoese minister. Therefore, Obreskov had to attend the audience alone and claim that Levashov could not participate because of an illness. However, the Porte renewed its demand to recall Levashov. Obreskov sent a note to the Porte on June 3/14, in which he refused to report the demand directly to his court, because it would mean that Levashov had done something wrong or that Obreskov was intriguing against Levashov. Even worse, argued Obreskov, the Russian government could conclude that the Porte believed all the slander of Russia's enemies. Obreskov explained that Levashov arrived to assist him during a time of illness and not to replace him. Now that Obreskov was able to carry out his functions on his own, Levashov was merely a private person who did not participate in running the mission, and this situation would continue until Obreskov got sick again or died. Finally, Obreskov implored not to be bothered by this demand again: "this would be a deathly blow for me and I will not be able to continue my ministry." But the reis efendi approached Obreskov once again and the Russian resident had no choice but to finally inform Panin about the matter in secret.¹²³³

Panin was in dismay when he learned about such a sudden change in the Porte's disposition. On September 20/October 1, he wrote to Obreskov about his surprise, noting, however, that it must not have been so surprising considering the instability and extreme unreliability of the Porte, "for with every change of the ministry, it seems, one should await something special due to the local deeply-ingrained barbarity." Panin approved Obreskov's actions in general but asked him to insist on Levashov remaining in Constantinople, "because otherwise his departure would provide a cause for Russia's enemies to celebrate a victory over Russia." In addition, reminded Panin, Obreskov would also lose a source of assistance—

¹²³³ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 6ob.-8ob.

although hopefully minor—if Levashov were to leave. In the meantime, due to recovery of Obreskov’s health, Levashov did not need to communicate with the Porte himself, he could abstain from formal and ceremonial visits to the Porte and its ministers, through which the fact of his accreditation, which was so unpleasant to the Porte, would be neutralized. Levashov’s remaining in the background would also thus demonstrate that he had not come in order to cause a break in mutual relations but solely to relieve Obreskov because of the latter’s health problems at the time.¹²³⁴

After receiving Panin’s letter from September 1765, Obreskov was not in a hurry to reply. He addressed this issue only in his report from December 12/23, 1765. He apologized for not responding earlier: he said he was too busy to address this issue in his November 11/22 report and, moreover, his hands were bothering him that day.¹²³⁵ This was surely not the most convincing excuse, if only because Obreskov could have asked Levashov to assist him. Moreover, we know that on November 11/22 Obreskov wrote a letter to the vice-chancellor Golitsyn, in response to the latter’s letter from September 21/October 2. Obreskov expressed his regret to Golitsyn about inability to change the Porte’s resolution on “this” matter, which most likely referred to Levashov’s status. Obreskov suggested that the only solution would be “for the interested side to take measures” that were in part suggested by Obreskov in his reports.¹²³⁶

Obreskov’s explanations in his December letter to Panin also indicate that he did not try too hard to defend Levashov’s right to stay. Thus, Obreskov noted that he had planned to carry out Panin’s instructions from September 20/October 1, but on December 1/12 the reis efendi

¹²³⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 355-356.

¹²³⁵ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 417. Most likely, Obreskov was referring to gout.

¹²³⁶ 90.1.526.1765, L. 48. Despite the cryptic nature of Obreskov’s message to Golitsyn, the dating and the subject matter suggest that they were discussing Levashov.

Yet, when a plague outbreak struck Levashov’s residence on September 17/28, Obreskov kindly took Levashov into his own house in order to observe a quarantine. Obreskov had to send his wife and children to stay with his English father-in-law. Obreskov pitied Levashov for having remained without servants, clothes, or any living amenities. 90.1.526.1765, LL. 13, 47.

called Pinii and said that the grand vizier wanted to send a letter to Russia and suggested that *chargé d'affaires* Levashov could take it there if he had not left yet. Obreskov orally and in writing declared that accredited diplomats could not be sent away without proper recall from their courts, except for two occasions: when the peace was about to be broken, and when the individual in question committed some crime. But if the Porte desired to send Levashov away, it had to present a written request with explanation of reasons. Still, the Porte persisted in its demand and finally asked Obreskov to find a fitting way to send Levashov away; otherwise, the matter could grow more serious. However, Obreskov was concerned that such action would imply that Levashov had done something wrong at the Porte, which was not true, because Levashov had earned special respect and consideration of all foreign nations in Constantinople. Obreskov tried to explain to the Ottoman government that the Russian court was trying to avoid the situation that occurred in 1745 and 1750, when an Austrian representative administered the Russian mission after the deaths of residents Veshniakov and Nepliuev, respectively. Obreskov also pointed out that assistant diplomats were attached to other foreign missions in Constantinople: the Austrian internuncio had a court/*pridvornoi* secretary, who was expected to succeed him and the Venetian ambassador had an assistant appointed by the Senate.¹²³⁷

Obreskov then tried to paint his attempt to strip Levashov of his official character as his sincere effort to help Levashov stay in Constantinople. He wrote that in order to find out if the Porte wanted Levashov to leave completely or simply to remove his official character, Obreskov shared with the Porte the letter that he was planning to send to St. Petersburg. Obreskov planned to ask to remove Levashov's official character. It turned out, noted Obreskov, that this was the only cause for the Porte's unease. Perhaps the Ottoman government felt embarrassed that it was not giving the second *tayin* to Levashov. In any case, the Porte insisted that there was no need to

¹²³⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 417-418, and 90.1.526.1765, LL. 28-28ob., 30.

keep two accredited diplomats from one nation and approved Obreskov's suggestion to remove Levashov's character of *chargé d'affaires*. Obreskov was evidently not against the idea himself: "I do not know what you think of it. But I think that this can be done." He also added: "Oh! If only the protracted matter [Polish issue] were resolved, I could again ask you to recall me. But until it is resolved (for I am compromised in it to some extent), I am not bothering you [about it]." Thus, Obreskov simply recommended complying with the sultan's wish in this matter. He said that the recall letter could be presented and corresponding answer received in secret.

Obreskov explained that the Porte seemed intent on accepting the recall letter in secret because it was not quite comfortable with the sultan's desire, but could not do anything to oppose it.¹²³⁸

Empress Catherine immediately saw through Obreskov's subterfuge. She noted on Obreskov's report from December that if Levashov's official character were to be removed, Obreskov's argument for why Levashov could not be sent away—namely, in the absence of an official recall letter from the Russian government—would immediately lose its force, "and they [the Porte] would send him [Levashov] away without ceremonies." The empress followed up on this remark with a personal note to Panin, in which she asked him to "Talk to me about Levashov's case; if they [the Porte] fear a break with us, they would drop their demand; if they are using this as an excuse [to break relations], then nothing would help; therefore my opinion is not to agree to the shameful dispatch of the re-accreditation letter for secret presentation; this would not remain secret and others would laugh at us."¹²³⁹

As a result, on February 28/March 9, 1766 Panin wrote to Obreskov that he regretted to learn about the Porte's continuing resistance concerning Levashov's accreditation. Panin asked Obreskov to allow him to "sincerely open his heart." The main problem for the Porte, in Panin's

¹²³⁸ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 417-418, and 90.1.526.1765, LL. 28ob.-31.

¹²³⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 418.

view, seemed to have been the need to pay *tayin* to Levashov. Therefore, Panin recommended to Obreskov to drop this demand and to explain to the Porte that Levashov was being accredited in advance in case, “God forbid,” of Obreskov’s grave illness. Consequently, Levashov’s credentials would come into force only when Obreskov would no longer be able to deal and negotiate with the Porte. Panin maintained that this solution was better than to give in to their “barbaric” whim and remove formal character from Levashov. The latter, insisted Panin, was to be a means of last resort. If the Porte continued to persist in its demand, Panin authorized Obreskov to promise the Ottoman government that he would write to St. Petersburg, in which case the Russian government would agree to satisfy the Porte’s request.¹²⁴⁰

At the end of 1765 Golitsyn had to remind Levashov that his continuing attempts to get rid of Obreskov hurt nobody more than Levashov himself. Levashov had written three letters in one month: namely, on November 6/17, 18/29, and 19/30,¹²⁴¹—at a time when Obreskov was ostensibly thinking how to help him remain in Constantinople. Levashov also wrote a separate letter to chancellor Vorontsov, which was opened by Golitsyn due to Vorontsov still being abroad. After reading the letters, Golitsyn expressed that mutual friendship required him to warn Levashov that his letters to him, Vorontsov, and Panin produced quite opposite results. Namely, Levashov’s description of Obreskov’s illness in terms much graver than those used by Obreskov himself struck everyone as unusual. Golitsyn warned Levashov that his action would distance him from desired results. It was precisely because Golitsyn had taken part in appointing Levashov to Constantinople, that Golitsyn could not remain indifferent to negative discussions of Levashov’s recent letters. He offered Levashov friendly advice to leave Obreskov alone and not

¹²⁴⁰ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 474-475. In August 1766 Panin wrote to Obreskov that Catherine II allowed him to accept the Polish king’s gift of a tobacco box with his portrait, but Panin asked Obreskov also to let Levashov know that the empress allowed him to accept this favor as well. *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 58. This means that the empress wanted Obreskov and Levashov to share the gift somehow.

¹²⁴¹ From 1765, according to the chronological order of document publication in Volume 57 of *SIRIO*, although the exact date on the document is missing.

to advertise his illness when Obreskov himself did not complain about it too much. St. Petersburg thought that Levashov should be happy with his present salary in expectation of his future fate. Golitsyn endorsed this advice out of friendly sentiments towards Levashov. As for promotion in rank in reward for the settlement of the Polish affairs, Golitsyn assured Levashov that it would follow, but Levashov had to be patient.¹²⁴² It should be mentioned here that the Polish affairs were far from settled at the time and Levashov surely did not play a leading role in them.

As a result, Levashov remained in Constantinople in a subordinate position to Obreskov until the war broke out in fall 1768. The main reason that kept Obreskov on the Bosphorus was continuing instability in Poland-Lithuania and St. Petersburg's supreme trust in Obreskov's abilities over those of Levashov.¹²⁴³ Neither the Porte, nor Obreskov himself managed to get rid of Levashov. The Obreskov-Levashov antagonism contrasts with the harmonious relationship between their predecessors in the 1730s, Ivan Nepliev and Aleksei Veshniakov. However, the two pairings are quite similar in that they included, on one hand, a Russian officer who had no prior diplomatic experience and found himself on the Bosphorus at a relatively young age by force of unusual circumstances and, on the other, a minor French-speaking career diplomat with experience in European politics. Neither Veshniakov, nor Levashov later, could compare with Nepliev and Obreskov, respectively, in their knowledge of the local circumstances. Levashov's eagerness to completely replace Obreskov just two months after arriving in Constantinople was

¹²⁴² *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 431.

¹²⁴³ As a result of complications in Poland, in late October/early November 1766 Panin prohibited Obreskov from leaving Constantinople. At first, after having learned by late summer of the Porte's recognition of Stanislaw August, Panin indeed thought that Obreskov would have an opportunity to take a vacation to improve his suffering health. But upon learning of unexpected intrigues in Poland Panin regretted to say that he needed Obreskov to remain in Constantinople because of his knowledge, experience, skill, and other excellent qualities. Panin hoped that Obreskov would "find healing in his loyalty to the empress and in his own glory, which he had throughout his residency earned due to his skill, diligence, and noble behavior in all circumstances." *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 190.

very premature. Even the ambitious Veshniakov had never been so demanding. After all, unlike Obreskov, Levashov did not even know Italian or Turkish.¹²⁴⁴

Levashov's service biography also read: "On various commissions and out of personal curiosity he [Levashov] traveled through almost all European states and famous places." At a later time, Levashov bragged that he had known nine emperors, which included female empresses and a Turkish sultan, and had the pleasure of speaking to many of them in person.¹²⁴⁵ It is clear that Levashov was more oriented towards outward achievements and sought wide recognition. These qualities were not the most fitting for the position of Russian resident in Constantinople, which required more circumspection than daring. Levashov's search for glory, or at least relevance, throughout the remaining portion of his exceedingly long life,¹²⁴⁶ proved perennial. Although initially anonymously, he published numerous works on Turkey, especially after the outbreak of the second Russo-Turkish war during Catherine's reign. He appears to have looked at the war as an opportunity to seek attention and long-desired promotion. Unfortunately for him, however, Catherine continued to neglect him. Most probably she was left with a bitter taste after witnessing his acrimonious disposition in Constantinople. She let him retire to his newly granted property in freshly partitioned Poland with a thirty-percent raise in pension as early as 1778.¹²⁴⁷

Levashov surely thought highly of himself and most probably considered himself a better diplomat than Obreskov. After all, Levashov was the author of the first Russian translation of the

¹²⁴⁴ Levashov's service biography from 1775 onward indicates that he could speak French and Italian, as well as a little German. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 408-409. Levashov must have learned Italian while in Constantinople.

¹²⁴⁵ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 408-409, 409-410. He also claimed that the idea of establishing a city at the location of the Ottoman fortress Hacibey—Odessa—belonged to him.

¹²⁴⁶ According to his official biography, Levashov was born in 1719 and lived until 1820!

¹²⁴⁷ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 409-414. As noted above, Levashov could possibly have been born in 1727 and entered military service at nine years of age. In that case, he had lived only 92 years, not 102.

famous diplomatic manual by Francois Calliers. In 1757, while stationed in Vienna as an embassy noble, Levashov had not only translated Calliers' work but also attached information on diplomatic protocol from other authors. Unsurprisingly, Levashov sent the first volume of his translation personally to the grand chancellor, A.P. Bestuzhev-Riumin. Levashov used this opportunity to thank Bestuzhev "for sending him [Levashov] to foreign courts, where he received sufficient opportunities to better understand the causes of things in this world and to understand himself," and the more he tried to understand, the more his gratitude for Bestuzhev waxed. Levashov took advantage of the ongoing Seven Years' War in order to highlight the importance of politics and diplomacy in addition to military arts in guiding a country. In other words, he was seeking promotion. He sent the second volume of his work already to the vice-chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov, which therefore must be dated to around 1758. Neither Bestuzhev-Riumin, nor Vorontsov, however, were impressed by Levashov's work, at least not enough to publish it, although his promotion to the position of the embassy counselor in 1757 might be related to his scholarly labors. It took a war with Turkey and Obreskov's and Levashov's release from famed captivity to bring to light the forgotten translation, which was finally published in 1772.¹²⁴⁸

In some ways it is regretful that Levashov did not find recognition as a diplomat. He seems to have been sincerely dedicated to his profession. In a preface to the second volume of his translation, Levashov highlighted both the value of diplomacy and the need for Russia to promote native-born Russians in the diplomatic service. Thus, he wrote that a state needed politics and skillful ministers who could negotiate treaties with other states. He advocated against any kind of isolation, either in politics or in trade. Because Russia had to engage in commerce and alliances with its neighbors, it required, according to Levashov, a science for orienting itself

¹²⁴⁸ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 414-415.

in the community of other nations, without which it could be in danger, “like a swimmer in an open ocean, moreover without any helm.” Levashov stressed that native-born Russians were few and far between in the diplomatic profession and unfortunately Russia had not been able to do without foreigners in this line of work. Praising the reforms of Peter I, Levashov wrote: “Dare, Rosses! To achieve loud glory, to which horns summon, and show the world, how much your intelligence and vigor are worth.”¹²⁴⁹

However, Levashov’s thinking was similar to Veshniakov’s in that his understanding of the Ottoman Empire was somewhat one-dimensional and he was also fond of high-flung rhetoric that could not be a productive basis for diplomatic activity. One should only consider Levashov’s comments on the outbreak of another war between Russia and Turkey in 1787. In a letter to A.R. Vorontsov, the president of the Commerce College, Levashov expressed his dismay at the news: “One could not fathom that the Ottoman Empire would declare this war first, and I could not imagine anything else but that the grand vizier, a protégé of the famous *Kapudan Paşa*, must have surely consumed too much opium. In any case, a mess has been started.” Such sensationalist simplification of reality and lack of nuance in assessment indeed remind one of Veshniakov and his encouragements in the 1730s to attack and divide up the Ottoman Empire. In another letter Levashov characterized the Swedish king, Gustav III, as “a bear who broke away from chains and attacked Russian borders.” He also chided Prussia for opposing Russia as evidently it had forgotten thanks to whom it possessed Pomerania and Silesia. Levashov retained his belief in the need for diplomacy, however: he claimed that Russian military successes against the Turks caused great envy of and zeal against Russia among European states, which proved the wisdom of a Russian saying that bad peace was better than a good fight.¹²⁵⁰

¹²⁴⁹ Kessel’brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol’skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 415-416.

¹²⁵⁰ Kessel’brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol’skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 410.

Chapter 14. Natural and Unnatural Alliances: Austria versus Prussia

Before Catherine began to tackle the Polish issue, she faced a difficult dilemma, so difficult, in fact, that for the first year or two of her reign her policies toward two nations specifically—Austria and Prussia—were full of intrigue and prevarication. It appears that she tried not to choose one over the other and to placate both sides without entering into any commitments with any of them. However, by 1764, unequivocally, she chose Prussia, supposedly following the guidance of the head of the CFA, Nikita Panin, who hoped to form the so-called alliance of the north, to counteract France and Austria.

Even though the broad lines of this re-orientation have been established, this issue merits much more historical attention and the present dissertation cannot present a definitive conclusion about why Catherine chose Prussia over Austria, or even why she focused on Poland so much. While general historical narratives provide various short explanations,¹²⁵¹ these are still not very convincing. Some special studies, on the other hand, vary in their conclusions in significant ways, thereby highlighting once again that the subject requires further study.¹²⁵²

¹²⁵¹ See, for example, Franz A. J. Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe, 1756-1763* (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008), pp. 397-400; Albert Sorel, *La question d'Orient au XVIIIe siècle: le partage de la Pologne et le traité de Kainardj* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1889), pp. 12-14; Murphy, p. 140. Florinsky, characteristically, makes a very perceptive observation concerning Panin's system: "The real significance of this proposal, which was never adopted, consisted in the abandonment of Russia's alliance with Austria in favor of one with Prussia. The actual course of events, however, was determined by the desire in Berlin and St. Petersburg for territorial aggrandizement at the expense of Poland, and not by Panin's doctrinaire plan designed for the maintenance of the *status quo* and the preservation of peace in Europe." Florinsky, pp. 515-516. However, scholars have not been very clear about the reasons for Russia's reorientation towards Prussia. From among the general accounts, perhaps Simon Dixon attempted the most rigorous explanation, although once again Dixon presents his argument in the context of a general account of Catherine's reign and his argument therefore lacks sufficient supporting evidence. Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), pp. 160-162.

¹²⁵² Griffiths' account is the primary English-language study of Panin's Northern System. "The Rise and Fall," pp. 547-556. While providing a useful overview, it still does not account for why Catherine made steps towards an alliance with Prussia already one month after ascending the throne. The explanation provided by Griffiths in his dissertation is likewise cursory. David M. Griffiths, "Russian Court Politics and the Question of an Expansionist Foreign Policy Under Catherine II, 1762-1783," Ph.D. Dissertation (Cornell University, 1974), pp. 14-15, 28-30, 35-38. Herbert H. Kaplan provided a detailed account of Catherine II's options in 1762-1763. His evidence suggests that as early as July 1762 Frederick II was the first to signal to Catherine II that he would support her policy in

In this section I will situate Obreskov's activities in Constantinople in the framework of the changing alliance structure of the Russian Empire in 1762-1765. My conclusion about the reasons for the Prusso-Russian alliance of 1764 will challenge some established views by emphasizing that the naked imperial ambition, tinged by personal links with Poniatowski, to decisively dominate Poland drove Catherine II in all her choices: to prevaricate initially in order not to scare both friends and enemies, but at the same time to slowly build the foundation for an alliance with desperately-isolated Prussia in order to guarantee the unimpeded election of Poniatowski. She knew that cooperation with Austria would eventually be off the table because of Poland: Vienna would support a Saxon or Hapsburg candidate, but never an obvious puppet of Russia. However, Catherine made the final move only after Augustus III finally died, and only after Prussia proved its loyalty by supporting her in Courland and, later, pledged support for the empress's chosen candidate for the Polish throne. Her extreme circumspection revealed both her attentiveness to the counsel of her various advisors, who oftentimes pulled her in opposite directions, as well as her desire to determine the best ways to achieve her goal. Unlike Panin, Catherine indeed does not appear to have believed in diplomatic systems, but only in concrete measures aimed at specific objectives.

Obreskov's new instructions in the second half of 1762 enjoined him to maintain normal relations with Regin but to be friendly and cooperative with Penkler. Therefore, he proceeded to maintain cordial relations with Regin only superficially, so as not to give Regin a reason to complain. In reality, even without any orders from above, Obreskov remained suspicious of Regin despite the rapprochement that had been ordered by Peter III. In late 1762, for example,

Poland-Lithuania. However, it is significant that following the death of Augustus III and Catherine's open announcement of her preference for a Piast candidate Maria Theresa expressed agreement to the potential election of a native Pole. Herbert H. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 12-35, especially pp. 20-21 and 26-27.

Obreskov was distrustful of Rexin's warnings that the French were instigating the Crimean khan to attack Russian territory. Rexin tried to convince Obreskov that the French and Austrian ambassadors were preparing an unfriendly ruse. Obreskov thanked Rexin for the warning, "but I believed [him] as much as the circumstances warrant it."¹²⁵³ Moreover, Obreskov praised the French ambassador for sincere and friendly cooperation in regard to Austrian affairs. Frederick II, of course, tried to take advantage of the French-English preliminary negotiations to alert the Porte about potential danger from Austria, but the Porte dismissed Rexin with "a cold and unsatisfactory answer."¹²⁵⁴

Obreskov explained Ottoman actions as stemming from the same peaceful doctrine of the grand vizier. However, he also believed that Austria had to end the war as soon as possible because there existed a danger of having unpleasant encounters with the Porte. Namely, the Porte could take advantage of the upcoming expiration of the term of the Treaty of Belgrade in order to pressure Austria, which was still preoccupied with the war with Prussia, into making concessions. Already in June 1762, at the time of military preparations designed to scare Vienna into ceding Temesvar to the Ottoman Empire, the Porte reminded Austria about the finite term of the treaty. The Porte's sentiments changed for a while but on December 20/31 the dragoman of the Porte recommended to Penkler, seemingly in great confidentiality, to begin negotiations about the renewal of the Belgrade Treaty, whose validity was to expire in three years.¹²⁵⁵

¹²⁵³ Obreskov was equally skeptical about Rexin's warning concerning the Danish envoy Geller, who was allegedly inciting the Porte against Russia. Obreskov assured St. Petersburg, who also received this intelligence through the Prussian king, that there was no foundation for these claims. This was the reason why Obreskov had not reported Rexin's claims regarding Geller to St. Petersburg, "knowing his [Rexin's] meager concern/*maluiu nezhnost*' in observing the truth." 90.1.420.1762, LL. 66-68.

¹²⁵⁴ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 89, 91.

¹²⁵⁵ Obreskov explained that the Treaty of Belgrade had been signed in 1739 for the term of twenty-seven years. In 1747 Penkler tried to make the treaty eternal and spent a lot of money on bribes for this purpose. But Penkler could not convince the Porte to use the term *ebedi*, and agreed to accept the term *mugasagai* instead, which was a crafty formulation of the Porte that allowed it to have the power to choose to prolong the term of the treaty "if it did not contradict the religion." In other words, explained Obreskov, the Porte would prolong the term of the treaty only if it was in its interests to do so. Therefore, rather than deriving any benefit Vienna in fact had weakened the condition of

Thus, Obreskov still identified the main danger, although relatively minor, to be the Ottoman attack or diplomatic pressure on Austria. However, he also observed Ottoman movements in areas close to Russia. Thus, on November 23/December 4 he reported that the Porte dispatched four large boats (*saikas*) to the Black Sea and supplied the fortresses of Ochakov, Bender, Hotin, Vidin, and Belgrade with gunpowder, as well as sent many bags, picks, shovels, and cannons to Belgrade. On the other hand, the Porte disbanded Anatolian workers who had arrived the previous summer for works at border fortresses and 9,000 of whom had been sent to Belgrade.¹²⁵⁶

On February 19/March 2, 1763 St. Petersburg ordered Obreskov to keep track of the Porte's negotiations with the Austrian internuncio concerning the renewal of the Belgrade Treaty. St. Petersburg was concerned about Obreskov's report from January 1763, in which he reported that the Porte announced to the Prussian envoy in Constantinople that it planned to observe peace with Austria according to the Belgrade Treaty. Consequently, the Russian government was concerned that when the treaty expired in three years the Porte would be free from any obligation to preserve peace.¹²⁵⁷ By this time, however, Obreskov was utterly enthusiastic about the Porte's "exact and unaffected" disposition to keep peace with its neighbors, as evidenced by its recent orders to all the border pashas—on the Russian, Hungarian, and Persian borders—to prevent any disorders that could hurt mutual relations. He even hoped that if the Hubertusburg (*Gubernsburg*) peace negotiations finally put an end to the European war, the Porte would remain peacefully inclined towards Austria despite the fact that most of the

the Treaty of Belgrade. However, at the time Austria remained very pleased with the results of Penkler's negotiation, either in order to outwardly convince its military adversaries at the time that it was safe from an Ottoman attack, or because Maria Theresa indeed believed, as a result of a favorable twist in translation, that the new provision was beneficial for Austria. Therefore, when in late 1762 Penkler appealed to the 1747 agreement, which he believed rendered the treaty eternal, the dragoman objected, saying that the sultan found that renewal agreement contrary to the religion and laws of the empire. 90.1.420.1762, LL. 89-90.

¹²⁵⁶ 90.1.420.1762, LL. 64, 66-66ob.

¹²⁵⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, p. 327.

Austrian forces would return to Hungary. He believed that the Porte would abide by the term of peace—twenty seven years—mandated by the Treaty of Belgrade, and when the latter expired, would comply with the conditions of the renewal treaty signed with Baron Penkler in 1747. It was also possible that the Porte would renew the Belgrade Treaty altogether.¹²⁵⁸ Still, Obreskov remained on the alert and admitted in summer that this issue was worrisome.¹²⁵⁹

The prospect of an Ottoman attack on Austria—still disconcerting for Russia—once again reappeared in winter 1763-1764. At the time St. Petersburg suspected that the Prussian king was negotiating a defensive alliance with the Porte against Austria. Obreskov replied to his government on February 28/March 11, 1764, however, that the Porte would not conclude such an alliance. He explained that rumors about the renewal of the negotiation began after a servant of Ahmed Efendi, the Ottoman extraordinary envoy to Prussia, arrived from Berlin together with a Prussian courier in January. Although Obreskov and Penkler could not find out about the Porte's disposition towards this matter, Obreskov noted that everything seemed to belie Frederick's assertion to Russia that it was the Porte who was seeking Prussian alliance, while Frederick was responsive to Ottoman wishes because he could not waist such a good chance to strengthen himself against Austria. If the Porte really desired such an alliance, concluded Obreskov, it would have concluded it a long time ago.¹²⁶⁰

¹²⁵⁸ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 70-70ob., 79ob.-80.

¹²⁵⁹ For example, in his July 31/August 11, 1763 report, Obreskov was generally sanguine: he repeated his earlier assurance that "Everything here is well and the peaceful system of the Ottoman Porte is in its full force." Indeed, the Porte finally managed to convince the khan to move back from Căușeni to Bahçesaray and even though the Porte took measures to repair various fortresses in Bosnia, the Ottoman government officially informed the Austrian and Venetian diplomats about these plans and assured them that the repair works were direly needed simply not to allow these fortresses to completely fall apart. However, the only potential concern related to the repeated suggestion by the dragoman of the Porte to Penkler to renew the Treaty of Belgrade. Penkler declined, insisting that the treaty had already become perpetual and Maria Theresa pledged to uphold it. To this the dragoman replied that the sultan hated everything that had been done by his predecessor, Mahmud III. But Penkler countered that Mustafa III had also pledged to uphold all treaties signed by his ancestors when he ascended the throne. The conversation ended on this note and the dragoman stressed that he brought up the topic on his own initiative and the discussion did not carry official character. 90.1.454.1763, LL. 70-71ob.

¹²⁶⁰ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 145-145ob.

Obreskov referred to Frederick's assertion as communicated to him by the imperial order N 3 from 1764, but a note on the margins said that the order N 3 did not contain such information.¹²⁶¹ The order, dated January 7/18, 1764, indeed did not speak of Frederick's assertions to St. Petersburg. The Russian government simply explained to Obreskov its understanding of Frederick's actions. St. Petersburg no longer hoped to influence Frederick to abandon his desire for an alliance with the Porte. The order instructed Obreskov to indicate to the Porte that such an alliance would concern Russia and could cause Austria to restore its old alliances, implying the alliance with Russia. At the same time, Obreskov had to help Penkler very carefully, so as not to push the Porte towards Prussia.¹²⁶²

Obreskov speculated that Frederick could have become convinced of the Porte's desire to conclude the defensive alliance on the basis of the latter's instruction to Ahmed Efendi "to accept offers of an alliance and without concluding anything immediately report to the Sublime Porte through a courier." However, this formulation did not signify the Porte's desire to ally with Prussia. On the contrary, believed Obreskov, this particular instruction demonstrated that the Porte anticipated the Prussian offer and wished to preclude any inappropriate responses by its envoy.¹²⁶³

Obreskov's communication with Penkler was not so productive. Obreskov reported that he told Penkler that St. Petersburg had instructed its envoy in Berlin, Prince Dolgorukov, to try to prevent the Prussian king from insisting on the treaty with Turkey. However, Dolgorukov's efforts were unsuccessful and Obreskov noted to Penkler that everything now depended on the Porte and Russo-Austrian prevention measures. "But as far as I could notice, either because of the displeasure of his court at the increasing friendliness between Your Highest Imperial

¹²⁶¹ 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 145ob.

¹²⁶² Order N 3 is published in *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 176-178.

¹²⁶³ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 145ob.-146.

Majesty's Court and the [Prussian] king and differences on the matter of the election of the Polish king, or because the danger from it [a Prusso-Ottoman treaty] did not appear so great [*ili zhe po nenastoiatel'stvu pod sie vremia ot togo opasnosti*], he [Penkler] did not accord any respect to anything I told him, and likewise did not discuss it except noting that the Prussian king could easily pretend in front of the entire world that he never sought it [the Ottoman alliance].”¹²⁶⁴

At the time of receiving this report, however, St. Petersburg was very close to signing the alliance with Prussia. Therefore, it is unsurprising that on the margins of Obreskov's report, a personal remark of the new head of Russian foreign policy, Nikita Ivanovich Panin, read: “It seems to me that it is already time for us to stop talking about this matter and leave the court of Vienna to its own fate, for indeed Russia will not be shaken by that Alliance, while the court of Vienna has already moved far away from a natural connection with us, so that we should not labor in its [Vienna's] interests at the risk of attracting others' envy.”¹²⁶⁵ This remark was made around early April 1764 (O.S.)¹²⁶⁶ and clearly demonstrates the decisive break that the new Prussian alliance—concluded on March 31/April 11, 1764—had effected in Russia's foreign policy.

Historians have pointed out that Catherine made her final decision to commit to an alliance with Prussia under the pressure of a potential Prusso-Ottoman alliance.¹²⁶⁷ The first to

¹²⁶⁴ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 146-146ob.

¹²⁶⁵ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 146-146ob.

¹²⁶⁶ Obreskov's report from February 28/March 10, 1764 arrived in St. Petersburg on April 3/14.

¹²⁶⁷ De Madariaga wrote: “The possibility that Catherine might achieve her objects in Poland even without a treaty with Prussia induced Frederick to press ever more strongly for the conclusion of an alliance between the two powers, while at the same time he fell in with Catherine's demands for joint action in Poland. The visit of an envoy from the Ottoman Porte, who arrived in Berlin in November 1763, enabled him to increase the pressure on Russia. ... The specter of an alliance between Prussia and the Ottoman Porte persuaded Catherine of the need to conclude the agreement with Frederick....” De Madariaga, p. 190. Also see Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, p. 87, fn. 132; Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great*, pp. 158, 161. In making such an assessment, scholars have relied on the work of H.M. Scott, “Frederick II, the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Russo-Prussian Alliance of April 1764,” *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (April 1977), pp. 153-175. Scott was using Russian sources in translation, so perhaps his

suggest this was H.M. Scott in 1977. He argued that Frederick II was increasingly frustrated by the lack of Russian responsiveness to the concrete draft of the alliance treaty that he had submitted in late summer 1763. Consequently, out of desperation Frederick came up with the plan to use the publicity of the Ottoman embassy to Berlin, led by Ahmed Resmi Efendi, to fan Russian fears of a Prusso-Ottoman alliance, which Russia would perceive as a challenge to its plans in Poland.¹²⁶⁸ Indeed, Catherine was not rushing to sign the alliance with Prussia. As Nosov points out, even after sending its counter-proposal in January 1764, which was immediately accepted by Berlin, the Russian government, and especially the empress, was still holding off on concluding it. It took the empress another two months to finalize the alliance. But the reason for the change in her resolve was not the threat of a Prusso-Ottoman alliance, but the complicated situation in Poland-Lithuania on the eve of the election campaign, which necessitated having an ally in order to prevent possible military interference by Austria. The pleas of her representatives in Poland, Keyserling and Repnin, to hurry with the conclusion played the decisive role in Catherine's decision to seal the Prussian alliance. Just before she did so, her diplomats in Poland conveyed the absolute necessity of henceforth acting in alliance with

misinterpretation is a result of a faulty translation. Scott perused original documents published in *SIRIO*. However, very frequently the sources he referred to tell a different story. Thus, he claimed that Frederick wanted Russia to be concerned about his possible alliance with the Porte. But the orders that Panin wrote in January, while acknowledging the futility of preventing the Prusso-Ottoman alliance, also stressed that the Porte should see that Russia's advocacy of a Polish candidate who was not desirable to Austria was, by contrast, beneficial to the Porte. This point had to be made without Penkler's knowledge. Moreover, Panin forwarded to Obreskov reports of the Russian representative in Berlin, Vladimir Dolgorukov, which showed that Frederick was actually helping Russia in regard to Poland. Namely, the Prussian king supported the Russian position on Poland in front of Ahmed Resmi Efendi. This would, stressed Panin in his letter to Obreskov, help the Russian cause at the Porte. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 174. Therefore, the Russian government clearly gave up on trying to prevent the Prusso-Ottoman alliance and now sought just to make sure that neither Austria, nor the Porte, would interfere in Poland. Panin's strategy was theoretically brilliant: to prevent the danger of the Austrian and Ottoman interventions, he chose to set the two against each other by ordering Obreskov to highlight to the Ottomans that their interests in Poland did not lie with Austria. This is what the Porte, in fact, did by declaring that it would support only a native Polish king.

¹²⁶⁸ Scott writes: "Frederick's skillful exploitation of Resmi Ahmad can only be understood in terms of ...his developing conviction in the closing weeks of 1763 that the Russian alliance which he had been seeking since the final stages of the Seven Years' War might be about to slip through his fingers." See Scott, "Frederick II, the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Russo-Prussian Alliance of April 1764," p. 155.

Prussia in Poland-Lithuania, especially because Frederick had already proven his support and desire to cooperate to the maximum extent.¹²⁶⁹

The Prusso-Ottoman alliance was disconcerting only to the group of Russian statesmen who did not want Russia to ally with Prussia. However, this pro-Austrian group effectively had lost influence after Nikita Panin assumed the leadership of the CFA shortly after the death of Augustus III.¹²⁷⁰ It took him a couple of months, but Panin relatively swiftly activated his plans for an alliance with Prussia because events in Poland required it. The January orders to Obreskov—one of which instructed him to subtly prevent the Porte from engaging in an anti-Austrian alliance with Prussia, while the other stressed that Obreskov had to communicate to the Porte that Russia had effectively re-oriented of its diplomatic “system” away from Austria—signified the transition from the early policy of protecting Austrian interests at the Porte to the

¹²⁶⁹ Nosov quotes, for example, that on March 24/April 4, 1764—on the eve of the Lithuanian Confederation and the entrance of Russian troops into Poland—Repnin wrote to Panin that it was necessary to conclude a treaty with Prussia as soon as possible, for it was impossible to act effectively without it. Repnin argued that even though Frederick had announced that he would be indifferent if Austria attacked Poland after the Russian penetration of Poland, Repnin could not be sure how Frederick would actually think and act in such case. Indeed, concludes Nosov, the main goal of the Prussian alliance was to deter Austria from an attack on Poland, which both Prussia and Russia were having serious concerns about. B.V. Nosov, *Ustanovlenie rossiiskogo gosподstva v Rechi Pospolitoi, 1756-1768 gg.* (Moscow: Izd-vo Indrik, 2004), pp. 59-60.

Indeed, Frederick consistently supported the idea of a native Polish candidate for the Polish throne in front of Ahmed Resmi Efendi. He pointed out that it was in the Porte’s interests to support a native Pole, who, unlike a Saxon candidate, would not be an Austrian ally. Despite this, Demir also uses Scott’s argument that Catherine feared that a Prussian-Ottoman alliance would prevent the election of Poniatowski in Poland. Demir, pp. 182. Demir, on p. 197, notes that Virginia Aksan has criticized this argument in “Ottoman-French Relations 1739-1768”, in Sinan Kuneralp, ed., *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History*, Vol. I (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1987), p. 54, but there is no sign of criticism of Scott’s argument in her article.

¹²⁷⁰ Panin was formally appointed senior member of the CFA in the last week of October 1763. De Madariaga, p. 189. Before that, indeed, the Russian government sounded more concerned about the prospects of the Prusso-Ottoman alliance. Thus, it ordered the Russian envoy in Berlin Prince Dolgorukov to keep a close watch over conferences between Ahmed Resmi and Frederick II. St. Petersburg warned Dolgorukov that the proposed Prusso-Ottoman alliance would be against Russian interests: “Even if it [the alliance] consists in defensive measures and not in aggression against the Austrian court, of which Count Finkenstein had assured our former envoy to Berlin Prince Repnin, this alliance would nevertheless touch us as well in consideration of closely tied interests of the Austrian court with ours against the Turks and can in many ways harm us in many respects.” On October 10/21, 1763 Obreskov was also instructed to aid Penkler at the Porte in preventing the realization of the alliance. However, Obreskov had to do this subtly, so as not to upset the Prussians, from whom St. Petersburg was also expecting certain friendly favors in other matters. Obreskov was instructed not to spend any money on preventing the Prusso-Ottoman alliance but leave it up to Vienna to decide if it wanted to give necessary bribes at the Porte. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 22-24. The reference to “certain friendly favors,” of course, related to Poland, but these favors were not at risk because of the potential alliance between Prussia and the Porte, but only if Russia openly supported Austria at the Porte.

obvious preference for Prussia.¹²⁷¹ In a couple of months this policy became entrenched, forcing Russia to come face to face with Austria's anger.

In this light, the potential Prusso-Ottoman alliance might even have signaled to Russia that Prussian credit at the Porte could make it an effective ally there against Austrian-French intrigues aimed at arousing the Porte against Russian plans for Poland. Indeed, over the following years Obreskov would most closely cooperate with the Prussian envoy in warding off Ottoman attempts to interfere in Polish affairs.¹²⁷² This cooperation was quite productive and successful overall when the two sides were willing partners, but as it will be shown below the Prussian government surreptitiously engaged in a sabotage of Russian interests at the Porte after the election of Poniatowski as the king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The potential Prusso-Ottoman alliance was not completely welcome in Russia because of the latent fear that the treaty could be in some way directed against Russia, as had once been suggested by the Porte in fall 1762. Therefore, Obreskov had to remain vigilant on this point. Namely, on April 28/May 9, 1764 St. Petersburg informed Obreskov about the conclusion of the alliance with Frederick II¹²⁷³ and instructed him to stop trying to prevent the conclusion of an alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Prussia. In particular, Obreskov did not need to

¹²⁷¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 174-178. Already in mid-December, upon receiving Obreskov's report from October 31/November 11, 1763, Panin expressed hope to the empress that the new grand vizier, although a fierce person, would not go against Russia too strongly when he would learn of the change in Russia's system concerning Austria, and consequently Polish affairs. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 142. Significantly, Panin did not communicate this idea to Obreskov for another month—until January 7/18, 1764.

¹²⁷² On April 17/28, 1764 St. Petersburg ordered its envoy in Berlin, Dolgorukov, to ask Frederick to instruct his envoy in Constantinople, Rexin, to support Obreskov at the Porte in regard to Polish affairs. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, p. 296.

¹²⁷³ It is unclear why the order was sent so late relative to the date of the signing of the treaty—March 31/April 11—as well as the date when Obreskov's latest reports reached St. Petersburg—April 3/14,—but quite possibly the Russian government was preoccupied with organizing the introduction of its troops into Poland. Indeed, documents published in *SIRIO* demonstrate the overwhelming preoccupation with the military entrance into Poland during the month of April. By not publicizing the signing of the treaty right away, the empress was probably trying to avoid immediate obstruction by the enemies of the movement of her troops. Interestingly, St. Petersburg even waited more than two weeks before informing its envoy in Berlin about the conclusion of the treaty, which was done on April 17/28. All other Russian ambassadors abroad, including Obreskov, learned about the event from the circular order dated April 27/May 8. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 297, 316.

support Austria at the Porte because of Penkler's lukewarm and indifferent reception of Obreskov's earlier offer. More fundamentally, however, St. Petersburg stressed that a Prusso-Ottoman treaty would not endanger Russia because it was directed against Austria. Still, Obreskov had to remain on guard and ensure that if such a treaty were to be concluded, its obligations would not include general terms and expressions that could subsume Russia as well. Even in such a case, Panin did not believe that Russia would have serious reasons to worry about the security of its border provinces.¹²⁷⁴ In other words, Catherine concluded the treaty with Prussia because events in Poland required it and not because of the fear of a possible Prusso-Ottoman alliance.

On the other hand, the obvious rapprochement with Prussia and the breaking of the previous alliance obligations with Austria, while initially hugely helpful in Poland, still caused substantial difficulties for Russia. The Austrian government became more hostile towards Russia, and in 1765 Penkler took a step to hurt Russian interests at the Porte by revealing the identities of Obreskov's secret informants to the Ottoman government. This action enraged St. Petersburg, which in response went as far as ordering Obreskov to encourage the Porte to open a war on Austria. This instruction, however, was put on hold because of new worries about Prussia. Despite the above-noted assertion of St. Petersburg that a Prusso-Ottoman treaty would not endanger Russia, it was unpleasantly surprised to learn in 1765 that Rexin was negotiating a Prusso-Ottoman alliance at the Porte. The news was all the more worrying because the Prussians were ostensibly even advocating provisions that could be directed against Russia.

Thus, on June 2/13, 1765 St. Petersburg responded to Obreskov's report from April 16/27, in which the resident had informed his government that the Austrian representative in

¹²⁷⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 316-323.

Constantinople had been inciting the Porte to a break with Russia.¹²⁷⁵ Panin expressed Empress Catherine's extreme irritation with Vienna: "We see that the Austrian court, having chosen to sacrifice more and more its permanent interests to its present blind alliance with France and to its unbridled desire to return the lost Silesia as well as to spread its power over the German states, is taking off its mask in your place as well...." The Russian government found it greatly disconcerting that the Austrian court had offered the sultan to renew the Belgrade peace treaty, which was set to expire in 1766, when the international situation was so charged. St. Petersburg could not explain this action other than as an attempt by Austria to encourage the Porte to attack Russia. The patience of St. Petersburg was further strained by the fact that Penkler, the Austrian internuncio, had recently disclosed to the Ottoman government the identities of secret informants at the Porte who were in Obreskov's pay.

The empress expressed her utter displeasure, noting that Austria's actions forced Russia to forget about everything and care only about its own interests.¹²⁷⁶ Namely, Catherine ordered Obreskov to apply all his experience, prudence, and energy to find a way to "redirect the cloud that the Austrian house is preparing [for us, Russia] against itself, taking into account our current close alliance with his Prussian Majesty." In other words, the empress called on Obreskov to

¹²⁷⁵ It was Panin who stood behind such a drastic decision. Upon learning of Penkler's actions, he presented the following note to Catherine: "Such action everywhere is considered a veritable treachery. Obreskov has been well instructed and after such an incident there is no need in showing any respect; one thinks that he will use all efforts to bring wrath against the Austrian court while we acquire the right of navigation on the Black Sea. Your Majesty will always be able to keep the Prussians away from this squabble; the Turks won't as much harm Austria as only break their pride and elevate for them the value of our friendship above that of France and any other nation." Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 385-386 (although Kessel'brenner's endnotes are very confusing).

¹²⁷⁶ It was hypocritical of the Russian government to accuse Austria of undermining Russia at the Porte while St. Petersburg itself had been hoping that the Porte would turn against Austria as early as fall 1764. Thus, on November 16/27, 1764 the empress praised Obreskov for his efforts in countering anti-Russian propaganda in Constantinople after the Polish elections and encouraged him to continue arranging relations at the Porte in accordance with the new Russian political system in foreign relations. Namely, Russia cared only about its only interests, and hoped to show Austria that it was not Russia but Austria that needed the alliance with Russia against the Porte, while Russia alone could defend its interests at the Porte. Catherine hoped to solve peacefully other issues with the Ottoman Empire, while the latter, "would now turn to her other neighbor who was much more important to pay attention to, and would even seek ways to assure security from our side for this purpose." *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 103.

incite the Porte to a war against Austria. She further explained that dangerous fallout from the war could be easily prevented: Russia could restrain Prussia from harming Austria excessively, while the Turks alone could never cause substantial damage to the Austrian army. The main objective lay in “breaking the horn of its [Vienna’s] pride and haughtiness,” thus forcing Austria to be more reasonable in its foreign policy thenceforth. St. Petersburg requested Obreskov to observe greatest secrecy in the matter, to prevent the Porte from ever finding out Russia’s role in encouraging the Ottoman government to attack Austria. This was important in order to leave Austria with the impression that its own unchecked appetite and anti-Russian actions led the Porte to turn against Vienna.¹²⁷⁷

This order seems very reckless. Catherine shouldered Obreskov with a complex task that he had to carry out as a pure intrigue, without possessing substantial tools or arguments to persuade the Porte to remain friendly, or at least neutral, to Russia, all the while working against powerful French propaganda. Moreover, Catherine sent this instruction not knowing anything about the disposition of the new grand vizier. At the end of the letter, Panin asked Obreskov to report on the developments after the appointment of the new grand vizier, Muhsinzade Mehmed

¹²⁷⁷ St. Petersburg took time to explain to Obreskov its current political orientation in order to demonstrate that Russia’s interests did not contradict those of the Ottoman government. Namely, Panin wrote that the Russian government chose to rely on alliances with Prussia and Poland in order to preserve general peace in Europe. Russia could not allow Poland to become as active in public affairs as Austria was. Moreover, due to its internal constitution, Poland could not become such an active player in Europe. Prussia, on the other hand, was located away from Turkish borders and therefore the Porte had no reason to be concerned about its own security in view of the Russo-Prussian alliance. Even the fact that Russia and Prussia together put some limits on Poland’s political interests could not be detrimental to the Porte.

Obreskov had to convince the Porte that its own interests dictated that, if the sultan desired to wage a war, it was fairer and more useful to fight Austria than Russia. It was fairer because the Belgrade peace treaty would no longer constrain the sultan and therefore his attack would not be seen as treacherous. It was more useful to attack Austria because the Porte could capture valuable territory only on the border with the Habsburgs.

The Russian government left it up to Obreskov to decide “where, when, and how to act and to coax.” The only helpful argument that St. Petersburg suggested to the resident concerned the empress’s decision to resettle the New Serbia colony from the right to the left bank of the Dnieper, leaving the former settlement as a steppe barrier zone. “If necessary, you can also use this circumstance—albeit only as a last resort—in your favor, to present it to the Turks as recent evidence of our sincere desire to remove all causes for doubt and suspicion. We call it a last resort because on the other hand the uncouth Turks could interpret it [the decision to resettle the colony] as a [sign of] certain timidity.” 89.8.1.374.1765, LL. 79-83.

Paşa. In addition, the new order came at a time when Obreskov had to defend his court against rumors at the Porte that Russia had been helping Georgians in their fight against the Ottoman government. According to Panin, the rumors were completely baseless. However, St. Petersburg provided very little truly convincing information, advice, or evidence that could help Obreskov in carrying out the tall order of inciting the Porte to a war against Austria. As a result, it is not surprising that Obreskov did not act on this order immediately, similar to the circumspect position he had adopted in 1762. As late as October, he did not notify Rexin about this instruction and did not take any measures in line with the order. By that time, he could also cite a serious reason against the plan of action adopted in St. Petersburg.

Namely, through Obreskov Panin soon learned that he had mistakenly placed full trust in Prussia. Kesselbrenner rightly points out that Obreskov must have smiled when he received the order from June 2/13, 1765 because by that time he had learned about intense Prussian intrigues in Constantinople aimed at signing a military alliance with the Porte. It took Obreskov considerable efforts to finally achieve the recall and replacement of the skillful Prussian envoy Rexin, who had a decade-long experience in Prussian secret diplomacy in the Ottoman capital.¹²⁷⁸ Obreskov's primary task in this connection consisted in convincing his own government about Rexin's intrigues, which Frederick staunchly denied.

Despite Frederick's repudiations, it appears that in 1765 Prussia tried to undermine Russian credit at the Porte by claiming that Russia planned to change the Polish constitution and to attack the Porte. This was not true: Catherine never planned to allow Poniatowski to carry out his reform of the commonwealth's government system.¹²⁷⁹ Similarly, far from planning an attack on the Ottoman Empire, Catherine's preoccupation with Poland-Lithuania, as seen above, led her

¹²⁷⁸ Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, p. 386.

¹²⁷⁹ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, pp. 44-49.

to attempt to encourage the Ottoman Empire to attack Austria. The blame for these alleged Prussian claims to the Porte fell on Rexin, but Frederick not only denied having instructed Rexin accordingly, but also eventually exculpated his representative from any blame, instead pointing to intrigues of enemy nations—France and Austria,—as well as those of Boskamp.¹²⁸⁰ Although Frederick had to replace Rexin with a different envoy, the damage to Russia was already done and quite palpable, as Panin told Solms, the Prussian ambassador in St. Petersburg, in January 1766.¹²⁸¹

Yet, Panin chose to overlook this issue. Throughout this episode and in general Panin remained enamored by Solms as “a person of excellent honesty by character.”¹²⁸² Panin’s reaction indicates that his desire to protect his system was overriding.¹²⁸³ Thus, in a letter to Repnin from September 5/16, 1765 Panin wrote that “it was possible that the [Prussian] king still hoped to conclude the alliance [with the Porte], or as usual to keep affairs in disarray by design, taking into account his envy of Russia’s good intentions in Poland and his hope to take advantage of the Porte’s lack of recognition of the Polish king to settle the Prussian-Polish customs question.” However, Panin believed that the smooth logic of his Northern Alliance would bring Frederick into line: “But now his policy has been unmasked and he will have to take

¹²⁸⁰ Boskamp had first served Frederick II, as a courier of the Constantinople mission and, then, as a Prussian consul in Crimea in the early 1760s. Following the ignoble ousting of Boskamp from Crimea by Kırım Giray in late 1762, Boskamp evidently had a falling out with Frederick II and began to serve the Polish royal candidate, Stanislaw Poniatowski.

¹²⁸¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 419-420; Conversations between Panin and Solms and correspondence between Panin, Obreskov, and Repnin, as well as between Frederick and Solms on the other hand, can be traced in *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 309-313, 325-328, 334; and Vol. 22, pp. 388-393, 396-397, 399-400, 403-411, 419-421, 481-482.

¹²⁸² *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 325.

¹²⁸³ On the Panin’s Northern System, see David M. Griffiths, “The Rise and Fall of the Northern System: Court Politics and Foreign Policy in the First Part of Catherine II’s Reign,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (1970), pp. 547-569, here pp. 550-551, which condenses his extensive treatment of Panin’s political system in his dissertation: David M. Griffiths, “Russian Court Politics and the Question of an Expansionist Foreign Policy Under Catherine II, 1762-1783” Ph.D. Dissertation (Cornell University, 1974). Also Ransel described the Northern Accord in detail and traced Panin’s leading role in committing Russia to the alliance with Prussia: Ransel, pp. 123-200.

Russia's side."¹²⁸⁴ Thus, although Panin admitted his realization that Prussia did not always act in full support of Russian plans in Poland, even later he apparently did not wish to acknowledge the negative effects of Prussia's selfish interests, which regularly complicated Russian policy in Poland ever since the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski.¹²⁸⁵

For several months, Obreskov continued to persuade Panin that rumors concerning Rexin's activity were true. On October 9/20, 1765, for example, Obreskov responded to Panin's letter from August 16/27, in which Panin had informed Obreskov that the Prussian king had sent him, Panin, a personal letter assuring St. Petersburg that Prussia had not sought an alliance with the Porte after signing the alliance treaty with Russia. Obreskov noted that, certainly, Panin had reasons to believe the Prussian king because the latter had not yet given cause to doubt his sincerity. However, Obreskov drew Panin's attention to two documents that he procured "from the very nest," which likely meant the Porte's chancellery. Obreskov noted that he obtained these documents with untold difficulty and substantial expense because the Porte had increased measures to preserve the secrecy of sensitive information.¹²⁸⁶ The content of the documents was copied from Turkish originals in Obreskov's house, in the resident's presence. Unfortunately, reported Obreskov, the documents belied Prussian assurances. The first one was a draft of an eternal defensive alliance between Prussia and the Porte, consisting of eleven articles. Moreover, Obreskov noted that the alliance was directed not only against Vienna, as was Frederick's original intention in earlier negotiations, but, "to my own extreme surprise, against all Christian

¹²⁸⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 338.

¹²⁸⁵ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 320-330.

¹²⁸⁶ Obreskov paid 500 chervonnye *zincirlis*, or 1,375 levki, for the two documents. 89.8.394.1766, LL. 5ob. The difficulty must have also stemmed from Penkler's divulging to the Porte of Obreskov's secret informants earlier in the year.

nations neighboring the Porte and the king, without excepting the Highest Court of Her Imperial Majesty.”¹²⁸⁷

The second document was Rexin’s ardent request addressed to the reis efendi from early November 1764 to conclude the defensive alliance as well as two additional articles. This document proved that the draft of the treaty, which was left undated as usual, had been sent by the Prussian king and presented to the Porte by Rexin between late August and October 1764, because the reis efendi in question was appointed only on August 9/29, 1764. In the letter, Rexin indicated that he had been waiting impatiently for an answer from the Porte: “There is no answer from you yet, probably you are busy. On September 1 the king informed me that he was confident that the Porte would not delay the conclusion of this matter further, judging by the *takrir*—written response—of the Porte addressed to the king and passed through me [Rexin] in February and by the most pleasant letter of the grand vizier to the king about this alliance.” Rexin also suggested adding two more “useful” articles to the treaty. First, the king pledged to undertake mediation in case, “God forbid,” there was a break in relations between the Porte and Russia—more precisely, “if any coolness or irritation of friendship takes place.” Secondly, the

¹²⁸⁷ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 9-9ob. Frederick announced that he authorized Karl Adolf Rexin, “who resided at the Porte on business (commercial affairs),” to conclude an eternal defensive treaty with the Porte, on the basis of the eighth article of the mutual treaty of friendship from March 22, 1761, which foresaw possibility of greater cooperation for the purpose of guarding each other’s peace and security. Consequently, the first article stressed that the eternal alliance would be mutually beneficial. Per the second article, however, the alliance did not mean that one of the powers could attack or insult one of its neighbors in peacetime. But if one of the Christian neighboring nations attacked one of the signatories, the other had to encourage the aggressor to stop or at least to pay reparations. If this would not be sufficient, the sides had to employ all their available forces to help each other, read the fourth article. The fifth article noted that because of the great distance between the two nations, it was quite difficult to provide direct military assistance or to join forces. Therefore, the sides had to attack each other’s aggressors in order to divide the latter’s forces. The sixth article prohibited the signatories from accepting any separate offers of peace or truce. The seventh article specified that the new alliance officially renewed the 1761 treaty and all its articles about commerce, which granted Prussia the same freedoms as the ones enjoyed by French, English, and Dutch merchants. According to the eighth article, the Porte had to provide passports to Prussian merchants that would protect them from corsairs in the Archipelago. Prussia also had a right to establish consulates in all ports of the Archipelago islands. The ratification of the treaty had to take place four months or sooner after signing. 90.1.526.1765, LL. 14-18ob.

Prussian king promised that from now on the election of the present Polish king would not bring any harm or disadvantage to the Porte.¹²⁸⁸

Therefore, it appears that Prussia had not ceased its attempts to sign the alliance and even renewed them after the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski, probably counting on Russia's support, or at least lack of hindrance, as appreciation for Prussia's aid in securing the election.¹²⁸⁹ Rexin's additional articles, on the other hand, seemed to have been aimed at excluding Russia from the *casus foederis* of the alliance with the Porte, which was imperative in order not to violate the 1764 Russo-Prussian treaty. Yet, Obreskov was skeptical. He admitted his confusion about the exact objective the Prussian king was pursuing by suggesting the two additional articles, especially the first one concerning Russia. Obreskov did not think that Frederick was doing it to try to limit or at least blur his obligation expressed in the fourth article, namely to provide military assistance. The resident thought that, "judging impartially by the obvious and resolute desire of the Prussian king to conclude the alliance with the Porte," it was more likely that the additional articles were a ploy to conceal, when necessary, from the Russian court the obligation contained in the fourth article. Otherwise, thought Obreskov, there was no need for the first additional article because its substance was already contained in the third article of the treaty. Obreskov also thought that the second additional article, in which Frederick promised that the Polish election would not be detrimental to the Porte, served to alert the Porte that it could face some kind of threat from the new Polish king if it would not sign the treaty with Prussia. Obreskov further informed his court that since having made these proposals in fall 1764 Rexin

¹²⁸⁸ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 9ob., 19-23.

¹²⁸⁹ Indeed, in May 1764 Obreskov reported that the Prussian king tried to be sincerely helpful in assisting Russia at the Porte regarding Polish matters. Obreskov also expected that Frederick would cooperate even more eagerly because in response to the king's new attempts to sign a defensive alliance with the Porte in April he, Frederick, received a much less encouraging answer than before. At this point, however, Obreskov was no longer in friendly communication with Penkler and decided not to share this news with the Austrian internuncio "lest his court turn even haughtier." 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 59ob.-60ob.

intensified his insistence on concluding the alliance with the Porte, especially in March—May 1765, to such an extent that a significant part of the secret expedition [at the Porte?] became aware of this matter.¹²⁹⁰

Obreskov shared his opinion that the Prussian king was prepared to sacrifice anything to conclude the treaty with the Porte. To illustrate his point, Obreskov reminded his government that instead of feeling eternal gratitude to the Russian empress for countless favors, “or it is better to say for saving him,” the king had been ready to attempt to convince the Russian empress to concede to the Porte everything that Russia had gained after the Pruth Treaty. It was clear that Frederick was “infected by this passion” for many years now, possibly because he imagined that the alliance with the Porte was far superior to any other means of securing his territory. Perhaps, Frederick hoped that it would be easy to convince the Porte to recognize all his enterprises as falling under the scope of the treaty. Moreover, the Prussian king must have weighed in his mind that the eternal treaty with the Porte would be more important than the treaty with Russia, which had a term of only eight years. All of these circumstances caused Obreskov to worry that Prussia could sooner or later succeed in signing the treaty with the Porte, especially because of the instability of and frequent changes within the Ottoman government.¹²⁹¹

Still, Obreskov allowed for the possibility that Rexin, whom the resident knew to be imprudent and of low intelligence,¹²⁹² could have exceeded his king’s instructions due to his

¹²⁹⁰ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 9ob.-10.

¹²⁹¹ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 10-10ob.

¹²⁹² This is how, for example, Obreskov explained the differences between his own report on public disturbances in Constantinople in August 1765 and that of Rexin. It is clear that Obreskov considered his Prussian colleague completely worthless: “The difference...stems from different ways of thinking and imaginations; he, due to a brisk mind that is completely uncontrolled by bonds of reason, as is known to all his acquaintances here, imagines various daydreams about every incident, and presents everything that the liveliness of his spirit can birth as genuine truth, caring little about providing necessary evidence.” On the contrary, Obreskov claimed that he examined every incident from all sides, analyzed it as much as his intelligence allowed him, and made his conclusion about what was really credible or at least seemed credible. As a result, Rexin ascribed the public uprising to something great and worthy of attention that was not really warranted, while Obreskov understood its real meaning, which was simple. Moreover, Rexin proved his point by referring to the made-up executions of various supporters of the late grand

thoughtless zeal. However, Obreskov could not expose Rexin's actions openly because he could not compromise his secret sources. The resident implored Panin to keep the two documents secret "because otherwise I will not have any more means to protect Russian interests at the Porte in such cases." As a result, Obreskov thought that it was not advisable for Frederick to publicly disavow his envoy's actions at the Porte or to demand any explanations.¹²⁹³

In view of these developments, Obreskov admitted that he could not approach Rexin about Panin's order N 11 from June 2/13 because he could not trust that the Prussian envoy would not reveal to the public Russia's intention to incite the Porte against Austria. Obreskov told Rexin that he had not received such an order and then claimed that the Porte appeared unlikely to agree to it. Overall, Obreskov revealed to Panin that the Porte indeed did not appear inclined to enter into conflict with Austria. First, almost all foreign ministers in Constantinople supported the Austrian court. Secondly, Vienna would surely make an official notification to the Porte about the crowning of the new Holy Roman Emperor via an extraordinary internuncio who would bring lavish gifts and thus, doubtless, strengthen the Ottoman-Austrian friendship at least for some more time.¹²⁹⁴

In November, Obreskov once again expressed his skepticism about Frederick's assurances that he did not know about Rexin's intrigues at the Porte. "I myself am more than confident that His Majesty did not exactly instruct Rexin to harm the interests of Her Highest Imperial Majesty, and especially to cause coldness between the Porte and Her court." However,

vizier, which was an obvious lie for not one such person was executed. Obreskov pointed out that his own analysis proved correct: namely, the uprising and threats stopped as soon as the Porte executed the infamous Greek Stavraki and exiled several students of public seminaries, who were responsible for writing and distributing grievances and incendiary claims. As for the public's complaints about the empty treasury (*neoborot deneg*), those continued, however the government and the sultan cared little for them because this was a regular topic. 90.1.526.1765, LL. 32ob.-33.

¹²⁹³ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 10, 10ob.-11.

¹²⁹⁴ Obreskov was also upset that the Prussian envoy was not helping him to convince the Porte to accept the new Polish envoy, Aleksandrowicz. 90.1.526.1765, LL. 11-12.

because it was well known that the Prussian king desired to conclude the alliance with the Porte regardless of the price, Obreskov thought that the king decided, based on his experience of twenty-four years, that peace and stability were not conducive to achieving his goals. Therefore, Frederick must have resolved to bring the Porte to the point where it felt indignation and great worry. For this reason, Frederick probably instructed Regin to prevent and postpone the Porte's recognition of the Polish king and to sow concerns and irritation at the Porte to the point that it would itself seek to conclude the alliance with Prussia. However, thought Obreskov, Regin could have decided that the surest way to disturb the Porte's confidence was to appeal to its greatest fear—that Russia harbored harmful plans against it. Thus, Regin overstepped his bounds and, vainly hoping that his intrigues would not become known, began to make confused presentations to the Porte, which became known almost to everyone, especially to the surprised Ottoman public.¹²⁹⁵

In this way Regin, claimed Obreskov, became the only reason for the continuing disagreement between Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire. To remedy the situation, Obreskov sent a note to the sultan, who “realized the cunning of those who pretended to protect his interests.” Consequently, the sultan ordered the Porte to appoint a guide for the reception of Aleksandrowicz and to recognize the Polish king through an official letter of the grand vizier. But when Regin learned about Boskamp's invitation to the Porte, Regin preempted it by sending his dragoman to the reis efendi with new claims of possible negative consequences for the Porte if it were to recognize the Polish king. The reis efendi replied to Regin with great passion: “It is already time to remember about conscience and to stop instead of continuing these intrigues and bothering the Porte.” The reis efendi further promised that he would throw into the fire any other written note that Regin would send in the future about this matter. Subsequently, Boskamp met

¹²⁹⁵ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 24-24ob.

with the reis efendi twice and agreed on everything. But Rexin did not want to give up and “sowed his poison in the sultan’s palace, where every evil is heard with open ears.” As a result, the sultan drastically changed his mind to the great surprise and insult not only of Obreskov, but also of the Porte itself. Obreskov was particularly insulted by the conditional acceptance of the Polish diplomatic representative because there potentially could be no limits to these conditions, “due to local barbarity and great viciousness/*zamashki*, especially towards the weak.”¹²⁹⁶

Finally, Obreskov suggested that in order to acquire obvious evidence against Rexin the Russian government had to question Rexin’s dragomans. One of them, named Frankopulo, was in Berlin at the moment, while the other one was in Constantinople. In general, Obreskov thought that Frederick’s expressed readiness to recall Rexin was but a reflection of the king’s earlier intention to recall him because the king was unsatisfied with him, while the Prussian government completely despised him. Count Finkenstein, for example, called Rexin a complete ignoramus and a muddler. The king, however, was chiefly upset at Rexin’s excessive spending. In fact, the king stopped approving Rexin’s bills. As a result, in order to sustain himself Rexin had to pawn almost all the gifts that had been intended for the sultan and the Porte in case of the conclusion of the treaty.¹²⁹⁷

On December 10/21, 1765 Obreskov reported that the Prussian translator Frankopulo had returned from Berlin on November 12/23, having brought news to Rexin that the king was recalling him. His successor would be Major Zegelin, who was expected to arrive through Hotin in late February 1766. Obreskov noted that he knew Zegelin quite well from the time when he visited Constantinople between July 1764 and March 1765. In fact, due to the Prussian mission’s lack of a summer residence, Zegelin lived at the Büyükdere residence of the Russian mission for

¹²⁹⁶ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 24ob.-25.

¹²⁹⁷ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 25-25ob.

more than two months. The chief purpose of Zegelin's earlier visit was to investigate Rexin, especially the latter's spending. Obreskov could not say if Zegelin had noticed Rexin's intrigues against Russian interests, but Obreskov was confident that Zegelin knew about the new offer of alliance and about Rexin's attempts starting in December 1764 to prevent the Porte from recognizing the Polish king. This was clear from Rexin's and Zegelin's open declarations that the king had ordered Rexin to share everything with Zegelin, and not to undertake anything without Zegelin's knowledge. Moreover, Obreskov received reliable intelligence that proved that Rexin and Zegelin acted together.¹²⁹⁸ This intelligence came in May 1765 from a distant location and Obreskov confessed that he could not name his sources. The secret information concerned Zegelin, whose remarks in conversations with others indicated that the Prussian king had changed his policy towards the Polish issue and was attempting to prevent its conclusion. The secret informant warned Obreskov to be wary of Rexin's intrigues. Overall, however, Obreskov had a good impression of Zegelin: the latter seemed to be an honest and intelligent person who was not capable of intrigues and who could carry out the Prussian king's orders with better judgment than Rexin.¹²⁹⁹

Thus, as early as after the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski as the king of Poland, Frederick's actions began to contradict Russian interests: it is surprising how calmly Panin talked of Frederick's obstruction of the recognition of the new Polish king by the Porte. In view of this circumstance, as well as Obreskov's complete disdain for Rexin, the Russian and Prussian cooperation at the Porte became extremely strained in 1765. Rexin even accused Obreskov of being indifferent to Austrian attempts to renew the peace treaty with the Porte, which expired on November 14/25, 1765. As a result, Obreskov had to defend himself in front of his own

¹²⁹⁸ This was indeed the case. Beydilli, *Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar*, pp. 94-95.

¹²⁹⁹ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 26-26ob.

government.¹³⁰⁰ Such brazen hypocrisy—Frederick expected Russia to carry the burden of resisting the renewal of the Austrian-Ottoman peace treaty, while he was at the same time sabotaging the Porte’s recognition of Stanislaw August, so desired by Russia—strikes one as a good illustration of the inherent incongruity of the 1764 Russo-Prussian alliance.¹³⁰¹

After all, the conclusion of the Russo-Prussian alliance led to a situation—only a year or so later—when both Austria and Prussia—one openly, the other covertly—challenged the Russian strategy in Poland and at the Porte. In this light, evidence from Constantinople introduces the question of the wisdom of the Russian government’s decision to ally with Prussia. This question did not receive necessary attention in historical literature.¹³⁰² Most works note that the reasons for the alliance had to do with Poland, but very few underscore how troublesome the cooperation became already a year after the signing. Indeed, the very idea of a Northern

¹³⁰⁰ Obreskov was determined to prevent the renewal of the treaty, but he did not want to unreservedly serve Prussian interests, while the latter’s actions were proving to be unhelpful and even detrimental. Obreskov, therefore, declined Rexin’s offer of assistance in this matter because, he wrote, he realized that the renewal would be more harmful to Prussia than Russia. It would have made more sense, argued Obreskov, if Rexin requested Obreskov’s help in this matter, rather than assuming that Obreskov would take the leading role. To explain away his refusal, Obreskov reminded Rexin that Austria would not attack Prussia when the latter was supported by Russia. Evidently, Obreskov’s response offended Rexin, who began to malign Obreskov’s indifference. But Obreskov assured St. Petersburg that he had reasons for thinking the way he did. Namely, he believed that Vienna would not renew the treaty because it feared that the Porte would make inordinate demands and ask for rewards. Moreover, Austria might not need to renew the treaty after all, if the Porte tacitly recognized the 1747 renewal act. Vienna could achieve this by tacit means. Namely, the new Holy Roman emperor sent a letter to the Porte, in which he promised to sacredly observe the peace treaty. Since the treaty had already expired, the emperor’s declaration could refer only to the 1747 renewal agreement. Therefore, if the Porte invited the Austrian internuncio to an audience without any clarifications on the subject of the treaty and, moreover, expressed an agreement to observe the treaty, this would constitute the Porte’s recognition of the 1747 treaty. Still, Obreskov promised to do everything in order to prevent the Porte from making such an assurance in return, although he could not promise that his efforts would be successful. 90.1.526.1765, LL. 33-34.

¹³⁰¹ Scott also notes that in early 1766 Prussia tentatively tried to approach Vienna for rapprochement, probably to put pressure on its Russian ally. Also, the new Prussian envoy, Zegelin, who arrived in Constantinople in May 1766 had "public orders to co-operate with his Russian counterpart" and "private instructions to seek, wherever possible, to undermine St. Petersburg's position at the Porte." Scott concludes that Frederick was ambivalent about Russia: the alliance was essential to his security, but he feared Russia's power and ambitions. Moreover, the winter of 1766-1767 revealed growing tensions between Russia and Prussia. The latter envied and was concerned by the former's growing power. Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern powers*, pp. 163-164, 180-181. But if the Prussian position was "ambivalent," then how should one characterize Russia’s position: was the Russian government naïve or did it prefer to close its eyes? The recognition of Stanislaw August, however, was a very serious issue for Russia, and it is not clear why St. Petersburg chose to overlook Prussian intrigues at the Porte to such an extent.

¹³⁰² The only exception is the recent work by Maksim Anisimov: Anisimov, *Semiletniaia voina*, pp. 501-543.

Alliance, advocated by Panin since 1763, failed primarily because of Prussian opposition, no matter how skillfully Frederick tried to conceal it.¹³⁰³ The empress herself does not seem to have believed in Panin's system either, as she realized that Panin's plan required a strong Polish state, which neither she nor Frederick was willing to accept.¹³⁰⁴

Of course, Russia had aligned with Prussia, and even France, before, but since 1746 Russia entered upon a pro-Austrian course and Elizabeth embarked on an openly anti-Prussian foreign policy in 1753.¹³⁰⁵ A recent study of the "establishment of Russian domination in Poland," dates the growth of the Russian involvement in Poland to the period from 1756 to 1768, noting that key Russian statesmen decided to support a Piast well before Peter III or Catherine II came to power. Consequently, Nosov argues that already in late 1760 St. Petersburg was open to seeking peace with Prussia, seeing that neither France nor Austria, unlike Prussia, wanted to support Russian plans in Poland, which was seen as central to the tasks of Russian diplomacy at the time.¹³⁰⁶ Still, even this study's dating of the origins of Russia's focus on Poland and

¹³⁰³ Along with Prussia's resistance to various aspects of Russian policy in Poland, Panin's Northern System was hurt by Prussia's selfish reluctance to tolerate Russian plans to sign alliances with Saxony and England. Panin wanted to counterbalance a three-power Bourbon block (France, Spain, and Austria) with a northern alliance between Russia, Prussia, Saxony, England, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and Poland, and any other state that wished to oppose the Bourbon-Austrian union. The project, however, proved unwieldy. Frederick, for example, did not like the idea of allying with England, Saxony, and Bavaria, and, in general, of having to enter into obligations with other powers besides Russia, whose alliance was sufficient for his security. Therefore, his actions in relation to these states—although carried out covertly—often were contrary to Russian interests. *SIRIO*, Vol. 37, pp. 150-151, 173; Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 227, fn. 3; p. 237, fn. 4; 238, 281-282, 289-290; 311, fn. 3; 316-319.

¹³⁰⁴ For example, Panin argued that even though Russia lost Austria—its most important traditional ally against the Ottoman Empire,—it could defend itself against the Porte with the help of Poland. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, p. 7.

As a result, Panin was not against reforms in Poland as long as there existed a strong pro-Russian party, which could also be achieved through support of the non-Catholic minorities. Griffiths also thinks that had Catherine followed Panin's proposal of allowing centralizing reforms in exchange for full civic rights for the dissidents, the Poles might have well accepted the compromise. Griffiths, "The Rise and Fall," 554-555.

¹³⁰⁵ Liechtenhan, *Elizaveta Petrovna*, p. 409. In her other book Liechtenhan notes the breakdown in Russia's diplomatic relations with France and Prussia around 1750. "From late 1750 the trilateral union France-Prussia-Russia, which was so solid in the early 1740s, began to unravel." Liechtenhan, *Rossii vkhodit v Evropu*, pp. 224, 225.

¹³⁰⁶ Nosov, Chapters 1 and 2.

concomitant search for alternative allies to 1756 is somewhat mysterious, because nothing is said of the earlier period and the reasons for such a turn in policy.¹³⁰⁷

Existing scholarship also has not provided a unanimous answer on who stood behind Russia's turn to Prussia. Most times, authors argue that Panin was chiefly responsible for choosing the pro-Prussian direction of Russian foreign policy. Stegnii, for example, notes that Catherine promised Prussia to sign an alliance already in April 1763. With Keyserling's and Panin's help she promoted her vision against the opposition of the pro-Austrian faction, consisting of Bestuzhev and the Orlovs. Overall, it took a year for Catherine, Keyserling, Panin, and Repnin to prevail.¹³⁰⁸ In the meantime, Catherine attempted to divorce her interests in

¹³⁰⁷ Indeed, Maksim Anisimov has criticized Nosov's argument and dating, which Anisimov argues is not supported by primary evidence. Even though St. Petersburg found itself in a difficult position as the party of Augustus III began to oppose the Czartoryskis since 1753—the Russian government itself became divided on whom to support,—Russia's policy was consistent in that St. Petersburg attempted to preserve stability in Poland by reconciling the opposing parties with each other. Anisimov could not find any sources—even among the most secret ones—that demonstrated St. Petersburg's resolve to support a Piast successor. Maksim Anisimov, "Plany Rossii v otnoshenii Pol'shi vo vremia Semiletnei voiny (Po povodu raboty B.V. Nosova)," *Otechestvennaia Istoriiia*, Vol. 5 (2008), pp. 172-178. Through his work in the archives Anisimov found evidence for the conventional view, namely that until the end of her days Elizabeth was in favor of the alliance with Austria and would have supported the Saxon candidate to the Polish throne. Anisimov even conjectured that had Elizabeth lived several years longer, Poland could have escaped partitions. Instead, the main problem in mutual relations—instability and indefinite status of borders—would have been resolved peacefully by means of pushing the Russian border further west "to its natural geopolitical boundaries," while Poland would have been compensated with Eastern Prussia. Catherine II, however, had to act from a different position because she could not offer territorial compensation to Poland anymore. Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 316-317. On the significance of the problematic status of the borders between the Russian Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a source of diplomatic and regional tensions in the 1760s, see Oksana Viktorivna Mykhed, "Not by Force Alone: Russian Incorporation of the Dnieper Borderland, 1762-1800," (Ph.D. Dissertation. Harvard University, 2014), pp. 1-211.

¹³⁰⁸ Nikolai Repnin was Panin's nephew. Catherine sent him to assist Keyserling in Warsaw due to the latter's failing health in November 1763, shortly after Panin became the head of the CFA. Petr Stegnii, "Pervyi razdel Pol'shi i rossiiskaia diplomatiia," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2001), pp. 152-174, here pp. 156-158, 161. In general, Stegnii's discussion of the Polish issue in 1762-1764 is suggestive of a long-standing Prussian conspiracy, dating back to 1756. Thus, he traces Catherine's ideas regarding Poland to Prussian influences. For example, he writes that the Prussian king promoted the idea of electing a native Piast to the Polish throne in order to undermine the Saxons, and thereby Austria, and because he realized that he could satisfy his territorial pretensions to Poland only in alliance with Russia. In reference to the Polish succession issue in 1762-1763 Stegnii notes that "Catherine knew that only two people from her immediate circle—Panin and Keyserling—would support her plans in relation to Poland." Both Panin and Keyserling, however, were tied to the Prussian plans for Poland. These plans centered on Poniatowski, who had first arrived in Russia in 1755 in the entourage of English ambassador Charles Hanbury-Williams. In fall 1756—at the start of the Seven Years' War—both Empress Elizabeth and her chancellor Bestuzhev were convinced that Poniatowski, along with Williams, was in the pay of the Prussians. Back in those days Catherine, who was grand duchess at the time, frequently borrowed money from Williams. Correspondence between Catherine and Williams proves that the latter discussed Catherine's course of action in case she ascended

Poland, where cooperation with Prussia appeared the most advantageous, from her interests in Turkey, where she continued to count on Austria as Russia's traditional ally in that area.¹³⁰⁹

Yet, Panin's orders to Obreskov indicate that he had turned into a rather dogmatic proponent of the Prussian alliance. In this I disagree with the nineteenth-century Russian historian, Nikolai Chechulin, who turned out to be the staunchest advocate of Panin as an intelligent policy-maker, whose policies were "simple, clear, and pragmatic," and who, along

the Russian throne. Already in fall 1756 Williams suggested—and Catherine concurred—that Nikita Panin, then Russian ambassador in Sweden, was the perfect candidate for the position of vice-chancellor. Williams also wrote to Catherine in fall 1756: "I hope that one day you will make him [Poniatowski] Polish king."

Moreover, the Williams-Prussia-Poniatowski nexus also involved German Karl Keyserling, a Courlander in Russian service. Keyserling had been involved with Polish matters since 1733 when he helped newly elected Augustus III strengthen his position. Starting in 1744 Keyserling was Stanislaw Poniatowski's tutor in logic and mathematics due to his close relations with Stanislaw's family, the influential pro-Russian clan of Czartoryskis. Later, in 1747-1749 Keyserling was Russia's ambassador in Berlin, where he earned Frederick II's trust. Stegnii, "Pervyi razdel," pp. 155-158.

Keyserling had a reputation of being pro-Prussian. He appears never to have learned Russian properly and led his correspondence with St. Petersburg in German, which was not exceptional at the time but earned criticism of some leading Russian statesmen. His first diplomatic appointment was to Poland, where he assisted his government in installing Augustus III on the Polish throne. According to some sources, namely French ones as cited by Liechtenhan, Keyserling was highly corruptible. As a result, he really liked his diplomatic post in Prussia, where he hoped to spend the rest of his life, because the Prussians paid him handsomely in order to neutralize him. In the early 1750s Austria asked St. Petersburg to recall Keyserling from Dresden, where he was posted at the time, but, instead, Keyserling was appointed to Vienna. Although initially Keyserling decreased tension in Russo-Austrian relations, in 1756 Austrians complained that Keyserling was trying to prevent Russia from concluding an alliance with Austria and France because this alliance was directed against England and Prussia, Keyserling's fellow Protestants. Poniatowski remembered that in Vienna Keyserling pretended to be a homebody and bookworm, detached from his responsibilities, which was but a cover-up for his ceaseless efforts to organize a secret intelligence network. Chancellor Count Mikhail Vorontsov's nephew's son, Prince Mikhail Vorontsov (1782-1856), reported that his father, diplomat Semen Vorontsov (1744-1832), had described Keyserling as "a Prussian at heart and in soul, fanatical Lutheran, who hated Kaunitz, and did not leave him [Kaunitz?], while in Vienna." Anisimov, *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, pp. 54-56.

Nosov also presents evidence that Keyserling was the chief conduit of Catherine's secret advances toward Prussia, as early as August 1762. However, already then Keyserling noted to the Prussians that they would have to overcome the opposition of Panin and Bestuzhev, "especially Bestuzhev." Still, by 1763 the Prussian envoy in St. Petersburg identified Panin and Vorontsov as being pro-Prussian. As for Vorontsov, notes Nosov, his position was usually whatever the dominant position at court was, so he probably was not actively working for the alliance. In this respect, his position is a good indicator of Catherine's position, who was "the most consistent pro-Prussian." Nosov argues that with Keyserling's help she did everything possible to persuade the Russian ruling elite to accept the alliance, as well as to portray Frederick as its initiator. Nosov, pp. 51-53, 56.

Soloviev pointed out that Hermann-Karl von Keyserling was the first to advocate turning away from Austria and towards Prussia. Soloviev, Book XIII, Vol. 25, pp. 155-156.

¹³⁰⁹ As in 1756, Bestuzhev considered Prussia dangerous for Russia. The chancellor Vorontsov, vice-chancellor Golitsyn, and Volkonskii supported his position. And yet, Ulianitskii points out that reliance on Prussia and Austria in the questions of Poland and Turkey, respectively, was not entirely well founded: Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 307-309, 330-335.

with Catherine, never surrendered Russia's independent interests to the alliance with Prussia.¹³¹⁰ Even if one accepts Chechulin's argument, one has to admit that Panin and Catherine must have realized what a handicap it was in reality, but relatively speaking preferred its benefits to having no alliance at all. Still, there was an element of unwarranted trust in Prussia.¹³¹¹ Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why the Russian government chose to overlook the Rexin episode for so long—Obreskov had to work hard to convince Panin that it was true.¹³¹² Likewise, some amateurism can be observed in Panin's decision to instruct Obreskov to incite secretly the Porte to attack Austria to teach the latter a lesson. Obreskov rightly treated this order with tacit disregard. Not only was this order impractical; but Panin's suggested course of action was also not a good solution to breaking up Austria's close cooperation with France.¹³¹³

But the 1764 alliance should also be judged on the basis of its usefulness in regard to Poland, which was one of the main reasons for its conclusion. It is safe to say that Prussia's distinct interests in Poland became a serious factor in the deepening quagmire that characterized

¹³¹⁰ Chechulin himself commented on the overnight change of course under Catherine, which prompted the Austrian ambassador to single out Panin and Keyserling in particular as disregarding the outcomes of the Seven Years' War. Chechulin proceeded to defend the "more confident" foreign policy course chosen by Catherine and Panin, highlighting the stark break from the traditional alliance with Austria: "Panin was quite content in the early 1770s to note how well Russia managed to shed Austria's influence that had been the mainstay of the previous thirty five years." Chechulin rejected existing historiography that portrayed Catherine and Panin as beholden to Prussia. He did not believe that "Frederick controlled Russian foreign policy." He stressed that the idea of installing a Piast on the Polish throne was recognized as more advantageous by Russian statesmen as early as 1727, and Catherine selected Poniatowski as her candidate for the Polish throne as early as July 1762. All of this evidence, argues Chechulin, disproves that Prussia stood behind Russian choices, just as Catherine herself made a choice, upon Keyserling's advice, not to abolish *liberum veto* or institute any other major change in the Polish Republic. Likewise, Chechulin chooses one side in the historiographical debate about which side benefitted the most from the 1764 alliance: he concludes that Russia benefitted more, arguing against Soloviev's position that Frederick managed to impose on Russia a treaty the latter did not really want. Nikolai Chechulin, *Vneshniaia politika v nachale tsarstvovaniia Ekateriny II* (St. Petersburg, 1896), pp. 38, 43, 46, 51-52, 53-54, 62, 98, 180-181, 220, 231, 233-235, 239-240. Druzhinina also criticized Soloviev for exaggerating the intrigues of foreign states, especially Prussia. Elena Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir 1774 goda: Ego podgotovka i zakliuchenie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955), p. 10.

¹³¹¹ De Madariaga also highlights this point. De Madariaga, p. 205.

¹³¹² Chechulin's rendition of this incident is entirely skewed in order to portray Panin as inherently suspicious of Frederick and Rexin. Chechulin, p. 79. On the contrary, Obreskov had to work hard to convince Panin that Prussian actions were unfriendly. If not for the solid evidence furnished by Obreskov, Frederick could have succeeded in resisting the Russian request to recall Rexin.

¹³¹³ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 333-339.

the Russian position in Poland-Lithuania. In addition, it is questionable whether making the entire foreign policy of the Russian Empire subservient to the requirements of the Polish question was a wise policy.¹³¹⁴

In short, it would be correct to blame Panin for forging a diplomatic system that left Russia without effective allies when the war broke out between St. Petersburg and Constantinople in 1768. Catherine II herself had a major role in skewing Russia foreign policy towards a single objective, whether it stemmed from her amateurishness or opportunism.¹³¹⁵ Of course, one might argue that the war with the Porte brought untold advantages to Russia, thereby exculpating Catherine and Panin from their miscalculation. However, one must not discount that Russia's victory in the 1768-1774 war was not a given and a series of crises, both internal and external, created severe challenges for the Russian domestic regime and foreign policy in the early 1770s. Preference for Prussia, despite the alliance, did not benefit Russia during the war: while Austria planned to curtail Russia's successes by either military or diplomatic means, Prussia desperately schemed against its ally and even drew closer to Austria on the basis of their mutual resentment of potential Russian gains in the war against the Ottoman Empire.¹³¹⁶

¹³¹⁴ Chechulin himself points out that Panin was preoccupied first and foremost with maintaining Russian influence in Poland. As a result, "Russian relations with other states were determined by its actions in Poland, ever since Russia assumed an active role there." Chechulin, pp. 231-234.

¹³¹⁵ De Madariaga aptly describes Catherine's foreign policy as opportunistic. De Madariaga, pp. 187, 192. In his study of Russia's expansion into the Caucasus during Catherine II's reign, Sean Pollock also came to the conclusion that between 1762 and 1774 "Catherine's government was cautious, pragmatic, and opportunistic in its approach to the region." In effect, argues Pollock, "Catherine's government showed little interest in Caucasian affairs" before the war of 1768-1774 and especially before the rise of Grigorii Potemkin. Pollock, pp. iii, 382, 385-386, 387.

¹³¹⁶ Beydilli, "*Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar*," pp. 97-103. The first meeting between Joseph II and Frederick II took place as early as August 1769. They met on Silesian territory and Joseph II proclaimed his renunciation of any plans to regain Silesia from Prussia. During their second meeting in September 1770 the two sides agreed to act as mediators in the conflict between Russia and Turkey. This was done in order to prevent Russia from making inordinate gains. But Frederick also tried to create friction between Russia and Austria in order to advance his own interests. In early 1771, Frederick already suggested that Russia take a part of Polish territory. For its part, in late 1770 Austria decided to enter into a secret alliance with the Porte, which was signed on July 7, 1771. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 339-351, 358-368, 370-373, 375-392, 401-403, 466-467. The latter alliance was not ratified, however, because Austria agreed to take its share in the spoils of the Polish partition.

Whether it was possible to keep the Austrian alliance or not is another question, but it seems that Catherine did not try very hard to preserve it in view of her dominant interest in Poland.¹³¹⁷ Russia's long-term strategic interests in the Black Sea required cooperation with Austria. Even Panin himself saw the need to be more accommodating towards Austria already during the war with Turkey.¹³¹⁸ In a decade, however, his rivals and successors, led by the empress herself, would return to the Austrian alliance.¹³¹⁹

On a final note, while the question of why Catherine and then Panin re-oriented themselves towards Prussia has not yet found a completely convincing answer, it should by now

¹³¹⁷ Dyck presents the Austrian perspective in the early 1760s as characterized by a similar choice to distance itself from Russia, in view of Vienna's lack of interest in supporting Russia in a future war with the Ottoman Empire, which was seen as the only remaining purpose of the alliance since Russia no longer wished to help Austria against Prussia. He even blames Kaunitz for subsequent events: "Kaunitz's willingness to allow the Russian alliance to lapse probably paved the way to the international disorder, which culminated in 1768-74 with Catherine's triumphant war over Turkey and the First Partition of Poland." Even the 1781 alliance proved to be disappointing for Vienna, having demonstrated that Russia had become a stronger partner, by contrast to the 1740s-1750s. Harvey L. Dyck, "Pondering the Russian Fact: Kaunitz and the Catherinian Empire in the 1770s." *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol 22, No. 4 (1980), pp. 451-469, here pp. 453, 469. But in 1776 Kaunitz also admitted that the estrangement had not been unavoidable: "Since the early 1760s Kaunitz had never wavered in thinking that Austria and Russia were objectively "natural allies," and he attributed the Austro-Russian estrangement that followed Peter III's overthrow to Catherine's friendship for Frederick II." Dyck, "Pondering the Russian Fact," p. 465. In general, Dyck also offers an interesting comparative explanation of Russia's foreign policy adventurism: "Of all Russia's monarchs since Peter I, Catherine II alone possessed the wit and will to grasp the singular opportunities for development and expansion inherent in Russia's political and geo-strategic position. Because of her position on the fringe of the balance system Russia labored under fewer external limitations than did Austria. Russia was incontestably stronger than her immediate neighbors Sweden, Poland and Turkey, and relatively immune to direct pressures from the great powers. Mainly for this reason Russian statecraft could afford to be more adventurist. For Russia a failed policy was that and no more; her future as a great power was not at stake. For this reason, and because of her autocratic power at home, Catherine was able to seize the initiative internationally at small risk, dabbling, probing, playing situations by ear. She could dash headlong into complications with Poland and Turkey without first plotting all the alternatives and calculating all the risks. She could also make forays into European politics and draw back when challenged. Austria was not similarly free, for her condition, in Kaunitz's words, was perennially grave." Dyck, "Pondering the Russian Fact," p. 468.

¹³¹⁸ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 369-370, 374-375, 377-378. Still, as late as 1779 Panin proposed to Catherine an idea of a triple alliance between Russia, Prussia, and the Ottoman Empire, which the empress categorically rejected. The pro-Prussian faction was actually closely tied to Panin by clan and professional ties. His charge Grand Duke Paul also adopted Panin's ideas. Griffiths, "The rise and fall," pp. 557, 561-563.

¹³¹⁹ It is true that Russo-Austrian relations in the eighteenth century were complicated and sometimes even adversarial. However, bilateral alliances of 1726 (defensive), 1746 (defensive), and 1781 prove that the two empires had uncontested mutual interests and in many ways were "natural" allies, despite their inevitable and truly problematic mutual jealousy concerning the Danubian principalities. Maria Petrova, *Ekaterina II i Iosif II: Formirovanie rossiisko-avstriiskogo soiuza, 1780-1790* (Moscow: Nauka, 2011), Chapters 1 and 2. On Kaunitz's system and his desire to keep the alliance with Russia as well as on the leading role of Panin in fostering the Russo-Prussian treaty, see Petrova, pp. 80-84.

be clear that Panin's Northern Alliance was a theoretical program that answered the needs of Catherine's pragmatic aims. Perhaps, Catherine II's early foreign policy can indeed be classified as pacific in the sense that she did not actively plan any actual territorial expansion of the empire. However, her ambition to maintain predominant influence in neighboring states such as Poland-Lithuania, regardless of the means necessary, was by default an ambitious diplomatic project that eventually turned into a military protectorate over the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth and inevitably caused concerns and opposition among foes and friends alike.

Chapter 15. Tensions over Poland, 1763-1765

The key goal of Russian diplomacy in Constantinople in the 1760s was to keep the Ottoman Empire from interfering in Poland-Lithuania. Looking at the Russian foreign policy through the prism of the Constantinople mission, moreover, allows one to suggest that Catherine II had little interest in engaging in a war with the Ottomans during this period. On one hand, the empress might have been still under the impression of the advice of the former English envoy to St. Petersburg, Hanbury Williams, which he had offered to her in fall 1756: “Always avoid war with the Ottomans’ since even victorious campaigns against them could ‘cost you a hundred thousand men, without a pitched battle.’”¹³²⁰ On the other, even though recent studies present Catherine’s foreign policy views as being from the start oriented towards the Black Sea,¹³²¹ her insistent orders to Obreskov to achieve the commercial navigation rights by way of lobbying and bribes attest to her considerable belief in the possibility for Russia of establishing itself as a Black Sea power by diplomatic means.

¹³²⁰ Dixon, p. 162. Of course, this was a natural advice for a British diplomat to give to the Russian court at the time.

¹³²¹ John LeDonne, “Geopolitics, Logistics, and Grain: Russia’s Ambitions in the Black Sea Basin, 1737-1834,” *The International History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2006), pp. 5-6; Petr Stegnii, *Razdely Pol’shi i diplomatii Ekateriny II: 1772, 1793, 1795* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2002), pp. 86-87, and, in particular, Irina Smilianskaia, M. B. Velizhev, and E. B. Smilianskaia. *Rossiiia v Sredizemnomor’e: arhipelagskaia ekspeditsiia Ekateriny Velikoi* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), pp. 29-86. LeDonne argues that Catherine did not suddenly become interested in the southern project only with the appearance of Grigorii Potemkin in 1774, but harbored ambitions to free the Ottoman Orthodox subjects and gain access to the Black Sea and the Straits from the very beginning of her reign. However, as noted in the introduction, the work of Petr Stegnii, whom LeDonne quotes, along with Albert Sorel, as his major source does not contain evidence to support LeDonne’s argument. Thus, Stegnii notes that even before Catherine became empress she developed the idea that in order to achieve international glory Russia had to link up the Black, Caspian, and the Baltic seas, and reroute the trade of China and East India through the “Tatary.” Stegnii, *Razdely Pol’shi*, p. 87. However, this general strategic plan did not presuppose the absolute inevitability of military conflict. The records of Obreskov’s residency in the 1760s show that Catherine seriously attempted to negotiate navigation rights through diplomacy. Likewise, her sanction of Grigorii Orlov’s projects of sending secret missions to the Greek peninsula and the Balkans since 1763 does not necessarily have to be interpreted as the evidence of her desire to drive the Ottomans from Europe, but as a form of more targeted intelligence-gathering, pulse-taking, and a potentially useful strategic leverage in case a conflict eventually broke out.

Ultimately, Russia failed in the task of keeping the Porte at peace as a result of St. Petersburg's own heavy-handedness in Poland-Lithuania. However, for half a decade Obreskov worked hard and was quite successful in mobilizing his various resources in keeping the aggressive elements in the Ottoman ruling elite—primarily the sultan himself—from opposing Russian domination of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Even though Mustafa III's decision to open war on Russia in 1768 was rather rash, it reflected deep-rooted Ottoman security anxieties concerning its regional interests that had been in play throughout the decade.

Obreskov's major difficulty was not so much in containing negative Ottoman reactions but in adjusting his position and arguments when developments in Poland spiraled out of control. While the Russian government wanted to keep the Porte away from Poland, it could not give up on its essential objectives for the republic. As a result, St. Petersburg tried to win time by partly concealing its plans and emphasizing at every turn that Russian and Ottoman interests fundamentally coincided in Poland—the mutual goal was to keep the Polish state and government weak and divided. But with every initiative, the Porte saw not that the Poland was still weak and divided—which was very much the case—but that Russia's control over—or determination to control—its western neighbor was inescapably growing stronger. Realizing this fundamental concern of the Porte, in late 1767 Obreskov made a risky step of promising that the Russian army would withdraw from Poland after the conclusion of the 1768 *sejm*. The Russian government and the Russian representative in Poland were surprised and disappointed by Obreskov's decision, but if not for the formation of the Bar Confederation and its unpredictable consequences, Obreskov's promise might not have provided a pretext for the Ottoman declaration of war.

In the war that ensued the Porte aimed at improving its strategic position in the region, even if it meant annexation of Polish territory, but its disorganized war machinery rendered the fight a losing battle. The irony of the situation was that the Porte might have found a common language with the Russians if it tried: in October 1768, before learning of the outbreak of war, Panin contemplated appeasing the Porte by ceding part of Polish Podolia to the Ottoman Empire, while Russia could annex Polish areas on its western border.¹³²²

“We Want a Piast, but Really Only Poniatowski”

With Catherine II on the Russian throne, Obreskov almost immediately felt the importance of the Polish issue in the foreign policy of the new Russian empress.¹³²³ The first Polish problem that Obreskov had to solve at the Porte was not the succession issue, however. Initially, Catherine wanted to ensure Russian control over the Duchy of Courland, which was a fief of the Polish Crown. On February 21/March 4, 1763 St. Petersburg informed Obreskov that a Polish Senatus Consilium was set for February 28/March 11 in order to transfer through majority vote feudatory rights on the Duchy of Courland to Prince Charles,¹³²⁴ which ran contrary to the

¹³²² *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 171.

¹³²³ Catherine began to prepare the ground for the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski very shortly after assuming the throne. In August, she confirmed Peter III's choice of Hermann-Karl von Keyserling as Russia's new ambassador to Poland and instructed him, mainly, to ensure the election of a Piast to the Polish throne after Augustus III's death. Officially, this remained the goal of the Russian empress until the elections took place on September 7, 1764. Only in her secret instructions and confidential negotiations with the Prussian king did Catherine openly name her candidate of choice—Stanislaw Poniatowski. Her secret plans were known to a limited number of officials: Chancellor Vorontsov, Nikita Panin, and Keyserling. Soon, Panin supplanted the ailing Keyserling as the main advisor of the empress on Polish affairs and in November 1763 Catherine sent Prince Nikolai Repnin, Panin's son-in-law, to assist Keyserling in Warsaw. Stegnii, “Pervyi razdel,” pp. 158-162.

Catherine's commitment to her chosen course in Poland found expression in her spending. In January 1763 Keyserling received 50,000 rubles for creating an intelligence network and only in 1763 Russia spent more than one million rubles on intelligence gathering in Poland. In fact, between 1763 and 1766 Russia spent 4.4 million rubles—7-8% of its budget—on Poland. Kudriavtsev, pp. 340, 357. The election itself cost Russia more than 800,000 rubles, as opposed to the originally envisioned 100,000 rubles. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, p. 29, fn. 16.

¹³²⁴ One of the younger sons of the Polish king, Prince Charles Christian Joseph of Saxony.

1736 Constitution that granted Courland to Duke Ernst Johann von Biron.¹³²⁵ The transfer had already been made in 1758 but without notification of the republic, which was illegal according to the 1607 Constitution. Now that the Saxon court and its supporters within Poland strove to finalize the transfer in spite of Russian opposition, they threatened to invite the Ottoman Empire to protect Poland from Russia's interference in its domestic affairs. St. Petersburg was concerned that Poland could indeed appeal to the Porte for help in this matter. In connection with this, the Russian government instructed Obreskov to respond to the Porte that Russia had an obligation to protect the rights, regulations, and laws of the Polish Republic according to the guarantee of 1716, as well as due to being a neighbor interested in Poland's fate. Therefore, Catherine argued that Russia had to support the articles of the 1736 Constitution, which granted Courland to Biron. "Russia can not look on as one part of the Polish Republic acts to change a law that had been agreed upon by the entire nation," read the instruction to Obreskov. St. Petersburg cautioned Obreskov to make sure that he had to communicate the above points to the Porte only in the form of a friendly gesture, rather than as an obligation to report on Russia's actions. It would be most beneficial, however, if Obreskov helped ensure—as much as it depended on Russia—that the Porte stayed away from European affairs. The Russian government's ultimate objective was to remove factors that encouraged the Porte's participation in European affairs and especially eliminate ways for the Ottoman government to position itself as a judge in Polish affairs.¹³²⁶

On April 1/12, Obreskov wrote that the Porte had not expressed any interest in the Courland matter and only ordered the Hotin Pasha and the Prince of Moldavia to carefully observe the Senatus Consilium and possible discussions in it concerning the heir to the Polish

¹³²⁵ The famous favorite of Empress Anna and one-time Russian regent Ernst Johann von Biron.

¹³²⁶ 89.8.243.1763, LL. 3-4ob., and *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 333-334.

throne. However, Obreskov noted that negative rumors began to circulate among the public and he took measures to counteract them with his own information.¹³²⁷

Catherine managed to force Charles out of Courland by April 1763 and restored Biron to his hereditary duchy. In effect, Courland, though a Polish fief, became a Russian protectorate.¹³²⁸ After this episode, Obreskov judged the state of mutual relations as rather harmonious and repeatedly assured St. Petersburg of the coincidence of Ottoman interests in Poland with those of Russia. Even when changes of Ottoman grand viziers forced him to reassess the situation, he always concluded that the Porte was determined to maintain peace.

The long period of stability in Ottoman government came to an end with the death of the grand vizier Koca Ragıp Paşa in April 1763. Obreskov reported on this with great detail because the death interrupted many of his existing negotiations. “Raib Pasha” fell gravely ill on March 12/23 and the sultan freed Ragıp Paşa from responsibilities to facilitate his recovery, appointing, with Ragıp Paşa’s approval, a three-*bunçuk* Hamza Paşa in his place. Shortly, on March 28/April 8m Koca Ragıp Paşa “paid his debt to nature,” dying on the seventy-first year of life. Obreskov was filled with “deathly sorrow” because he had not been able to finalize some matters, such as the establishment of the Russian consulate in Crimea. On a positive note, however, Obreskov described the new grand vizier Hamza Paşa as a man of exceptional qualities, although quiet to the point of timidity. He was old, having passed through the entire bureaucratic ladder at the Porte. Namely, Hamza Paşa had served for many years as *Mektubcı*, once as reis efendi, and three times as grand vizier’s *kahya*. His good reputation made him a welcome participant in all

¹³²⁷ Just in case, however, he requested St. Petersburg to send him a copy of the afore-mentioned guarantee of 1716 because he could not find it in the mission’s archive. On the margins of his report, a member of the CFA noted that the document in question was not a guarantee per se but the 1716 treaty between the Polish King August II and a Polish Confederation, concluded under the mediation of Peter the Great. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 141-141ob., 143-143ob., 148.

¹³²⁸ Florinsky, p. 516; Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, pp. 6-7; De Madariaga, pp. 187-188; Davies, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 5.

government councils at the Porte. It was also crucial that Hamza Paşa always served in the capital and therefore had full knowledge about all the affairs at the center.¹³²⁹

To this stellar portrayal of the new grand vizier, Obreskov added a scripted note, in which he shared his concerns about the ability of Hamza Paşa to tackle his new responsibilities:

His Sultanic Majesty could not have chosen a more upright man for this position, but at the same time one who is most able to squander and hand over to courtiers all the power that his predecessor had acquired, and one can only wait and observe if his quiet nature and old age would prevent him from gathering adroitness that is necessary to govern the empire, and if his timidity would make him incapable of voicing an opinion that would be contrary to the intention of the sultan but based on the interests of the empire; otherwise, one [Russia] should not expect any hostility from him, although his softness will hardly lead to anything good either.¹³³⁰

The new grand vizier proved to be “excessively timid” for Obreskov. In his May 1763 report, Obreskov reported that Hamza Paşa hesitated to interfere in the matter of the fortress of St. Dimitrii and instead delegated it to the khan and the future Russian consul in Crimea. Obreskov wanted to speed up the Porte’s resolution but his secret informants advised him against it. Overall, Obreskov noted that following the death of Ragıp Paşa the Ottoman government continued to adhere to its earlier peaceful sentiments. In fact, Obreskov felt that the Porte’s pacific policy was firmer than ever. The sultan was interested in the affairs of the state and the grand vizier was so timid that he did not do anything without first reporting it to the sultan. As a result, most of the real power devolved onto the *mufiti*, who was seen as a strong figure by officials at the Porte. After Ragıp Paşa’s death, relations between Constantinople and Bahçesaray also became more even.¹³³¹

The Porte continued to pay attention to its border defenses, which Obreskov followed very closely.¹³³² But his confidence in the Porte’s peaceful disposition was also informed by the

¹³²⁹ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 156-159, 166.

¹³³⁰ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 167-168.

¹³³¹ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 61-61ob.

¹³³² The Russian resident described the Porte’s efforts in March 1763 to fortify its border defenses in Europe. He noted that the amount of ammunition and other provisions that the Porte planned to send in summer to Hotin, Bendery, Belgrade, Orşova, Bosnia, and Niş was not great. Namely, the Ottoman government allocated 3,000

news of disturbances in Ottoman Georgian provinces. The Porte had to make serious preparations in the east, where a Trans-Caucasian people named Açık Başı¹³³³ were reported to have been bothering neighboring Ottoman subjects, especially “Migrintsy,”¹³³⁴ for several years. The Porte ordered to gather an army in Asia and appointed a *serasker* with 12,000-15,000 soldiers from *sancaks*. However, Obreskov considered that the amount of ammunition and military provisions allocated for subduing the Açık Başı people was insufficient. Namely, the Porte ordered to send to Trabzon only 6 field cannons, 5,000 cannon balls, 120 *kantars* of gunpowder, and 16 cannon carriages. As a result, Obreskov concluded that the designated serasker would not pursue the Açık Başı too forcefully.¹³³⁵ Overall, it was clear that the Porte tried to avoid being embroiled in a conflict on its borders.¹³³⁶

However, Obreskov could already feel that a new chapter was opening in Russo-Ottoman relations. He did not know Catherine’s plans for Poland to the full extent yet,¹³³⁷ but Polish

cannon balls, 5,000 bullets, and 60 *tulums* for carrying water to Hotin. The Bendery garrison expected to receive 7,000 bullets and 2 *kantars* of wire. The main defense points on the Austrian border were expected to receive less substantial provisions: 300 fusils and 2 field cannons for Belgrade; 2 field cannons for Orşova; 60 *kantars* of gunpowder and 12,000 baskets, rope/*pletenska*, and shovels for various forts in Bosnia; and only 2,000 picks/*kirki* and crowbars/*lom* for Niş. 89.8.334.1763, L. 166ob.

¹³³³ Imeretians. However, elsewhere Obreskov called them Mingrelians: “Milgriltsy Achik Bash nazyvaemye.” 90.1.454.1763, LL. 61ob. He made a similar mistake in formulating the article of the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty concerning Georgia: Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 231.

¹³³⁴ Mingrelians.

¹³³⁵ 89.8.334.1763, LL. 168ob.-169.

¹³³⁶ For example, it instructed the khan to persuade the Lezgins to attack the Açık Başı. Similarly, the Porte ordered the Crimean khan to instruct the Kuban serasker not to interfere in internal fights of the Abaza people, and to return fugitive families to the Alty Kesek Circassians. Similarly, in response to the news coming from the Babylon Pasha about new rebellions in Persia, as a result of which many different parties came close to the Ottoman border, the Porte ordered the pasha to avoid any compromising actions. 89.8.334.1763, LL. 18ob., 43-44ob., 47ob.-65, 166ob., 168; 90.1.454.1763, L. 61ob.

¹³³⁷ In spring 1763 he received the first—rather vague—order concerning Russia’s future position at the death of Augustus III. “The Polish King is old and sick”—so began St. Petersburg’s ciphered letter to Obreskov from February 8/19, 1763. The letter was sent from the Russian capital to Constantinople on February 21/March 4, while its copy had been already sent on February 8/19 to the Russian ambassador in Warsaw Count Keyserling. The empress wanted to prepare her resident at the Ottoman court for the upcoming struggle against opponents of Russia’s interests in Poland. Namely, she instructed Obreskov to convey to the Porte that Russia’s goal was to protect the Polish ancient laws and its constitution, and to thwart external pressure that would interfere with the goal of selecting a candidate for the throne who enjoyed universal support of the Polish republic. “Our state interest,” read the letter to Obreskov, “demands that the Polish throne should be occupied by a king who would strive to maintain good neighborly friendship with us, and moreover we have a right to defend the Polish constitution and to

affairs were increasingly at the foreground of his activity at the Porte.¹³³⁸ He could feel the effects of the Polish developments through the tireless efforts of the Poles themselves and the Crimean Khan to engage the Porte in Poland. For example, on June 27/July 8, 1763 Obreskov informed his court that the Crimean khan reported to the Porte that the Poles had asked him to send his representative to Warsaw as proof of the Sublime Porte's commitment to protect Polish liberties, which were in danger. In response, the Porte allowed the khan, as well as the Hotin Pasha and the Moldavian hospodar, to send their agents to Poland and ordered them to assure the Poles that the Porte would protect them. In turn, Poland sent its own representative, one Stankiewicz, to Constantinople. Obreskov noted that it appeared that Stankiewicz would engage in intrigues at the Porte.¹³³⁹

Next, although Obreskov at first did not connect the appointment of “Iritly Agmet Efendi”—Ahmed Resmi Efendi—as an envoy to Prussia to the Porte's interest in Poland,¹³⁴⁰ he

protect [Poland, or its constitution] from coercion.” With this in mind, Obreskov had to be ready to counter attempts of competing powers to convince the Porte that Russia's interest and actions in Poland ran contrary to Polish interests, thereby planting a seed of discord between the Ottoman and Russian empires. St. Petersburg insisted that the new Polish king would have to be chosen by the entire republic in a unanimous fashion. 89.8.243.1763. Proekty reskriptov rezidentu v Konstantinopole Obrezkovu, aprobovannye Ekaterinoi II, s raspriazheniiami v sviazi s kandidaturai na pol'skii prestol Poniatovskogo, naznacheniem turetskogo posla v Rossiiu, uchrezhdeniem russkogo konsul'stva v Krymu i zakupkoi loshadei v Turtsii. February 8, 1763—October 3, LL. 1-2ob. Also in *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 312-313. The ciphered version of the order is preserved in 90.1.450.1763, LL. 4-4ob.

¹³³⁸ For a discussion of the events surrounding the promotion by Russia and election of Stanislaw Poniatowski to the Polish throne in 1763-1764, see H.M. Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern powers*, pp. 103-116; Mykhed, pp. 49-61; Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, pp. 25-45. A Turkish scholar has recently highlighted the significance of this episode for many European states and the Ottoman Empire. Hacer Topaktaş, “Avrupa'nın Ortak Derdi Polonya Tahtı: Stanislaw August Poniatowski'nin Seçimi (1763-1764)”, *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Ankara 2011), pp. 183-196.

¹³³⁹ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 63ob.-64. On St. Petersburg's suspicions about Stankiewicz in March 1763, see 89.8.243.1763, L. 5ob. and *SIRIO*, Vol. 48, pp. 389-390.

¹³⁴⁰ He simply reported that the Porte wanted to reciprocate Rexin's embassy, but Rexin's statements revealed that Prussia was not particularly excited about this sign of attention from the sultan. 90.1.454.1763, L. 64. Mustafa III expressed a desire to send an envoy to Berlin in January 1763. The Polish question was the deciding factor. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 67-69. Frederick was surprised by this offer because the Ottomans usually sent envoys only to exchange treaties or to announce accessions of a new sultan. Frederick concluded that the Porte wanted to use the embassy to put pressure on Austria before renewing the Treaty of Belgrade with Vienna. Frederick also judged that it would be beneficial to reconnect with the Porte in view of the expected death of the Polish king. Frederick wanted the Ottoman envoy to Prussia to receive powers to sign an alliance treaty with Prussia but the Porte replied that only the grand vizier had such powers. It was clear that the Porte was not interested in the alliance, especially not until Ahmed Resmi returned from Prussia. Demir, pp. 177-178, 183-184.

was soon able to identify the purpose of his trip.¹³⁴¹ On July 31/August 11, Obreskov sent to St. Petersburg a copy of the Porte's instruction for Ahmed Efendi, as well as the list of the sultan's gifts for Frederick II, together with their prices. The very first article of the instruction indicated that the Porte was exceedingly interested in the events unfolding in Poland. Namely, it instructed Ahmed Efendi to announce to the Poles, during his passage through Poland, that the Ottoman Porte would continue to provide help and protection until the Polish Republic caused the Porte to suspect its intentions. The Porte would not allow any violation of ancient freedoms and rights and, if this happened, "would not conceal its displeasure." Even the main objective of Ahmed Efendi in Prussia was to discuss the issue of Polish succession. The Ottoman envoy had to announce to the Prussian government ministers that the Porte would never allow any Austrian prince to acquire the Polish crown, in which goal Russia promised to support Austria. In addition, the Porte hoped that because of mutual obligations between Russia and Prussia, the latter would not do anything that would be contrary to the friendship and interests of the Porte. Finally, the last article of the instruction authorized Ahmed Resmi to receive Prussian offers of an alliance and, without concluding anything, immediately forward them through a courier to the Porte. A separate article of the instruction admonished the envoy not to exceed or overlook any of the instruction points. Otherwise, the goal of the embassy in regard to Prussia itself was to assure it of Ottoman friendship and to collect detailed information on the condition and power of the Prussian king.¹³⁴²

Still, well into the fall Obreskov reported that the Porte was pacific and friendly towards Russia. In late August/early September, for example, he wrote that "everything in the local

¹³⁴¹ Demir writes that foreign ambassadors were very curious about the reasons behind Ahmed Resmi's embassy, but they could not discover any information despite offering bribes. For example, on July 26 the English ambassador reported to London that he could not learn about the reasons for the mission. Demir, p. 178. However, we see that by July 31/August 11 Obreskov already had a copy of Ahmed Resmi's instructions.

¹³⁴² 90.1.454.1763, LL. 71ob., 73-73ob. These contents of the instruction coincide with those used by Aksan and Demir in their studies. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 67-69; Demir, pp. 177-178.

administration is quiet and His Sultanic Majesty continues to govern in all matters himself.”¹³⁴³

In late September/early October he reported, once again, that “Nothing has happened.” The Ottoman government continued to observe peace and Obreskov expected the sultan to uphold the “current reasonable and mutually beneficial system” for some time. Obreskov also attached a copy of the sultan’s official letter to the Prussian king and noted that the style of the letter differed from the one the Ottomans used in addressing the Russian and other respected courts that had a long history of relations with the Porte. Obreskov highlighted that the ostensible reason for the embassy to Prussia was reciprocal presentation of gifts.¹³⁴⁴

However, by late October/early November 1763, unwittingly, Obreskov had entered a critical and, coincidentally, final stage of his diplomatic service in Constantinople. It might not have been obvious at the time, but the Polish succession issue and the highly-interventionist policies that Catherine and Panin would choose to pursue in Poland by far defined the remaining five years that Obreskov got to spend on the Bosphorus, before the sultan declared war against the Russian Empire in fall 1768. On October 31/November 11, 1763 Obreskov reported to the empress the latest developments at the Porte concerning Poland. While Augustus III was still alive the Porte ignored the Courland issue, despite its earlier promises to protect Polish interests there. Obreskov explained that the foremost concern at the Porte revolved around possible attempts by Austria, with Russian help, to install one of the Hapsburg princes on the vacant Polish throne. This worry had already received expression in the seventh article of the Porte’s instruction to Ahmed Resmi Efendi, which ordered him to inform Prussian ministers that the Porte would not tolerate such a scenario.¹³⁴⁵

¹³⁴³ 90.1.454.1763, L. 84.

¹³⁴⁴ 90.1.454.1763, L. 101.

¹³⁴⁵ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 73, 116.

This concern shows how little the Porte knew about real plans in St. Petersburg and even in Berlin. Obviously, it was quite challenging to procure intelligence about the two possibly most secretive governments in Europe. The Ottoman government was clearly cognizant of this difficulty: the embassy of Ahmed Resmi Efendi to Berlin addressed precisely the need to gather intelligence about Poland and to counter designs of Austria and Russia with the help of friendly Prussia. In the process, of course, Ahmed Resmi learned that Russia and Prussia together were resolved to support a native Polish candidate to the Polish throne.¹³⁴⁶ In addition, French propaganda in Constantinople began to influence the Porte's position on Poland. But the Porte still seemed to be confused about Russia's intentions, as will be shown below.

At first, Obreskov was pleased upon learning that the Porte's suspicions about Russia were based on groundless fears. He immediately took the opportunity to convey to the Dragoman of the Porte that Russia was not planning to interfere in Polish elections if other European powers would not get involved by putting forward their candidates. Obreskov felt that he was able to calm the Porte. However, after the news of the death of Augustus III arrived in Constantinople on October 20/31, Obreskov admitted that he could not confidently predict how the Porte would act henceforth. He could only follow developments as they unfolded.¹³⁴⁷

Members of the Porte reasoned that the Russian empress would probably not pursue her earlier intention of putting Prince "Chertorinskii" (Czartoryski) on the Polish throne after she realized that not only almost all the Poles but also Poland's neighbors were against it. The Porte thus hoped that Catherine would agree that it would also be in her own interest to see Prince Charles succeed his father to the Polish throne. Especially if Charles would renounce his rights to

¹³⁴⁶ Ahmed Resmi reported from Poland that France and Austria planned to support their candidates orally, but Russia and Prussia planned to support an election of a native Pole through military intervention. Under the pretext of needing to remove provisions from Poland, Russia sent troops to Warsaw, and local population was in uproar and some even left their lands out of fear. Demir, p. 181.

¹³⁴⁷ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 116-116ob.

Courland, the Porte expected the royal transition in Poland to proceed smoothly, thereby guaranteeing stability on the Ottoman border. In addition, the Porte presented the sultan with excerpts from earlier treaties with Russia, including articles, underscored Obreskov, “signed after the Pruth misfortune/*neshchastie*,” that obliged Russia not to interfere in Polish affairs and not to disturb Polish freedoms, as well as the Belgrade Treaty, “which abolished all the preceding treaties with the Porte, except for border demarcations.”¹³⁴⁸

On the other hand, the Ottoman ministry held a conference concerning Poland, as a result of which it prepared special orders for the Crimean khan. First, the Porte instructed the khan, together with the Hotin governor and the Moldavian hospodar, to maintain peace on the Ottoman border and to prevent any attacks by Tatars or other Ottoman subjects against Polish territory. Secondly, the khan had to assure Polish leaders that the Porte would treat the Polish succession issue as if it was the Porte’s own affair. Namely, the Porte wanted to make sure that ancient institutions and rights of the Polish Republic would be observed and to prevent interference of other powers in the election of the new king. The khan had to encourage the Poles to report sincerely and correctly about all the violations of their ancient regulations. And, finally, the khan had to send trustworthy and skillful agents to maintain contacts with the Poles.¹³⁴⁹

Taking into account the afore-mentioned reactions of the Porte, Obreskov concluded that there were insufficient reasons to suspect that the Porte planned to intervene militarily in Polish affairs. Rather, it appeared to Obreskov that the Porte was mainly interested in assuring a decent and orderly royal transition in Poland. However, he had to admit that the latest change in the grand viziers was an ominous sign. On October 20/31—the very day when the Porte learned about the death of King Augustus III—the sultan deposed Hamza Paşa and recalled from Aleppo

¹³⁴⁸ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 116ob.-117.

¹³⁴⁹ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 116ob.

Çorlulu Mustafa Paşa, who had already served twice as grand vizier. Back in the 1750s Obreskov struggled to contain Mustafa Paşa's aggressive disposition, although in 1756 Mustafa Paşa lost the sultan's favor and was replaced, allowing Obreskov to save the 10,000 chervonnye that he received from St. Petersburg in order to achieve Mustafa Paşa's peaceful deposition through bribes. Obreskov characterized Mustafa Paşa as possessing influence and cunning, as well as being the most capable—out of the entire Ottoman Empire—to disturb peaceful relations with Russia and to command the Ottoman army.¹³⁵⁰

According to Ottoman sources, it is clear that the Porte did not want to implicate itself in the Polish royal succession issue, although the ruling elite was divided in opinion. For example, as soon as the Porte learned of Augustus III's death it ordered Ahmed Resmi to leave Poland immediately, especially because at the time the Ottoman envoy was staying at Branicki's residence. But the sultan was more adventurous. He paid more attention than his ministers to Branicki's calls for Ottoman troops to support his own candidacy at the royal elections. The sultan sought the advice of the *şeyhülislam* if it would be appropriate for Ahmed Resmi to stay in Poland until the end of the elections. But the *şeyhülislam* composed a special memorandum, noting that there was no precedent for a presence of an Ottoman or another foreign representative at Polish royal elections. If Ahmed Resmi were to stay as an observer, then Russia, Prussia, and Austria would also send their representatives and the elections would not be free. The sultan began to doubt his own stance and asked for further advice from the grand vizier Mustafa Paşa. But the grand vizier also agreed with the *şeyhülislam* and insisted that Ahmed Resmi had to leave Poland immediately. Historian Uğur Demir notes that the sultan's position showed that he

¹³⁵⁰ 90.1.454.1763, L. 117.

did not fully comprehend the significance of the matter and how it could lead the Porte into a diplomatic deadend.¹³⁵¹

Demir also notes that the information the Porte was receiving about the death of Augustus III was varied and contradictory. It inevitably spurred discussions about how the Ottoman Empire should react to the Polish succession crisis. The Porte was worried about reports of the movement of Russian troops to the Polish border. In general, the Porte recognized that its interests would be most hurt if the new Polish king would be a Russian adherent. In order to understand how likely this was and what legal rights the Porte had to interfere in Poland, the Ottoman ministers consulted previous Russo-Polish and Russo-Ottoman treaties. The conclusion was that even though the 1720 treaty empowered the Porte to intervene against a pro-Russian king, the Belgrade Treaty overrode all the previous Russo-Ottoman agreements. The grand vizier sent the copies of the said treaties to the sultan and the latter came to the same conclusion.¹³⁵² However, the grand vizier suggested that one way for the Porte to acquire a pretext for intervening in Poland was to have Polish hetmans officially request Ottoman help. The grand vizier cautioned, however, that the sultan had to be friendly until the very end, encouraging Russia not to interfere in Polish affairs. However, if Russia would not listen, the sultan could do nothing else and had to tell the Poles that he could not help them. The grand vizier believed that

¹³⁵¹ Demir, pp. 179, 180-181, 192.

¹³⁵² The article on Poland of the 1720 treaty of eternal peace between the Russian and Ottoman empires repeated the relevant article of the 1711-1713 treaties, which prohibited Russia from interfering in internal Polish affairs and introducing Russian troops into Poland. However, the new article also contained a detailed additional provision that allowed Russia to introduce its troops into Poland in case Sweden or some other foreign power were to send its troops to Poland in order “to impose absolutism and hereditary monarchy, or to violate the rights and liberties of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or to annex part of Polish territory.” Russian representative Aleksei Dashkov tried to remove the restrictions of the 1711-1713 treaties during the negotiations in 1720 and instead to make the Russian and Ottoman empires guarantors of the Polish republic’s elective monarchy, its liberties, and territory. However, he eventually agreed to accept the Ottoman counter-proposal because it was in many other ways conducive to Russian interests, the chief of which was to conclude an eternal peace treaty that would safeguard peace in the south. Indeed, Russian diplomatic efforts in the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires allowed St. Petersburg to force Sweden to conclude peace the following year. Nikiforov, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii v poslednie gody severnoi voyny*, pp. 303, 306-307, 324-325, 333.

the Porte could not risk breaking peace with Russia because of the Polish issue. While the grand vizier's advice was not the most convincing for the sultan, in effect until May 1764, the Porte followed his suggestions.¹³⁵³

Therefore, Obreskov was correct in both his optimism and caution. He was particularly alert in view of the arrival in Constantinople on October 23/November 3 of the Polish envoy, Lieutenant Stankiewicz. The latter represented the Crown Hetman Branicki and Obreskov naturally had to keep close watch over Stankiewicz's actions at the Porte, especially because the French ambassador closely advised the new Polish representative.¹³⁵⁴ On November 29/December 10, 1763 Obreskov reported that Stankiewicz's behavior was decent and that the Polish envoy had not yet made any representations against Russia. However, Vergennes was actively trying to involve the Ottomans in Polish affairs. On November 3/14 Vergennes approached the grand vizier's *kahya* and declared that the French "emperor" expected the Porte to participate in preventing enemies of the Ottoman Empire from handing the Polish crown over to "their loyal prince" and to put a stop to Russian domination of Poland. Louis XV expected the Porte's cooperation on the basis of the close friendship between France and the Ottoman Empire and their usual common measures concerning the protection of the freedom and constitution of the Polish Republic. Vergennes also recommended Stankiewicz on behalf of Louis XV as the most fitting intermediary between the Porte and distinguished Polish leaders.¹³⁵⁵

However, the grand vizier's *kahya*, who had assisted Obreskov in the matter of the St. Dimitrii fortress, declined to make any official reply and encouraged Vergennes to await the

¹³⁵³ Demir, pp. 188-190.

¹³⁵⁴ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 117-117ob.

¹³⁵⁵ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 123ob.-124, 125ob. Branicki sent Stankiewicz in spring 1763 in order to prepare the Porte to help him during the expected royal elections, although the official reason was to settle a compensation argument between Poland and Crimea. The Porte was not sure if receiving Stankiewicz would be a good idea, but Vergennes supported Branicki's emissary, and the Ottoman government finally accepted him after the death of Augustus III, especially after it learned that Russia was moving troops to the Polish border. Demir, pp. 176-177.

arrival of the new grand vizier. The *kahya* also added his personal opinion that the Porte had to avoid compromising its position vis-à-vis Russia for the sake of Poland and denied that there were any treaties between the Porte and Russia concerning Poland. Equally, noted the *kahya*, the Porte had signed no treaty with the Poles that obliged it to protect them. Moreover, there was no precedent for the Porte's interference in Poland for "as much as the Porte had been advised and encouraged during the elections of the late King Augustus III [to interfere on behalf of Stanislaw Leszczyński], the Porte did not actually intervene to protect [Polish freedoms]." Obreskov was pleased with the *kahya*'s "most sensible" reply to Vergennes and noted to St. Petersburg that the opinion of the *kahya*, who enjoyed great credit in the Ottoman government, possibly indicated that the entire Ottoman imperial council would take the same position. However, Obreskov could not be sure of this until the arrival of the new grand vizier, whose past unfriendliness was a cause for worry.¹³⁵⁶

Obreskov was unnerved nevertheless by Catherine's unrealistic order to ensure that the Porte would observe Polish affairs indifferently and abstain from making pledges of support to Polish magnates, both currently and in the future, when Russia would put forth its candidate for the Polish throne.¹³⁵⁷ In the beginning of his report from November 29/December 10 Obreskov wrote:

¹³⁵⁶ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 124-124ob.

¹³⁵⁷ Upon learning on October 8 of the October 5 death of Augustus III, Catherine ordered to instruct Obreskov to prevent the Porte from interfering in Polish affairs. Were the Porte to announce that it would work to protect the freedoms and rights of the Poles after the death of the Polish king, Obreskov had to convey to the Porte that the Russian empress wanted to express in all friendly sincerity that it had the same intentions towards Poland and was therefore interested in ensuring that the royal elections would be lawful and in accordance with Polish freedom. More practically, St. Petersburg authorized Obreskov to bribe close associates of the sultan in order to prevent the Porte's participation on the side of those nations who opposed Russian designs in Poland. Obreskov could use furs for gifts, as well as a significant sum of 50,000 rubles. Obreskov had to spend money frugally, but if he and Levashov considered it necessary to bribe the grand vizier himself, they could use even more money. Most importantly, Obreskov had to limit the Porte's participation in Polish affairs as much as possible. *SIRIO*, Vol. 51, pp. 24-27, 42-43, and 89.8.243.1763, L. 18. The Russian government also sent additional funds to the extraordinary envoy Prince Dolgorukov in Constantinople. At first, the CFA forwarded letters of exchange for the amount of 5,900.40 rubles on September 1. Upon learning of Augustus III's death, the CFA forwarded another set of checks

But my all-merciful ruler, I take the liberty to report to your Imperial Majesty out of servile duty that as much as I wish, out of my zeal and ardor for the service of Your Highest Imperial Majesty, to succeed in carrying out this desire of Your Highest Imperial Majesty in actuality and in its entirety, I am equally regretful that I cannot provide Your Imperial Majesty with an assurance based on solid foundation that the Ottoman Porte would not, despite all my imaginable efforts and bribes, oppose your plan if not directly then at least underhandedly, for as much as I could notice through long experience, due to competing interests of the two empires, [the Porte] dislikes and hates everything that can please and benefit Your Imperial Majesty, and moreover one of its [the Porte's] fundamental maxims is the rule that in order to preserve the greatness of the state it has to maintain its respectability and credit in Poland by interfering in its affairs under the pretext of being an interested neighbor, as it had in fact done on all occasions as far as experience shows, and even if one supposes that it [the Porte] itself does not think about taking part in Polish affairs, but the intrigues of outsiders and Polish magnates themselves draw it in, as is currently being done—although so to say prematurely—by the French ambassador Cavalier Vergennes.¹³⁵⁸

In other words, while Obreskov did not perceive a threat of military intervention by the Porte in Poland, he could not deny that the Porte was for various reasons interested in the fate of the republic. Therefore, Obreskov felt that he had to clarify the picture for St. Petersburg in order to avoid becoming responsible for the inevitable participation of the Ottoman government in Polish affairs, to a lesser or greater degree.

Obreskov went on to assure the empress that she had nothing to worry about even if the Porte continued to meddle in Poland by way of promises to the Poles and secret intrigues but did not openly take the side of anti-Russian Poles and did not send its own or Tatar troops to Poland. Obreskov did not see any signs that the Porte would take such an active and obvious participation in Polish affairs and he believed that more subtle measures of the Porte in Poland did not present a serious obstacle to the plans of the Russian empress. Moreover, he explained that the Porte's expected failure to provide tangible help to the Poles, despite all the earlier promises, would cause the Poles to realize how little they could rely on the Turks. As a result,

for the same amount on October 9. 89.8.348.1763. Kantseliarskie tsiduly iz Gosudarstvennoi KID chrezvychainomu poslanniku v Konstantinopole Kniazii Dolgorukovu o posylke deneg. September 6—November 13, 1763, LL. 1-3.

On November 10/21 St. Petersburg also sent a circular order to all its representatives abroad, denying rumors that Russia and Prussia planned to capture certain Polish provinces. On the contrary, declared the Russian government, Catherine II strove to preserve universal peace. She had no need to expand her territory, which already comprised a significant portion of the globe. The empress's primary preoccupation lay in settling empty lands of her domain with people and thus in contributing to the flourishing of her empire. 90.1.450.1763, LL. 70-70ob.

¹³⁵⁸ 90.1.454.1763, LL. 123-123ob.

the Poles would more readily submit to Russia's designs for their homeland, especially, noted Obreskov, if St. Petersburg managed to carry out the elections very swiftly.¹³⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Obreskov promised his court that he would do everything to prevent the Porte from making any remarks about Poland. Obreskov had already planted information in the public and with his secret informants that the Russian empress wished that the Poles would elect their king freely, but she would interfere if other powers or even the Polish magnates muddled the process through their intrigues. The Porte tried to find out through Obreskov if Russia was open to the succession of the Saxon Elector or one of his brothers to the Polish throne, but Obreskov explained that such a succession would be problematic for Poland and the Poles would be careful to avoid this scenario because if a Saxon became their king for the third time there would be a danger that "through this habit the Polish crown would become hereditary in that [royal] house."¹³⁶⁰

While Obreskov continued to carefully observe actions of the French and Austrian representatives in Constantinople, following an order from St. Petersburg he became closer to the Prussian envoy Rexin. In turn, Rexin received instructions from Frederick II to cooperate with Obreskov closely and sincerely in relation to Polish matters. Rexin also had to announce to the Porte that the Prussian king decided together with the Russian empress to leave the Poles full freedom to choose their king but to oppose any contrary developments. In a memorandum submitted to the Porte on November 21/December 2, 1763 Rexin encouraged the Ottoman government not to fall into the French trap, which would only lead to a hereditary monarchy in Poland.¹³⁶¹

¹³⁵⁹ 90.1.454.1763, L. 123ob.

¹³⁶⁰ 90.1.454.1763, L. 124ob.

¹³⁶¹ 90.1.454.1763, L. 125.

The new grand vizier, Çorlulu Mustafa Paşa, arrived in the capital on November 27/December 8 and accepted the grand vizier's seal from the sultan the following day. Obreskov had an audience with Mustafa Paşa before all other foreign diplomats, on December 13/24, 1763.¹³⁶² Surprisingly—given Mustafa Paşa's earlier record of opposing Russia—the new grand vizier came out in support of the Prusso-Russian position on Poland. First, on January 15 the Porte sent one of its officials to tell Obreskov that the Ottoman government wanted to see free elections in Poland and inquired if it was true that Russia wanted to install Poniatowski. Obreskov denied these rumors in an official memorandum addressed to the Divan. The very next day the Porte announced to the foreign diplomatic corps that it wanted free elections in Poland but the future Polish king would have to be a native Pole. The Porte also ordered the Hotin commander to preserve peace at the border and make sure that no intervention in Polish affairs took place from the Ottoman side.¹³⁶³

Thus, despite initial fears Obreskov achieved his main goal. On February 28/March 10, 1764 Obreskov reported to St. Petersburg that he was able to convince the Porte to agree to the election of a Piast to the Polish throne, as advocated by the Russian and Prussian courts. However, he had to note that French intrigues against Russia continued at the Porte. It was particularly disturbing that Vergennes found a way to communicate directly with the sultan through a Neapolitan doctor, Nicolas de Caro, who looked after the members of the palace and its harem.¹³⁶⁴ Vergennes tried to convince Mustafa III that he, as an Ottoman sultan, could propose his own candidate for the Polish throne. As a result, the sultan began to make detailed

¹³⁶² 90.1.454.1763, LL. 126ob., 130.

¹³⁶³ Demir, pp. 194-196; Murphy, pp. 143-147; Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, p. 31; Hacer Topaktaş, *Osmanlı-Lehistan diplomatik ilişkileri: Franciszek Piotr Potocki'nin İstanbul elçiliği, 1788-1793* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), p. 24. Aksan evaluates this announcement of the Porte in support of a Piast candidate as evidence of the Porte's "fairly profound misapprehension of the real state of affairs." Aksan, "Ottoman-French Relations," p. 55.

¹³⁶⁴ Murphy also details this relationship. Murphy, pp. 121-122.

inquiries at the Porte and with Obreskov concerning Polish affairs. Obreskov felt that the best answer was a firm one: he assured the Porte that he had already received all instructions from St. Petersburg concerning Poland and that Russia would not interfere in the election of a Piast candidate but will defend the republic in case of any disturbances. The dragoman of the Porte admitted to Obreskov that the sultan began to concern himself with Poland only because of Vergennes' intrigues. The dragoman found Obreskov's response sufficient for showing the sultan that it would not be so easy to appoint his own candidate to the Polish throne as the French tried to convince him. The dragoman also admitted that the grand vizier and the Porte knew about Doctor Caro's influence on the sultan, but due to the importance of the doctor and the sultan's fondness of him, they could not change the situation until a more favorable time.¹³⁶⁵

Obreskov's conversation with the dragoman seemed to have produced an effect. The dragoman informed Obreskov in a friendly manner that when he presented Obreskov's responses in writing to the grand vizier, the dragoman also added in conversation a stirring account of Obreskov's despondency. Namely, the dragoman said that when he was about to leave the Russian mission, he noticed that Obreskov looked quite gloomy. The dragoman inquired about the reason and Obreskov, "with a heavy sigh and almost with tears in his eyes," responded that he regretted very much that all his health-taxing efforts in the past fourteen years to strengthen and further promote friendship between the two empires were being undermined by certain people, who intended to cause a break between Russia and the Porte. When the grand vizier heard this story, he ordered to add it in writing to the report that he, together with the *mufti*, were going to present to the sultan the following morning.¹³⁶⁶ Reportedly, the sultan was particularly

¹³⁶⁵ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 99-102.

¹³⁶⁶ Obreskov reported that on February 23/March 5, 1764 the grand vizier Mustafa Paşa got engaged with a three-year old daughter of the sultan. Therefore, having become the sultan's son-in-law, the grand vizier had a chance to become closer to the sultan. 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 74. The wedding took place on April 12/23, but already in May

struck (*vstrepenulsia*) when he read about attempts of some to cause a break between the two empires. The dragoman of the Porte and the scribes of the reis efendi's secretary informed Obreskov that the sultan allegedly said that indeed it seemed like someone wanted to cause a clash, to which the grand vizier and the *mufti* reacted approvingly by nodding their heads. Obreskov admitted that the story sounded improbable, but he noticed that starting on February 14/25 the Neapolitan doctor lost access to the sultan and his harem, while different doctors were called to treat the sick eldest daughter of the sultan.¹³⁶⁷

Still, Obreskov did not feel completely convinced. He decided to counter French propaganda with the help of the Prussian envoy Rexin, but "in order that he [Rexin] did not become too proud" that Obreskov approached him with a direct offer for assistance, Obreskov sent a scribe of the dragoman of the Porte to request urgently that Rexin had to present a note to the Porte, reminding the latter that the Prussian king, together with the Russian empress, planned to oppose any other candidate to the Polish throne except a Piast, born of native Polish father and mother. The said scribe enjoyed Rexin's confidence and usually composed all of Rexin's notes to the Porte. This time the scribe also wrote the necessary note to the grand vizier on behalf of Rexin. Expectedly, the note stressed all the points that could alert the Porte. Namely, that

Obreskov reported that the grand vizier would not benefit from it. First of all, the wedding was very expensive—the grand vizier spent up to 300,000 levki. Moreover, he would have to cover all the expenses of his young wife when she would turn ten years old. More importantly, the Kapudan Pasha married the widow of the late Ragıp Paşa—the sultan's eldest sister whom the sultan respected greatly and who had therefore been behind Ragıp Paşa's strong position at court. As a result, the grand vizier's influence took a hit. 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 39-39ob.¹³⁶⁷ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 102ob.-103ob. The sick daughter died on March 3/14. 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 156. Caro indeed seems to have lost the sultan's favor. He left Constantinople in the middle of 1764. In early 1766 Obreskov reported on Caro's travels and recent return to the Ottoman capital. Obreskov noted that Caro had travelled through Moldavia and Cracow to Berlin, from where he proceeded to Holland, Paris, Madrid, Naples, and other Italian cities. He then apparently decided to return to the Ottoman capital, travelling to Vienna and then again through Cracow and Moldavia. Caro spent most of the time in Naples and Moldavia. Obreskov did point out that Caro's extensive voyage raised suspicions in many people, who thought that perhaps Caro had been tasked with resuming negotiations with the Porte on behalf of Spain for a treaty of friendship and commerce that had begun in 1761 but were then interrupted. Obreskov admitted, however, that it was very difficult to guess Caro's real intentions. It was quite possible, thought the Russian resident, that Caro travelled around because he wanted to brag about his service to the sultan. 89.8.394.1766, L. 62ob. However, although Obreskov does not mention it, it is plausible that Caro went to spy on European, and particularly Polish developments, for the sultan. After all, he departed Constantinople right on the eve of the Polish royal elections.

election of anyone except a Piast would only be in the interests of Austria and France, as well as the Pope, who would do anything to defend the Saxon dynasty, which had converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in order to acquire the Polish crown. Upon reading this note, the reis efendi instructed the dragoman to assure the Prussian envoy that the Porte's resolution would remain unchanged.¹³⁶⁸

Obreskov made an independent decision to approach Rexin because, he explained to St. Petersburg, he felt the need to counter the actions of the Polish envoy, lieutenant Stankiewicz, who managed to present letters from the Polish Primate to the sultan and the grand vizier and to get accredited at the Porte as an interim envoy by February 1764. It was said that Stankiewicz approached the grand vizier with a secret request, signed by the Crown Hetman and various Polish magnates, for Ottoman help and protection. It was obvious that Stankiewicz was blindly devoted to France. Moreover, Vergennes began to argue that the Saxon princes could be considered native Poles because they were the offspring of the late king. Obreskov countered this false propaganda secretly through the dragoman of the Porte, noting that a native Pole was one who was born of a Polish father and mother, had real estate and titles in the republic, or was naturalized via a unanimous decision of a General Diet. "And all of this resulted in such a success," celebrated Obreskov, that on February 17/28, when the first French dragoman Duval came to the Porte with a new French memorandum, the reis efendi—"being naturally quite rude"—threw the memo in Duval's face and rebuked the French ambassador for daring to burden the Ottoman ministry with such nonsense. The reis efendi accused Vergennes of treating the Porte as "children or inane, but the Porte knows how to distinguish truth from lie, and has already responded to the ambassador once and for all concerning this matter."¹³⁶⁹

¹³⁶⁸ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 103ob.-104ob., 122-123.

¹³⁶⁹ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 104ob.-106ob., 109-109ob.

Obreskov was able to influence the events and gather information about internal deliberations at the Porte thanks to his secret informants. Thus, Obreskov asked the dragoman of the Porte personally to translate letters that the Ottoman government planned to hand to Stankiewicz in order to prevent the French from confusing and altering the meaning of the Porte's message by making their own translation. The scribes of the reis efendi's secretary informed Obreskov that the Porte decided that it was not appropriate for the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire to leave the Polish request without an answer but given the intense interest of neighboring states in the Polish elections, the Porte had to act carefully and not to antagonize its neighbors. Moreover, Ottoman ministers thought that "it was not only unfair but also contrary to religion to sacrifice Muslims and risk negative consequences in order to promote accord and peace among Christians." The Ottoman Empire had to seek greater glory for itself but it could not enter into unpleasant obligations. Therefore, the Porte also sent orders to the Crimean Khan not to make any contrary moves. On February 26/March 8 the dragoman of the Porte brought response letters of the Porte—translated by the dragoman himself—to Stankiewicz, but without the sultan's letter to the Polish Primate. The dragoman assured Obreskov that the letters' content was completely compatible with Russian wishes.¹³⁷⁰

Obreskov could, therefore, assure his government that the Porte would not support the opposing side. There was, however, one possible danger of further complications. Namely, Obreskov worried that during Ahmed Efendi's return trip from Berlin Russia's enemies could either bribe him or use another pretext to keep him longer in Warsaw in order to convince the pro-Russian faction in Poland that Ahmed Resmi Efendi was appointed by the Porte to observe

¹³⁷⁰ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 107-108.

the General *Sejm* and the royal election. Obreskov suggested that St. Petersburg try to prevent such a possibility.¹³⁷¹

In his report from March 6/17, 1764 Obreskov informed his court that the Porte's disposition toward Poland was in line with Russia's desires. Namely, the Porte refused to help the Polish opposition. In order to make sure that the disparaging news reached the latter as soon as possible, Obreskov sent copies of Ottoman official letters to Russian representatives in Warsaw. Moreover, the Moldavian hospodar sent a report to the Porte that was conducive to Russian plans. The hospodar described Polish nobility as having divided into two camps. The first one supported the Saxon princes and was backed by France and Austria. The Crown Hetman and the Primate headed this group. It was rumored that this party planned to elect the crown hetman, who in view of his old age would cede his throne to a Saxon prince or another candidate from France and Austria. The second party in Poland consisted of "almost the entire people and majority of the *szlachta*." They wanted to elect a Piast, but not the crown hetman because they knew of the cunning plans of France and Austria.¹³⁷²

Obreskov singled out the dragoman of the Porte, Gregorios Ghika (*Grigorei Gika*),¹³⁷³ for his "diligence and courageous behavior" in helping Russia achieve the Porte's agreement with Russian plans for Poland and in assuring helpful reports from Moldavia and Wallachia. Obreskov recommended St. Petersburg to reward the dragoman for his assistance. In the meantime, Obreskov decided to encourage Ghika's help through a gift of 500 chervonnye *findiks* to the dragoman himself and a two-time gift of 100 chervonnye *zincirlis* to the dragoman's scribe, "for the papers shared by him and for his obvious loyalty." The dragoman also promised

¹³⁷¹ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 108ob.-109.

¹³⁷² 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 151-155.

¹³⁷³ Gregorios Ghika (III), Imperial Dragoman from 1758 to 1764, as well as *Voyvoda* of Moldavia in 1764-1767 and 1774-1782, and *Voyvoda* of Wallachia in 1768-1769. Christine M. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (University of California Press, 2010), p. 184.

to help Obreskov by suggesting to the Porte to instruct Ahmed Efendi in Berlin not to linger in Poland during his return trip.¹³⁷⁴

Therefore, Obreskov was successful in keeping the Porte indifferent toward Polish developments in spring 1764, largely thanks to his secret informants. The Prussian first dragoman—who was also Ghika’s relative—also provided some assistance, for which Obreskov rewarded him with 50 *findiks*.¹³⁷⁵ The policy of bribing and rewarding cooperation was working for the moment, although it required considerable resources. The following month, on April 10/21, 1764, for example, Obreskov alerted his government about his diminishing stores of furs. Panin sent this as an excerpt for Catherine’s approval, arguing that it was important to satisfy Obreskov’s request for thirty *sorok*¹³⁷⁶ of sable and thirty *sorok* of ermine fur in view of “the current circumstances.” The empress fully approved the request.¹³⁷⁷

In April 1764 Obreskov reported that the Porte had replaced its dragoman with Georgios Karaca (*Karadzha*).¹³⁷⁸ The latter was the son of the physician and dragoman of the Dutch embassy in Constantinople, “but it is not possible to say anything definite about his qualities due to lack of experience [of dealing with him].” In turn, Obreskov had great hopes for Ghika, the previous dragoman, who had been appointed the Prince of Moldavia on March 18/29. Ghika assured Obreskov that he would continue, to the extent possible, to serve Russian interests during his presence in Jassy, be it in regard to Poland or anything else. Obreskov presented Ghika with a

¹³⁷⁴ 89.8.1.357.1764, LL. 155-156.

¹³⁷⁵ 89.8.1.356.1764, L. 119ob.; 89.8.1.357.1764, L. 155ob.

¹³⁷⁶ Usually this term is interpreted as a bundle of forty pelts sewn together because it was considered that this amount was necessary to sew one fur coat. Adam Falowski, “The East-Slavonic *sorok* “40” Revisited,” *Studia Etimologica Cracoviensia*, Vol. 16 (2011), pp. 7-15.

¹³⁷⁷ 89.8.1.356.1764. Reliatsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova i poverennogo v delakh Levashova Ekaterine II o politike Turtsii v otnoshenii Pol'shi i o vmeshatel'stve Krymskogo khana v pol'skie dela, ob otnosheniiakh Turtsii s krysmkim khanom, o skoplenii turetskikh voisk na persidskoi granitse i o stroiashcheisia kreposti. Prilozheniia: Kopii not i promemorii Obrezkova Porte, kopiia pis'ma viziria k partii kniazei Chartoriiskikh i vypiski iz gazet "Konstantinopol'skie vedomosti" po ukazannym voprosam. Chast'iu shifrovannye, na russkom, ital'ianskom, i turetskom iazykakh. April 10-May 30, 1764, LL. 3-3ob.

¹³⁷⁸ Georgios Karaca, Imperial Dragoman from 1764 to 1765, and then again between 1770 and 1774. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, p. 184.

sable fur of highest quality—worth 1,000 rubles—from the mission’s 1763 reserve. In addition, Obreskov appointed regular pension of 200 Dutch chervonnye to the new hospodar for his many earlier favors to the Russian resident. Obreskov was confident that the hospodar would continue to be extremely helpful in Jassy.¹³⁷⁹ It has to be noted, however, that by fall 1764 the Porte and the sultan was increasing suspicious that Ghika was reporting incorrect information, forcing Ghika to defend himself against these accusations in early 1765.¹³⁸⁰

Despite Ghika’s refutations, there exists strong evidence that he was instrumental in helping Russia keep the Porte at peace throughout 1764. He worked especially hard in his last weeks as the dragoman of the Porte to facilitate Obreskov’s efforts to keep the Porte away from interfering in Poland. The situation was critical because in the run-up to the royal elections in Poland Hetman Branicki stepped up his appeals to the Porte to pledge assistance to him and his backers. His emissary in Constantinople, resident Stankiewicz, attempted to procure an audience, or at least a secret meeting, with the grand vizier. The Porte avoided making any commitment and declined Stankiewicz’s requests for a private meeting with the grand vizier. Stankiewicz, in his turn, refused the offer to present his points on paper. Therefore, the Porte sent its dragoman to find out what Stankiewicz wished to convey the Ottoman government. Stankiewicz relayed Branicki’s plea for Ottoman support of his party at the election *Sejm* against Russia’s plan to put Stanislaw Poniatowski on the throne, which was widely known in Poland. The republic, stressed Stankiewicz, was already surrounded by Russian troops, who also guarded substantial stores of weapons within Poland. Stankiewicz further alerted the Porte to Catherine II’s alleged intention to marry Poniatowski and thereby annex the Polish Republic to the Russian Empire, which would be detrimental to Ottoman interests. The dragoman of the Porte presented Stankiewicz’s

¹³⁷⁹ Obreskov had spare funds after the death of his earlier informant, Hasan Ağa, in 1763, to provide pension to the dragoman. 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 20ob., 28ob.-29ob.

¹³⁸⁰ Demir, p. 200.

points in writing to the Porte, to which the dragoman also added a note that the talks of the marriage had been already circulating for several months among the Polish public, but that even Stankiewicz himself, when pressed by the dragoman, admitted that these were unfounded rumors.¹³⁸¹

The Porte was not interested in discussing these matters at an audience and hurried to compose an official response to Branicki, designed to put an end to Polish and French instigations to interfere in Polish affairs. The Porte reaffirmed its desire to see a native Piast on the Polish throne. Secondly, the Porte expressed dismay at Stankiewicz's complaints regarding Russian weapon stores in Poland. After all, declared the Porte, the Poles had themselves agreed to allow Russia to establish weapon depots on their territory during the reign of the late Augustus III. Moreover, according to its treaties with Russia and Poland, the Ottoman government had no right to demand that Russia remove its weapon stores and accompanying troops from Poland or to oppose the entrance of Russian troops into Poland. The Porte completely ignored Stankiewicz's point about the possible marriage between Catherine II and Poniatowski, stressed Obreskov, "as a token of respect for the empress."¹³⁸²

Obreskov gloated about the effect that this letter had on the Polish resident. Stankiewicz received it at a banquet that the Danish envoy organized on the occasion of the birthday of the Danish King. Upon reading the letter, he could not conceal his embarrassment and apprehension from all the other foreign diplomats present there. Obreskov further commented that in order to redeem himself, Stankiewicz "used cunning, characteristic of the Poles," and tried to deny that he had spoken about these matters with the dragoman. In response, however, Stankiewicz received a harsh reprimand from the reis efendi, "whose inclemency and rudeness are already

¹³⁸¹ 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 18-19ob.

¹³⁸² 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 19ob.-20ob.

known to everyone,”¹³⁸³ who stressed that the dragoman’s loyalty was true and tested, in reward for which he was appointed as the ruler of Moldavia. Obreskov’s revealed his anti-Polish prejudice in his description of Stankiewicz’s reaction to the reis efendi’s words: “Anyone except a Pole would be ashamed for the rest of his life [for receiving such a reprimand].” However, to Obreskov’s displeasure, Stankiewicz persisted in his efforts. The Polish resident asked for the French ambassador’s help in convincing the Porte to change the content of the letter, most importantly by excising references to Stankiewicz’s words and the Porte’s responses to them. Stankiewicz argued that these matters were not part of the official letter from Branicki, while the Porte’s response—if left unchanged—would become known in Poland and incite Russia to oppress the Poles even more. The Porte found these arguments convincing and prepared a revised letter, according to Stankiewicz’s request. However, “by God’s mercy,” Obreskov found out about it on April 1/12 and applied all his efforts to prevent the Porte from handing the revised version to Stankiewicz.¹³⁸⁴

Obreskov realized that if the Porte did not express itself as clearly as it did in the first letter, Branicki would be able to announce in Poland that the Porte had agreed to his oral proposals. Moreover, Obreskov wanted to teach Stankiewicz a lesson—to contain himself more in his complaints against Russia, instigated as always by the French ambassador. Finally, Obreskov wanted to make sure that his empress could, if she so desired, demand satisfaction for Stankiewicz’s unacceptable behavior. For these purposes Obreskov needed to procure copies of the points that Stankiewicz had presented to the Porte. Therefore, on April 2/13 he met with an undisclosed confidant of an official who had great credit at the Porte. The official in question “was in charge of all the affairs, was most versed in relations with foreign states, in which he was

¹³⁸³ This description of the reis efendi was underlined with red pencil in the original.

¹³⁸⁴ 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 20ob.-21ob.

theoretically second to the reis efendi, but in reality, in view of the latter's old age, the chief official overlooking foreign affairs at the time." In conversation with the confidant of this official, Obreskov expressed his surprise that the Porte made a decision to revise the letter to Branicki. Obreskov could only explain this as a result of the Porte's misunderstanding of Stankiewicz's true intentions. Obreskov warned that this action could lead to undesired consequences. Moreover, it would turn into a precedent, enabling diplomats of other states to demand the same indulgence from the Ottoman government.¹³⁸⁵

Obreskov was able to convince the said Ottoman official through his confidant—with a promise of a generous reward—to assist Obreskov in this matter, as well as to ensure that the Porte publicly announced its peaceful intentions towards Poland. As a result of the official's active efforts, after holding councils and seeking the advice of the *şeyhülislam* and the dragoman Ghika, on April 4/15 the Porte decided to order Stankiewicz to send the original letter to Branicki. The Porte also seemed to be irritated with the constant French intrigues and sent Vergennes a note, announcing that the Porte was not interested in interfering in Polish affairs. The Porte stressed that it did not have any right, based on its treaties with Poland and Russia, to oppose the entrance of Russian troops into Poland.¹³⁸⁶

Ghika further offered his help to Obreskov in facilitating the Porte's acceptance of Russia's candidate for the Polish throne. For this purpose, Ghika advised that the future king had to officially address the sultan and the grand vizier upon being elected and pledge to uphold mutual interests. Ghika promised to personally deliver these letters where needed and to make the most use out of them, arguing that through such respectful address the Polish king would mollify the Porte's ego. Obreskov concluded that Ghika must have made this suggestion as a

¹³⁸⁵ 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 21ob.-23.

¹³⁸⁶ 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 24-25ob.

result of his eagerness to serve the Russian court, and most likely he had solid reasons for making such specific suggestions. Panin noted on the margins of Obreskov's report that indeed someone like Ghika had to be cultivated. The empress herself commented on Obreskov's description of his efforts to keep the Porte peaceful with utmost appreciation: "Obreskov's diligence, skill, and effort cannot be praised enough, may Lord God bless our affairs the same way henceforth."¹³⁸⁷

In view of the intensifying preparations for the Polish royal elections, Obreskov entered into direct correspondence with the Russian representatives in Warsaw, Keyserling¹³⁸⁸ and Repnin. On May 27/June 7, 1764 Obreskov informed them that anti-Russian intrigues had completely failed to incite the Porte against Russia. On the contrary, the Porte was resolved to leave the Poles to their fate if the latter could not reach an agreement among themselves.¹³⁸⁹

However, Obreskov advised to St. Petersburg to apply great energy in promoting the desired candidate to the Polish throne, so that the matter could end as soon as possible. As long as the elections took place swiftly, it would not matter to the Porte if Russia sent 10,000 or 30,000 troops into Poland. He reported that all members of the Imperial council unanimously admitted Russian actions in Poland to be legitimate and, rather than oppose Russian military presence in Poland, the Porte decided to write to the Poles that they should not even hope for any support or help from the Ottoman Empire against Russia. Despite a short interruption effected by new complaints of the khan, the Porte indeed issued such letters both to Obreskov and Stankiewicz. As a result, Obreskov concluded that "in relation to current Polish affairs all

¹³⁸⁷ 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 27ob.-28ob.

¹³⁸⁸ Count Keyserling would soon pass away—on September 19/30, 1764.

¹³⁸⁹ 90.1.512.1764, LL. 84-84ob. On July 5/16, 1764, Obreskov reported to St. Petersburg that the Porte continued to maintain its favorable disposition towards Russia despite attempts of Russia's enemies to paint a negative picture of St. Petersburg's actions in Poland. In fact, the Porte decided to appoint Derviş Efendi—despite his old age—as extraordinary envoy to Russia in response to Dolgorukov's mission because Derviş Efendi had behaved reasonably during his earlier mission to Russia and the Porte hoped that his reappointment would satisfy the Russian court and advance mutual friendship. On June 23/July 4 Derviş Efendi left for Russia. 90.1.490.1764, LL. 1-1ob.

negotiations with the Porte have successfully ended according to the wish of Your Highest Imperial Majesty, and I do not know what more I can demand from it [the Porte].”¹³⁹⁰

According to Obreskov’s copy of the letters, the grand vizier and the sultan blamed the Poles for their divisions and proffered advice from historical chronicles, which showed that “those states that divided into parties and plunged into internal strife were completely ruined and devastated. The Poles should stop enmity and hatred and anger that is hidden in their hearts and, uniting together, should agree and elect a true native Pole....” The sultan expressed his belief—“based on his innate acuity/*pronitsanie*”—that, unlike a foreigner, a native Pole would protect the Polish freedoms and help the kingdom flourish and prosper. A foreigner, on the other hand, did not care as much about Poland and would bring his army, which was a recipe for the destruction of Polish freedoms.¹³⁹¹

However, the Porte did not necessarily fully support Russia’s position. Mustafa Paşa wrote to Branicki that the Porte’s opinion did not coincide with those of Berlin and St. Petersburg in everything. News from the Ottoman-Russian border and the Crimean khan soon made the Porte much more apprehensive about Polish developments. In particular, Vergennes and the khan encouraged the Porte to intervene after Russian troops forced Branicki and the Lithuanian *Wojewoda* Karol Radziwill to flee Warsaw and even the republic. The French spread rumors that Catherine would marry Poniatowski when he became king and would thus take full control of Poland. As a result, an Ottoman official told Obreskov in June that the Porte would be upset if Poniatowski were to be elected king. The grand vizier, likewise, passed a half-pleading letter to Obreskov: Mustafa Paşa referred to his tireless efforts to improve Ottoman-Russian

¹³⁹⁰ Reports from May 8/19, 1764 and May 30/June 10, 1764. 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 59, 151-153.

¹³⁹¹ 89.8.1.356.1764, LL. 177-177ob., 186-189. Demir notes, however, that in its letter to Branicki the Porte also added that if events took a turn that was detrimental to the Porte the Ottoman side would intervene in the conflict. Demir, p. 201.

relations, but all of them would be in vain if Poniatowski became king. The Porte, warned the grand vizier, would never recognize the marriage of Catherine and Poniatowski. Consequently, the Russian side began to announce that Poniatowski would have an obligation to marry a Polish princess.¹³⁹²

The plight of Branicki and Radziwill concerned the Porte the most. In particular, it was disturbed by news that Russian troops were besieging Kamianets-Podolskii, where Branicki and several thousand of his followers were hiding. In late July Prince Radziwill reached the Ottoman border near Hotin and the Porte allowed the Hotin commander and Moldavian *voyvoda* to help Radziwill. Moreover, the Porte threatened Obreskov and Rexin that if Russia intervened in Polish elections with military force, the Porte would break friendly relations with both Russia and Prussia. In response, Rexin and Obreskov combined their efforts to try to remove Stankiewicz from Constantinople. But the Porte claimed that it would wait for the results of the Polish elections before deciding what to do with Stankiewicz and accepting the new Polish envoy that had been sent by the interim Polish government. Indeed, with the Porte's permission Stankiewicz stayed in Constantinople until August 1765.¹³⁹³

On August 11 the *sadaret kethüdası*, or *kahya*, who would become the reis efendi ten days later, Yağlıkçızade Mehmed Emin Efendi, met with Obreskov and confronted him about Russian interference in Polish elections. Obreskov replied that all Russia wanted was to restore order in the republic and restore the ancient order of things through some reforms, and the Poles had asked Russia for this help. The 7,000 Russian troops in Warsaw, who, claimed Obreskov, did not have any guns or ammunition, would ensure orderly elections. Obreskov pledged that if

¹³⁹² The khan ceaselessly complained about Russia and warned about Russian troop concentrations on the Ottoman border, forcing Obreskov to be on the defensive all the time. At a certain point, however, Obreskov threatened that Russia would have to take action against the khan if the Porte did not do anything. As a result, the Porte entreated the khan not to provoke a conflict. Demir, pp. 201-207; 90.1.512.1764, L. 86.

¹³⁹³ Or 1766. Demir, pp. 211-213, 218, 263.

Russia did anything that went against Ottoman interests he would without hesitation resign from his post.¹³⁹⁴

Once again, the Ottoman government split into two camps. Mustafa III was very receptive to French presentations in support of Branicki. As a result, the sultan had a falling out with the grand vizier, who accused Vergennes of deception and being on Austria's side. Mustafa Paşa did not want to sacrifice peace between the Russian and Ottoman empires because of Poland. By contrast, the sultan believed that the greatest threat to the Porte would come if Russia allied with Poland. He accused the grand vizier of outdated thinking, the same thinking that characterized Mahmud's reign. The conflict between the two would eventually grow to a point that the sultan would depose and execute Mustafa Paşa in March 1765, following accusations that the grand vizier took bribes from Obreskov.¹³⁹⁵

Ottoman Disappointment with Poniatowski's Election

Given the serious divisions of opinion in the Ottoman ruling elite on the Polish question, it is not surprising that the election of Stanislaw Poniatowski as king of Poland in September 1764 caused great anger among many Ottomans, despite Obreskov's earlier conclusion that the Ottomans would close their eyes to Russian actions in Poland if everything took place quickly. Aksan argues that the Ottomans were angry because they misunderstood Russia's and Prussia's real motives: the Porte had only agreed to the Russian and Prussian insistence on non-

¹³⁹⁴ Demir, pp. 214-216.

¹³⁹⁵ Demir, pp. 217-218, 227. It is possible that Penkler's revelation of Russian secret informants in the Ottoman government played a role in this episode, about which Obreskov reported in April 1765. Kessel'brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii. Ot Posol'skoi izby do Kollegii inostrannykh del*, pp. 385-386.

interference in Polish elections.¹³⁹⁶ Demir shows that many Ottomans, including the sultan, clearly saw Russia's real objectives in Poland but the divisiveness of the Ottoman government, Obreskov's lobbying and bribes, as well as the grand vizier's firm aversion to a conflict with Russia over Poland led to the Porte taking a peaceful position prior to the elections. Still, many hoped that the Polish nation would indeed choose its new king freely, at least not under obvious direction of the Russian government.

As a result, the election of Poniatowski under Russian military pressure became a watershed in Russo-Ottoman relations. Although on the surface the Ottoman government remained peaceful, many officials were now interested in rolling back Russian domination of Poland.¹³⁹⁷ From this moment on, Obreskov's consistent and overwhelming preoccupation lay with preventing Ottoman support for the Polish opposition. Ottoman recognition of Stanislaw August in itself took almost two years of endless negotiations, entreaties, and bribes. While for the most part Obreskov felt confident that he could persuade the Porte to tolerate Russian actions in Poland, his efforts proved to be a losing battle: except for a brief period when passions subsided, the Russian government began to withdraw its troops from Poland, and the Porte recognized Stanislaw Poniatowski as king of Poland in 1766, the newly-raised dissidents' issue brought all the conflicts out into the open anew.

The Ottoman government wanted to know if the Polish elections were free or not. The Porte was receiving contradictory information not only from France and Austria versus Prussia and Russia but also from Moldavia, Wallachia, Crimea, and the border commanders. According to Ghika's earlier advice, Obreskov painted Poniatowski as friendly to the Porte: Poniatowski declared that he supported the Porte and thanked it for its advocacy of a Piast candidacy. In

¹³⁹⁶ Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, p. 79.

¹³⁹⁷ Murphy, pp. 147-148.

addition, Poniatowski reportedly considered the Ottoman Empire to be of first importance, while Russia and Prussia for him were only secondary. However, these presentations produced an opposite effect when the Porte learned that Prussia and Russia clearly interfered in the elections. The grand vizier found himself in a very difficult position: the sultan was furious and accused the grand vizier of making a mistake by believing Obreskov who had apparently lied to the divan. As a solution, Mustafa Paşa suggested first to wait for the Russian and Prussian representatives to agree to the Porte's view and put the replacement of the new Polish king with another candidate on the agenda. In case of refusal, the Porte then would have a solid foundation for making an independent decision how to act. He also advised to ask the *şeyhülislam*'s opinion. But the sultan thought that his government had to hurry because Russia was trying to win time and take full advantage of the situation.¹³⁹⁸

The Porte regretted that it had openly supported a Piast and now turned for support to France. The reis efendi told Vergennes that it was unimportant for the Porte if the new king was a Pole or a foreigner. The most important was the fact of free elections. The Porte certainly did not want a king who was under Russian influence. The reis efendi asked Vergennes if anything could be changed. Vergennes replied that there was nothing impossible for the Porte but this particular effort would be extremely difficult and dangerous. First and foremost, the reis efendi wanted to know how the Porte could topple Poniatowski. Vergennes replied that the only solution was war but he was not in a position to advise it. However, if the Porte was really determined, then it could achieve the desired impact. In order for the Porte's effort to appear legitimate, Vergennes advised stressing that most Polish senators were not present at the elections and that Russia crushed Poland and Lithuania with 60,000 of its troops. Vergennes knew that the Porte had already started military preparations at the border. The Porte, he told the

¹³⁹⁸ Demir, pp. 224-228, 235.

reis efendi, was the only power that could provoke the Russian forces and influence Russia. But this is not exactly what the reis efendi wanted to hear. Vergennes' message essentially indicated that neither France nor Austria would help the Porte in opposing Russia in Poland. But Vergennes tried to assure the reis efendi that Russia would respect Ottoman demands because it could not face the prospect of another war: all of Russia's money had already gone to Poland.¹³⁹⁹

But, once again, the Porte was divided. Mustafa III was greatly alarmed by the Russian threat to Polish freedom, while the grand vizier and the *şeyhülislam* tried to moderate his stance. Still, the grand vizier confronted the Russian representative. At a meeting with the dragoman of the Russian mission in October, Mustafa Paşa declared: "Your government destroyed me.... I trusted its word, and now it is my responsibility. So be damned the moment I met him (Obreskov)! Make sure that he submits a letter that would correct the situation. I personally recommended Obreskov and now he destroyed his own and my reputations. The Porte would never accept the new king and his letters. The only solution is to depose Poniatowski and if Obreskov does not give a firm guarantee that he would expend all his efforts to achieve this goal, none of his representations would be accepted."¹⁴⁰⁰

In the meantime, Warsaw hoped to establish relations with the Ottoman Empire with the help of Karol Boskamp, who had formerly been in Prussian service. The Polish government

¹³⁹⁹ Murphy, pp. 148-150. The reis efendi also had a slight hope that the Russian people would rebel against the empress because of the death of Ivan VI, which would also undermine Poniatowski's rule in Poland. Demir, pp. 228-232.

Vergennes took a similar position in early 1765: he encouraged the Porte to oppose Russia in Poland, but without pledging active French support. Demir, p. 248.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Demir, pp. 233-235. Ironically, St. Petersburg got the impression from Obreskov's reports that the reis efendi was on their side. Thus, in his report from October 4/15, 1764 Obreskov wrote that he had told the reis efendi that Austria and France were trying to incite the Porte against Russia, first because they had planned in 1757 to put the Saxon prince on the Polish throne and also because Austria was upset with Russia for choosing to ally with Prussia, and in this way wanted to force Russia to ally back with Austria. In response to this, the reis efendi told the dragoman "Remember, what I told you. See, I was right." In this place Catherine made a note on the margins: "This reis efendi is a very smart man and we have to attract him to our side." *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 83, 155.

The very same day the reis efendi had met with Vergennes and broached the topic of attacking Russia. Murphy, pp. 148-149.

dispatched Boskamp as embassy counselor to Constantinople in fall 1764.¹⁴⁰¹ Boskamp had to assist in procuring the Porte's agreement to receive the official Polish envoy Thomasz Aleksandrowicz. However, the Porte did not want to recognize Aleksandrowicz as an internuncio but planned to receive him only as *chargé d'affaires*. This was not the biggest problem. More significantly, the Porte resolved to send Aleksandrowicz back to Poland because Russia's enemies had convinced the Ottomans that the Poles would replace *votum liberum* with majority vote after the coronation, thus laying the ground for sovereign monarchical rule in Poland. The Porte was particularly irate that the new Polish king did not yet marry a Polish woman, as had been promised. The Porte was determined to oppose such a change in the Polish Constitution and was prepared to take radical measures against such possibility.¹⁴⁰²

Disagreements over Aleksandrowicz dragged for another two years while the envoy himself kept waiting at the border. Thus, in fall 1765 the Porte attempted to downgrade Aleksandrowicz's status to that of an extraordinary envoy and advance various conditions for recognizing him. Namely, the Porte wanted to accept Aleksandrowicz only as an envoy of the Polish Republic, without mentioning that he was also the envoy of the king. Reppin and Obreskov worked hard to ensure that the Porte would recognize Aleksandrowicz as "the envoy

¹⁴⁰¹ 90.1.512.1764, L. 70, 77, 78. Poniatowski employed Boskamp as his foreign policy advisor and later as a representative at the Porte. Boskamp was "of a cosmopolitan diplomatic agent type that was characteristic for the XVIII century, when moving from the service of one country to that of another was a widespread practice. Enterprising, go-ahead and self-confident, he had a good grasp of the relations in the Ottoman Empire, and the command of Turkish and Greek, so rare among European diplomats and, which, making him independent from interpreters, gave him the strengths that were very much desired while on the service of a weak country with no well-established position in Istanbul." In 1765-1766 Boskamp worked in Constantinople to organize a proper reception of Poniatowski's official envoy, Thomasz Aleksandrowicz, at the Porte, which essentially paved the way for the final Ottoman recognition of the new Polish king, although the latter came almost two years after the fact. Poniatowski sought to establish a permanent residency in Constantinople, but the Porte did not agree to it. However, Aleksandrowicz's embassy, with Boskamp's help, resulted in the establishment of a Polish school of Oriental languages in Constantinople. An officer from the King's Office, Zygmunt Everhardt, managed this school for Polish translators, which continued to exist under the protection of the English embassy after the upheaval caused by the Confederation of Bar. Aleksandrowicz's embassy also resulted in a paper "Comments on the Current Status of the Ottoman State and its Internal and External Government." In contrast to the prevailing Polish public opinion that the Ottoman Empire was a formidable power, the paper argued that the Porte was, inherently, in a deep crisis. Gierowski, pp. 278-279, 283-284.

¹⁴⁰² 90.1.512.1764, LL. 87-90ob.; Demir, p. 237.

of the king and the republic.”¹⁴⁰³ Still, Obreskov warned St. Petersburg in December 1765 that due to the sultan’s “extreme belief in his own greatness and arrogant irrationality,” there existed a possibility that the sultan could easily get furious and propose harsh conditions for the acceptance of the Polish envoy Aleksandrowicz, especially if the sultan noticed that Poland did not have strong support from outside.¹⁴⁰⁴

The Porte was so persistent in its opposition to the election of Poniatowski that it withheld its recognition far longer than any other nation. Most states recognized the new Polish king in November 1764, except for Austria and France. But the Porte was still hoping that it could organize the Polish opposition to depose the new king. The Ottoman government was concerned by reports, brought by agents of the Moldavian *voivoda*, that the king planned to replace *liberum veto* with majority vote on certain issues. Moreover, Warsaw and St. Petersburg were said to be preparing to sign an alliance agreement and settle mutual border issues: the Porte learned with concern that Russia could thereby gain a wide strip of border territory—namely, at a distance of forty hours of horseback riding from the old border.¹⁴⁰⁵

Mustafa III did not trust the Moldavian *voivoda* and the Porte tried to find out about Polish developments from other sources, as well as to make contact with both groups of Poles. For example, the Hotin commander sent two agents—Mahmud Ağa and Ali Bey—who had been to Poland with similar missions before. Their chief goal was to determine if Poniatowski could be deposed. The Porte, however, became disappointed by the new intelligence: the Polish opposition seemed to be withdrawing from active struggle. By early 1765, however, the good news was that under the influence of the Polish opposition Russian troops began to withdraw

¹⁴⁰³ 90.1.534.1765, LL. 39, 43.

¹⁴⁰⁴ 90.1.526.1765, LL. 27-27ob.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Demir, pp. 236-242, 246-247, 250.

from Poland, and rather quickly.¹⁴⁰⁶ But the Moldavian *voyvoda* reported that as a result the opposition to the king dwindled starting in February. In March the Porte learned that Branicki joined Poniatowski's camp.¹⁴⁰⁷

Consequently, the Porte decided that it needed to devise a new approach in regard to Poland: it could no longer count on using internal opposition. Mustafa III felt emboldened by Russia's withdrawal of its forces from Poland, as it seemed to confirm that his hard line was the most appropriate approach. Therefore, on March 30, 1765 he removed Mustafa Paşa from office and fired the latter's supporters as well. One of the primary reasons for this decision was a rumor that the grand vizier, the reis efendi, and the chief dragoman wanted to take a bribe from Obreskov in return for organizing a proper reception for Aleksandrowicz. As a result, the reis efendi was also fired. Both the French and English ambassadors interpreted these actions as indicating that the war party had become dominant in the Ottoman government.¹⁴⁰⁸ This conclusion soon proved incorrect.

The next grand vizier was Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa, who was an experienced provincial administrator, especially versed in the situation in Rumelia. On one hand, he turned out to be a cautious politician who eschewed embroiling the Ottoman Empire in new foreign conflicts. On the other, during his grand vizierate the Porte was overwhelmed by widespread disturbances and rebellions in its various provinces. Still, despite the fact that in late 1765 the Porte was pursuing a much more peaceful policy towards Russia than before, it still had not

¹⁴⁰⁶ On December 20/31, 1764 Repnin informed Obreskov that the empress had ordered the withdrawal of most of the Russian troops from Poland during winter, in order to prove that they had been introduced into Poland only upon the demand of the republic itself. 90.1.512.1764, LL. 79-79ob. On January 11/22, 1765 Panin wrote that he was happy to have received news from Obreskov about the Porte's agreement with Russia on Polish affairs and "perhaps greater-than-ever propensity to the political beginnings of our empire, which should appear to it [the Porte] purer than before." In this connection, St. Petersburg hoped that Obreskov would be able to finalize the matter quickly in Russia's favor before leaving his post, which he insisted he needed to do in view of his poor health. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 153-155.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Demir, pp. 242-246, 249-252.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Demir, pp. 252-257.

recognized Aleksandrowicz, and therefore Poniatowski as well. The Porte was divided: some officials thought that by not recognizing the Polish king, the Porte was pushing him further into Russian hands; others—under French influence—continued to deny the recognition. Vergennes believed that the most active advocate of the first position was the *şeyhülislam*. But the Imperial council decided to wait for France and Austria to recognize Poniatowski first. This happened in the early months of 1766, and the Porte finally allowed Aleksandrowicz to come to Constantinople. In July he was received at the Porte, which effectively signified the Porte's official recognition of the Polish king.¹⁴⁰⁹

Thus, in the years 1765-1766 Russo-Ottoman relations were comparatively peaceful. Indeed, by early 1766 Obreskov could not find what to write about to St. Petersburg. For example, on February 15/26 he wrote that he did not have any news to report and was sending mail to Russia only because it was his usual practice to maintain monthly correspondence. He only mentioned the latest developments concerning Georgia, where the Porte continued its half-hearted campaign to pacify the Açıık Başı.¹⁴¹⁰ Similarly, in March Obreskov noted that the new Prussian envoy, Johann von Zegelin, had arrived, but otherwise affairs were in the same calm condition.¹⁴¹¹

¹⁴⁰⁹ Demir, pp. 258-266, 269-274; Topaktaş, *Osmanlı-Lehistan diplomatik ilişkileri*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁴¹⁰ 89.8.394.1766. Reliatsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova i poverennogo v delakh Levashova Ekaterine II o politike Turtzii v Gruzii, o vzaimootnosheniakh Turtzii s Avstriei, o pritesneniakh khristianskikh nevol'nikov i postroike novoi turetskoi kreposti. Chast'iu shifrovannye. Prilozheniia: Kopii not Obrezkova Porte, not i ukazov Porty, gramot avstriiskogo imperatora sultanu i viziriu, i doneseniiia Antiokhiiskogo patriarkha v Sinod i vypiski iz gazety "Konstantinopol'skie Vedomosti" po ukazannym voprosam na russkom, turetskom i ital'ianskom iazykakh. January 14—March 17, 1766, LL. 38-38ob., 54-56, 60-61, 87ob.

¹⁴¹¹ 89.8.394.1766, LL. 82-83.

Chapter 16. On the Road to War, 1766-1768

Complications in Poland over the Dissidents' Issue

Just when the Porte recognized Poniatowski in July Russo-Ottoman relations were entering another round of tensions over events in Poland. The coming to power of Duc du Choiseul in France in spring 1766, moreover, aimed at encouraging the Porte to open a war on Russia in order to hurt the power of the Russian empress and her influence on European affairs. According to Choiseul's instructions to Vergennes, it was not as important for the Porte to be able to win the war—which most likely it would not be able to do due to its weakness and decay,—but its announcement and development would thwart Russia's threat to France.¹⁴¹² The secret plan bore its fruit in about two years, although Vergennes increasingly frustrated Choiseul due to his lack of enthusiasm for the new strategy. For example, in May 1766 Vergennes assured Choiseul that a declaration of war by the Porte was impossible at the moment, and only vaguely possible in the future.¹⁴¹³

Developments in Poland greatly aided Choiseul's plans. In 1766 Russia and Prussia began to pressure the Polish regime to guarantee equal civil rights for non-Catholic minorities, the so-called dissidents.¹⁴¹⁴ A fair amount of arm-twisting, intrigue, cajoling, hypocrisy, corruption, and repression characterized Russian policy in Poland for the next two years.

¹⁴¹² The plan was to use the Ottoman Empire, Poland, and Sweden to neutralize Russia, as well as Austria—to neutralize Prussia, in order to take revenge against England. Sorel, pp. 25-27.

¹⁴¹³ Demir, pp. 266-269; Scott, pp. 165-170. In late April 1768 Choiseul recalled Vergennes, but the new ambassador, Chevalier de Saint-Priest, did not arrive until November. Vergennes knew that the Ottoman Empire would be crushed by a war with Russia. Murphy, p. 157, 160, 171. Starting in April 1768 Vergennes distanced himself from running the embassy because he began to spend a lot of efforts on trying not to be removed from the post. As a result, he removed himself from diplomatic issues even though the atmosphere was the most propitious for achieving Choiseul's goals. Therefore, the dragoman of the French embassy took upon himself the leading role in encouraging the war party in the Ottoman government. Demir, p. 289.

¹⁴¹⁴ Demir, pp. 274-278.

Catherine II was chiefly responsible for imposing unrealistic demands on the Poles because defense of Orthodox communities became the foundation of her public image both at home and abroad. Otherwise, neither her Prussian ally, nor her own ambassador in Warsaw, Nikolai Repnin, believed in the viability of achieving her objectives without major upheaval and bloodshed.¹⁴¹⁵ Repnin tried to fulfill his duties by adroit political maneuvering: he began to play off Poniatowski against his opponents because Poniatowski resented St. Petersburg for not allowing him and his supporters to institute fundamental reforms in Poland with the purpose of strengthening the Polish state. But Repnin was likewise not ready to satisfy the opposition's desire to remove Poniatowski completely. The convoluted policy could not but result in an open conflict.

As a result of complications in Poland, in late October/early November 1766 Panin prohibited Obreskov from leaving Constantinople. At first, after having learned by late summer of the Porte's recognition of Stanislaw August, Panin indeed thought that Obreskov would have an opportunity to take a vacation to improve his suffering health. But upon learning of unexpected intrigues in Poland Panin regretted to say that he needed Obreskov to remain in Constantinople because of his knowledge, experience, skill, and other excellent qualities. Panin hoped that Obreskov would "find healing in his loyalty to the empress and in his own glory, which he had throughout his residency earned due to his skill, diligence, and noble behavior in all circumstances."¹⁴¹⁶

Indeed, since 1767 the Porte's displeasure and opposition were becoming more apparent due to the negative propaganda of France, Austria, and the Crimean khan against Russian

¹⁴¹⁵ Barbara Skinner provides a very useful account of the dissident crisis of the 1760s: Barbara Skinner, *The Western front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox conflict in eighteenth-century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), pp. 117-129. Oksana Mykhed highlights Repnin's original opposition to the forcing of the dissident question. He believed that the aims of the Russian government had to be pursued more gradually and tactfully. Mykhed, pp. 148-149.

¹⁴¹⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 190.

intervention in Poland.¹⁴¹⁷ Indeed, even though different khans ruled Crimea in the last several years before the war, all of them engaged in anti-Russian intrigues. Obreskov tried to counter the negative rumors by emphasizing that the renewed presence of Russian troops in Poland was legal: they were defending Polish independence and peace. Obreskov tried to explain how important the Orthodox issue was for Russia.¹⁴¹⁸

In early 1767 Panin praised Obreskov's foresight in taking actions over the previous fall that were in line with the desires of the Russian government, even though Obreskov did not know about these desires concretely until he received later orders. Panin stressed that despite challenges the Russian empress could not abandon the dissident cause and was resolved to take radical measures for its solution. Panin informed Obreskov that Russia planned to create a dissident confederation by late February and introduce its troops into Poland in order to gather an extraordinary *sejm*, which would have to resolve internal infighting in Poland and fix the Polish form of government. Panin stressed that Obreskov's knowledge and experience were essential in explaining to the Porte the purpose of Russian actions in Poland so as to prevent the Porte, likely incited against Russia by Paris, Vienna, and Warsaw, from voicing any protests. Even if Austria decided to make military demonstrations on its border with Poland, Catherine would remain unfazed, but Obreskov would have to convince the Porte not to meddle in the conflict of its two large neighbors and to let them exhaust each other, which would be to the Porte's own benefit. As usual, Panin authorized Obreskov to make judicious use of bribes. And, finally, Panin pointed out to Obreskov that he had to oppose rumors that Russia was inciting a religious war in Poland. Firstly, Russia was still in support of the dominant right of Catholicism in Poland. And, after all, the rights demanded for the dissidents—participation in *sejms* and appointment to government

¹⁴¹⁷ Demir, pp. 278-279.

¹⁴¹⁸ Demir, p. 280.

positions—would never undermine the strength of Catholicism, which managed to grow dominant despite initially comprising less than half of the republic’s population and to such an extent that dissidents had the only freedom—to breathe the same air—while their bodies and properties depended wholly on the Catholics.¹⁴¹⁹

In spring 1767 Obreskov confirmed St. Petersburg’s fears that Poniatowski was looking for help in Constantinople. Through the Crimean khan as the intermediary Poniatowski encouraged the Porte to get involved in Polish affairs.¹⁴²⁰ However, on June 20/31, 1767 Obreskov wrote to Repnin that “Here, the affairs of our court are in such a pleasant state as one could wish for.” The Porte recommended to the new khan, Maksud Giray, to observe friendship with Russia. On August 21/September 1 Obreskov confirmed that the Porte’s friendly sentiments towards Russia were “enduringly firm.” On the other hand, the position of the French was problematic. As a side note, Obreskov mentioned that he had been suffering from poor health.¹⁴²¹ Most likely, he was thereby excusing his long silence between June 20 and August 21.

The relative quiet of the years 1766-1767 in Russo-Ottoman relations was evidenced by long breaks in Panin’s responses to Obreskov’s letters. Thus, both in 1766 and 1767 Panin did not write anything to Obreskov for half a year—between February/March and August,—despite having received—in both years—six different reports from Obreskov.¹⁴²² In August 1766 Panin expressed hope that the friendly welcome that the Porte had finally extended to Aleksandrowicz would translate into the Ottoman recognition of the Polish king.¹⁴²³ Similarly, in late

¹⁴¹⁹ 90.1.542.1766-1767, LL. 58-72ob., and *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, pp. 276-284.

¹⁴²⁰ Kudriavtsev, p. 349.

¹⁴²¹ 90.1.564.1767. Peregiska rezidenta A.M. Obrezkova s poslannikom v Varshave kniazem Repninym o Konstantinopol’skikh i Varshavskikh dvorakh. S prilozheniiami. Chast’ dokumentov shifrovana. Imeiutsia dokumenty na frantsuzskom iazyke, LL. 28-29, 30-31.

¹⁴²² *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, pp. 58, 447.

¹⁴²³ He also informed Obreskov in confidence about the Russian government’s measures to ensure the favorable outcome of the upcoming Polish *sejm*. In this connection, it was important for Obreskov to find out more about

August/early September 1767 Panin wrote to Obreskov only to praise him for his “reasonable and sufficient efforts to keep the Porte calm.”¹⁴²⁴

Obreskov’s Blunder

But precisely at this moment the French were mobilizing themselves in an effort to involve the Porte against Russia. In particular, Choiseul dispatched Baron de Tott to Crimea to encourage tensions at the Russo-Ottoman border. On August 29/September 9, 1767 Reprin informed Obreskov that Baron Tott, the French officer whose wife lived in Constantinople, was visiting Warsaw, where he was collecting all the confused rumors, most likely in order to lead anti-Russian propaganda on the Bosphorus, where he was planning to travel next. Obreskov wrote back to Reprin on October 6/17 that he knew Tott quite well. Obreskov had intelligence that Tott stopped in Jassy in preparation for a trip to Crimea, where he would likely try to rouse the khan against Russia. Obreskov also informed his colleague that the Ottoman government praised Reprin for not sending a military company to the area near the Turkish border fortress of Hotin. The Porte was concerned that even a small number of Russian soldiers would cause great concern among local Ottoman subjects and the Porte would have to send troops to the area as well.¹⁴²⁵

On October 3/14 Reprin confirmed that Tott had left Warsaw and was travelling through Hotin to Crimea. Tott was spreading rumors that the Russian court was in agreement with the Polish king and wanted to increase monarchical power in Poland. “He has gone mad, for we

Boskamp, because he could intrigue against the Prussian envoy in Constantinople and, in general, “Anything can be expected from a Hungarian vagabond, besides he had already been implicated in that craft.” *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 58.

¹⁴²⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 447.

¹⁴²⁵ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 12, 32-32ob.

stand for the ancient freedom, as do all neighbors of Poland, including the Porte,” wrote Repnin. He also shared equally disturbing news that the Wallachian hospodar had been bribed by Tott and dispatched his spies to Poland. Repnin also doubted that de Laroche—the emissary of the Moldavian hospodar in Warsaw—being French by birth, would be helpful to Russia.¹⁴²⁶

In addition, Repnin warned Obreskov that the Bishop of Kamenets Count Krasinski was very friendly with the Bishop of Cracow and was also in close contact with the Pasha of Hotin, due to them being very close neighbors. Therefore, it was to be expected that the Bishop of Kamenets would make false anti-Russian claims to the pasha. Repnin encouraged Obreskov to pay particular attention to news coming from Hotin to the Porte. Repnin did not fully believe that the Pasha of Hotin could or wanted to cause a break with Russia, but just in case Repnin ordered all Russian troops not to approach the Turkish border by more than twelve miles. Repnin put faith in Obreskov’s assurances that the Porte had peaceful and friendly plans in relation to Russia. Consequently, Repnin did not believe rumors that the Porte sent 15,000 troops to Hotin and 40,000 to Jassy.¹⁴²⁷ However, Repnin hoped to hear the latest information from Obreskov.

The news coming from Obreskov was indeed increasingly unsettling. He wrote on October 22/November 2 that anti-Russian agents brought alarming, exaggerated news to the Porte related to the dispatch of a Russian military company of 500 soldiers to Podolia. The anti-Russian propaganda inflated the number of soldiers by a factor of six and maintained that Russian troops had siege artillery and bombs. In particular, the false information was coming from the Moldavian emissary in Warsaw de Laroche and was confirmed by the “staunch villains”: Kiev *Wojewoda* Count Potocki, Archbishop of Cracow Soltyk, and Bishop of

¹⁴²⁶ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 17-17ob. Obreskov received the August 29 letter on September 24.

¹⁴²⁷ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 17ob., 21-21ob.

Kamenets-Podolskii Krasinski. Finally, Obreskov wrote that the Polish opposition demanded the Porte's attention, but unsuccessfully. He then crossed out the last sentence.¹⁴²⁸

Instead, Obreskov detailed the nature of the appeals made by the Polish opposition to its Ottoman neighbor. The Poles complained of Russian oppression of Poland and "in the most servile manner" asked the Porte to order the Crimean khan to save Poland from complete destruction. Members of the Ottoman government reacted with great indignation, but Obreskov managed to counter the negative propaganda with a note that he claimed convinced the Porte to keep its policy of not interfering in Polish affairs. "But if the latter do not get resolved soon I cannot promise that I will be able to keep the Porte in its indifference, especially if the troops of Her Imperial Majesty appear near the borders of the Porte in however small quantities. I request not to allow [the troops] approach the borders without the most urgent need."¹⁴²⁹

As for Tott, Obreskov informed Repnin that Versailles had sent him to Warsaw to assure the Poles of France's strong support. Tott had to collect news in Poland that accorded with French interests, after which Tott would go to Crimea, where he would prove to the khan that the khan's and the Porte's interests require them to help the Poles as soon as possible to defend themselves against the brazen oppression of Russia. Obreskov assured Repnin that this was not dangerous because he knew that the Porte had good intentions towards Russia and the khan depended on the Porte. However, he added a caveat: the Russian troops should not approach Turkish borders. Thus, Obreskov hoped that all the French intrigues would only end in France's own embarrassment. Obreskov was encouraged in his belief in the Porte's peaceful intentions by the considerate and exceptional treatment he and his staff received after a fire consumed the Russian embassy residence in September. Namely, the Porte provided Obreskov with an

¹⁴²⁸ 90.1.564.1767, L. 33.

¹⁴²⁹ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 33ob.-34ob.

apartment that was especially quiet and took upon itself all the expenses. Neither the Dutch ambassador, nor the Naples envoy received similar compensation. Obreskov recommended Repnin to publish this fact in Polish press without identifying the above-mentioned two foreign ministers. Obreskov believed that this piece of information would demonstrate to the Polish opposition—“the rude/uncivil ones”—“how attentive the Porte is to our court and open eyes of those who think that they will be succeed in causing a rupture between it [Russia] and the Porte.”¹⁴³⁰

In response, on November 28/December 9, 1767 Repnin wrote a cyphered message to Obreskov. Repnin denied rumors that Russian troops had approached the Turkish border with siege artillery. On the contrary, neither the Cossacks in Podolia, nor any other Russian troops in Poland had siege artillery. As for one of the military companies that was closest to the Ottoman border, Repnin had ordered it not to come closer than fifteen miles. Now that Repnin learned of the Porte’s concerns, he promised to order that company to withdraw to Podolia and all other troops—to stay way from the Ottoman border. Repnin expressed hope that he would be able to finish matters in Poland in February of the following year. As for the dissident affair, Repnin reported with satisfaction that it was finalized according to Russian wishes and signed by the delegation of the Polish Republic.¹⁴³¹

The events were increasingly developing not to Russia’s advantage, however, especially after the Porte learned of the manner in which Russia pressured the Polish opposition during the *sejm*.¹⁴³² On November 20/December 1 Obreskov informed Repnin that Russia’s opponents, especially the French ambassador, managed to present the latest developments in Poland to the

¹⁴³⁰ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 33ob.-34ob.

¹⁴³¹ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 25-25ob.

¹⁴³² This Diet received the name “the Repnin *Sejm*” of October 5, 1767-February 27, 1768 in historiography because of the forceful measures that Repnin carried out to ensure that Catherine II’s program for Poland passed through the Polish parliament. On the Repnin Diet see Mykhed, pp. 144-159; Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, pp. 83-90.

Porte in the most odious and threatening light. As a result, Obreskov's note did not have the desired effect. The Porte was particularly indignant about Repnin's arrest of leading members of the Polish opposition. Vergennes, in the meantime, made another proposal to the Porte to conclude an alliance with France that would oblige both states to protect Poland. "Therefore I cannot say what will happen," admitted Obreskov.¹⁴³³

Yet, on December 5/16 Obreskov wrote to Repnin that the Porte continued to allow Russia freedom of action in Poland. "Consequently as a result of the Act [of the Diet on the election of Polish plenipotentiaries for negotiations with Repnin] from October 19 [you can] bring the affairs into order." Moreover, the French ambassador received another insult from the Porte when he failed to free—despite the letter of the capitulations—the French dragoman who had been employed at the Alexandria vice-consulate. Obreskov gloated over the fact that the French nation was being oppressed in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, which showed that Versailles's credit was not as high as the French liked to boast. In his last letter from 1767 Obreskov noted to Repnin that the Porte promised to send orders to the khan and to the Hotin Pasha, admonishing them to preserve peace.¹⁴³⁴

Obreskov's assessment was on the whole correct: the ruling Ottoman administration did not want to confront Russia over its actions in Poland. However, he seems to have been unable to envisage the looming ascendancy of the war party within the Ottoman government. Ottoman sources reveal that, as usual, the sultan was the first to become agitated by the events surrounding the *sejm* of 1767 and he began to seek ways to interfere in Polish affairs. After the Moldavian *voyvoda*—Gregorios Kallimaki (1767-1769)¹⁴³⁵—reported in October that Russian

¹⁴³³ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 35-36ob. Repnin's letter from October 3 did not reach Obreskov until November 12.

¹⁴³⁴ 90.1.564.1767, LL. 37-39.

¹⁴³⁵ Gregorios Kallimaki was the *voyvoda* of Moldavia in 1761-1764 and 1767-1769. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, p. 184.

troops entered Lithuania and applied military pressure in the region the Porte became concerned. The Ottoman officials divided into two camps. The grand vizier led the faction that wanted to wait out and defended the need for a peaceful policy. The ulema, however, declared that the extent of Russian interference in Polish affairs had exceeded any degree of patience and the Porte's patience henceforth would only hurt itself. New reports from the Crimean khan further stressed Russian application of force in Poland and relayed the Poles' calls for the Porte to help them.¹⁴³⁶

The grand vizier was shocked to learn that Russia had sent 40,000 troops into Poland. He did not know how to report this to the sultan and believed that the Porte now had to obstruct Russian intrigues in Poland as much as possible. First, the reis efendi, Yenişehirli Esseyid Osman Efendi,¹⁴³⁷ met with Obreskov on December 3/14, 1767. Their meeting lasted four hours. The reis efendi gave the Russian resident an ultimatum: the Porte would not interfere only if the Russian army left Poland in fifteen to twenty days and released all political prisoners. Obreskov accepted this demand and noted that the Porte's wishes were legitimate.¹⁴³⁸ After the secret conference with the reis efendi the resident reported to St. Petersburg that the reis efendi remained pleased with his explanations of Russian actions in Poland. Obreskov also pointed out that he agreed to the reis efendi's two conditions because he did not see anything unjust or unreasonable in them.¹⁴³⁹

As mentioned above, Obreskov also informed Repnin on December 5/16 that the Porte would allow Russia freedom of action in Poland. However, it is clear that both the promise Obreskov made to the reis efendi and the assurance he gave to Repnin that the Porte would not

¹⁴³⁶ Demir, p. 281.

¹⁴³⁷ November 5, 1767-September 25, 1768.

¹⁴³⁸ Demir, p. 282.

¹⁴³⁹ Soloviev, Book XIV, Vol. 27, p. 218.

contest Russian actions in Poland were leaps of faith. Obreskov's statements at the aforementioned conference became highly controversial and resulted in his loss of much political capital at the Porte in 1768. French diplomacy benefitted the most from Obreskov's promise because the continuing presence of Russian troops in Poland—regardless of reasons—on the surface tarnished Obreskov's reputation among the Ottoman public.

This was perhaps the lowest point of Obreskov's career. Back in St. Petersburg and in Warsaw, Catherine II, Panin, and Repnin were quite distraught to learn that Obreskov overstepped his bounds at such a critical moment. Catherine and Panin struggled to explain Obreskov's actions: they ascribed his mistake to his bad health and emotional weakness following a personal loss. Repnin wrote to Panin that he could not accept the Ottoman ultimatum. More importantly, Repnin was appalled not so much by the Ottoman demand but by the "timid acquiescence" of Obreskov, who was moreover satisfied with himself as if he had achieved success. Repnin confessed to Panin that Obreskov had made a promise that could be warranted only after losing several battles. Repnin could not imagine withdrawing all the troops when it was necessary to assure calm and order at the upcoming regular *sejm* in fall 1768 and the *sejmiks* that would precede it.¹⁴⁴⁰

Panin replied to Repnin that he too was disappointed to learn that Obreskov "had acted with excessive and inappropriate pliability in his promises to the Porte. I think, and apparently correctly, that the reason lies in his poor health, which did not allow him to preserve in such an important moment the necessary prudence, which is otherwise characteristic of him; but now when the deed is done and we cannot help him without creating further problems, we need, in order to solve the knot that had been tied by him so badly, to at least show outward intention to carry out his promise, for by smearing the Turkish ministry's lips, we can win time, which is the

¹⁴⁴⁰ Soloviev, Book XIV, Vol. 27, pp. 226-227.

best corrector in the world.” Unlike Repnin, Panin believed that it would be better to return the troops in May in any case. To satisfy the Porte Russia could also withdraw several completely unnecessary detachments in winter or at least to announce to the troops closest to the Ottoman border that they would leave right after the conclusion of the February *sejm*. Panin thought that the best solution was to withdraw the troops in May because even without Obreskov’s premature promise to the Porte Russia planned to remove its troops the following summer in order to avoid complaints and suspicions of Russia’s neighbors. Moreover, “It is not the time yet to have a break with the Porte.”¹⁴⁴¹

To Obreskov Panin wrote on January 31/February 11 in sympathetic terms that he would once again ask the empress to allow Obreskov to leave his post for Russia. Panin framed his message as a response to Obreskov’s continuing pleas to recall him and as a result of compassionate appreciation of the latest upheavals in Obreskov’s life. Namely, Panin noted the difficulties created by the September fire at the mission and expressed condolences concerning the “other of the two tragedies”—the death of Obreskov’s wife. Panin hoped that Obreskov would find strength to persevere in the face of this tragedy. Then Panin turned to the topic of Obreskov’s promise to the reis efendi. He regretted that Obreskov had promised to the Porte so prematurely and on his initiative that Russian troops would withdraw in February and that Russia would release the arrested Polish magnates after the upcoming *sejm*. There was no chance to fulfill these promises so quickly without hurting the empire’s interests. Moreover, the *sejm* might not even end in February. In order to defend Russian actions at the Porte and preserve the Porte’s trust in Obreskov, Panin had ordered Repnin to make actions that could deceive the Porte into believing that Russia would fulfill its promise. Panin hoped that the Porte would understand that Russia first had to make sure that the Polish affairs were completely settled. The other excuse

¹⁴⁴¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 120.

was that the Polish climate did not allow for easy withdrawal until April. Obreskov had to explain to the Porte the value of Russia's writing the *liberum veto* into official Polish law, while making cardinal laws not subject to *liberum veto*, but being under Russian guarantee, for which all Polish neighbors had to thank Russia. As for the arrested Polish magnates, however, it would not be possible to free them until August, when the ordinary *sejm* was scheduled to take place, for they could cause trouble in advance. Obreskov had to assure the Porte that Russia was not following any ulterior motive in Poland but strove to guarantee that Poland would always be weak and thus non-threatening to its neighbors.¹⁴⁴²

The February *Sejm* ended to Russia's satisfaction but St. Petersburg had to confront a widespread rebellion of the Polish opposition that began in the Podolian town of Bar in February.¹⁴⁴³ Catherine II was extremely irritated by the Confederation of Bar. In a letter to Panin she quipped: "Here are the pleasant crusaders who call on the Turks to fight Christians." Catherine did not know whether the Turks would chose to open war on Russia or would merely ask for Russian satisfaction of their Polish protégés through a negotiation. Both options promised troubles, but Catherine suspected that the Porte would choose the second route. It was critical, the empress stressed to Panin, that the Bar Confederation had to be put down as soon as possible to avoid complications.¹⁴⁴⁴ Naturally, Catherine was quite displeased that it was taking such a long time for Russian troops to disperse the Polish rebels. She also grew disappointed with Obreskov: "And I conclude from Obreskov's behavior that his physical and, therefore, moral strength is weakening. I am dying of fear lest he will ramble. Combine the promise he made to

¹⁴⁴² *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, pp. 27, 28.

¹⁴⁴³ Mykhed covers the Confederation of Bar with attention to Polish and other local sources of the Dnieper borderland, including original archival materials. Mykhed, pp. 159-177.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Catherine II, "Pis'ma i zapiski Imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu." *ChIOIDR* (1863), Book 2, Part 2, pp. 2-160, here p. 110.

the Reis Efendi with the lack of news with which he leaves us.”¹⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, St. Petersburg did not have any news from Obreskov about the Porte’s reaction to the conclusion of the *sejm* and the outbreak of the Confederation of Bar until June 1768.

In the meantime, the sultan was preparing to open a campaign against Russia—“to repay for the latter’s actions in Georgia and Poland”—already in late 1767. At the time Mustafa III was heard shouting in front of his German doctor, Ghobis, who cooperated with the Austrian internuncio Brognard, that he would have attacked Russia a long time ago, “if not for some rotten people from among the ulema” who had prevented the sultan from aggression thanks to Russian bribes. The sultan hoped that Austria would not oppose his plan since it was no longer Russia’s ally. But the sultan needed time to remove proponents of peace from his administration. The Confederation of Bar played into his hands. The Porte preferred not to respond to the confederates’ pleas and see if Russia would indeed withdraw its army from Poland, as promised by Obreskov,¹⁴⁴⁶ although some evidence points to the confederates’ belief that the Crimean Khan and the Porte had guaranteed their support to them in the form of Tatar cavalry and some other ways.¹⁴⁴⁷ But the Russian army was not leaving Poland and it even grew in size. In March the Porte demanded an explanation from Obreskov. Obreskov promised that the Russian army would leave Poland in a month at the latest. However, starting in April Russia decided to use organized force to quell the rebellion. Consequently, one part of the Ottoman establishment wanted to send troops to Bender, Ochakov, and Hotin. Another part insisted that the Porte had to talk to Obreskov once again. The latter won and the reis efendi met with Obreskov in May. The meeting lasted two hours and Osman Efendi used much firmer language. He announced that it

¹⁴⁴⁵ Catherine II, “Pis’ma i zapiski,” pp. 110-111.

¹⁴⁴⁶ The Ottomans advised the confederates, whom they regarded as tiresome *banditti*, to surrender. Jerzy Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697-1795* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 198.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Mykhed, p. 163.

was contrary to the Porte's honor and interests to tolerate such a protracted Russian interference in Poland. The reis efendi threatened that the sultan and his deputies sometimes had to do things they did not want to do because of the nature of Ottoman populace. But the reis efendi also said that the Porte would not help the confederates, whom he called crooks who would fall apart without external help. Since the confederates were subdued, the reis efendi stressed, Russia had no other reason to keep its troops in Poland.¹⁴⁴⁸

Obreskov replied that the Porte was incorrect in underestimating the confederates. The latter had announced that they denounced the Russo-Polish treaty. Therefore, they were in open rebellion against Russia and Russian troops had to continue their presence. The best way for the Porte to ensure that the Russian army withdrew was to assist it in catching the rebels by allowing Russian troops to enter Ottoman territory. But the reis efendi warned that although the Porte did not plan to interfere in the Russian pacification campaign, if the Russian troops only approached the Ottoman border the Porte would not react well to it. Still, Obreskov hoped to dispel the tensions by bribing the reis efendi to assist, among other things, in removing the French consul Baron de Tott from Crimea.¹⁴⁴⁹

Obreskov was acting on the latest orders from St. Petersburg, in which Panin made an utmost effort to emphasize common interests with the Porte. He instructed Obreskov to stress to the Ottoman government that Russia's achievements in Poland were directly advantageous to the

¹⁴⁴⁸ Demir, pp. 283-286.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Demir, pp. 286-288. In mid-April the reis efendi told Vergennes that the Porte did not need advice and that it knew well what serves its interests best. The reis efendi believed that it was more important for Russia to acquire Polish territory in Lithuania. The Porte, however, would oppose any Russian capture of Polish territory in the direction of Ottoman borders because that would spell a threat to the Ottoman Empire. The reis efendi, likewise, did not sympathize with the Catholics who protested the forced introduction of the dissidents' political rights. He also did not have any respect for the "blindly fanatical" confederates and admitted that the Russians were not as stupid as to withdraw their troops from Poland when the "best part of the [Polish] nation" supported the Russians and the new laws. Andrei Petrov, *Voyna Rossii s Turtsiei i Pol'skimi konfederatami s 1769-1774 god* (St. Petersburg: Tipografii A.V. Veimara, 1866), pp. 55-56. (on the basis of French archival sources as copied by the nineteenth-century Russian historian Alexander Turgenev). It is significant that following reports like these Versailles decided to replace Vergennes with St. Priest.

Porte. Namely, Russia had codified *liberum veto* as a cardinal law, which could not even be overturned by confederations, which commonly acted based on majority vote. This assured Poland's liberties, which its neighbors were interested in preserving. Thanks to Russia royal elections in Poland would also be maintained in their freedom—far from the danger of the crown becoming hereditary. Quite astoundingly, Panin overlooked Russia's participation in the Holy League of the late seventeenth century in order to point out that the Porte would benefit from the increased rights of the dissidents. Namely, he argued that Russia's success in protecting Polish dissidents meant that Poland's "all four religions would now be equal and prevent Poland from following its Catholic majority in joining external co-religionist causes, as had been the case with Jan Sobieski's participation in the relief of Vienna." Moreover, equal rights of all four religions would make Poland's government weaker, because Poland would not be as unanimous as it was during Catholic domination. The commonality of Russian and Ottoman interests, stressed Panin, lay in preserving Poland in its weak state. Panin warned Obreskov not to call the confederation the "Bar confederation" in communications with the Porte, but simply to refer to it as "a conspiracy of mutineers and haters of internal and external peace/quiet."

In another postscript, Panin also advised Obreskov to explain to the Porte that France could take advantage of the situation. In fact, it was quite possible that France stood behind the Polish disturbances, which it could have caused in order to turn to Russia's disadvantage the promise that Obreskov had made to the reis efendi regarding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Poland in February. Poles were probably counting that they would be safe near the Ottoman border and there were news that the confederates were spreading false assuring letters of the Porte and the Crimean Khan among Poles. It was clear that the French emissary Baron de Tott had encouraged the confederation's mutiny. Therefore, Obreskov had to repeat that presence of

French consuls in Crimea hurt Russo-Ottoman friendship. Russia expected that the Porte would “remove this stone from their relationship as a sign of sincere favorable disposition.” Moreover, Russia expected the Porte to abstain from any harmful actions, similar to its recent demand to declare a promise that Russian troops would withdraw, as this had become the cause of difficulties in Poland.¹⁴⁵⁰

The Balta/Galta Incident

It appears that the Porte’s lack of desire to support the confederates and Panin’s and Obreskov’s emphasis on friendly mutual relations and shared objectives allowed for dispersion of tensions for the next several months. But the Balta events served as the final blow to Obreskov’s efforts to maintain peace. The Balta incident was nothing more than a border clash between irregular Zaporozhian Cossacks and Ukrainian *haidamaks*—the rebels of the famous 1768 *Koliivshchyna*¹⁴⁵¹—and the Turkish (or Tatar) garrison of the town of Galta that lay across from Balta on the River Kodyma. Although the clashes were significant enough to cause a war, historians have not described them in a consistent manner. Sergei Soloviev has provided the most detailed account in his multi-volume history of Russia, as well as in his more specific study of the “fall of Poland.”¹⁴⁵² Soloviev and historians who followed his account correctly speak of two towns—Balta and Galta—that saw violent clashes. Indeed, given the fact that the Ottoman government and public was most enraged by ostensible massacre of Muslims within the Ottoman

¹⁴⁵⁰ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 60.

¹⁴⁵¹ Skinner, pp. 129-134, and Mykhed, pp. 177-196, 199.

¹⁴⁵² See Soloviev, *Istoriia Rossii*, Book XIV, Vol. 27, pp. 242-252. Also Soloviev, *Istoriia padeniia Pol'shi* (Moscow: Tipografiia Gracheva i Komp., 1863), pp. 85-87.

border, it would have been more appropriate to call the events a “Galta” incident. Moreover, the attacks also affected the town of Dubossary.

The significance of these cross-border clashes lies in the fact that the Tatar *voyvoda* of Galta exaggerated the number of deaths on the Turkish side and misrepresented the perpetrators as official Russian troops in pursuit of the Polish confederates. As a result, the Constantinople public became enraged against what appeared to be Russian brutality towards Muslims and continuous oppression of the Poles. In reality, the Cossacks and the *haidamaks*—Panin called them “a *haidamak* gang with our Zaporozhians”¹⁴⁵³—did not cross the Ottoman border until the Galta garrison attacked them first. All the Ukrainians wanted to do was to plunder and kill the rich merchants of Balta, especially the Jews, as well as its other non-Orthodox residents. It was simply a local manifestation of the bloody anti-Catholic/Uniate/Jewish rebellion that was consuming Polish Ukraine at the time, which became the largest uprising in the Ukrainian lands in the eighteenth century. The Polish confederates entered the scene only towards the end, when they began to fight the Cossacks and *haidamaks* and destroy the few remaining Orthodox inhabitants of Balta. But the reasons behind Turkish/Tatar actions are more uncertain. Supposedly, they crossed the border with the Jews who had managed to flee Balta in time and now wanted to avenge the deaths of their brethren. However, the sudden protective urge of the Tatar border commander seems best explained by the theory that the French consul in Crimea Baron de Tott managed to fulfill his mission by provoking a border incident that could be used to fan the flames of increasing anger against Russia among Constantinople crowds. In this task, Tott received help from a close associate of the deposed Crimean khan, Kırım Giray,—the Galta *voyvoda* Yakub Ağa, as well as possibly, the Polish confederates.¹⁴⁵⁴

¹⁴⁵³ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 181.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Various authors have implicated Tott in the events. Some authors also mention the role of the Polish rebels in

This version of events is the most likely. The Russian government itself concluded that Tott stood behind the incident. In fact, when Obreskov came to see the grand vizier for the last time—that is right before he was imprisoned in Yedikule—he brought with him the latest evidence of Tott’s intrigues against Russia, as evidenced from Tott’s personal correspondence with Choiseul, which the Russian government managed to intercept. Obreskov did not have a chance to use this evidence, however, because the audience swiftly became confrontational and the grand vizier was not willing to listen to the resident.¹⁴⁵⁵

Latest research in Ottoman sources also reveals that Kırım Giray, Yakub Ağa, and Tott successfully organized and manipulated the border incident with the purpose of pushing the Porte to open war on Russia. Thus, Demir uncovered the writings on this subject of Şemdanizade Efendi, a prominent Ottoman cleric who was the chief judge of Constantinople at the time of these events and who personally knew the *şeyhülislam*, various Crimean khans, and other key personalities. Şemdanizade claimed that Kırım Giray knew that the only way for him to regain the khanship was through inciting war against Russia. For this purpose he had appointed his close associate, Yakub Ağa, to the governorship of the border area. Then, in 1768, Kırım Giray ordered Yakub to incite a disorder that would lead to a war. As a result, Yakub began to incite the Russians to attacks the Balta Jews. When the Cossacks and *haidamaks* indeed massacred Balta residents, Baron de Tott was already in the area and encouraged the Tatars to cross into Balta to attack the Russian side.¹⁴⁵⁶

drawing the Russian military groups towards the border at Balta. Demir, p. 290; Rifkat Iusupov, “Rech’ Pospolitaia i Russko-Turetskie voiny vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Moscow State University, 1979), p. 73. Topaktaş writes that Yakub Ağa represented the interests of the Bar Confederation. Topaktaş, *Osmanlı-Lehistan diplomatik ilişkileri*, p. 27. Conspicuously, Tott himself did not say anything about the incident in his memoirs. Demir, p. 290.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Obreskov received the intercepted letters of Baron de Tott only five days before the fateful audience. Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Demir, pp. 289-290.

This account fits well with the Russian version of events, even though Demir cautions that Şemdanizade was a member of the Ottoman peace party and therefore his account was not entirely impartial.¹⁴⁵⁷ Most importantly, the identity of Yakub Ağa points to the possibility of his involvement in such an intrigue. Very little is known about him, but judging by references to him in Ottoman sources as Lipka Yakub Ağa, and by those in Russian sources as Iakub Galek, or Agalek,¹⁴⁵⁸ he was a Lipka Tatar with a complex loyalty system reflecting his cross-border allegiances.¹⁴⁵⁹ Thus, already in 1766 Russian sources mentioned the Dubossary *voyvoda* Yakub

¹⁴⁵⁷ Demir also points out that in view of the lack of alternative sources, Şemdanizade's account cannot be named the most reliable. The only other contemporary account of the events, by the scribe of the Financial Department (*Maliye Kalemi*) Zakeriyazade Mehemed Said Efendi, sounded more anecdotal. Namely, Zakeriyazade reported that the original spark for the border clashes occurred at a Balta tavern when Russian soldiers came in and started a fight with several janissaries who were calmly enjoying their time. The fight grew in scope and Muslims attacked the Russian soldiers. The Russians opened fire in return and as a result many casualties occurred on each side. Demir, p. 290.

¹⁴⁵⁸ "Leh" means "Polish" in Turkish, so the appellation Agalek—as reported in Russian sources most probably based on how he was known at the Crimean court—very likely pointed to Yakub Ağa's roots among the Lipka Tatars of the Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Lipki/Lipka Tatars are somewhat enigmatic and their name and history—controversial. For the present discussion, it is important that their identities and loyalties historically were split between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where many Tatars received noble status, became hereditary landowners, and bravely fought for the republic in its numerous wars with outside invaders, and the Ottoman Empire, to whose sultan they looked as their religious-political authority in view of his role as the protector of the Muslim Holy Places. See Michael Polczynski, "Seljuks on the Baltic: Polish-Lithuanian Muslim Pilgrims in the Court of Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I," *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol. 19 (2015), pp. 409-437. The classical version of the history of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars and the origin of their name is in Z. Abrahamowicz and J. Reychmann, "Lipka," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Leiden, 1986), 765-767. Still, the use of the name "Lipki/Lipka/Lubka/Lupka," allegedly originating in the Crimean Tatar language and denoting "Lithuanian Tatars," has been contested by historians over the last couple of centuries. For example, see discussion in Harry Norris, *Islam in the Baltic: Europe's Early Muslim Community* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), pp. 196-199.

Although Abrahamowicz and Reychmann cite the work of the nineteenth-century Russian Orientalist Vasili Smirnov in their article, they do not pay attention to his criticism of the accepted view of the origins of the name "Lipka." It appears that Smirnov did not have sufficient information and, moreover, was primarily preoccupied with identifying the "Lipki Tatars" of the immediate Polish-Ottoman-Crimean border region. Smirnov encountered the term when he was studying the eighteenth-century chronicle of an Ottoman official, Mustafa Kesbi. The latter referred to them as "Lipka, Lipkalar" and described them as Tatar villagers from tribes subject to the rule of the Crimean Khan who were dissatisfied with the khan's rule and migrated into Russian territory, where they became subjects of the Russian government. The latter made sure to settle Russians in the towns where Lipka Tatars lived so that subsequent generations of Tatars would leave their culture behind. As a result, these Tatars became only nominal Muslims and adopted Russian customs. "They are like Russians among Russians and like Muslims among Muslims. It is these [Tatars] that are called Lipka." Smirnov found this explanation rudimentary. However, other descriptions were similarly unsatisfactory to him. Smirnov concluded that the so-called Lipka Tatars had since disappeared; therefore, in historical sources their identification was closely connected—also still tentatively—to the geographical area that they inhabited (between 25-27 degrees longitude and 48-49 latitude). Some sources claimed that Lipka Tatars had historically inhabited southern Bessarabia, and Lipka was a derivative of Livka—"litovskie"—Lithuanian, because the early fifteenth-century Lithuanian ruler Vytautas had pushed Lithuanian Tatars out of

Ağa who was residing in Bahçesaray with the khan's permission and who was obviously fluent in Russian because he conversed one-on-one with a Russian officer who visited Crimea in early 1766 to negotiate reopening of the consulate. Indeed, Yakub Ağa had earlier served as Kırım Giray's translator and was the chief secret informant whom the Russian consul in Crimea Nikiforov managed to recruit there before his recall.¹⁴⁶⁰

Already by spring 1766, however, the Russian government received intelligence pointing to Yakub Ağa's unreliability. Namely, a new secret agent of the Russians in Ochakov—scribe and translator of the Ochakov Pasha, Iurii Grigorov “of Greek origin, born in Bahçesaray,”¹⁴⁶¹—alerted them about his suspicions concerning Yakub Ağa. In fact, Grigorov did not know that Yakub Ağa was cooperating with the Russians, but he wanted to warn them not to trust him because he had “sly and devious motivations.” As a result of this information, the Kiev ober-

southern Podolia and Western region. However, Smirnov stated that identification of Lipka Tatars with Lithuanian Tatars was incorrect, and everything else was baseless conjecture. Historical sources from 1672—Ottoman capture of Kamenets-Podolskii,—were especially rich with mentions of Lipka Tatars. The latter were subjects of Poland, but appealed to the Crimean Khan for a permission to settle in Budjak (Bessarabia). However, at the time, the Ottoman governor of Silistra and the Porte itself declined the petition. Some Lipka Tatars inevitably joined the Ottoman side during the war, however, and the peace treaty of Buczacz prescribed amnesty for them and a right to resettle in Ottoman territory. Vasilii Smirnov, *Sbornik nekotorykh vazhnykh izvestii i ofitsial'nykh dokumentov kasatel'no Turtsii, Rossii i Kryma* (St. Petersburg, 1881), pp. XXXVI-XLI. The geographical area denoted in exact coordinates—from Ricci Zannoni's 1772 map—coincides with the then Ottoman-Polish border area, including Hotin and Kamianets-Podolskii, with most of the area lying west of these towns.

According to Obreskov's report from 1758, “Libki”/Lipka Tatars from Poland were seeking to relocate to the Ottoman Empire (a place “Lipkania” near Soroki, which lies almost directly north of Balta), but the Porte was not responsive. Obreskov's secret agent pointed out that the Porte's response went contrary to its decision to provide refuge to several thousands of Persians in Kars. 90.1.375.1756, LL. 202-202ob., 209ob. Judging on the basis of Smirnov's/Zannoni's geographical placement, therefore, the Lipki Tatars were interested in migrating slightly east of where they were located at the time. This also coincides with their earlier requests to migrate to Budjak. Indeed, the migration of the Lipka Tatars into Ottoman territory continued in bouts. For example, in 1765-1766 about 2,000 Lipka Tatar households left the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in order to settle in Ottoman border villages in the Hotin area. “Lehistan'dan Hotin'e Hicret Eden Müslüman Lipka Taifesinden Hotin'de Askeri Birlikler Oluşturulması, 02.02.1769,” in Numan Yekeler, ed., *Yoldaki elçi: Osmanlı'dan günümüze Türk-Leh ilişkileri = Posel W Drodze: Stosunki Turecko-Polskie od czasów Osmańskich do dnia dzisiejszego* (Istanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2014), pp. 248-251, here p. 249.

¹⁴⁶⁰ As of late 1765, Nikiforov maintained secret correspondence with this agent from Kiev. It is not entirely clear from the document, however, if this agent was the same Yakub Ağa or another Yakub—a Christian translator of the khan named Iakov, who was mentioned as a different person in early 1766. *SIRIO*, Vol. 57, pp. 365, 481-484. However, subsequent evidence points to the fact that it was the *voyvoda* Yakub who had been the Russian secret agent. See *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 5. Also Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁶¹ Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 164.

commandant Iakov Elchaninov recommended to St. Petersburg to put more trust in Grigorov's intelligence. Elchaninov argued that Yakub was a native Turk who went against his own religion by serving the Russians. Therefore, Russia could not expect from Yakub the same loyalty and diligence that could be offered by a co-religionist such as Grigorov.¹⁴⁶²

The Russian government, namely the secret department of the Kiev provincial chancellery, did not break ties with Yakub Ağa but became more cautious in dealing with him. Information coming from Yakub Ağa was noticeably doubtful and scarce, while the *voyvoda* insisted on receiving the considerable pension: in August 1768 he forcefully collected the usual amount from one Russian merchant and instructed the latter to seek compensation with Nikiforov. Already in summer 1767 the Russians knew that Baron de Tott was trying to recruit Yakub Ağa with the help of lavish gifts. Tott's own scribe, Iakov Popovich, finally confirmed his superior's secret cooperation with Yakub Ağa, and with Iakov's help the Russian government procured copies of Tott's correspondence with Choiseul, in which the French consul revealed that Yakub Ağa had grossly exaggerated Muslim casualties at Balta and Dubossary: instead of a few dozen of dead and wounded, Yakub Ağa reported almost two thousand casualties.¹⁴⁶³ Reportedly, the Crimean khan at the time, Maksud Giray, wanted to execute Yakub Ağa for the false report but Tott protected his collaborator.¹⁴⁶⁴

Numerous Border Tensions as a Result of the Bar Confederation

Ironically, the Balta incident was not very different from the participation of Lipka Tatars in the Bar Confederation in spring 1768. Namely, in May 1768 St. Petersburg learned that up to

¹⁴⁶² *SIRIO*, Vol. 67, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶³ Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, pp. 38-39, 155-156.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, pp. 98-99; Iusupov, pp. 73-74.

500 Lipka Tatars were among the confederates. Repnin complained to the Moldavian and Wallachian emissaries in Warsaw that this fact contradicted the Russo-Ottoman peace and friendship, but he believed that the Porte probably did not know about it and expressed confidence that the Ottoman government would preclude similar incidents in the future. Panin wondered if the Lipka Tatars were secretly encouraged to join the Bar confederates by the khan, in turn encouraged by Baron de Tott, since he thought it unlikely that the Porte had sanctioned their participation. On the other hand, Panin thought that it was impossible for the Porte not to be aware of the Bar Confederation and the participation of the Lipki Tatars in it. Moreover, Panin was concerned that the Polish rebels must have appealed to the Porte for protection and Russia's enemies could have procured Porte's agreement to support the Polish rebels. Therefore, Panin asked Obreskov to demand from the Porte to call back the Lipka Tatars and make sure that no other Ottoman subjects get involved in the Polish conflict.¹⁴⁶⁵ Characteristically of Russia's desire to avoid confrontation, however, St. Petersburg did not want to exaggerate the incident. As proof of Russia's friendship, Repnin was ordered to ensure medical treatment of the caught Lipka Tatar Ahmed Muha. Repnin then had to send him—and any other Ottoman subjects caught by the Russians from among the rebels—to the Pasha of Hotin. Still, Russia hoped that the Porte would order the Hotin Pasha to execute Ahmed Muha publicly on the Polish border to serve as an example to others. This would also prove that the Porte did not take any part in the Bar Confederation.¹⁴⁶⁶

Just as in the Balta incident, inhabitants of the border region acted on their own initiative and as a result increased tensions between the two governments. However, while Russia was

¹⁴⁶⁵ It is evident that Panin was referring to the Lipka Tatars inhabiting Ottoman territory, as explained above, in fn. 458. Indeed, according to some sources, in March 1768 the “confederates already knew that they would be able to use 6,000 Tartar cavalry. In addition, 4,000 Tartar soldiers were sent to them and some help from the Turkish side was guaranteed.” Mykhed, p. 163. As we can see, however, the reported number of the Tatars aiding the confederates was only 500.

¹⁴⁶⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 83.

seriously interested in de-escalating tensions, the situation in the Ottoman capital by late summer was conducive to a declaration of war. Indeed, Choiseul skillfully combined intrigues in Crimea with intrigues in Constantinople. In July 1768, for example, Vergennes received 3,000,000 livres to incite public antagonism towards Russia.¹⁴⁶⁷ The French also suggested to the Polish confederates to offer the sultan cession of Podolia to the Ottoman Empire if he declared war against Russia.¹⁴⁶⁸ But the Russian government was completely committed to staving off the potential conflict with the Ottomans.

Panin felt increasingly unnerved both because the Polish confederates were fleeing into Ottoman territory and because military upheaval in the border region interrupted regular postal correspondence. For example, St. Petersburg did not hear anything from Obreskov for approximately three months—from March to June 1768. Already in April, however, St. Petersburg heard rumors from Hotin that the Porte had ordered to prepare the Hotin fortress for defense and promised to increase the garrison to 10,000 troops. Panin found this information disconcerting, although he did not quite believe it. But by early June Panin still had no news from Obreskov. Panin wrote that the court was worried that Obreskov's reports could have been captured by the Polish rebels, for the usual mail route lay through Podolia, which was the main site of the disorders. Therefore, Panin asked Obreskov to resend copies of all his reports since February, if he had sent any, through Warsaw, or through the Novorossiiskaia province and the fortress of St. Elizabeth.¹⁴⁶⁹

In the meantime, the fighting between Russian troops and Polish rebels was spilling over into Ottoman territory. Indeed, as early as February—already on the eve of the fateful *sejm*—

¹⁴⁶⁷ Sorel, p. 26. Sorel notes that Vergennes did not need to resort to using this money at all. Sorel, p. 28. Also, see Aksan, "Ottoman-French Relations 1739-1768," in S. Kunalalp, ed., *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History* (Istanbul, 1987), p. 56.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Iusupov, p. 74.

¹⁴⁶⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, pp. 83, 93.

Repin had to warn the Hotin Pasha that he would have to send a military command against the Kamenets-Podolskii provincial *sejmik* because the latter had disrespected officers sent by Repnin to communicate the ambassador's demands concerning dissidents. But members of the *sejmik* fled to Moldavia.¹⁴⁷⁰ Further, in May Repnin informed Catherine that the rebels defeated the Russian commander Dedushitskii's troops and Dedushitskii fled into Moldavia. However, the Polish rebel commander Potocki crossed the Turkish border and pursued Dedushitskii within Ottoman territory. Repnin felt that the situation was critical enough to warrant his temporary suspension as ambassador and assumption of military command over the Russian troops in the south of Poland, a suggestion that Catherine declined, not wanting to risk Repnin's person.¹⁴⁷¹ Somewhat later, Colonel Veisman with 400 troops made a surprise attack on Potocki's main Podolian stronghold, Podgaichi, capturing the town and completely scattering the confederates. However, Veisman's further actions were questionable. Namely, when Potocki crossed the Dniester into Ottoman territory, Veisman wrote a letter to the Moldavian hospodar, warning that "henceforth he would pursue his adversary anywhere he would find him, if the hospodar was not interested in preventing such incursions into Moldavia."¹⁴⁷²

Upon receiving news of the incident involving Veisman, St. Petersburg informed both the Russian ambassador in Warsaw, Repnin, and Obreskov that Veisman had acted irrationally and that his actions and words did not reflect the position of the Russian government. Thus, on June 9/20 Panin wrote to Repnin that he was surprised by Veisman's "strange and mindless action." Panin believed that Veisman did not come up with the idea of sending "scandalous letters" to the Moldavian hospodar and the Pasha of Hotin by himself. Most likely, "the brazen and superficial

¹⁴⁷⁰ According to conditions agreed upon with the Ottoman Empire, Russian troops could not approach the Ottoman border by more than fifteen *versts* (about 10 miles). Kamenets stood at a distance of 4 *versts* (approximately 2.7 miles) from the Ottoman border. Members of the Kamenets provincial *sejmik*, therefore, tried to take advantage of being protected from retribution by Russian troops. Petrov, p. 29.

¹⁴⁷¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 95.

¹⁴⁷² Petrov, pp. 51-52.

Boskamp” had drafted these letters, written “in a special comic-political style,” in languages that were unfamiliar to Veisman. However, this fact did not excuse Veisman from responsibility for the mistake, even if it did not lead to negative fallout. After all, the Russian government expressly warned Veisman not to engage into any confrontations with the Turks. Therefore, he should not have threatened chief Ottoman border commanders. Panin felt relatively helpless in the situation, noting that the only solution was to wait for the Porte’s reaction and hope that the Ottoman government would be convinced by Russia’s assurances that Veisman’s actions exceeded instructions from above. Panin, however, resolved to remind all other Russian commanders near the Turkish border that they had to avoid coming close to the border and entering into any correspondence with Turkish border commanders. At the same time, due to Panin’s belief that Veisman had not acted on purpose and in view of Veisman’s military achievements, the Russian government punished the commander only with removal from command, which was a sufficiently punitive measure for an officer. In a letter to Obreskov Panin similarly explained that Veisman’s letters were nothing but Boskamp’s fault. Boskamp happened to be in Veisman’s entourage when Polish rebels attacked Veisman’s troops. Panin instructed Obreskov to calm the Porte down by informing it that Veisman had been punished for his transgression.¹⁴⁷³

¹⁴⁷³ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, pp. 92-93. It should be noted, however, that Panin’s earlier order might have confused the Russian border commanders. Namely, several months earlier Panin had admitted to Obreskov that Russian troops might need to pursue the confederates near the Ottoman border, which would go against Obreskov’s earlier promise to the Porte that Russian troops would leave the area, but Panin assured Obreskov in confidentiality that he ordered Reprin not to stop in the face of any warnings from Ottoman border commanders in his pursuit of the confederates because the empress’s honor depended on defending all the achievements of Russia in Poland, and Russia was ready to choose one inconvenience over another, especially because one inconvenience [potential conflict with the Porte] was only potential and much less substantial. Panin described the Ottoman Empire as a state filled with excessive haughtiness and empty ambition, as well as ignorance, if it thought that it could prescribe laws to Russia according to its whims. Reprin was given all the freedom to decide to take necessary measures against the confederation in the border area and to use part—while withdrawing the rest—or all Russian troops there, but Reprin had instructions to make appropriate notifications to the Moldavian *voivoda*, the Pasha of Hotin, and the Crimean Khan about upcoming actions and the importance of reasons behind them, assuring these Ottoman border commanders that Russian troops would not touch the Ottoman border itself. Therefore, Panin highlighted to Obreskov that Russian

Veisman's message to the Moldavian hospodar was certainly incendiary and especially damaging to Obreskov's efforts to keep the Porte out of the conflict. Therefore, in response Obreskov wrote a personal letter to Veisman, admonishing him not to antagonize the Turkish side and to move away from Ottoman borders. We only have a copy of this letter and we do not know if it reached Veisman. The dating of the letter—June 2/13—shows that Obreskov learned of the incident earlier than St. Petersburg. In fact, the Porte informed him about it. The Ottoman government reported to Obreskov that Colonel Veisman in the course of a pursuit forced 4,000 Polish—“*Trembovskikh*”/Trembowla—rebels, led by the Lithuanian Cupbearer Potocki, to cross into the Moldavian principality. In turn, the Polish rebels disturbed so many Ottoman inhabitants during their flight that many Ottoman subjects had to leave behind their houses, property, and cattle and seek refuge in the mountains. The Porte also informed Obreskov of Veisman's letters to the Pasha of Hotin and the Moldavian hospodar, “in which you [Veisman] demanded, using quite inappropriate tone/style—unless there was some mistake in translation,—not to accept similar insurgents into the Porte's regions or not to let them out [when they want] to attack you [the Russians], otherwise threatening to pursue them anywhere they chose to hide.”¹⁴⁷⁴

Obreskov expressed dismay at learning of Veisman's letters, for he knew that Veisman had been tasked by the government to pursue the rebels to the very borders, but he could not understand why Veisman decided to address himself to the pasha and the hospodar in the way that he did. Obreskov reproached Veisman for meddling into what were solely Obreskov's

troops might have to stop their withdrawal from Poland, which had already begun and that Repnin would have—for lack of other means—to deploy his troops to Bar, which was very close to the Ottoman border. As soon as the disorders stopped, Panin promised to withdraw Russian troops not only from the border area with the Ottoman Empire, but also from Poland entirely. *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 60. Five days later, however, on March 31/April 11, 1768 Panin added that Russian troops could not cross Ottoman or Austrian borders under any pretext. If Turkish or Austrian troops crossed into Poland to oppose Russian troops, Russian commanders could oppose them in the same manner they exhibited, making a written or oral declaration of such necessity in advance. *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, p. 71.

¹⁴⁷⁴ 90.1.571.1768. Pis'mo (chernovik) rezidenta Obreskova polkovniku Veismanu o prekrashchenii presledovaniia vosstavshikh poliakov, dostigshikh predelov Moldavii, i otkhode ot turetskoi granitsy. June 2/13, 1768, LL. 2-3.

powers, for the Ottoman border commanders could not respond to Veisman without seeking the Porte's orders first. It was Obreskov's prerogative to communicate with the Porte. Moreover, Veisman's threats to follow the rebels anywhere, which thereby included Ottoman territory, only served to offend the Ottoman court, which was already irritated by the disturbances caused to its subjects and the onslaught of so many thousands of outsiders, which it had to provide for, whether or not it wanted to. Obreskov expressly stated that Veisman's letters and proclaimed intention to stay near the Ottoman border hurt his—the resident's—efforts to preserve peace between the two empires. Therefore, Obreskov asked Veisman to move seven to eight miles away from the border, in order to remove the excuse employed by fugitive rebels that they were not disturbing Ottoman subjects on purpose but out of extreme duress.¹⁴⁷⁵

Obreskov's handwriting in this letter was unusually sprawling—unlike in any of his numerous reports and letters—indicating that he wrote it in a state of extreme agitation and hurry. As we know, it was characteristic of Obreskov to take independent actions in situations that he felt were critical. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this instance Obreskov took it upon himself to prescribe course of action to a Russian military commander. For fear of losing critical time, Obreskov had to interfere into military matters without first receiving an approval from St. Petersburg: “And I am reporting to His Illustrious Highness Ambassador Prince Repnin as well as the court of Her Highest Imperial Majesty the fact that I am suggesting to you this withdrawal, hoping that you will carry out [my request]. And I hope that it [my suggestion] will not be disapproved [by the government].”¹⁴⁷⁶

Colonel Veisman's ultimatums to the Ottoman border commanders and other instances of Russian troops crossing the Ottoman border demonstrate that it was not the fact of violating the

¹⁴⁷⁵ 90.1.571.1768, LL. 3-4ob.

¹⁴⁷⁶ 90.1.571.1768, LL. 4ob.-5.

border that became the chief Ottoman complaint against Russia. The Balta/Galta incident carried greater significance: thanks to the exaggerated report of Yakub Ağa, the Ottomans were appalled by the attack of Russian troops against Ottoman civilian subjects. Still, minor violation of the border in June caused indignation at the Porte, which ordered its border authorities not to send the Polish rebels away and even help them if necessary.¹⁴⁷⁷

The Balta incident led to a heated reaction among the Ottoman public. The war party, headed by the sultan, clamored for war, while Constantinople and its suburbs became sites of massive public disorders and crimes. Of course, it did not help that the *hajdamaks* who plundered Balta and Galta boasted that they were Russian subjects on a mission from the Russian empress.¹⁴⁷⁸ The Ottoman public was additionally concerned because of news that large-size Russian regiments had been sighted before the Hotin fortress. As a result, the imperial Divan resolved to start military preparations. People claimed that the Porte would send 12,000 troops at first, and then another 20,000, but in reality the number of troops sent did not exceed 2,000.¹⁴⁷⁹

The Ottoman administration decided that the events did not warrant opening war on Russia. As first, the Porte did not believe Obreskov's assurances. The grand vizier and *şeyhülislam* Veliyüddin Efendi tried to collect more information through the former kadi of Constantinople, Damadzade Mehmed Murad Efendi, who was versed in conversations among foreign diplomats. Murad Efendi met with Obreskov in secret to find out more about Balta, but Obreskov provided the same information. The grand vizier and *şeyhülislam* also asked other foreign diplomats about the events and concluded that this was not a solid reason to start a war. The grand vizier contacted Obreskov through intermediaries and passed some information in secret. He wanted to convey to the resident that Ottoman border military activity did not in any

¹⁴⁷⁷ Demir, p. 288.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Mykhed, p. 192.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Demir, p. 289.

way mean that a war was planned against Russia. No more than 10,000 troops would be sent there. Moreover, the new Hotin pasha was a prudent person and his appointment was not to prepare for war but to contain aggression of the troops. In response, Obreskov assured the grand vizier that Repnin would remove Russian regiments from the immediate border area and that the Russian government would punish the perpetrators and deliver satisfaction to the Ottoman side. Obreskov also announced that he personally wrote to Russian border commanders to withdraw from the Ottoman border.¹⁴⁸⁰

But the Balta events and news of the Russian capture of Cracow on August 17 led to serious military preparations. Popular sentiment was the most important factor in driving the Porte to take an aggressive stance. By early August, foreign diplomats began to rumor that the Porte would attack Russia in spring 1769. Part of the Ottoman elites also believed that the Balta incident was a sign that Russia planned to attack Ottoman territory. Along with Hotin, preparations at Ochakov and Bender began in the first half of July and in late September the Porte increased the number of provisions and artillerymen at Hotin.¹⁴⁸¹

Russian Attempts to Avoid Conflict

As a result, even though communication channels between Obreskov and St. Petersburg were repaired, the depth of emotion and swiftness of subsequent Ottoman reactions worked against the resident. By the time Panin procured copies of Tott's correspondence with Choiseul and forwarded them to Obreskov—on August 11/22—Mustafa had already replaced his grand vizier on August 7. In his August letter, Panin regretted that he could not allow Obreskov to

¹⁴⁸⁰ Demir, pp. 290-291.

¹⁴⁸¹ However, already by August many problems erupted in border fortresses, such as disorders, inefficient repair work, and looting of bread-shops. Demir, pp. 291-294, 297-298.

return to Russia despite the resident's bad health because of the critical situation. Panin informed Obreskov that the Russian government could partially fulfill the Porte's ultimatum to remove Russian troops from the position of immediate proximity to the Ottoman border. Obreskov had accepted this ultimatum in order to prevent the Porte from sending 20,000-30,000 Tatars to the Polish border. However, Panin could not accept the reis efendi's main demand that in order for him to be able to contain the angry Ottoman public both Russian and Polish troops had to leave Podolia. Panin hoped that Obreskov would be able to calm the Ottoman government down and explain that Russian troops would not need to be stationed in Podolia if the Porte prevented the Polish rebels from leaving the Ottoman territory—where they were hiding—back for Poland. The Russian government was likewise concerned about news that Polish rebels were gathering forces—almost 3,000 men—in Ottoman Moldavia with French financial assistance. Panin wanted Obreskov to disprove French propaganda at the Porte, which accused Russia on planning to capture Podolia and Kamenets-Podolskii. Panin argued that the Russian Empire had no need to extend its territory at the expense of its neighbors because it was already extremely vast. Panin also admitted to Obreskov that the Porte's demand for Polish troops to leave Podolia was not only unreasonable but caused suspicions in St. Petersburg. If asked about this, Obreskov had to remind the Porte that Podolia was Polish territory.

Panin believed that the way to deal with the Porte was by combining softness with firmness. Russia did not want a war with the Ottoman Empire, but it was difficult to predict the Porte's reaction in view of its inconsistency. Panin envisioned that his arguments and proof of Tott's and "swindler" Yakub's intrigues might not be enough, so he also sent Obreskov a generous amount of 70,000 rubles for bribes. The chief goal of Obreskov was to give the Porte the opportunity to calm down its fanatic populace and back down from its rash decision to send

troops to the border. To prove continuing friendship towards Russia, the Porte would have to punish Yakub Ağa and send Tott away from Crimea.¹⁴⁸²

Around the same time, the Russian government also prepared an extensive exposition—it consisted of forty five double-sided pages—of the Polish issue from the beginning of Catherine II’s reign in order to highlight that Russian actions in Poland did not threaten Polish freedom and territory, as well as Ottoman interests, and that the new cardinal laws approved by the February 1768 *Sejm* were beneficial to the Porte.¹⁴⁸³ The report stressed that the goals of the Russian court with regard to Poland were not expansionist but consisted in preserving its ancient freedoms. The Russian government admitted to the Porte that its true motivation in Poland was in line with the Porte’s interests: namely, to preserve Polish internal disagreements so that Poland could not threaten any of its neighbors. The report underlined that, by contrast, Austrian and French interests in Poland contradicted those of the Porte.¹⁴⁸⁴ Next, the report explained why St. Petersburg inevitably had to oppose the new Polish king’s designs to abolish the *liberum veto* because it would have threatened Poland’s neighbors.¹⁴⁸⁵ The Russian empress succeeded in

¹⁴⁸² *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, pp. 138, 146; Demir, p. 291.

¹⁴⁸³ 89.8.2173.1767. *Zapiska o vzaimootnosheniakh Rossii i Turtsii s Pol’shei*. The document was dated incorrectly to 1767 in the archival catalogue. Judging by its contents, it was written already after the Balta incident.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Thus, the report accused the Saxon house of having decided a long time ago to acquire the Polish crown as hereditary, “similarly to how the Austrian house turned the Hungarian and Bohemian kingdoms into its hereditary possessions.” The report accused Austria of not heeding its true interests in relation to Poland and instead siding with the Saxon house because of Vienna’s excessive jealousy towards Prussia, which had already led it into a close alliance with the Bourbons. On the other hand, the report pointed out that France—unlike any of Poland’s neighbors—was not threatened by Poland or any possible changes in the form of Polish government. Instead, France was using Poland to spread its influence to all parts of Europe. 89.8.2173.1767, LL. 2ob.-7.

¹⁴⁸⁵ “The new Piast king began to forget about the general good” and attempted to limit *liberum veto*. The Russian government acknowledged that the Polish king’s intentions were commendable—namely, he aimed at improving internal administration of Poland—but “we [Russia] and Poland’s neighbors do not see absolutely any use from it, and it is not for this reason that we decided to elect a Piast king, but only in order to remove Poland from uninterrupted succession of the princes of the Saxon house and thereby free it from any external dependence.” Therefore, Russia came out against all the new endeavors of the new king and successfully prevented any change to the principle of *liberum veto*, “which in essence alone constitutes the entire security of neighboring states.” The report highlighted that the ease with which Russia managed to oppose Stanislaw August’s reform plans underlined Russia’s wisdom in choosing Poniatowski. Namely, a different Pole could have had stronger family connections and greater wealth and thus acquire greater strength, credit, and power. It would thus have been more difficult for Russia

guaranteeing the “eternal safety of Polish freedom by passing cardinal laws at the last Warsaw *Sejm*, which no one had a right to change in the future—a risk that arose with every interregnum and civil conflict.”¹⁴⁸⁶ The report also emphasized that Russia’s protection of Polish dissidents served Ottoman interests.¹⁴⁸⁷ Finally, the Russian Empire hoped to avoid war with the Porte, not for fear of the Ottomans but because such a war would not benefit anyone. The report pointed out that the Porte should appreciate the fact that Russia was opposed to Austria in Polish matters.¹⁴⁸⁸

Truly, the report was a sincere diplomatic effort to avoid a conflict. Indeed, St. Petersburg stressed that throughout the entire Polish crisis of the 1760s it always informed the Porte of its plans and intentions behind them.¹⁴⁸⁹ In his letter to Repnin, Panin admitted that he still hoped that the war with the Ottoman Empire could be avoided. Panin hoped that the Porte would not

to oppose and return to their due limits “power-hungry intentions that apparently appear together with [acquiring] the crown in an individual who suddenly rises above equality.” 89.8.2173.1767, LL. 12-15.

¹⁴⁸⁶ The report stressed that all Polish neighbors, especially the Ottoman Empire, benefitted from the current condition of Poland, for “now Poland due to its form of government that breaks down into thousand parts, does not represent anything at all in consideration of its neighbors, including the Porte, because it would require supernatural strength in order to set its machines in some motion.” On the contrary, maintained the author of the report, if Poland was allowed to get stronger, it could become at first a worrisome and then dangerous neighbor to all bordering nations, and especially to the Porte, “because it [Poland] in itself has enough internal strength that it can spread beyond its borders.” 89.8.2173.1767, LL. 15ob.-19ob.

¹⁴⁸⁷ According to the report, restoration of dissident rights effectively “divided the power of the legislative branch in between greater number of hands belonging to people of various religions and therefore of different orientations/*nachala* and different interests, who of course can never agree with each other in their opinions, and therefore will preserve the republic more than before in the full degree of its unlimited liberty.” Finally, the report pointed out that no neighbor benefitted from such a state of affairs more than the Porte, because restoration of dissident rights broke the unlimited hold on power in Poland of the fanatical Catholic religion, which could pose danger to the Porte if the shrewd Pope decided to raise Polish Catholics against Muslim Turkey. 89.8.2173.1767, LL. 20-23ob., 28.

¹⁴⁸⁸ 89.8.2173.1767, LL. 25ob.-27ob.

¹⁴⁸⁹ “Even now, when Turkish mobilization appears unsettling to almost the entire Europe, is the Russian court bothered by them and isn’t it awaiting, without any mobilization on its part, that the Porte would see it being tranquil and would have time to believe its [Russian] opinions, and realize the intrigues of common enemies..., and to calm down the disturbances incited by them [the enemies] among the Turkish people[?]” The Balta incident was referred to as an unfortunate event committed by “a reckless gang of itinerants/*brodiakh* and bandits,” which had since been punished ruthlessly by Russian authorities. Moreover, there were important similarities between the Russian and Ottoman empires that made their interests compatible: “Both empires are in themselves so extensive and great, that surely they do not need to expand their borders at the expense of each other or a third [state]. Where there is no direct need there cannot be a reasonable desire.” Only the enemies of Russia and Turkey were interested in causing a dispute between the two empires in order to exhaust their strength. “But we have to keep peace,” declared the report. For this purpose, Russian troops were instructed to return home after restoring peace and assuring compliance with the acts of the last Warsaw *Sejm*. 89.8.2173.1767, LL. 36-45.

really send its troops to Hotin and Bendery because “the Turks fear us inside and therefore avoid any external moves and reasons for irritating us.” But the Russian government did not want to take chances and give the Ottoman public cause for anger. Therefore, the empress ordered to punish brutally those involved in the Balta events right on the border, so that Ottoman subjects could witness it. In addition, Panin sent a letter to the grand vizier, explaining what had happened and expressing gratitude to the Porte for its continuing friendly and impartial behavior in relation to Polish affairs. Obreskov’s latest report confirmed that caution was the best course of action.¹⁴⁹⁰

Obreskov received these letters only on September 20/October 1, by which time he stood little chance of reversing the Ottoman decision to go to war. Several days later he received invitation to appear before the grand vizier and on October 6 he was imprisoned in Yedikule. This action of the Porte was tantamount to a declaration of war. St. Petersburg did not learn about this “Constantinople revolution” until October 29/November 9. Ironically, on October 17/28 Panin suggested to Repnin that “if the Catholic-fanatic blindness continues, Russia could cede part of Polish Podolia to Turkey and in turn gain areas on its own border [with Poland] as well.” Panin realized that the Porte was not defending Poland out of generosity of spirit but because it wanted to gain part of Polish territory. The Poles, noted Panin, were wrong in counting on the Ottomans.¹⁴⁹¹

While it is not clear if Catherine II would have approved Panin’s suggestion to partition Poland with the Ottoman Empire, it is significant that there existed an opportunity for the

¹⁴⁹⁰ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, pp. 122, 127.

¹⁴⁹¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 87, pp. 171, 181, 183. In its December 1768 instructions to the Field Marshal Alexander Golitsyn, St. Petersburg likewise claimed that the rebel Poles had appealed to the Ottoman sultan for help and promised to grant the entire Polish Podolia to the Ottoman Empire. As a result, “These promises incited the Turkish crowds and the sultan himself to violate the eternal peace with Russia.” 89.8.3.1864.1768. Koppii reskripta k fel’dmarshalu Aleksandru Golitsynu s rasporyazheniiami kasatel’no voennykh operatsii i s soobshcheniiami o polozhenii pol’skikh del i o politike Turtsii v Pol’she. December 16, 1768, L. 16.

Ottomans to reach an understanding with the Russians over Poland. However, the Porte was disproportionately influenced by the French and Austrian propaganda, which sounded increasingly convincing in view of Russia's profound interference in Polish domestic affairs.

The Ottoman Declaration of War

To be sure, the majority of Ottoman officials were against the war. The Balta events led to a familiar split within the Ottoman political elite: some of the statesmen wanted to declare war immediately, while others were against the war. The grand vizier, the *şeyhülislam*, and the reis efendi were against the war. The grand vizier, Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa, did not openly state his opposition but argued that conditions were not yet ripe for a war. He argued that one year was needed to complete preparations in border fortresses. The *şeyhülislam* and the Rumelian and Anatolian military judges announced that arguments for the war were insufficient to justify it. As a result of their opposition, all three statesmen were eventually replaced. Mustafa III replaced Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa with a pro-war Silahdar Hamza Mahir Paşa on August 7. Obreskov correctly predicted that the reis efendi would also be replaced. Indeed, on September 25 Yenişehirli Esseyid Osman Efendi was dismissed for his anti-war stance and closeness to Muhsinzade. In his place came el-Hac Mehmed Emin Recai Efendi. The sultan could not do away with the *şeyhülislam* as easily. In September the sultan applied a lot of pressure on the high clergy, insisting that Veliyüddin Efendi issue a war fetva. However, the *şeyhülislam* did not comply and even announced that a war against Russia under existing circumstances would be illegitimate. Due to the *şeyhülislam*'s popularity, the sultan could not do much. Even after the Porte imprisoned Obreskov, the *şeyhülislam* refused to accept the war. Only his death on October

25 allowed the sultan to seal his war declaration. The former Rumelian military judge Pirizade Osman Sahib Efendi had expressed his support for the war in hope of becoming the next *şeyhülislam*, which indeed took place after Veliyüddin's death. Mustafa III finally received the religious endorsement of the war on October 31.¹⁴⁹²

The pro-war party was convinced that the declaration of war would not translate into an actual war: Russia would immediately seek peace and negotiations would begin. Russia would withdraw from Poland as a result of Ottoman pressure and thereby the Porte's prestige would improve without any fighting. Even if Russia would accept the war, it would not last longer than a year, and with foreign states' mediation peace would be achieved.¹⁴⁹³ *Chargé d'affaires* of the Russian mission, Pavel Levashov, also noted in his memoirs the delusional bravado of the Constantinople public who called for completely defeating the Russians and driving Russian borders eastward. More importantly, the pro-war party also had an eye on the fertile Polish Podolia, which the confederates had promised to cede. Finally, the war proponents thought that Russia was still too financially and economically weak following the Seven Years War. As a result, they expected the Russian government to avoid the war by making concessions.¹⁴⁹⁴

¹⁴⁹² Obreskov tried to bribe Osman Efendi and asked the former Constantinople judge Damadzade Mehmed Murad Efendi for help. But the pro-war *sadaret kethüdası* (*kahya*) Hammamizade Ömer Efendi learned about the meeting and foiled Obreskov's efforts. Levashov described Osman Efendi as very cunning, greedy, and sly. For some unknown reason he hated Russia and could be said to have been the chief person encouraging the sultan to declare the war. Demir, pp. 295-300, 309.

¹⁴⁹³ Iusupov also notes that the proponents of war promised the sultan that the campaign would be a breeze—a six-month “promenade.” Significantly, Mustafa even tried to attract Austria to open joint military actions against Russia. He offered Vienna to put a Saxon prince on the Polish throne and promised to support Austrian plans to return Silesia. Iusupov, p. 75. A contemporary Ottoman official and diplomat Ahmed Resmi Efendi also described the wishful arguments of the war party in his chronicle: Ahmet Resmî Efendi and Ethan L. Menchinger, *Hulâsatü'l-i'tibâr. A Summary of Admonitions: A Chronicle of the 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman War* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2011), pp. 36-37.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Demir, pp. 295-296. The exact membership of the war party still appears unclear. The sultan was obviously at the head, with some ambitious people trying to advance their careers by advocating war.

Ahmed Resmi Efendi noted that the *kahya*,—which must be the above-mentioned Hammamizade Ömer Efendi,—led the war party in Constantinople. Iusupov also notes that the Hotin and Bendery pashas belonged to the war party. Iusupov, pp. 70-72.

By early October Mustafa III was ready to announce the war. Hamza Paşa called a consultative council on October 3, in which the sultan took part as well. The main subject of discussions was what pretexts could be used for opening hostilities. The chief argument was Russia's high-handedness in Poland. The council members concluded that Russia planned to subordinate Poland and then attack the lands of Islam.¹⁴⁹⁵ Obreskov realized that something was wrong after he received the invitation to appear before the grand vizier. Therefore, on October 5 he went to consult with the British ambassador Murray in Büyükdere. Obreskov asked Murray to protect his family if he was imprisoned.¹⁴⁹⁶ Still, not all Ottoman officials approved of Obreskov's confinement in Yedikule: some thought the declaration of war that this action implied was untimely. As a result, another consultative council took place on October 8 with the sultan's participation. The council resolved to announce the war officially. But even Kırım Giray, who was reinstated as the khan of Crimea on October 10, criticized Hamza Paşa for declaring the war so early. Kırım Giray was upset that Russia now had seven months to prepare for the actual war, which could begin in earnest only with a spring campaign. As a result of this criticism, the sultan dismissed Hamza Paşa on October 20.¹⁴⁹⁷ Yağlıkçızade Mehmed Emin Paşa—the new grand vizier—prepared the official announcement of the war on October 23, which accused Russia of many transgressions. The Porte claimed that Russia had violated peace terms by building fortresses close to the Ottoman border. Secondly, Russia interfered in Polish affairs, while Obreskov lied to the Porte in order to win time. Thus, Obreskov had promised that

¹⁴⁹⁵ The French had worked hard to insinuate this idea to the Porte. Petrov, pp. 54-55.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Gounaris, p. 678.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Ahmed Resmi Efendi and Smirnov after him note that Hamza Paşa was dismissed because he was newly discovered to be mentally deranged. Ahmed Resmi Efendi, pp. 43-44; Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo*, p. 99. In his translation of Ahmed Resmi's chronicle Ethan Menchinger notes that later Ottoman historians also referred to Hamza Paşa's paranoia, which he developed in Egypt: Ahmet Resmi Efendi, p. 43, fn. 107. Still, Ahmed Resmi Efendi's description of Hamza Paşa's behavior is slightly bizarre and could be allegoric. After all, Ahmed Resmi Efendi noted that the grand vizier's mania was discovered when he entered the Imperial Chamber together with Kırım Giray.

Russia would withdraw its troops from Poland, however not only this did not happen but instead the Ottomans suffered an attack on its civilians at Balta. In its special declaration to the Poles on October 29, the Porte announced—four years after the fact and two years after its official recognition—that Poniatowski’s election was illegal and demanded to organize new royal elections, during which the Porte would support the candidacy of the Saxon duke. The Porte also encouraged the Polish government to declared war on Russia.¹⁴⁹⁸

The manner in which the sultan declared the war betrays lack of serious deliberation and purposeful silencing of opposition.¹⁴⁹⁹ The sultan also implicitly acknowledged the rashness of the declaration by dismissing Hamza Paşa in response to Kırım Giray’s criticism. Catherine II would subsequently often emphasize that most of the Ottoman statesmen, including clergy, were against the war. Therefore, she put blame on Mustafa III for willfully precipitating a conflict with Russia.¹⁵⁰⁰ This assessment was correct. In the situation, Obreskov was powerless to stop what he and others called the “flood” of anti-Russian public sentiment, which swept most of the previous Ottoman administration from the scene.

The history of the relationship between the Bar confederates and the Ottoman government and military forces after the outbreak of the war has not been studied sufficiently.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Demir, pp. 300-310.

¹⁴⁹⁹ According to Polish archives, Mustafa III began to collect detailed information on maps of Podolia and other Ukrainian territories only shortly before announcing the war. Iusupov, p. 75.

¹⁵⁰⁰ The Russian government was also fully conscious of the role of French intrigues in the Ottoman declaration of war. For example, on December 16, 1768 St. Petersburg wrote to Field Marshal Golitsyn: “You have already been informed that this mass/*gromada* of barbarians had declared war against us by imprisoning our minister in Yedikule with all his retinue, against the opinion and desire of all distinguished Turks who comprised the government council and administration.” Further, St. Petersburg explained to Golitsyn that it was France whose cunning was responsible for embroiling Russia in the war. France had extracted Vienna’s promise, due to close alliance between Austria and France, to stay neutral in the conflict, thereby encouraging the Porte to freely challenge Russia with the goal of capturing Podolia. And even though the Porte had acknowledged the Piast king of Poland—Stanislaw August Poniatowski, elected in 1764,—the Ottoman government refuted the legitimacy of his election in its war declaration against Russia. St. Petersburg clearly singled out France for instigating the conflict: “The French court will not see any price as too high to pay for bringing us down and avenging us for our unseating of Stanislaw Leszczyński from the Polish royal throne and for our deeds in Poland, Sweden, and Denmark, as well as for the obviously growing greatness and power of our empire.” 89.8.3.1864.1768. Kopp reskripta k fel’dmarshalu Aleksandru Golitsynu s raspriazheniiami kasatel’no voennykh operatsii i s soobshcheniiami o polozhenii pol’skikh del i o politike Turtsii v Pol’she. December 16, 1768, LL. 17-18.

Some scholars highlight continuing contacts between the confederates and persistent, even if ineffective, Ottoman efforts to help the Polish rebels. Allegedly, the cooperation went as far as the signing of an unofficial agreement between the confederates and the Ottoman and Crimean sides to continue fighting Russia until the old government system of Poland-Lithuania would be reestablished. In return, the confederates promised to cede Podolia to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁰¹

Other scholars stress that the Ottomans turned their back on the confederates, which, if true, would vindicate Panin's point that the rebel Poles had made a mistake by counting on Constantinople. For example, Soviet historian Rifkat Iusupov argued that while some confederates had sincerely believed that the Porte wanted to help them without any ulterior motives, and even some later Polish historians touted the Porte for being a loyal friend of *Rzecz Pospolita* during partitions, this was far from the truth. According to the very first agreement that the confederates signed with the Porte at the start of the war, the two sides promised each other that in case of victory Poland would acquire eastern Ukraine while the Ottoman Empire would annex Podolia. But constant defeats of the confederates undermined the Porte's trust in their promises. Moreover, after the Russian army's unsuccessful attempt to capture Hotin in spring 1769¹⁵⁰² the Porte began to dream of making territorial gains at the expense of Russia and Poland-Lithuania independently of the confederates. Consequently, on June 21, 1769 the Ottomans declared war against *Rzecz Pospolita*, under the false pretext of the participation of Poles in Russian operations at Hotin.¹⁵⁰³

In particular, Iusupov underscored the detrimental effects of the second agreement that the confederates signed with the Porte, which put them in a subservient position: they promised to surrender Podolia and the Kiev *województwo* to the Ottoman Empire, gave permission to the

¹⁵⁰¹ Topaktaş, *Osmanlı-Lehistan diplomatik ilişkileri*, pp. 26-29.

¹⁵⁰² Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, pp. 149-150.

¹⁵⁰³ Iusupov, pp. 77-78. These were not the confederate Poles.

Ottomans to capture Orthodox peasants as slaves if they were against the confederates, and allowed Crimean Tatars to settle on Polish and Ukrainian lands. According to Polish archival sources consulted by Iusupov, many ordinary confederates protested against the agreement: local confederate units refused to fight along the janissaries because the latter undermined the confederates' position among local population due to robberies and unsightly behavior. As a result, the leadership of the confederation also became split because of the second agreement. For his opposition to the latter the military marshal of the confederation Jozef Pulaski was imprisoned by the Ottomans in Hotin and killed in July 1769.¹⁵⁰⁴ Overall, Iusupov concluded that “foreign policy adventurism of the confederation’s leadership negatively affected Poland’s interests and provided an excuse for the interference of European powers into internal affairs of the Polish state.”¹⁵⁰⁵

While the exact nature of these early wartime events needs to be researched further, there also exists later evidence that the Ottomans indeed planned to make gains at the expense of Poland-Lithuania in violation of the spirit of their agreements with the confederates. Namely, after major defeats in 1770 the Porte began to seek least detrimental ways to end the war. At first, the sultan offered Vienna to join the war against Russia, at the end of which the Austrian and Ottoman empires would have partitioned Poland. Vienna, understandably, considered this offer unrealistic. Reportedly, the Porte then offered Russia to sign peace, which would have obliged the Porte to surrender all Polish confederates, as well as its alleged rights to Podolia. Russia refused to discuss Poland with the Porte and announced its maximal demands concerning

¹⁵⁰⁴ Iusupov, pp. 79-80. This dating of Pulaski’s death is slightly incongruent with the accepted approximate dates of February or April 20, 1769. Herbert H. Kaplan notes that Jozef Pulaski died from plague. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, p. 118. Mykhed also recounts the split within the leadership of the Confederation between the party of Jozef Pulaski and that of Michal Krasinski and Joachim Potocki. The latter party kidnapped Pulaski, who died from illness in custody in April 1769. Mykhed, p. 167. Further scholarship is required on this point.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Iusupov, p. 82. In addition, Iusupov argued that Stanislaw August’s decision not to sign an official alliance and not to act jointly with Russia was a major mistake. The Polish king hoped that the war would weaken Russia’s influence in Poland. Iusupov, pp. 83-84.

the Black Sea. During the 1772 Russian-Ottoman peace talks the Ottoman Empire also tried to join the Polish partition project: it demanded Podolia for itself, but all the chief partitioning parties refused and the Porte stopped raising the Polish issue.¹⁵⁰⁶

The death of Augustus III in 1763 plunged Poland-Lithuania into a familiar cycle of an intense succession crisis and attendant diplomatic and military struggle between interested foreign powers. In light of our knowledge about Russo-Ottoman strategic competition in the region for most of the eighteenth century, the present study demonstrates that, strikingly, both Russian and Ottoman diplomacy in the 1760s was capable of choosing the middle way of peaceful compromise and accommodation. Up until the outbreak of the war, Panin continued to advocate the mutual benefits of a weak Poland-Lithuania to the Ottoman government. He was even ready to contemplate partitioning Polish territories together with the Porte. Much of the Ottoman government, likewise, managed for many years to put events in Poland in a bigger perspective and give the Russian government the benefit of the doubt, thanks in large part to the work of Aleksei Obreskov.

But it turned out that it required an enormous effort on Russia's part to ensure the said weakness of Poland-Lithuania. As a result, when Catherine began to practice unabashed repression of the Polish opposition in late 1767—early 1768, Mustafa III also seized the long-sought opportunity to reverse the unfavorable balance of power in the region by challenging Russia militarily. Imperial ambitions trumped decades of accommodating diplomacy.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Iusupov, p. 81. Other scholars have also noted the existence of some evidence—namely, the Austrian ambassador Baron Thugut's report from Constantinople to Vienna dated March 1770—of the Ottoman offer to Austria to partition Poland. Topaktaş, *Osmanlı-Lehistan diplomatik ilişkileri*, pp. 215-216, fn. 274.

Chapter 17. Obreskov's Contributions to the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca

It is undeniable that the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was a watershed in Russo-Ottoman relations and in European and Middle Eastern history. However, English-language scholarship has looked at the treaty primarily as a finite text, thereby overlooking the process of negotiations and the interplay of personalities and their ideas in formulating the articles of the groundbreaking agreement. Yet, the subject of this study, Aleksei Obreskov, was central to this process. Catherine II's government viewed his release from captivity as an essential precondition for starting peace talks. Obreskov's adroit and persistent negotiation skills resulted in a detailed formulation of final articles as early as the winter of 1772-1773. Although he could not reach agreement on many of them with his Ottoman counterpart, the thoroughness of his work and the respect he commanded with the government and the chief Russian general Petr Rumiantsev, who was the official Russian plenipotentiary at the final round of talks in 1774, resulted in the summary adoption at Küçük Kaynarca of the draft of the treaty fleshed out by Obreskov.

While the empress's list of demands lay at the basis of the Russian peace proposals over the years of the negotiations, I argue that Obreskov carefully adapted his instructions to the context that he knew better than any other Russian. He exercised considerable freedom in interpreting official Russian demands with a view to making their wording more specific and more advantageous to Russia in the long-term. He also suggested several new articles on his own initiative. Overall, it is clear that he seized the opportunity he knew was all too rare to make sure that the new treaty would guarantee Russia and the Russian residency in Constantinople comprehensive legal rights to carry out confidently its policies toward the Ottoman Empire. Obreskov's long tenure as resident stood behind his engaged position during the talks, which

resulted in the longest peace treaty between the Russian and Ottoman empires to date: the number of articles in the 1774 treaty was about twice as many as in each of the treaties from 1700, 1711-1713, 1720, and 1739. Significantly, my focus on Obreskov's agency and contributions to the treaty results in a new perspective on the controversial articles concerning Ottoman religious minorities.

Obreskov's Release

Catherine II knew how the Ottomans had blackmailed the Russian government in the early 1710s by keeping the resident Tolstoy and other Russian diplomats hostage in Yedikule. Therefore, it was of utmost concern to her that the Porte release Obreskov as soon as possible. In addition to this consideration, however, another reason stood behind her desire to free Obreskov before starting any negotiations. Obreskov and his entourage represented indispensable diplomatic and linguistic talent that the Russian government and army could use to its advantage during the war.

In early 1769 Catherine admitted that the Russian government lacked a skilled translator of Ottoman Turkish. All the best translators— Guglielmo Dandrii, Joseph Crutta, and Denis Melnikov—were in captivity with Obreskov. Therefore, she could not send anyone to Aleksei Orlov, who traveled to Italy to prepare the ground for the Russian navy's Mediterranean expedition.¹⁵⁰⁷ Similarly, in September 1770, Catherine ordered Rumiantsev to send the official peace offer to the Ottomans both in Italian and Ottoman Turkish translations, but she did not trust translators of Ottoman in St. Petersburg. Therefore, she asked Rumiantsev to find a good

¹⁵⁰⁷ Catherine advised Orlov to find a Greek or a Slav, or several of them, in his area, who could translate for him. *SIRIO*, VOL. 1, p. 12.

translator in Moldavia and Wallachia, “but the person had to be very reliable and able to keep secrets.” Nevertheless, Catherine did not believe that Rumiantsev would be able to find someone who knew Russian and, therefore, she provided him with accurate Italian and French translations.¹⁵⁰⁸ Even as late as fall 1771, Rumiantsev admitted in a letter to Panin that he did not have people who knew Turkish well. By that time, however, Obreskov and his staff had been released and Rumiantsev asked Obreskov to leave Denis Melnikov with him.¹⁵⁰⁹

Obreskov’s release was seriously attempted in fall 1770, when first offers to start peace talks were exchanged between the belligerents.¹⁵¹⁰ It was Frederick II himself who suggested in September to the Russian government to appoint Obreskov as the official Russian plenipotentiary. He argued that this was the most convenient and straightforward option.¹⁵¹¹ However, Catherine did not really wish to appoint Obreskov as the chief negotiator while he was in the Ottoman hands or even leave him in captivity at the Porte, “because of his age, health, and cruel treatment at the hands of the Turks,” and because she was concerned that the Porte would keep him hostage to exert pressure on Russia.¹⁵¹²

With the help of the Prussian and Austrian representatives Catherine succeeded in negotiating Obreskov’s release, which she adamantly insisted upon before starting any negotiations. As a result, in June 1771 Obreskov, his staff, and personnel of the mission safely reached the first town on the Austrian-Ottoman border, Zemlin. Obreskov wrote to Panin in May, still from Demotika, that the Porte wanted to conceal the fact from the Ottoman public because it was ashamed to admit that it had to release Obreskov earlier than it had originally intended. Instead of sending him to the Danube, the Porte decided to send all the captives

¹⁵⁰⁸ *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, pp. 139-140.

¹⁵⁰⁹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 9, p. 426.

¹⁵¹⁰ Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 351-352; Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 153-154.

¹⁵¹¹ *SIRIO*, Vol. 37, pp. 307-308, 310.

¹⁵¹² *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, p. 523.

through Belgrade to Austrian Zemlin, so that the Ottoman public saw the release as a concession to the court of Vienna, which played a part of an interested mediator, rather than as a concession made directly to Russia.

Obreskov conveyed to Panin his continued fear for his life, especially if he decided to protest the harsh treatment he had been accorded in captivity. “Despite my non-malicious and non-vindictive character,” wrote Obreskov, “I cannot quickly forget everything I had to endure.¹⁵¹³ However, being still in their hands and power and knowing that they have no shortage of ways to get rid of people who could threaten them, moreover such ways that would leave no room for any lingering doubts [of foul play], instead of untimely complaints I have chosen to agree with the reis efendi to remove blame from the Porte for all the good and bad that had happened to me, and to personally completely forget all the unpleasant experiences.” In addition, Obreskov chose to assure the Porte that if the Russian empress decided to appoint him again to deal with Ottoman affairs, he would demonstrate his sincere desire to preserve mutual friendship and peace between the two empires.¹⁵¹⁴

To bolster mutual positive feelings, Obreskov penned a letter to the Porte upon reaching Zemlin on June 11/22, 1771.¹⁵¹⁵ Obreskov expressed gratitude for the respectful treatment he received on his trip from Demotika and praised his guide and the janissary lieutenant who were attached to him. The guide, *Telhischi* Edikli Zaim Ebubekir Ağa, and janissary lieutenant Altindzhi Mustafa Ağa had accompanied Obreskov for several years, ever since Obreskov was

¹⁵¹³ Details of Obreskov’s captivity can be found in Levashov’s memoir: Pavel Levashov, *Plen i stradanie rossiiian u turkov, ili Obstoiatelnoe opisanie bedstvennykh prikliuchenii, preterpennykh imi v Tsar’grade po ob’iavlennii voiny i pri voiske, za kotorym vlachili ikh v svoikh pokhodakh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Bogdanovicha, 1790).

¹⁵¹⁴ 89.8.1.436.1771. Depeshi rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova pervoprisutstvuiushchemu chлену KID Grafu Paninu ob osvobozhdenii Obrezkova iz-pod aresta i o sostoianii turetskikh oblastei, nabliudaemykh im vo vremia vozvrashcheniia iz Turtsii. Chast’iu shifrovano. Prilozheniia: Kopia peregovora Obrezkova s Portoi ob osvobozhdenii ego iz-pod aresta. May 2—November 10, 1771, LL. 5-11.

¹⁵¹⁵ The former captives departed Demotika on May 9/20 and proceeded through the Balkans with great fear of plague. 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 19-19ob.

taken by the grand vizier on campaign: first from Yedikule to the gathering center of the army at Dautbasha, then with the army marching to Bendery, and in Demotika. Obreskov recommended the guide for “behaving like a true Muslim, loyal servant of His Sultanic Majesty, and for frequently making sacrifices in taking care of me.”¹⁵¹⁶ It is doubtless that Ebubekir Ağa had witnessed or took part in Obreskov’s mistreatment throughout this period. Therefore, Obreskov was making a real effort to move past his memory of insults.

Obreskov made a special commentary on the state of Turkish provinces, which he witnessed during his travel to the Austrian border. He noted that the inhabitants of European provinces of the Ottoman Empire were broke as everywhere else in the empire, while their lands were devastated. Even local Turks were living in greatest misery. It was palpable everywhere, noted Obreskov, that everyone hungrily desired to see the war that had begun so unjustly finally end.¹⁵¹⁷

Obreskov spoke unfavorably of the British ambassador at the Porte, John Murray, who was exceedingly upset to learn that it was not his efforts, but those of the Prussian and Austrian ministers at the Porte that led to Obreskov’s release.¹⁵¹⁸ According to Obreskov, Murray’s subsequent conduct discredited him not only among the members of the Constantinople diplomatic corps but with the Porte itself. Obreskov reserved his most scathing criticism for the dragoman of the English embassy, Crutta. The latter’s two brothers were in Russian service, but Crutta himself was described by Obreskov as “a scatterbrain, chatterbox, insolent liar, and an excessive braggart.” In fact, Obreskov ascribed part of his increasing mistreatment in Ottoman hands to Crutta, whose “obscene declarations” at the Porte and “self-aggrandizement and

¹⁵¹⁶ 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 33-33ob.

¹⁵¹⁷ 89.8.1.436.1771, L. 21.

¹⁵¹⁸ Indeed, Ambassador Murray had tried to rescue Obreskov early on and hoped to become the official mediator of the Russo-Ottoman conflict, which the British believed to be only imminent as late as late November 1768. Gounaris, pp. 678-681.

inappropriate threats” in public turned the Porte against the English ambassador. As a result, every time Murray tried to make representations in Obreskov’s favor, the Porte not only disregarded them but also likely increased pressure on Obreskov.¹⁵¹⁹

Murray did not have any knowledge of Obreskov’s impending release. When he found out about it, he got so angry with Obreskov that he wrote the former Russian resident a letter, accusing him of standing behind the failure of the English king to become the mediator in the conflict between Russia and Turkey. Not having any means to hurt Obreskov, Murray began to persecute Obreskov’s brother-in-law, George Abbott, by excluding the entire Abbott family from his diplomatic protection, thereby exposing them to inevitable hardships. Obreskov asked Panin to write about this to Lord Cathcart and to the Russian ambassador in London, to make sure to protect Abbott. Obreskov reminded Panin that his brother-in-law not only took care of Obreskov’s children during his captivity,¹⁵²⁰ but also helped all the other Russian employees who remained in Pera. In doing so, Abbott put his own safety on the line and committed much labor and effort to the task. Obreskov found Murray’s oppression of the Abbott family to be unjust because Murray suspected incorrectly that Abbott had known about Obreskov’s impending release but chose not to tell the ambassador.¹⁵²¹

¹⁵¹⁹ 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 21-22. Obreskov was doubly cross with Murray because the latter failed to respond to Obreskov’s requests for money, which he communicated through Crutta. Instead, Obreskov managed to receive small amounts from his brother-in-law and commissioner George Abbott through secret channels that Obreskov established in Demotika. 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 22-23. Gounaris also acknowledges that Crutta had a notorious reputation, but he does not demonstrate that Murray was cognizant of the ways in which Crutta could have been undermining Murray’s agenda to become the official mediator in the conflict. Gounaris cites his name as Peter Crutta. Gounaris, pp. 681-682, 683. However, another author listed Pierre Crutta as the English dragoman in the later 1760s. Reychman, "Une Famille de drogman," pp. 84-90. It is possible that Murray simply could not control his dragoman and perhaps was not even conscious of how Crutta’s behavior or statements had detrimental effects.

¹⁵²⁰ Early in the war, in May 1769, Catherine pledged to take care of Obreskov’s children. Upon their arrival in Russia, she planned to send them immediately to the best education institutions of the Russian Empire: girls would go to the women’s monastery, and boys—to the Cadet Corps. Catherine noted that she was a personal witness of the success of these schools’ graduates. *SIRIO*, Vol. 10, p. 366.

¹⁵²¹ 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 23ob.-24ob. On June 16/27 Obreskov wrote another letter to Panin from Zemlin. He explained in more detail why Murray began to ostracize the Abbotts. Obreskov’s brother-in-law, George Abbott, was the treasurer of the “English Eastern Company,” or the Levant Company. The Porte wanted to conciliate

In his analysis of the antagonism between Murray and the Abbots, Greek scholar Basil Gounaris indeed acknowledges that Murray appeared to be of mediocre abilities as a diplomat. Murray unjustifiably took his failure to achieve the status of mediator as a personal slight by Obreskov. Moreover, Murray seems to have had an inherent disdain for George Abbott as a Levantine, describing him in his official reports as “a peevish, malicious native Asiatick, whose Body is as deformed as his Mind.”¹⁵²² Therefore, Obreskov’s complaints about Murray appear to have been grounded in reality.

Moreover, Obreskov castigated Murray for his negligence of the plight of Russian subjects remaining in Pera. Obreskov lamented that Murray did not once wish to send his dragomans to the Porte or even minor courts in order to protect the Russians. Likewise, Murray did not defend various Russian officers who had the misfortune of falling into captivity and found themselves in an Ottoman prison among the most base criminals. It was the Prussian minister Zegelin who exhibited humanity by demanding the officers’ transfer to the Yedikule

Obreskov by sending Abbott personally to Demotika together with Obreskov’s children. Murray at first promised but then refused to procure traveling documents from the Porte for Abbott. Prussian and Austrian ministers informed the Porte about it and the latter issued necessary traveling documents, which the two ministers handed to Abbott. But George Abbott decided not to leave because he did not want Murray to accuse him of leaving his duties before the directors of the Levant Company. George sent his younger brother, Bartholomew-Edward, who had just arrived from Angora, to Demotika. Bartholomew-Edward did not know Turkish and asked for help from the Russian embassy counselor Pinii in translating his traveling document. It so happened that the Russian dragoman Crutta was present during this conversation. Obreskov explained that Crutta had a habit of informing his brother, the dragoman of the English embassy, about everything he heard from Obreskov or Obreskov’s employees. As a result, Murray learned that Prussian and Austrian ministers helped Abbott procure traveling documents from the Porte, but most likely in an exaggerated form, so characteristic of “scoundrel Crutta.” Murray had already been angry with Abbott and, having a harsh and quick temper, he made a rash and unprecedented decision to withdraw diplomatic protection from the Abbott family. 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 28-29ob.

¹⁵²² Gounaris, pp. 684-690. By that time, the Abbots had indeed been Levantines for almost a century. Jasper Abbott (1655-c.1700), Maria-Cannela’s grandfather, had moved to the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of the seventeenth-century and since then the male Abbots put down their roots in the Ottoman Empire and generally married local Greek women, including Peter Abbott (1696-1768), Maria-Cannela’s father. See Michael S. Clark, “Genealogy of the Abbott Family,” <http://www.mikesclark.com/genealogy/abbott.html>. George Abbott, Maria-Cannela’s brother, married a Venetian woman, Anna Marcellini, who belonged to a local dragoman clan of Italian origins. Her father was the Danish dragoman Signor Giovanni Marcellini. Gounaris, p. 685.

Fortress. Obreskov asked Zegelin to continue helping the Russians in the Ottoman prison and to spend money for the purpose, if necessary, which would be returned by Abbott.¹⁵²³

The total number of captives released by the Porte with Obreskov, including the ex-resident himself, was fifty-seven. The group was numerous and included many children. As a result, Obreskov decided not to proceed through Vienna, as Golitsyn suggested to him in order to consult with doctors about his weak health and to take healing waters. Obreskov also took into account that going through Vienna was expensive and increased traveling distance. Therefore, he decided to pass through Hungary and Transylvania to Jassy, and then to Kiev or Kremenchuk.¹⁵²⁴ On July 28/August 8 Obreskov wrote to Panin that he was departing the same day from Zemlin and that he still planned to proceed not through Vienna, but through Moldavia and Kiev. However, Obreskov wanted to leave the majority of his entourage in Kiev in order to travel to St. Petersburg more quickly. Part of the reason for Obreskov's haste lay in the fact that Levashov had already departed, travelling through Vienna "and, as it seems, thinking that it would be more advantageous for him to precede my arrival to the highest court."¹⁵²⁵ Obreskov and his entourage entered Russian territory on August 15/26 and the Governor-General of Kiev Voeikov waived the obligatory quarantine as a gesture of respect towards Obreskov.¹⁵²⁶ After a difficult trip, by November 10/21, 1771 Obreskov was already in Novgorod.¹⁵²⁷ Catherine II awarded Obreskov with the Order of Aleksander Nevskii and 200,000 rubles. He also became an official member of the CFA.¹⁵²⁸

¹⁵²³ 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 29ob.-30.

¹⁵²⁴ 89.8.2212.1771. Otpuski byvshego rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova vitse-kantsleru kniazii Golitsynu o svoem obratnom puteshestvii v Rossiiu s prilozheniem spiska svoei svity. June 13—November 10, 1771, LL. 1-1ob.

¹⁵²⁵ 89.8.1.436.1771, LL. 37-37ob.

¹⁵²⁶ Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 276.

¹⁵²⁷ Obreskov did not stop in any village between Tula and Mozhaisk because he feared passing his communicable disease to local inhabitants. He was also very disappointed when he found out that Zemnogorsk and Iazhevbitsk coachmen had stolen 700 Dutch chervonnye and 700 in silver coins from his treasury chest. 89.8.2212.1771, L. 5.

¹⁵²⁸ Likhach, "Obreskov," p. 63; Luzanov, p. 148; Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, p. 276.

Obreskov's Role in the Peace Congresses, 1772-1773

As a result of his captivity, Obreskov had not participated in government discussions about the goals of the war and desired peace treaty terms. But he ended up playing an important role in negotiating the final peace treaty. At the first peace congress at Fokshany in summer 1772, he played second role after Grigorii Orlov, the empress's powerful favorite. Orlov's performance proved to be controversial and, as a result, Obreskov became the only Russian representative at the Bucharest congress in late 1772-1773. Here, he exhibited persistence, negotiation skills, and initiative. Through analysis of Obreskov's negotiations with the Ottoman side and other primary evidence, I highlight his role in achieving agreement on many of the articles that had been desired by St. Petersburg, as well as the significance of Obreskov's particular contribution to the final treaty.

Early on, the empress and her advisors decided that the war's goal would be to achieve free access to and navigation of the Black Sea, for which Russia needed a port and a fortress.¹⁵²⁹ Over the course of the following two years, St. Petersburg formulated its other demands in more detail.¹⁵³⁰ One Soviet Russian and one Turkish historian have treated the evolution of what would become the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty in their works.¹⁵³¹ Since we are interested the most in Obreskov's contribution, we should note the more stable list of Russian peace terms that

¹⁵²⁹ The State Council posed the question of ultimate peace goals already during its second meeting on November 6, 1768. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 109.

¹⁵³⁰ For example, when possibility of peace talks arose for the first time in fall 1770, Panin cited the following terms: Russia wanted Crimea to become independent, to regain full control of Azov and Taganrog, enjoy free navigation on the Black Sea, ensure general amnesty for Ottoman collaborators and possibly an island in the Archipelago, and some sort of arrangement concerning Moldavia and Wallachia—either independence or temporary Russian control until financial losses from the war were recouped. *Arkhiv Gosudarstvennago Soveta*, Vol. 1, "Protokoly Soveta v tsarstvovanie Imperatritsy Ekateriny II-i, 1768-1796. Ch. 1. Otdelenie istoricheskoe" (St. Petersburg: Vtoroe otdelenie Sobstvennoi E.I.V. Kantseliarii, 1869), p. 59.

¹⁵³¹ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*; Osman Köse, *1774 Küçük Kaynarca andlaşması: oluşumu, tahlili, tatbiki* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006).

appeared in spring and that became the basis for the peace negotiations in 1772.¹⁵³² I will argue that in implementing his government's objectives Obreskov stayed true to himself: he not only tried to push against certain points, which he believed to be unrealistic, but modified some peace terms in order to ensure their acceptance by the Ottoman side, as well as suggested completely novel terms on the basis of his extensive experience with the purpose of ensuring comprehensive benefits to Russia from the projected peace treaty. Interestingly, earlier scholars have not noticed that Obreskov made a substantial correction to and creatively augmented the article about Ottoman Christian minorities, which proved to be one of the most controversial legacies of Küçük Kaynarca.

St. Petersburg was determined from the start to have Obreskov participate in the first official peace negotiations. In April 1772 Catherine appointed Grigorii Orlov and Obreskov, and considered appointing a third plenipotentiary, which obviously did not happen.¹⁵³³ At the same time, Panin enthusiastically recommended Obreskov to Field-Marshal Petr Rumiantsev as a “loyal, enlightened, and distinguished patriot, and my true friend,” as well as an “honest, firm, and reasonable man.”¹⁵³⁴ During the Fokshany peace congress, Obreskov was not able to influence Grigorii Orlov or the course of the negotiations in a significant way because Orlov

¹⁵³² *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, pp. 246-256; Vol. 118, pp. 90-104; Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 128-136, 161.

¹⁵³³ *SIRIO*, Vol. 13, p. 232. Druzhinina argues that Catherine wanted to make sure that the Panin faction, represented by Obreskov, would not have a leading role in negotiations. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 160.

¹⁵³⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 110. Historians have commented on the close association between Panin, Rumiantsev, and Obreskov, and indeed the three saw eye to eye on many matters. They opposed the more aggressive designs—“the sand castles”—of the empress and brothers Orlovs, who wanted to go as far as organize a siege of Constantinople. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 150-151, 155, 157, 160.

De Madariaga frankly questioned why Druzhinina consistently sided throughout her work with the “Panin group.” De Madariaga argued that the empress's ambitions deserved more respect because they “won Russia so much territory.” De Madariaga, p. 616, fn. 11. In Panin's defense, one could argue that his and his allies' more circumspect position was legitimate and reasonable because the course of the 1768-1774 war was filled with challenges for Russia and could have ended differently. However, de Madariaga rightly points out that although Druzhinina identified Obreskov as a “Panin” man, it was never entirely the case. Obreskov was an independent thinker. De Madariaga, pp. 226-228.

confidently pursued his own strategy, which was not necessarily aimed at the conclusion of peace.¹⁵³⁵

However, being the only Russian plenipotentiary at the Bucharest peace congress, Obreskov had a direct and very productive influence on the course of the negotiations. The empress hoped that Obreskov's experience and knowledge about how best to approach the Ottomans would help conclude the peace talks successfully, thus reversing Orlov's mistake, which she indirectly admitted.¹⁵³⁶ But Obreskov's experience told him that some of St. Petersburg's demands were unrealistic. Thus, he wrote to Panin on October 9/20 that he greatly doubted that the Ottomans would cede Yenikale and Kerch if they lost the right to maintain other garrisons in Crimea. Obreskov also argued, following his earlier reports from Constantinople, that he knew that the issue of navigation of the Black Sea would meet with insurmountable obstacles. The empress, however, did not want to hear these objections. She wanted three things

¹⁵³⁵ Panin is responsible—possibly unwittingly—for creating the unfavorable portrayal of Orlov's behavior at the congress. Thus, the famous letter of Panin to Obreskov from September 4/15, 1772 blamed Orlov for his “newly-evincen madness and beating around the bush (*kolobrodstvo*), through which he sabotaged the peace talks.” However, Panin asked Obreskov to burn the letter. *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 222.

Sergei Soloviev concluded, however, that the congress did not fail because of Orlov, just as the empress herself admitted, even though Panin liked to claim otherwise. Soloviev, Book XIV, Vol. 28, pp. 546-549.

The historiographical debate was then joined by Vladimir Ulianitskii, who disagreed with Soloviev. Ulianitskii blamed Orlov for the failure of the Fokshany congress: Orlov's character and thinking were a poor fit for the peace negotiations. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 400-401.

It seems that Obreskov himself preferred to keep a neutral position in this conflict. Although Panin had assured him in September that the empress did not blame Obreskov for the failure of the talks and that Obreskov would not have to respect Orlov's “dreamy thoughts” as much anymore because the latter's “earlier fortune has completely passed” (reference to the empress's break with Orlov—in absentia—upon finding a new favorite; *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 222), Obreskov evidently preferred to be careful. He wrote a letter to Panin at the same time—on September 9/20,—in which he defended the order of the negotiation chosen by Orlov. As a result, on September 24/October 5 Panin had to explain to Obreskov that it was crucial to observe the initial instructions, which prescribed a set order for bringing up successive demands. Consequently, Panin stressed that Orlov had been wrong in bringing up the article on Tatar independence first. The Russian side had first to propose other, less important demands, which could then be compromised upon in order to achieve this most important objective. Panin added a friendly postscript, in which he confessed that he hoped he was able to disabuse Obreskov of his remaining “already completely incongruous (*nevmetnom uzhe sovsem*)” respect for Orlov's thinking. *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 242-244. Indeed, it is a little puzzling why Obreskov defended Orlov's disorderly approach to the negotiations, which clearly went against the instructions and against Russian accepted diplomatic methods, with which Obreskov was very familiar. Perhaps, the only reason was Obreskov's concern not to earn the wrath of the powerful favorite by joining in the criticism of Orlov.

¹⁵³⁶ *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, pp. 236-237. By the second half of 1772 Russia's position was becoming critical because of a coup d'état in Sweden and complications in Poland. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 183-187.

without any compromise: 1) Tatar independence, 2) navigation of the Black Sea; and 3) fortresses in the gulf between the Azov and Black Seas. Otherwise, she concluded, the new peace would be “as shameful as those of Pruth and Belgrade.”¹⁵³⁷ On October 30/November 1, 1772 Panin also advised Obreskov to do his utmost: “It is true that it will be difficult, but we need to achieve these great goals, even if it requires great efforts.”¹⁵³⁸

Nevertheless, St. Petersburg delineated certain compromises it would be able to tolerate in exchange for its main objectives, which should have eased Obreskov’s task in achieving Ottoman agreement to Crimean independence.¹⁵³⁹ As a result, he succeeded in negotiating many of the articles rather successfully. He completely agreed upon and signed with his Ottoman counterpart, the reis efendi Abdürrezzak Efendi, ten articles. Another six articles met with the reis efendi’s declaration that the Porte agreed to them. And only three articles met with insurmountable opposition, despite Obreskov’s painstaking efforts: Crimean independence, cession of Kerch and Yenikale to Russia, and Russia’s right to unlimited navigation of the Black Sea.¹⁵⁴⁰ Still, as a result of these preliminary negotiations, the final peace talks in 1774 went easier and faster.¹⁵⁴¹

The negotiation process revealed Obreskov’s deep knowledge of the Ottoman Empire, its state interests, and even ceremonial and cultural preferences.¹⁵⁴² Despite his age and very likely

¹⁵³⁷ *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 256. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 188-189.

¹⁵³⁸ *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 264.

¹⁵³⁹ It should be noted, however, that Obreskov did not completely agree with St. Petersburg’s readiness to concede to the Porte the right of providing some kind of investiture to Crimean khans. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 193-194.

¹⁵⁴⁰ *SIRIO*, Vol. 135, pp. 76-77; Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 242-243, 246. The Bucharest congress began on November 9, 1772 and in May specifically invited him to the final talks with the Ottomans, which he expected to start soon in view of Russian victories. But Obreskov was late—he arrived on July 12/23—because of the flooding of the Danube: Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 192, 194, 246.

¹⁵⁴¹ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 246, 261, 270. Rumiantsev consulted with Obreskov throughout spring-summer 1774 and in May specifically invited him to the final talks with the Ottomans, which he expected to start soon in view of Russian victories. But Obreskov was late—he arrived on July 12/23—because of the flooding of the Danube: Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 264, 266, 268.

¹⁵⁴² Druzhinina notes Obreskov’s sensitivity to the ceremonial traditions and cultural sensibilities of the Ottomans. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 192, 193, 198.

exhaustion from long and demanding service and arduous captivity, Obreskov exhibited firm negotiation abilities, which had been honed throughout his decades-long career on the Bosphorus. Moreover, Obreskov easily found common language with the reis efendi, who was a representative of the more progressive circle of Ottoman officials and intellectuals.¹⁵⁴³ Obreskov knew when to be flexible in order not to impede the course of negotiations. For example, he decided not to dwell on the question of who was at fault for starting the war.¹⁵⁴⁴ He also switched to another article when the discussion seemed to reach an impasse. Obreskov further arranged discussions of some of the most critical subjects—Crimean independence and navigation of the Black Sea—after a day of entertainment: he organized a ball to humor the reis efendi, with both European and Turkish elements.¹⁵⁴⁵

Proceedings of the eleventh conference can serve as an example of the style and dynamics of the negotiations.¹⁵⁴⁶ On December 3/14, 1772 Obreskov tied Russian concessions on the article about Crimea with the need for the Porte to grant Russia Yenikale and Kerch. Obreskov agreed that “the Porte, having spiritual authority over Crimea, keeps the tightest knot of friendship with the Tatars.” However, in turn he demanded for Russia an equally solid basis for friendship with the Tatars. Since Russia, unlike the Porte, could not attach the Tatars through spiritual links, then it would have to establish political ties, which consisted of guaranteeing Tatar independence and gaining control over the fortresses of Yenikale and Kerch.¹⁵⁴⁷

¹⁵⁴³ Aksan notes that Abdürrezzak Bahir Efendi was a brother-in-law of Ahmed Resmi Efendi, the distinguished diplomat who had visited Vienna and Berlin. Abdürrezzak’s father, Tavukçubaşı Mustafa Efendi, had served as reis efendi in 1736-1741 and 1744-1747, and was “a leading intellectual of the age.” Abdürrezzak himself served as reis efendi in 1772-1774 and in 1779. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 27, 107 (fn. 30).

¹⁵⁴⁴ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 194-195.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 198.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Ulianitskii also summarizes the subjects of the three last conferences in the year 1772—before an impasse was reached,—but more cursorily: Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 434-437.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Russia’s demand for Kerch was not new. Peter I had first raised this demand in 1698 during the Karlowitz peace negotiations. His envoy to Constantinople Emel’ian Ukraintsev repeated it in 1699-1700. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 23. In view of Russia’s concerns over the brewing conflict with Sweden, however, this demand was conceded.

Abdürrezzak Efendi, however, simply vouched that the Porte would not interfere into political affairs of the Tatars and resisted giving up the fortresses. He tried to argue that the Porte had a right to keep them in return for letting Russia enjoy the rights of “navigation and commerce” on the Black Sea. After all, stressed the reis efendi, it was well known that the Porte had no need for Russian commerce.¹⁵⁴⁸

Obreskov objected that navigation and commerce were not feasible without Russian control of Yenikale, which would serve as a harbor.¹⁵⁴⁹ The reis efendi, on the other hand, highlighted that surrender of Yenikale would undermine the security of the Ottoman capital, for “one can sail from Yenikale to Constantinople on a one-sail ship.” The threat would be all the more palpable because Russia demanded that the Porte abandoned all Crimean fortresses.

Obreskov countered, saying that passage of the Bosphorus channel alone required 200 hours of sailing.¹⁵⁵⁰ And although there was no point in concluding peace if one wanted to resume fighting, even if a war broke out again, Obreskov underscored that neither Kefe nor other Crimean fortresses would enable the Porte to prevent Russian ships from leaving Yenikale and

During the 1768-1774 war with Turkey, the Russian government realized that none of the ports in the Azov Sea could accommodate large ships. The eastern shore of the Crimean peninsula, with its harbors of Kerch, Yenikale, and Kefe was seen as necessary for enabling Russia to build and anchor ships fit for sailing into the Black Sea. Yenikale was particularly important because it directly guarded the Kerch Strait and, therefore, was the key to safe passage of ships. By early July 1771 the Russian army and navy—consisting of ten frigates newly built at the Voronezh wharfs—captured the three towns. The Kerch Gulf turned out to be the only place that could serve as a harbor. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 410-417.

¹⁵⁴⁸ 89.8.3.1752.1772. Depeshi polnomochnogo posla na Bukharestskom kongresse Obrezkova pervopristsutstvuiushchemu chлену KID Grafu Paninu o khode mirnykh peregovorov s prilozheniem protokolov konferentsii s turetskimi poslami, teksta rechei turetskikh poslov, zhurnala Obrezkova i perepiski ego s Prusskim poslom Zegelinom v sviazi s peregovorami, a takzhe statei preliminarnykh uslovii mira. Na russkom, frantsuzskom, ital'ianskom, i turetskom iazykakh. December 8-15, 1772, LL. 3, 5ob.-6. The latter point about commerce met the reis efendi's objection early on: he kept insisting that commerce with Russia had no appeal for the Porte. Therefore, if Russia desired it more, it had to compensate the Porte with something in return—even such a great concession as leaving Crimea under Ottoman control. Even then, the Ottoman side wanted to prohibit Russian merchant ships to pass the Straits and to put various limits on the commercial navigation of the Black Sea. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 195, 200-201.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Early on, in March 1770, Catherine determined that her goal was to secure Russian passage through the Kerch strait by acquiring a port there. Initially, she asked only for Yenikale and Taman, as the fortresses guarding the strait from the west and east, respectively. In September 1770 the Imperial Council decided to demand Kerch as well. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 146.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Therefore, approximately eight and a half days, which appears exaggerated.

sailing out into the Black Sea. The reis efendi then declared anxiously that he could only say that if Yenikale remained in Russian hands, then all the inhabitants of Constantinople would abandon the city. To this, Obreskov replied with humor: “This means that a small fort with a 600-man garrison in peacetime would achieve what our [Russian] armies on the Danube and in Crimea, as well as our navies sailing freely on the Black Sea and in the Archipelago, have not been able to achieve.”¹⁵⁵¹

The reis efendi tried to convey the irrational nature of popular Ottoman fears: “In every state there are ministers and people who do not understand reasoning.” Obreskov certainly knew that Ottoman sultans and the Porte were under a great influence of public moods. However, to counter the reis efendi’s objection, Obreskov decided to capitalize on the Ottoman lack of understanding of Russian society. He knew that the reis efendi and other Ottomans did not know enough about the Russian government and people. Obreskov pretended that public opinion in Russia was as important as in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, this was an intelligent move because it was only natural for the Ottomans to imagine that other states functioned on the same principles. Obreskov therefore indicated that public opinion in Russia would be insulted by the meager gains that the Ottomans were prepared to concede to Russia:

If the peace will be signed according to your suggestions what will the Russian people say? When, reading the peace treaties, they will find in the article on the Tatar independence—not having enough knowledge to distinguish spiritual [influence] from political one—that the Tatar khan would have to be confirmed by the sultan and that local/*zemskie* judges would be appointed in Crimea with the Porte’s approval, and that all fortresses in Crimea and Kuban were to remain under the Porte’s control? In addition, when they ask what provinces were annexed by Russia as a result of such a fortunate war and conquest of so much territory, but in turn will be shown that plot of deserted and infertile land that Your Excellency is conceding to Russia, together with commerce and navigation without ports and without a harbor. Now I am asking Your Excellency: whose people, Russian or Turkish, will have more reasons to remonstrate? No, there can be no offers more reasonable than the ones my court is making.¹⁵⁵²

¹⁵⁵¹ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 6-8. Indeed, Yenikale had been built at the turn of the eighteenth century in response to the Russian conquest of Azov. Thus, it had been conceived as a counterweight to the increasing threat from Russia.

¹⁵⁵² 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 8ob.-9.

Abdürrezzak Efendi pointed out that Obreskov did not mention among concessions already agreed upon by the Porte Russia's possession of Azov, Taganrog, and severance of 300,000 Tatars from the Ottoman Empire. The Porte also offered money, but Russia refused. "Do you think that the Porte is in such a dire situation that it will have to accept all the conditions [?]" Obreskov repeated that Russian "offers" were moderate and acceptable. After all, if the war continued the Porte could lose or gain something, but Russia would not lose anything. However, Russia had already conceded a lot to the Porte, "but what does it keep in return?" The reis efendi immediately began to name all the Russian gains. He started with Azov. Obreskov tried to interrupt him by saying that Azov had always belonged to Russia. Given the controversial nature of this claim,¹⁵⁵³ it is unsurprising that the rest of the eleventh conference devolved into an unproductive argument about Azov.¹⁵⁵⁴

On December 6/17, 1772 the twelfth conference took place between Obreskov and the Ottoman reis efendi. Obreskov asked the reis efendi if he was happy that Obreskov made a concession on the subject of the Porte's spiritual authority over Crimea.¹⁵⁵⁵ The reis efendi confirmed that this concession was very important for the Porte from the religious point of view, but once again an argument started over the Tatar issue. The reis efendi compared the Russian guarantee of the Tatar independence to the Polish example. The partition of Poland had just

¹⁵⁵³ Peter I first conquered Azov from the Ottomans in 1696. The 1700 Treaty of Constantinople confirmed Russian control over Azov. However, the disastrous war of 1711 resulted in Russia's loss of Azov. The Belgrade Treaty has caused the most confusion in subsequent historical accounts. Many historians are under the impression that the Belgrade Treaty granted Azov to Russia. For example, see Mikhneva, *Rossia i Osmanskaia imperiia*, p. 37. However, in reality the Belgrade Treaty created an empty buffer zone between the two empires that included Azov, Taganrog, and their environs. Russia had to raze Azov fortifications and abandon the area. Druzhinina and a few others correctly describe the status of Azov between 1739 and 1774 as neutral "in fact" (Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 31, 33-34, 198), but many confuse the creation of a buffer zone with Russia's gaining control over Azov. Vorontsov in his 1762 memorandum openly acknowledged that Russia did not possess Azov. *AKV*, Vol. 25, p. 301. It is clear from this that Obreskov was exaggerating the fact of Russian possession of Azov.¹⁵⁵⁴ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 9ob.-10.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Tatar judges had to receive written permission—called *murasele*—from Ottoman supreme religious authorities. 89.8.3.1752.1772, L. 21ob. The main aspect of spiritual authority, however, concerned the sultan's confirmation of every newly elected khan. The nature of this confirmation was contested during the negotiations. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 193, 198-200.

taken place and therefore the reis efendi accused Russia of using the pretext of this guarantee to eventually undermine Tatar independence and annex Crimea, as Russia did with Poland.

Obreskov retorted: “What need does my court have to postpone such an intention for the future if it could do it now if it saw any benefit? The Polish example has no place—the reason for what happened was not [Russia’s] guarantee, but intrigues of those whom the Poles believed blindly and brought affairs to such a point. Besides, Russia has from old times had substantial, rather than illusory, claims to some of the territory of this state [Poland], but did not want to act upon them. When it [Russia] saw, however, that other neighbors have acted upon their claims, then it was not appropriate for Russia to abstain from acquiring that which belonged to it.”¹⁵⁵⁶

The reis efendi further insisted that the Ottoman Empire would open a war on Crimea if the Tatars refused to obey the Porte in spiritual matters. Obreskov objected by saying that spiritual transgression warranted punishments of spiritual nature. For example, at first the Porte could try to exhort the Tatars to obey. If this failed, the Porte could prohibit the Tatars from visiting holy places, and, finally, the Porte could resort to anathema. Obreskov suggested specifying these various means of spiritual retribution—prescribed in Islamic religious books—in the peace treaty in order to remove pretexts that guileful people could use for evil purposes. However, the reis efendi objected, saying that the Tatars would then have even more nerve to disobey the Porte, forcing the latter to use arms against them. “It is true that the holy lawgiver and prophet has left us a book of testament, but he also handed us a sword in order to use against those who disobey his law,” argued the reis efendi. Obreskov expressed disbelief that the Tatars, having been recognized as righteous Muslims for several centuries, would be able to transgress the law to such an extreme extent. On the contrary, such formulation would only serve as a convenient excuse for another Ottoman government to recapture Crimea. After all, everything

¹⁵⁵⁶ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 11-12ob., 23-23ob.

could be interpreted in various ways, and the Russian government was disadvantaged by not being familiar with the Islamic law. The reis efendi's last word was that in case of the Tatars' disobedience in spiritual matters, the Porte would first make spiritual exhortations, then ask the Russian court for help, then resort to threats, and, finally, withdraw its guarantee of the Tatar independence and declare a war. Obreskov promised to return to the matter later.¹⁵⁵⁷

The rest of the conference was remarkably genial. The two representatives talked about the need for their empires—the Russian and Ottoman—to maintain friendship and together keep other powers in check. “No doubt, if these two states that already occupy so to say the entire half of the world firmly unite with each other, then they would keep all of the other powers in servility/*podobostrastie*,” began Obreskov. The reis efendi replied in agreement: “If our two empires decided to maintain balance of power, then surely they could intimidate all the other states: it seems that the very reason/*blagorazumie* demands that they keep mutual friendship; for there are no obvious reasons for disagreements between them.” Obreskov wholeheartedly embraced the idea: “During my service in Constantinople I have often discussed this subject with various ministers of the Sublime Porte; both sides agreed that there were no reasons for disagreement between the two empires; but evil minds of some and ambition of others have led [the two empires] to this state....” The reis efendi regretfully concurred: “Perhaps the time predestined by God [for such an understanding to take place] had not yet come then—they heard you but did not understand you....”¹⁵⁵⁸

It is no wonder, therefore, that Obreskov felt respect and veneration for Abdürrezzak Efendi. At the end of one of the conferences, Obreskov declared that he had never met such a

¹⁵⁵⁷ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 12ob.-14.

¹⁵⁵⁸ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 15-15ob.

decent and benevolent person throughout his entire career in Turkey.¹⁵⁵⁹ Thus, the negotiations took place in a rare atmosphere of congeniality.¹⁵⁶⁰ Mutual understanding could not erase differences on matters of substance, however. Both the thirteenth and the fourteenth conferences in December focused on the Russian demand to cede Yenikale. Thus, the reis efendi continued to insist that Yenikale was too crucial for Constantinople's security. Obreskov tried to argue that the Ottoman capital was well protected by the Bosphorus channel, which "was worth a hundred fortresses such as Yenikale," as well as by the Black Sea, which represented an effective buffer area. The reis efendi strove to highlight that the Porte had already made many concessions: "In satisfaction of these two concessions to the Porte [concerning spiritual authority over Crimea], perhaps Russia could be pleased with the severance of up to 300,000 Tatars from the Ottoman Empire." Obreskov pointed out that this loss was not so great because the Tatars used to be not Ottoman subjects, but only allies. He also mocked Tatar military assistance to the Porte as mere robbery, "and of course the Sublime Porte does not owe its present greatness to the Tatars." The reis efendi continued the conversation in a tone that was close to pleading: "An empire that already has Azov and Taganrog must yield Yenikale to another [empire], whose entire security depends on this fortress." Obreskov objected: "I have explained many times already that Azov and Taganrog are not enough for Russia's security." But the reis efendi insisted that the Porte needed Yenikale more than Russia.¹⁵⁶¹

¹⁵⁵⁹ Soloviev, Book XV, Vol. 29, p. 9.

¹⁵⁶⁰ On friendly feelings, also see Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 428, 459-460. Aksan explains that Abdürrezzak seriously strove to work out a sensible peace arrangement. However, behind his commitment stood some interesting advice from Ahmed Resmi Efendi. The latter wrote a memorandum for Abdürrezzak and the grand vizier on the question of whether it would be possible to defeat the Russians or force them to withdraw to their territory. Ahmed Resmi Efendi argued that "a state, particularly in its age of decline, should have enough sense to recognize its military and territorial limitations, and that the Russians had badly overextended themselves in the Mediterranean and the Caucasus, and would eventually pay for it, alienating the people and causing the eventual collapse of the empire." Thus, Abdürrezzak believed that even if the Porte signed peace, Russian successes would not be long lasting. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, p. 161.

¹⁵⁶¹ 89.8.3.1752.1772, L. 81-86ob., 95ob.-96.

It proved difficult, therefore, to achieve Ottoman agreement on the most crucial points. As a result, in December 1772 the negotiations reached a stalemate and Obreskov suggested to his government to make additional concessions, namely to drop the demand for military navigation of the Black Sea and to allow the Porte to maintain some base in Crimea, although the latter was riskier. Abdürrezzak wrote a similar request for new instructions to the Porte. It was at this point that Obreskov, on his own initiative, introduced new articles, which led to a breakthrough in some of the previously discussed matters.¹⁵⁶²

Obreskov's "Original" Articles

During the thirteenth conference on December 10/21, 1772 Obreskov suggested to discuss a list of articles, but a number of them was completely new. He suggested that if the Porte accepted these proposals Russia would release all Ottoman captives.¹⁵⁶³ Two of these suggestions concerned religious matters.¹⁵⁶⁴ Namely, Obreskov suggested that "Russia be

¹⁵⁶² In response to Obreskov's suggestions, St. Petersburg agreed to make insignificant concessions in Crimea: the Porte could retain Kuban, but without Taman, where however the Porte could build a fortress on the Black Sea shore. But Catherine adamantly defended her desire to use military ships on the Black Sea. The Imperial Council, however, was open to the idea: "merchants ships can always be transformed into military ones." Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 214-216.

But the response of the Ottoman government was ever less compromising. After receiving new instructions, Abdürrezzak Efendi began to resist anew in matters that had been discussed and partly resolved earlier. Obreskov realized that the Porte hardened its stance because it was hoping that Sweden would organize a diversion of Russian forces and that other foreign powers would support the Porte in the negotiations. The Turks also, in fall 1772, secretly organized their navy to attack by surprise the Russian fleet in the Archipelago. But the Russians reacted in time and defeated the Ottomans. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 227-228, 235.

¹⁵⁶³ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 217, 220-222, 246-247, 301, 348, especially pp. 220-222.

¹⁵⁶⁴ The other two suggestions were not as striking, although in making them Obreskov demonstrated forethought and desire to guarantee that Russia would achieve foremost diplomatic status in Constantinople and comprehensive benefits upon the conclusion of the war. "Knowing through a lot of experience that in the Turkish land the title of emperor or empress is as little known as among us the title of *padyshakh* [padişah] carried by sultans and therefore also meaning emperor; also knowing that the Porte has already for a long time called French kings emperors but the court of Versailles, feeling that this title did not enjoy the same consideration among Turkish people in Turkish regions as the title of *padyshakh*, attained for itself this title of *padyshakh* in return for French assistance with the Belgrade Treaty. Following my most submissive/*vsepoddanneishii* diligence towards Her Imperial Majesty and my wish to deliver the same eminence in the Turkish regions to the sacrosanct/*osviashchennyi* honor of Her Majesty, I

allowed to construct a church in Constantinople in the part called Pera, or Beyoğlu (*Beyuglu*), for the clergy practicing Greek-Russian religion [*dlia dukhovnykh greko-rossiiskii zakon ispovedaiushchikh*] because this is allowed to other courts and so that the church would be under the protection of Russian ministers [diplomats], and protected from any persecution.” The other suggestion pertaining to religion read: “So that the Christian law [religion] and churches would be protected by the Sublime Porte with greater diligence/*tshchanie* and so that the Russian ministers’ moderate/*umerennyia* representations on behalf of Christian churches would always be favorably received.”¹⁵⁶⁵ These two articles would eventually become articles 14 and 7, respectively, of the final peace treaty.

These articles form Obreskov’s most critical contribution to the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, primarily in view of the subsequent controversy. In particular, the legacy of these articles played an important role during the diplomatic crisis that led to the Crimean War of

took the liberty [*prinial smelost’*] to demand this title; and I have a hope to succeed in it.” 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 72-72ob.

The last original demand of Obreskov concerned Russian prospects of trade and navigation in the Mediterranean. Drawing on his knowledge of difficulties caused by pirates, Obreskov requested the Porte to facilitate Russia’s agreements with the Ottoman African cantons, which was necessary to ensure safety of Russian shipping in the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas, as well as in the Archipelago. The Porte had already assisted other nations in procuring such agreements and Obreskov hoped that his friendly request would also be granted. 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 72ob.-73.

The last demand also appears to be a ploy to achieve a breakthrough in regard to the navigation issue. Inevitably, the discussion of this article devolved into an argument about Russia’s demand for unlimited navigation rights. The reis efendi noted that the matter of protection of Russian ships in the Mediterranean could not be resolved before the conclusion of negotiations on Russia’s navigation rights. The reis efendi reminded Obreskov that he had conceded rights of free navigation to Russia only on the Black Sea, therefore he could not yet fully address Obreskov’s demand concerning the Mediterranean. He had worked hard, he said, to procure the sultan’s agreement to allow Russia free navigation in the White/Mediterranean Sea, but this right, as with other foreign nations, applied only to merchant ships, which could have necessary cannons and military ammunition for defense against pirates. Obreskov objected that other nations had freedom to send military ships to the Mediterranean as well. But “military ships do not come with goods,” retorted the reis efendi. Obreskov insisted that military ships were necessary for protecting merchant vessels. The reis efendi promised to consult with his government on the matter: “I think when necessary it will be possible [for Russia] to send military ships as well.” However, the main difficulty for the reis efendi seems to have lay in opening the straits to the free passage of Russian ships: “Would it be possible for some ships to sail in the White Sea, and others in the Black Sea, and then to come to Constantinople, where goods would be transferred [from one set of ships to the other]?” Obreskov naturally responded that such an arrangement would create great difficulties for Russian commerce. 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 77-77ob. Also see Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 224-227.

¹⁵⁶⁵ 89.8.3.1752.1772, L. 90.

1853-1856.¹⁵⁶⁶ However, I argue that the real significance lies in the fact that the only historians who noted Obreskov's authorship of these articles have missed the exact nature of his contribution.¹⁵⁶⁷ Namely, in relation to the question of religion Obreskov did not propose completely new articles but only added specifics to the original demand of the Russian government, as it had spelled it out in its draft peace proposals in 1770-1772: to demand "greater security and freedom of both religions in the lands of both empires."¹⁵⁶⁸ Importantly, Obreskov modified the original demand by dropping any reference to the reciprocal obligation of religious toleration. Instead, he proposed that only the Ottoman Empire would pledge to respect the rights of Christian minorities, and advanced a more specific suggestion—construction of an Orthodox church in Pera—that would allow Russia to substantiate its interest in the plight of Ottoman Orthodox subjects.

In view of the novelty of his suggestions, Obreskov explained their purpose to Panin in a separate note. Obreskov believed that the Russian court would be interested in providing Christian co-religionists, as well as its own merchants living in Constantinople with a church (*khram*), which they desperately needed because there was not a single church in the entire district/*okolodok* of Pera. Access to the chapel of the Russian mission, on the other hand, was

¹⁵⁶⁶ David M. Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (Longman, 1994), pp. 75-90, 104, 107; Köse, pp. 205-213. Latest research on the subject highlights the religious factor in motivating the Russian government to defend Orthodox minorities of the Ottoman Empire, however it was also to a significant extent an expression of and reaction to the widespread use of religious minorities of the Ottoman Empire by other European powers in order to counteract Russian influence there: Jack Fairey, "Russia's Quest for the Holy Grail: Relics, Liturgies, and Great-Power Politics in the Ottoman Empire," in Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), pp. 131-164. Also see his book, in which he notes that the Crimean War was the last European war fought for the sake of religion: Jack Fairey, *The Great Powers and Orthodox Christendom: The Crisis Over the Eastern Church in the Era of the Crimean War* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁵⁶⁷ Druzhinina was the first to draw attention to Obreskov's original articles in her book and also in her article: *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 217-227; "Russkii diplomat A. M. Obreskov," *Istoricheskie zapiski*, Vol. 40 (Moscow, 1952), pp. 267-278.

Among modern scholars, Stegnii is possibly the only one who clearly delineated—following Druzhinina's work—Obreskov's independent contribution. Stegnii, *Posol III klassa*, pp. 315-316.

¹⁵⁶⁸ *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, p. 248.

often prohibited because of almost constant plague outbreaks. Obreskov decided to suggest this article as a result of repeated requests coming from the inhabitants of Pera, addressed personally to him as well as to his predecessors, “to request on their behalf this God-pleasing benefaction.” Local Orthodox Christians, likewise, often offered to cover all the expenses for the construction of the church. “And since I considered present circumstances as conducive to this [enterprise], as well as knowing that other [foreign] ministers have public churches in addition to their missions’ chapels, I took the liberty of making such a demand.” In connection with the second clause concerning religion, Obreskov explained that he decided to suggest the right of Russian ministers in Constantinople to exercise certain protection over Christians and their churches in very moderate terms, “imagining that a direct demand for such a permission was impossible to establish on any basis, and anticipating that the Porte could be shocked by it.”¹⁵⁶⁹

A careful reading of the last argument suggests that Druzhinina has exaggerated the novelty of this particular article. On the contrary, the Russian government had already expressed a desire—independently of Obreskov—to ensure that the Ottoman Christians would not be oppressed by their government, as seen in its early drafts of peace terms. What Obreskov did was to moderate this demand in a way that would make it acceptable to the Porte. Indeed, it appears that Obreskov expected objections even to his softened formulation of this demand and was ready to drop it from the treaty if the Porte unofficially promised to pay respectful attention to Russian representations on the subject.

Objections from the Ottoman side did eventually arise. During the thirteenth conference, the reis efendi noted that a decision on the construction of a “national Russian church” in

¹⁵⁶⁹ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 71-72. Druzhinina provides more examples of the petitions of Constantinople Greeks for Russia to build an Orthodox church in Pera, both before and during the war. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 222-224; Druzhinina, “Russkii diplomat A. M. Obreskov,” *Istoricheskie zapiski*, Vol. 40 (Moscow, 1952), p. 273.

Constantinople depended on Ottoman clergy. Obreskov in turn reminded that Russia was making the demand on the same basis that allowed other foreign nations the right to maintain their national churches in Constantinople.¹⁵⁷⁰ During the fourteenth conference on December 13/24, 1772 the reis efendi reported that the grand vizier objected to Obreskov's demand to allow Russia the right to speak on behalf of "Greek" churches in the Ottoman Empire. Obreskov then explained that Russia was not demanding the right for its ministers in Constantinople to protect Greek churches, but only requesting that its ministers be allowed to present to the Porte in a friendly fashion the needs of the Greek churches. Obreskov maintained that Russia should not be excluded from practicing a right that the Porte had granted to all other nations who had churches of their religion in Constantinople. The reis efendi justifiably objected, noting that each other nation had, at most, only one national church in Constantinople, which it protected not on the basis of any obligatory treaty, but by appealing to the Porte's friendship. Here Obreskov revealed that he could drop this demand if the Porte registered somewhere that it would henceforth accept such representations of Russian ministers and respect these requests in consideration of mutual friendship. Thus, it was not absolutely necessary for Obreskov to officially guarantee such right to Russia by including it in the peace treaty. Instead, he asked the reis efendi to record in his protocols of the peace congress that this issue had been discussed and that the Porte resolved to respect representations of Russian ministers on behalf of Ottoman Orthodox subjects. The reis efendi agreed to address his government with Obreskov's original demand and, in case of difficulties, to resort to the last solution suggested by Obreskov.¹⁵⁷¹

Therefore, instead of suggesting new articles that would allow Russia to interfere in the Ottoman treatment of its Christian subjects, Obreskov was actually downplaying this demand

¹⁵⁷⁰ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 77ob.-78, 93-93ob.

¹⁵⁷¹ 89.8.3.1752.1772, LL. 77ob., 93-93ob.

and creatively advancing it by other means, namely the clause about building a church. Most strikingly, he did not find it necessary to mention that the Russian government expected Ottoman protection of its Christian subjects on the basis of reciprocity, although this is exactly how Catherine had originally framed her demand. For example, on March 22/April 2, 1771 St. Petersburg had instructed Aleksei Orlov, among other things, to demand “greater security and freedom of both religions in the lands of both empires.” The Russian government was confident that the Turks would likely agree to this demand.¹⁵⁷² The same article was also mentioned to the Austrian envoy in St. Petersburg, Prince Lobkowitz, in May 1771: the empress demanded “a more active protection from Ottoman law against violent oppression by [provincial] governors of Christian churches, “similar to the way it was done by Russia in relation to its Muslim subjects.”¹⁵⁷³ A year later, St. Petersburg kept the same formulation in its instructions to Orlov and Obreskov for the first peace congress: Russia was to demand “general amnesty and better, henceforth, protection of Christian churches in the Ottoman territories, in reciprocity for how Muslims in Russia, under the shadow of our laws, everywhere enjoy full freedom and security.” Once again, St. Petersburg did not expect that this point would meet with Ottoman objections. In addition, similar language of reciprocity was used in the article concerning Moldavia and Wallachia: “also to completely allow free and sacred practice of our Orthodox and other Christian faiths there, under the protection of the Turkish government, and not to be oppressed in any way, “in reciprocity for which we can promise the same for Muslims in our subjecthood.”¹⁵⁷⁴

It is not entirely clear what stood behind the empress’s insistence on the reciprocal obligation of religious toleration. Perhaps, she was looking for a justification of her desire to

¹⁵⁷² *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, pp. 248, 251-252.

¹⁵⁷³ *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, p. 296. Indeed, this demand—“protection of Ottoman Christian churches from cruel oppression of provincial governors” (it was marked with a “N.B.” on the margins)—had already been voiced to the Prussian and Austrian representatives in late 1770. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 126-127.

¹⁵⁷⁴ *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, pp. 93, 98, 103. Neither Ulianitskii, nor Druzhinina, have noticed this nuance. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 157, 161; Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 130, 296.

interfere in their affairs of the Ottoman Orthodox subjects in contemporary philosophical ideas about religious freedom. The empress might have also believed that her toleration of religious minorities would raise Russia's international prestige as an enlightened government. She could also have been relying on her exposure to Russian administration in the Muslim provinces of the Russian Empire, where during her trip before the war she found common language with the Tatars.¹⁵⁷⁵ Lastly, the empress could have been laying the ground for the Ottoman acceptance of the incorporation of the nomadic Tatar hordes into Russian protection.¹⁵⁷⁶ Interestingly, the empress believed that her demand that the Porte assure protection of its Christian subjects would not meet any resistance.¹⁵⁷⁷ It is clear that Obreskov felt differently. He chose a tactful solution: he did not raise any objections to the original formulation, but tacitly changed it, and attempted to provide a more concrete foundation for Russian interference, such as construction of the Orthodox church in Pera.

Therefore, close analysis of original sources makes it possible to recast the original argument about the religious clauses of the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty. Roderic Davison had argued that these articles, based on their final formulation, granted Russia very circumscribed rights, and

¹⁵⁷⁵ In 1769, Catherine bragged in her letter to Voltaire that “two years ago I knew many Tatar and Arab phrases in Kazan, which caused great pleasure to its inhabitants. Most of the local people are kind/good Muslims, very rich. They are building a magnificent stone mosque after my departure.” *SIRIO*, Vol. 10, p. 351. Recent historiography on religious toleration in Russia highlights Catherine II's role in reversing oppressive religious policies in the Muslim regions of the Russian Empire because she believed that the Russian Empire could profit more by turning its various confessions into obedient and productive subjects. See, for example, Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Catherine II also seems to have made religious toleration a part of her public image abroad. Skinner, p. 129.

¹⁵⁷⁶ In 1770 the four Tatar tribes that lived outside the peninsula (*Edisan, Budzhak, Dzhambuluk, and Edichkul*) accepted Russian suzerainty and were moved to the Russian-controlled shore of the Dniester. *SIRIO*, Vol. 97, pp. 187-188. Also Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiskii mir*, p. 108.

¹⁵⁷⁷ It is significant that the empress had not argued for her protection of the Polish dissidents in the 1760s in the same way. Of course, there were not as many Catholics in the Russian Empire as Muslims. Still, it is significant that Catherine advanced her demand on the basis of what could be called the principle of fairness, or reciprocity. This was a very different approach from that of Peter I, who had tried to achieve the Porte's guarantee to “ecumenical patriarchs and all pious Christians of the Greek faith” freedom to practice their religion. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, p. 32, fn. 1. Similarly, the Russo-Polish treaty of 1686 had provided for a unilateral obligation of the king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth not to oppress or allow to be oppressed any person professing the Greek Orthodox religion. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, p. 10.

were far from having given Russia the right of protectorship over Ottoman Christians.¹⁵⁷⁸ Close attention to the process of the peace negotiations and Obreskov's role in it, however, suggests something rather different. Druzhinina had been right in pointing out Obreskov's original contribution, but she failed to realize that Obreskov was actually moderating the original demand of his government that was in fact far more interesting than the final article of the peace treaty. Namely, the empress wanted to draw attention to the need for the Ottoman Empire to emulate Russia's tolerant treatment of its religious minorities. Pragmatic Obreskov likely interpreted this language as inappropriate for the Ottoman context, where ideally Islam always enjoined rulers to allow Christians and Jews freedom of religion and, therefore, there was no need to ask the Ottomans to emulate Russia. Moreover, Obreskov might have reasoned that such reciprocal clause could provide the Ottomans and their European allies with a right to interfere in Russian domestic affairs. It is enough to recall that when Obreskov had consulted with dragoman Kallimaki about interceding on behalf of rebellious Montenegrins who were facing harsh Ottoman military retribution in 1756, the dragoman had demurred by noting that the Porte would be unhappy about Russian interference in this matter, "just as Russia would object if the Porte

¹⁵⁷⁸ Roderic H. Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility": The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 34, no. 3 (September 1976), pp. 463-483. Davison wrote that articles 7 and 14 were the most controversial: "The central question is whether Russia received, under these articles, a right to act as protector of Ottoman Christians." This question was most important for qualifying Russian claims during the Crimean war that it had a special interest in the situation of Ottoman Christians as either rightful or not. Davison, "Russian Skill," pp. 463, 481.

The liberal interpretation of these articles persisted even after the Crimean War. Thus, Zhigarev in 1896 wrote that the treaty gave Russia a right to exercise protectorship over Ottoman Orthodox subjects. He wrote that the treaty had given Russia "*de facto* and *de jure* the right to protect the interests of the Orthodox Church and its [Russia's] co-religionists; *de facto*—because the Porte firmly pledged to protect Christian religion and took upon itself responsibilities to improve the condition of Moldavia, Wallachia, Georgia, Mingrelia, and Archipelago islands; and *de jure*—because the Porte included these promises and responsibilities in the treaty and allowed Russia the right to protect/pokrovitel'stvovat' the Orthodox church in the entire Ottoman Empire and the right to protect the interests of Moldavia and Wallachia." In short," wrote Zhigarev, "Russia received a unilateral right to intervene in internal affairs of the Turkish Empire with the purpose of protecting Christian peoples of the East." Sergei Zhigarev, *Russkaia politika v Vostochnom voprose: eia istoriia v XVI-XIX vekakh, kriticheskaia otsenka i budushchiia zadachi* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1896), pp. 191, 195, 197, 199-200.

Turkish historian Osman Köse follows Roderic Davison in arguing that the treaty did not give Russia actual protection rights. Köse, pp. 205-213.

began to sympathize with some Muslim people living towards the east of the Russian Empire.”¹⁵⁷⁹ In other words, if not for Obreskov’s modification of the original wording of Catherine II’s demand concerning religious minorities, most likely the empress would not have been able to flaunt her unilateral right of protectorship over the Ottoman Orthodox as she did shortly after the peace was concluded.¹⁵⁸⁰

The basic motivation, both of Catherine and Obreskov, however, was to lay the ground for Russia’s right to speak out in defense of Ottoman Christians were the latter to experience religious oppression. Obreskov’s personal experience suggested to him appropriate ways to tone down the empress’s demand. He knew that Russian diplomats at the Porte had not been able even to officially raise such matters for fear of provoking Ottoman apprehension that Russia wanted to meddle in its affairs. Such advocacy was always done surreptitiously, through secret agents and heavy bribes. Even then, reliance on the Greek dragomans of the Porte and patriarchs of Constantinople was not helpful in solving problems of non-Greek Orthodox believers in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Obreskov likely decided that it would be a sufficient achievement if he could simply normalize the practice of making such appeals on behalf of Ottoman Christian subjects directly and openly to the Ottoman government.

Thus, it is possible to say that Druzhinina has misinterpreted several of Obreskov’s “independent” suggestions as being completely novel. Still, she has rightly highlighted Obreskov’s initiative, independent thinking, flexibility, persistence, thoughtfulness, and strategic thinking throughout the negotiation process. In fact, his personal contributions to the treaty went beyond the four articles singled out by Druzhinina. At Bucharest, he alone was responsible for choosing the exact order of raising various issues, although he had to adhere to the general

¹⁵⁷⁹ 90.1.375.1756, L. 249.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Catherine II issued a manifesto to this effect in March 1775. Davison, “Russian Skill,” pp. 474-475.

instruction to discuss minor matters first in order to be able to compromise on some of them in later discussions of major issues. He proved to be a skillful and respectful negotiator. Based on his knowledge and personal observations he felt confident modifying original formulations of peace proposals and suggesting new matters. For example, following his long stay in Moldavia and Wallachia, he was able to propose very specific terms concerning the two Danubian principalities.¹⁵⁸¹

As a result, even though Obreskov finalized only ten articles and potentially agreed on some others by the end of the congress,¹⁵⁸² his detailed formulations of all the articles were

¹⁵⁸¹ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 232-234, 243-245; Druzhinina, “Russkii diplomat,” p. 274. St. Petersburg approved all of Obreskov’s independent suggestions. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 450, 452; Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 237. In January 1773 Catherine “all-mercifully approved” all articles that Obreskov included in the negotiations on his own initiative. Catherine wrote that she “eagerly recognized in them the fruit of your personal effort and local knowledge of our affairs with the Porte.” Catherine only suggested replacing the article on treaties with the African cantons with a demand for the Porte’s protection of Russian commercial ships’ unobstructed sailing, as in the Prusso-Ottoman treaty. *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 315.

It should be noted that Obreskov suggested these articles at a time when the negotiations reached an impasse in late 1772. They were thus partly designed to keep the talks going, even though both representatives could not discuss previous issues until they received new instructions. In this context, Obreskov also advised his government to make additional concessions, namely to drop the demand for military navigation of the Black Sea and to allow the Porte to maintain some base in Crimea, although the latter was riskier. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 214-216. Panin supported him but admitted that the empress did not want to hear of any concessions. Panin, therefore, asked Obreskov “to apply his wit, intelligence, and what not to formulate this particular article [on unlimited navigation] in such a way that the Ottomans would not feel threatened by being awakened to an arrival of a massive Russian fleet at the doors of Constantinople and, on the other hand, so that the empress would not feel that her hands were tied and she could not carry out her in reality unrealizable, but in theory attractive designs [a great naval base on the Black Sea].” *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 321. Ulianitskii, *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more*, pp. 461-463, 466.

Overall, Obreskov admitted that the articles that he was able to finalize in early 1773 while waiting for new instructions were relatively minor. However, he desired to make some progress and on his own initiative suggested to the Porte that it would also guarantee Crimean independence on par with Russia. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 234-235.

In spring 1773 Obreskov did not fully carry out the empress’s instruction to compromise by allowing the Porte to construct a fortress on the Black Sea shore of the Taman peninsula. Obreskov thought that this concession was not in line with Russia’s interests. Therefore, he ventured to suggest that the Porte take a small island between Crimea and Taman. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 238-249.

¹⁵⁸² Obreskov took the breakdown of the negotiations close to heart. When the talks reached an impasse in early 1774, Obreskov wrote that felt very depressed—worse, he said, than during his imprisonment in Yedikule. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, p. 236. In actuality, he was very close to succeeding. Namely, Aksan explains that the grand vizier’s council actually resolved to accept the Russian terms in spring 1773. They reasoned: “even if we continue hereafter to fight for ten years, there will be nothing better than this.” However, the grand vizier was afraid to assume sole responsibility and asked the imperial council in Constantinople to make the final decision. The latter rejected Russian demands. Both Vasif and Ahmed Resmi blamed Grand Vizier Muhsinzade Mehmed for indecisiveness and cowardice. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 162-163.

completely adopted—with some changes relating to final Ottoman concessions¹⁵⁸³—into the final text of the treaty in 1774.¹⁵⁸⁴ Field-Marshal Petr Rumiantsev, the official Russian plenipotentiary at the last peace talks at Küçük Kaynarca, had great respect for Obreskov. Rumiantsev closely consulted with Obreskov throughout the spring 1774 and expected him to be present at the final talks. Although Obreskov arrived two days after the signing of the treaty due to the flooding of the Danube, Rumiantsev acknowledged him as “the architect/*stroitel*’ of this cause [peace negotiations/treaty].”¹⁵⁸⁵

¹⁵⁸³ The final treaty could have been very different if not for resounding Russian victories in spring-summer 1774. Heated discussions in St. Petersburg in 1773-1774 involved those who wanted to make concessions in order to end the war as soon as possible and those—the empress and the Orlovs—who wanted to achieve maximum gains. In fall 1773-spring 1774 Panin advocated making important concessions, such as dropping the demands for Kerch and Yenikale and for unlimited navigation of the Black Sea. *SIRIO*, Vol. 118, p. 490; Vol. 135, pp. 74, 83. Yet, the summer campaign brought the Ottomans to the table of peace negotiations and they had to agree to almost all Russian conditions. Ahmed Resmi Efendi, the first plenipotentiary at Küçük Kaynarca, subsequently explained in his memoirs that he saw peace as a necessary objective and regretted that the Porte had not concluded peace earlier, when the Russians offered it in 1770. He highlighted that had the Ottomans agreed to it, they would have retained Crimea, which at that time had not yet declared independence. Likewise, in 1772-1773 “The value of the settlement Abdürrezzak Efendi reached with 1,000 pains during Bucharest negotiations was unappreciated. Know-it-all of the time, who had neither experienced the natural conditions of the world nor regarded past instances of war and peace among men of old, said, ‘It should be one way or the other. May it be firm, clear, and utterly sincere,’ and it is plain in what a predicament they ended up.” Ahmet Resmi Efendi, *Hulâsatü ’l-i ’tibâr*, pp. 66-68.

¹⁵⁸⁴ On July 11/22, 1774 triumphant Rumiantsev wrote to the empress from Küçük Kaynarca: “I finally had the pleasure of achieving peace through force of arms.... Ten articles that had been signed at the Bucharest congress were confirmed, and almost all the other [articles] were accepted in full.” I.I. Shakhovskoi, “Kuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii traktat 10 iulia 1774 g.,” *Russkii Arkhiv*, Book III, Vol. 10 (1879), pp. 137-169, here p. 152.

The Ottoman side also concluded that the Bucharest draft of the treaty was a convenient basis for the final treaty. Köse, p. 108. The grand vizier himself once again hesitated, but his council resolved to sign peace. The grand vizier then sought the opinion of the Chief Military Judge (*Kazı-asker*) who also felt that a peace treaty based on the Bucharest articles would be legitimate. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, pp. 166-167.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir*, pp. 261, 264, 266, 268. *SIRIO*, Vol. 135, p. 40. Rumiantsev wrote to Obreskov on February 10/21, 13/24, March 17/28, 21/April 1, April 11/22, 14/25, 22/May 3, and May 15/26, consulting with him about the Ottomans and asking for advice. “Vsepoddanneishiia doneseniiia i pis’ma Gr. P.A. Rumiantsova-Zadunaiskago, 1774 goda,” *ChIOIDR*, 1865, Book 2, pp. 297-305, 307-308. Rumiantsev and Obreskov corresponded with each other regularly in the earlier years as well, especially during and after the peace negotiations. For example, see 89.8.3.1766.1773. Peregiska polnomochnogo ministra na Bukharestskom kongresse Obrezkova s fel’dmarshalom Rumiantsevym o khode mirnykh peregovorov, o vutochtel’nosti [?] prusskogo i avstriiskogo ministrov v sviazi s peregovorami, o voennoplennykh, o strategicheskome znachenii Varny, o peresyлке pochy, o posylke razvedchikov v Konstantinopol’, o nedoverii k nichnikam [?], ob otnoshenii Valashskogo gospodaria k Rossii i o ego snosheniiakh s Turtsiei, o vozobnovlenii voennykh deistvii i khode ikh za Dunaem (1773), o vybore goroda dlia konferentsii s Turetskim poslom i o podgotovke podvod dlia poslov. January 2—November 29, 1773, plus December 6. Prilozhenie: Kopia manifesta Rumiantseva k naseleniiu Valakhii.

Epilogue

Obreskov returned to Russia after the end of the war, where he enjoyed more than a decade of peaceful and comfortable retirement, even though technically he retained the position of the member of the CFA and was appointed a senator in 1779.¹⁵⁸⁶ His last contribution to Russian diplomacy on the Bosphorus dates to 1775, when he was asked to write a detailed report on the ways to spread Russian commerce “with the Turkish empire and other regions in the Archipelago and on the shores of the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas through the Black Sea.”¹⁵⁸⁷ Obreskov presented a most detailed, forward-looking, and specific plan for developing Russia’s commerce with the Ottoman Empire, but only parts of it were realized in the next several decades because of continuing tensions with the Ottoman Empire.

In the meantime, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca gave Russia the right to maintain a diplomat of the second rank—envoy or plenipotentiary minister—in Constantinople, thus raising the prestige of the Russian mission. Moreover, the reparations of four and a half million rubles that the Ottoman Empire was obliged to pay to the Russian government served in part the purpose of buying a new summer residence for the mission in Büyükdere and assuring the stable financing of the embassy’s operations. Russia even won and later applied the right to open consulates anywhere in the Ottoman Empire. However, this too proved to be an abortive experiment at this early stage. Once again, the reason for the disruption lay in the multiplicity of contested points brought to the fore of Russo-Ottoman relations by the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Kessel’brenner, *Izvestnye diplomaty Rossii*, p. 391-392, 394.

¹⁵⁸⁷ 89.8.2175.1775 (orientirovochno). Kopia dokladnoi zapiski byvshego rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova o torgovle s Turtsiei na Chernom more, LL. 1-16ob. Vladimir Ulianitskii also published this report, although with some variations in content, in his book *Dardanelly, Bosfor i Chernoe more v XVIII veke*, pp. 470-475.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present work has been to trace the development of the first Russian permanent diplomatic mission in the Ottoman Empire. I expected to find that the residence of Russian diplomats on the Bosphorus had provided them and the Russian government with a better understanding of the Ottoman state and society, which could be crucial for formulating more effective foreign policy. Secondly, the history of the mission promised to provide a more nuanced and grounded characterization of Russian foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire, which has been usually painted as an unrelentless and aggressive strife to acquire warm water ports in the Black Sea. I have found that the Russian government indeed utilized the mission as the most important source of information on Ottoman politics. Constantinople's role as an important European diplomatic capital also turned the Russian mission into an indispensable tool for thwarting anti-Russian intrigues of hostile European governments. The close intertwinement of Russo-Ottoman relations with major European diplomatic developments directly affected Russia's relations with the Ottoman government. As a result, for most of the period under review the goal of the Russian mission was to prevent a conflict with the Ottoman Empire. This is also true of the early reign of Catherine II, which contradicts the view that her policy toward the Ottomans was belligerent from the start. In other words, the early history of the Russian mission in Constantinople attests to the importance of the diplomatic approach in advancing Russia's strategic objectives in the Black Sea region.

First, I considered the reasons for the establishment of the permanent residency by Peter I and how it fit in the broader institutional history of the Russian foreign affairs department. I found that Peter I's decision to engage Russia in the system of resident diplomacy was a result of both the experiments of his predecessors with this method of diplomacy and, crucially, the tsar's

own conscious orientational shift and determination to make the Russian state an active player on the international scene. The institutional foundation of the *Posolskii Prikaz* provided for a relatively quick adaptation to the system of resident diplomacy. This success allowed the Russian government to coordinate the different directions of its foreign policy with great agility and to take advantage of the more direct sources of information and channels for influencing foreign governments. However, in Constantinople certain challenges frustrated the effective functioning of the Russian mission, especially in the early period, when diplomatic relations were interrupted by the wars of 1710-1713 and 1735-1739. Cultivation of new diplomatic cadres who could lead the mission on the ground and of supporting linguistic personnel took time and, perhaps inevitably, was characterized by trial and error. As a result, the intelligence provided by Russian residents in Constantinople varied in value and impact. The period of peace in mutual relations from 1739 to 1768 allowed the mission, especially under the leadership of Aleksei Obreskov (1751-1768), to become a more effective institution. The example of the Constantinople mission shows that the Russians sought to be actively and closely involved in the local diplomatic corps and for this purpose adopted methods and practices that had been employed and honed for centuries by other European nations in their relations with the Ottoman Empire.

The Constantinople mission, from its very inception, served the goal of preventing a conflict with the Ottomans in the context of Russia's more important political and military engagements in Europe. It does not mean that the Russian government did not follow an active defensive strategy. Arguably, the war of 1735-1739 was initiated by Empress Anna's government as a preemptive measure, for her residents in Constantinople, Ivan Nepliuev and Aleksei Veshniakov, had been warning her for several years that the Ottomans would soon attack Russia. They advocated a preemptive war that would put an end to what they saw as the

inherently weak and vulnerable Ottoman colossus. This analysis proved to be overly optimistic and discounted not only the actual Ottoman reluctance to initiate conflict, but also the intense involvement of all the major European powers in the fate of the Ottoman Empire.

Russia's defensive strategy was particularly focused on the vulnerable southern border, where the Russian government continued to construct new defensive settlements and fortresses even during the peaceful decades of the 1750s and 1760s—not unlike the Ottomans. However, this policy was controversial and leading Russian statesmen such as the Chancellor Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin preferred not to pursue these projects as forcefully, being ready to compromise in the face of Ottoman objections. Despite the existence of some divergence in the views of principal Russian policy-makers, the Russian resident in Constantinople continued to receive orders to ensure Ottoman non-involvement in European conflicts that dominated Russian diplomacy in the 1750s and 1760s—the Prussian challenge and the Polish succession crisis, respectively. Moreover, Obreskov was urged repeatedly to achieve the right for Russia of commercial navigation on the Black Sea. This was, however, the only issue that Obreskov, as well as his predecessors, was sceptical about achieving through diplomatic means. Nevertheless, even Catherine II, who proved to be a more ambitious and enterprising ruler, was highly invested in preserving peace with the Ottoman Empire up to the very moment when Sultan Mustafa III declared war on Russia in fall 1768. Obreskov was quite successful in warding off Ottoman belligerence for more than four years, proving the value of the mission and the expertise that had been accumulated over many decades. But many leading Ottomans, most importantly the sultan himself, had become deeply concerned about Catherine's mounting heavy-handedness in Poland-Lithuania, which became the main impetus for the conflict.

My findings cast a new perspective on the history of Russo-Ottoman encounters across the Black Sea in the period 1700-1774. Objective analysis of potential threats inevitably led the Russian and Ottoman governments to view each other as competitors and to prepare for potential conflict. However, for most of the century regular diplomatic contacts, primarily through the Russian residency in Constantinople, helped the two empires maintain open communication channels and resolve points of contention through negotiation and even compromise. The Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth century were not the result of attempts at territorial aggrandizement on the part of either empire, but grew out of mutual concerns about vulnerable border security. The readiness of Catherine II's chief foreign policy advisor Nikita Panin to contemplate allowing the Ottomans to annex Polish Podolia in order to avoid potential war in 1768 speaks volumes about the range of approaches to the Ottoman Empire among Russian statesmen. The policy of prioritizing peace with the Ottomans in order to tackle more important foreign and domestic issues had an important and often central place in Russian diplomacy during the period in question.

My work contributes to the historical literature as it is the first account of the early history of the Russian mission in Constantinople that not only utilizes original sources for the least researched period of the middle of the century but also provides a longer perspective on the evolution of Russian diplomatic institutions, practices, and cadres and their significance for Russo-Ottoman relations. The Russian commitment—across different reigns—to maintain direct regular contacts with the Ottomans attests to the importance for Russia of maintaining peace on the Russo-Ottoman border and of cultivating independent channels for collecting intelligence and influencing Ottoman politics. In addition, I offer the first comprehensive account of Aleksei Obreskov's residency, which deserves attention as one of the longest terms that a Russian

diplomat had ever served in the Ottoman Empire. Obreskov also is an example of a circumspect and skillful diplomat who put a lot of thought into his analysis of Ottoman politics and the advice that he gave to the Russian government.

My focus on Russian diplomatic institutions and the role of individual diplomats highlights the significance of diplomacy as a tool of preventing and avoiding war in Russian foreign relations, especially in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, from the 1740s to the 1760s. Crucially, I argue that Catherine II largely continued this policy, especially in relations with the Ottoman Empire. My work adds to the discussion of continuities or persistent factors in Russian foreign policy by suggesting that an important continuity consisted in Russia's ability to maintain peaceful relations and negotiate problematic issues with its neighbors when the latter were also interested in upholding peace, which was certainly true of the Ottoman Empire for most of the period.

Explanatory Note

Personal names

Modern spelling of an individual's name in his/her native or primary language is used. However, it is not always possible to know the exact spelling of an original foreign name of a diplomatic employee in Russian service. In such cases, I have attempted to guess the original name based on the Russian transliterations used in the documents. I have likewise changed the Russian spelling of Turkish/Ottoman names into their modern Turkish forms (but with the older forms "Mehmed" rather than "Mehmet").

Place names

In general, I use modern official place-names in place of historic or non-official names, using the language of the country to which a place now belongs. However, I also use standard English forms such as "St. Petersburg," "Moscow," and "Kiev" for well-known locations. I denote the capital of the Ottoman Empire with its historic name, *Constantinople*, to emphasize that the ways in which people living in the eighteenth century conceived of that city were markedly different than if they had used Istanbul. For the same reason I preserve the eighteenth-century Russians' use of *Tsar'grad* whenever they referred to the capital of the Ottoman Empire in this way. In addition, if a place name has since been changed, I use the old version: *Akkerman*, not *Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy*.

Russian and Ottoman terminology

Some Russian terms have been used in their original spelling (*d'iak*). In such cases, they are italicized and their explanations are provided in the glossary. Most European languages in the earlier period used the word "Turk" to mean either "Ottoman" or "Muslim." Therefore, I have translated Russian references to the "Turks" in the documents as "Ottomans." Where Ottoman terms exist in standard English forms (pasha) and are not part of a personal name, those are used here. Otherwise, the words are presented in italics and the explanations are provided in the glossary.

Dates

Dates are given in the Gregorian calendar unless otherwise noted, in which cases both dates are used (June 28/July 9, 1762). The Julian calendar lagged behind the Gregorian one by eleven days in the eighteenth century.

Romanization

I use the American Library Association—Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian, however I omit the use of the apostrophe for denoting soft consonants before endings in personal names. Instead, I add -i- for better readability: *Soloviev*, not *Solov'ev*.

Currencies

For Ottoman currencies, I consulted Şevket Pamuk's *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 167-168. The currencies often quoted in Russian archival sources refer to the following new forms of Ottoman gold coins in the eighteenth century:

Chervonnye fonduklii/funduklii— findık
Chervonnye zinzhirlii— zircirli

According to Russian archival sources, in 1763 one gold *findık* was equivalent to 2 rubles 20 kopeks and one gold *zircirli* equalled 1 ruble 50 kopeks. 89.8.334.1763. Reliatsii rezidenta v Konstantinopole Obrezkova Ekaterine II..., LL. 120-121.

Archival citations

I cite the documents of the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (*Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii, AVPRI*) by noting the number of the collection/*fond*, the number of the subseries/*opis* ', the number of the section of the subseries/*chast* ' (wherever pertinent), the number of the file/*delo*, and the number of the relevant pages/*listy*. The catalogue of the *AVPRI* collections refers to documents sometimes with the inclusion of the year, sometimes without. However, I have consistently included the year into every archival reference in order to ease the reader's understanding of the chronological belonging of the material, the origin of which is specified in the form of shortened archival citations in footnotes. Thus, 89.8.1.374.1765, LL. 2-3ob. denotes *fond* 89, *opis* ' 8, part 1, *delo* 374, *listy* 2-3ob., and year 1765, even though the year itself is not part of the official number of the document in the catalogue. In cases where a year number forms part of the official number of an archival document, the year precedes the number of the *delo*. For example, 89.1.1720.3, L. 8 denotes *fond* 89, *opis* ' 1, year 1720, *delo* 3 (of year 1720), and *list* 8.

Abbreviations

RGADA—Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov

SIRIO—Sbornik Imperatorskago Russkago Istoricheskago Obshchestva

AKV—Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova

RBS—Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar '

ChIOIDR—Chteniia v Imperatorskom Obshchestve Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh

Glossary

- Ağa*—title given to senior officers and some palace officials.
- Bailo* (pl. *baili*)—permanent representative of Venice in Istanbul.
- Berat*—an imperial deed of grant, a writ for an appointment to an office. *Berats* given to Christian or Jewish subjects of the sultan in the service of a foreign embassy or consulate in the Ottoman Empire assured a protected status to their holders.
- Beylerbeyi/beglerbegi*—governor of a large military-administrative province of the Ottoman Empire, normally containing two or more *sancaks*.
- Beylikçi*—the senior official under the *reis efendi*; director of the central chancery office responsible for the composition, issuance, and conservation of all regulations, *divan* decisions, edicts, and orders, except those relating to financial matters.
- Çavuş*—official messenger of the Sultan.
- Çavuş Başı*—chief of the *çavuş* corps attached to the imperial divan. He ushered petitioners into the meetings of the divan, and was the grand vizier's deputy in that official's law court.
- Çuhadar* (Russ. "chegodar")—an Ottoman court official serving the sultan directly and responsible for the sultan's outer garments
- Çorbacı*—a janissary company commander.
- Defterdar*—state treasurer, senior financial official in the Ottoman government.
- D'iak*—chief clerk of a government department in Muscovy.
- Divan*—council, especially the Imperial Council of the sultan.
- Dragoman*—interpreter (primarily, in Istanbul, from and to Turkish).
- Ferman*—an edict of the sultan.
- Fetva*—authoritative legal opinion based on the Islamic law and issued by a religious authority, especially the *şeyhülislam*.
- Haidamaks*—informal Cossack groups in Right Bank Ukraine in the eighteenth century who attacked local non-Orthodox population and formed a destabilizing force in the borderland between the Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
- Hekimbaşı*—the sultan's chief physician.
- Janissary*—infantryman, member of the salaried infantry corps.
- Kadi* (or *kadı*)—judge.
- Kahya* (or *kethüda*)—a term that can designate different kinds of representatives/deputies. Almost every official of note and every important Ottoman household had a steward. The *kahya* of the grand vizier was in fact the latter's deputy. He managed most of the grand vizier's correspondence and daily schedule, and in general acted as the grand vizier's confidant and personal administrative secretary.
- Kapıcı Başı*—head of the gatekeepers of the palace. Although the gatekeepers of the imperial palace did keep watch at the gate to the second court of the palace, they had more important roles as messengers, chamberlains at palace functions, and as special agents on important missions to the provinces, including in the capacity of an official escort for a visiting ambassador.
- Kapudan Paşa*—admiral, the commander of the Ottoman navy.
- Kazı-asker*—"military judge," supreme judge of the Ottoman Empire. There were two supreme judges: one for the European and the other for the Asian provinces.

Kızlar Ağası—the superintendent of the *harem*, or private quarters of the imperial palace.

Kesedar—An official in the *reis efendi*'s suite. He was concerned with the filing of papers and the transaction of business.

Mektubcu—the grand vizier's general secretary. His bureau was concerned with outgoing correspondence issued by the grand vizier or that accompanied the sultan's *fermans*, and the grand vizier's communications with the provinces.

Miralem—Ottoman court official who oversaw standard-bearers and musicians

Nişancı Baş—an official of the highest period in the early period, who was charged with power to affix the sultan's seal to official documents and to examine and correct documents. With time, his position in official protocol remained high, but the power of his office diminished.

Pasha—"lord," an honorific title for viziers, governors of large provinces, and the commander of the navy.

Pod'iachii—government clerk in Muscovy.

Porte—"the Sublime Porte," traditional term for the Ottoman government, from Turkish *kapı* (gate), referring originally to the administration of government and justice in front of the Sultan's gate.

Reis Efendi (or *reis ül-küttab*)—chief scribe, or the official responsible for the work of the chancery, that is, the central administrative bureaus of the imperial divan. Gradually, he began to control the direction of foreign affairs and became the foremost official maintaining contacts with foreign diplomats in Constantinople.

Reitar (from Germ. *Reiter*)—novel cavalry formation that appeared in Muscovy in 1632. *Reitar* regiments were better trained with firearms and were more tactically maneuverable due to their officer structure.

Sancak—large military-administrative district of the Ottoman Empire.

Sejm—the parliament of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth underpinning the latter's predominantly republican form of government. Its sessions were usually held for six weeks every two years.

Serasker—commander-in-chief of a military campaign.

Sorok—a bundle of forty pelts sewn together because it was considered that this amount was necessary to sew one fur coat.

Szlachta—the noble class of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Şeyhülislam (Mufti)—the supreme religious authority of legality in all public affairs in the Ottoman Empire.

Tayin—daily allowance.

Telhisçi—memorandum writer for the sultan.

Tezkereci—reader of memorandums and petitions submitted to the Imperial Council

Timar—a military fief with an annual revenue of less than 20,000 *akçes* bestowed upon a *sipahi* for military services.

Vakıf—pious foundation, an irrevocable pious communal endowment of income-producing property assigned to a specific purpose in perpetuity. The principal source of income was rent.

Vakhmistr (from Germ. *Wachtmeister*)—a military rank of non-commissioned officers.

Voyvoda—ruler of tributary Moldavia or Wallachia.

Zaim—a holder of a military fief with an annual income of 20,000-100,000 *akçes* and officer in the provincial *sancak* cavalry.

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