

BULGARIA IN THE WAR PLANS OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBIA (1903 – 1912)

Prof. Aleksandar Životić, PhD
University of Belgrade (Serbia)

Abstract. The paper analyzes the geopolitical and military circumstances of the emergence of Serbian war plans created in the event of a Serbian-Bulgarian military conflict, based on unpublished archival sources kept in the Military Archives and relevant historiographical and memoir literature. The evolutionary stages of the Serbian war plan and their dependence on international circumstances in the Balkans, the interest of the great powers in inter-Balkan problems and the current conjuncture of Serbian-Bulgarian relations are indicated. The beginnings of professional military planning in Serbia, mobilization and concentration plans, as well as initial operational plans are especially presented. The measures undertaken by the Serbian General Staff regarding the organization of traffic and supplies in the event of a war with Bulgaria were also presented.

Keywords: Serbia; Bulgaria; war plan; general staff; mobilization; concentration

Introduction

The war plans of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbia began to be defined during the period of existence of the Active Army Command (1897 – 1900) headed by King Milan. Given that the relations with Austria-Hungary and Romania were favorable, no measures were taken to create special war plans because war with those countries was not expected in the near future. Nevertheless, the experiences of the past, as well as the undefined relations with Turkey and Bulgaria, forced the Serbian supreme authorities to begin developing war plans in the event of a conflict with Turkey and Bulgaria. Since the Serbian army was still not sufficiently prepared for stronger military actions, it was considered that a military convention, or the establishment of a military alliance with Turkey, could be a powerful tool against a possible Bulgarian invasion of Macedonia. This idea was not new and was based on the idea of an alliance of all Balkan countries that King Alexander spoke about during his visit to Constantinople in 1894. Turkey was not interested at first, but changed its position during the Cretan War and then the conflict with Greece. The government of Đorđe Simić hesitated with its answer, so the government of Vladan Đorđević continued to deal with the issue. The plan to reach an agreement with

Turkey failed due to the complicated international position of the Kingdom of Serbia, but Bulgaria received new privileges from Turkey, which drastically complicated Serbian-Bulgarian relations. Diplomatic incidents, increased intelligence activities and troop movements on both sides of the border were the consequence of this. Such circumstances forced the Serbian military leadership to urgently begin work on creating war plans in the event of an armed conflict with Turkey and Bulgaria (Ratković-Kostić 2007, p. 336). Therefore, at the secret meeting held on March 28, 1898, in the Ministry of Defense under the chairmanship of the commander of the Active Army, the main idea of war plans for the event of a conflict with Turkey and Bulgaria was adopted. On that occasion, the war objectives for both cases of war, the necessary military forces and the principled way of carrying out the concentration of troops were determined.

In case of a possible conflict with Bulgaria, two variants of the war plan were developed. The first version was developed under the assumption that Bulgaria invades Macedonia without an agreement with Serbia. In that case, Serbia would have Turkey as an ally and would wage an offensive war. In the second version, assuming that only a local conflict would occur, Serbia was preparing for a war of an offensive-defensive nature. In the first case, the mobilization of the Active Army and both calls of the People's Army was foreseen. After the mobilization and concentration in the vicinity of Niš, in that case, the main part of the Serbian army would go on the offensive against the rear of the main part of the Bulgarian army, while a smaller part of the Serbian army would be left to protect the front of the Timok region. In the second case, it was necessary to ensure a successful defense by grouping forces in a favorable and convenient way, and then at the right moment to go on the offensive, even occasionally, using the enemy's mistakes in strategic and tactical grouping, as well as the possible vacillation of the enemy's command and of the engaged troops. The attack had to be carried out with a strong counterattack. For conducting operations on the Serbian side, two fronts were designated – Nišava-Sofia and Timok-Danube regions, and which would be the main one in the event of a war conflict remained to be assessed on the basis of the Bulgarian choice of the main operational direction. Minister of the Army Colonel Dragomir Vučković, Chief of the Corps Department of the Active Army Command General Lazar Lazarević, Chief of the General Military Department of the Ministry of the Army Colonel Vukoman Aračić and Acting Chief of the General Staff Department of the Active Army Command Lt. Col. Svetozar Nešić were convinced that the eventual Bulgarian main strike would follow the Nišava valley towards Pirot and Niš, while Generals Jovan Atanacković, Minister of Construction and Aleksandar Cincar-Marković, Chief of Staff of the Active Army Command, believed that there was a danger of a possible concentration of Bulgarian troops around Vidin, which would then undertake an offensive in the direction of Zaječar – Boljevac – Paraćin. By conquering Paraćin and Čuprija, the Bulgarian army would cut off a large part

of the northern front and deprive the Serbian army of its main sources of supply. They believed that it would be much easier to overcome the Zaječar fortified camp, which had weaker fortifications, than to penetrate through the difficult natural barriers towards Niš or to use siege artillery to overcome the fortified front near Pirot. Considering the possible directions of Bulgarian penetration, King Milan turned his attention to Knjaževac as an important strategic point that had a central place on the line between Pirot and Zaječar and which allowed making a divide in the Serbian front and directing attention towards one of these two points. That proposal was not adopted because in practice it would mean a weakening of forces on both fronts (Ratković-Kostić 2007, p. 336).

Based on the opinions expressed, Lieutenant Colonel Nešić drew up a plan for the concentration of the Serbian army in the event of a war with Bulgaria. According to his plan, the bulk of Serbian troops were to be gathered in the vicinity of Pirot, smaller parts around Zaječar, and the reserve around Niš. It was estimated that the Bulgarian mobilization could last from 9 to 16 days, and accordingly it was planned that the Serbian mobilization would last from 8 to 10 days in order to achieve a time advantage over the potential opponent. The experience from the Serbian-Bulgarian war in 1885 showed that the mobilization of the Serbian army needed twice as much time, but now, unlike in 1885, the Serbian army could count on several railways, and not one like then, i.e. on the Belgrade – Niš, Vranje – Niš – Pirot, Smederevo – Velika Plana and Lapovo – Kragujevac railways with a total track length of 540 kilometers. In order to make the mobilization, faster, a special timetable was used, which trains would run on all lines from the beginning of the mobilization to the beginning of the concentration of the troops. Intelligence work towards Bulgaria was also intensified, so there were frequent reports on the situation in Macedonia, as well as in Turkey, Italy, France and Austria-Hungary (Milićević 2001, p. 141).

The war plans also were aligned with the mobilization plan prepared by the General Staff a year earlier. The main principles of the Serbian mobilization plan were based on the territorial principle of replenishment, which enabled the greatest possible speed of implementation of mobilization tasks, because the units were mobilized from certain territories which were filled with recruits in peace time. According to this, personnel units in peacetime were permanently deployed in the territory from which they were filled in case of mobilization. War warehouses were distributed accordingly (Ratković-Kostić 2007, p. 340).

1903: The first variant

The Serbian war plan for the event of a military conflict with Bulgaria began to take shape at the same time as the war plan prepared for the potential conflict with Turkey. Colonel Svetozar Nešić, who in his capacity of Chief of Staff of the Active Army Command, and then of Chief of the Main General Staff, worked on it

with his colleagues under the difficult conditions of the disbandment of the Active Army Command and the re-education of the Main General Staff during February 1903, and completed the plan for the concentration of the Serbian army in the case of conflict with Bulgaria. The plan was made with the assumption that Bulgaria would attack Serbia and, accordingly, with the assumption of the initial Bulgarian offensive. It was adapted to the possibility that the Serbian army could go on the offensive at an opportune moment¹. It was made in accordance with the decisions made in 1898 with full respect for the negative experiences from the Serbian-Bulgarian War of 1885 (Životić 2019, p. 271 – 272).

The adopted concentration plan meant that the majority of the Serbian forces of the first line consisted of the Nišava Army, which was supposed to operate in the Nišava-Sofia front line in the event of war. The most important part of it - the main army was supposed to gather on the Nišava direction where there were to be 27 squadrons, 48 battalions and 29 batteries (21 field, 6 howitzer and 2 cavalry, as well as one company of city artillery). The First Division of the second call (1 squadron, 20 battalions and 5 batteries) should have been stationed in front of Babušnica near Kostur. In order to protect the Sveti Nikola direction near Baltaberilovac, a joint detachment should have been concentrated, which would consist of 1 squadron, 4 battalions and 1 battery. All together, the main group of the Nišava army was supposed to have 29 squadrons, 72 battalions and 35 batteries (24 field, 3 mountain and 6 howitzer and 2 cavalry) and one company of city artillery. The second grouping of the Nišava army – the Vlasina troops was supposed to be concentrated in two smaller detachments. The first one was supposed to gather around Crna Trava in order to close the Vlasina direction and was planned to have 8 battalions, 1 mountain battery, 1 artillery company and an incomplete cavalry squadron. The second detachment was supposed to gather in the area of Svođa-Ljuberađ in order to protect the route over the Daščani kladenac. That detachment should have been composed of one squadron, 8 battalions and 5 batteries. The Vlasina troops had less than two squadrons, 20 battalions, 4 mountain batteries and 3 artillery companies in total. The Nišava army had 31 incomplete squadrons, 96 battalions, 39 batteries (24 field, 7 mountain, 6 howitzer and 2 cavalry), as well as one city artillery company and 3 second-call artillery companies².

The Timok army was supposed to operate at the Timok-Danube front. Its forces were to be supposed to gather in four groups. The most significant part was to be concentrated around Zaječar (10 squadrons, 32 battalions, 3 field batteries, 3 companies of city artillery, 1 pioneer company and 1 division of the ammunition column). The second group was supposed to gather around Knjaževac in order to protect the Kadibogas direction. That group was supposed to consist of 1 squadron, 4 battalions and 1 artillery company. The combined detachment near Negotin was supposed to consist of 8 battalions, 2 artillery companies, as well as two-thirds of the cavalry squadron. A smaller detachment of the strength of the 1. Battalion of the

9. Infantry Regiment of the Third Call and the 4. Company of the 2. Battalion of the City Artillery Regiment of the First Call was supposed to protect Kladovo. There were in total: 11 squadrons, 45 battalions, 3 field batteries, 3 artillery companies, 4 city artillery companies and 1 pioneer company. Šumadija Division of the first call would be the strategic reserve that would initially be on the move in the area from Knjaževac to Pandiral (16 battalions, 9 batteries and 1 squadron)³.

The concentration plan in case of an armed conflict with Bulgaria was set up in such a way because it was assumed that the Serbian army could bring to the battlefield 20 infantry regiments of the first call with a total of 80 infantry battalions, 32 cavalry squadrons (4 cavalry regiments of 4 squadrons, 5 divisional cavalry regiments with 3 squadrons and one cavalry squadron of the Royal Guard) and 57 artillery batteries (42 field, 6 howitzer, 7 mountain and 2 cavalry), as well as 15 infantry regiments of the second call with a total of 60 infantry battalions with 15 artillery companies - batteries of the second call and 10 cavalry squadrons of the second call. It was estimated that Bulgaria could oppose Serbia with 36 infantry regiments with 4 battalions each and one infantry regiment with three battalions, i.e. a total of 147 infantry battalions, 32 cavalry squadrons (4 cavalry regiments of 4 squadrons, one guard cavalry regiment of 4 squadrons and 6 cavalry divisions of two squadrons each) and 63 artillery batteries (6 regiments of 9 batteries and one mountain artillery regiment of 9 batteries). Serbia could also count on a third call with a strength of 60 infantry battalions and 5 – 10 cavalry squadrons, while the Bulgarian reserve army had 75 battalions (36 infantry regiments of two battalions each and one infantry regiment of three battalions) with another 6 squadrons. Bulgaria also had at its disposal the forces of the People's Militia with the strength of 36 infantry battalions⁴. Therefore, the advantage of the infantry of the Bulgarian army was big, and in the artillery almost insignificant, which enabled the Serbian military planners to create a defensive war plan, because they counted on a possible Bulgarian attack with realistic assumptions that the Serbian army could, using the superiority of the terrain and occasionally an even balance of forces to go into a counter-offensive at the right moment (Životić 2019, p. 271 – 272).

Along with the concentration plan, a background arrangement plan for the eastern front was drawn up. It was completed on February 8, 1903, and after certain changes and additions, it received its definitive form on May 10, 1903. According to that plan, it was necessary to establish three military road supervision stations in the rear and in the front, 10 starting stations each in the front and rear areas, 6 assembly and head stations in the front, 32 ordinary stations in the rear area and another 20 ordinary stations in front, two main stacking yards in the background and one in the military section, 6 military and manual stacking yards each in the barracks and rear section, 10 mobilization stacking yards in the front and rear section, 32 stage stacking yards in the background and 20 stage stacking yards in the front. In addition, in the case of the war with Bulgaria, it was necessary to form

two railroad supervision stations in the front and rear areas, 4 starting stations in the rear and one in the front area, 3 end stations in the front area and 6 concentration stations in the rear area and 4 concentration stations in the front⁵.

1906: The Second Variant

In the fall of 1906, the Main General Staff was forced to change its plans in case of war with Bulgaria. The reasons for such a decision were of a military and political nature. On the one hand, the dynamic modernization of the Serbian army required the adaptation of war plans to the new circumstances, while the political conditions threatened with the outbreak of a new conflict with the eastern neighbor. Namely, Serbian-Bulgarian relations up to that moment were friendly, but when Bulgaria, under the pressure of Austria-Hungary, decided to cancel the privileges for Serbian exports that it used for the export of Serbian goods through the Bulgarian ports of Burgas and Varna, relations visibly worsened. At the same time, fierce attacks of the Bulgarian press on Serbian politics in Macedonia were happening. The crisis in Serbian-Bulgarian relations reached its peak in the spring of 1907, when the Bulgarian Minister of Military Affairs, General Mihail Savov, openly threatened Serbia with war. (Skoko, Opačić 2018, p. 176). A new concentration plan for the event of an armed conflict with Bulgaria was completed at the General Staff at the end of September 1906. The war plan was drawn up under the leadership of the assistant chief of the Main General Staff, Colonel Petar Bojović, who at that time was the deputy of the Chief of the General Staff, as General Radomir Putnik was at that time the minister of war. On November 26, 1906, the plan was approved by King Petar Karađorđević in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief and General Radomir Putnik, Minister of War⁶.

When sketching the basic ideas for a new war plan intended for a possible military collision with Bulgaria, Colonel Bojović and his associates relied on an already existing plan that was completed in 1903 under the leadership of Colonel Nešić. Assessing the military power of both countries, Petar Bojović pointed out that Serbia and Bulgaria were countries with approximately the same natural wealth, but that Bulgaria was in a more favorable economic position because it had access to the Black Sea. He estimated that Bulgaria's financial power was stronger than Serbia's because Bulgaria had a higher income as a territorially larger country, and it also had smaller national debts. Its army was numerically larger than the Serbian army in accordance with the total population. The numerical ratio was estimated to be 1.5:1 in favor of Bulgaria. In addition, it was also considered that the Bulgarian army was better armed, supplied and trained than the Serbian one. Within the Serbian General Staff, there was a belief that the Bulgarian army felt morally superior to the Serbian army due to the victory in the 1885 war. The Bulgarian officer corps was claimed to be more numerous and monolithic because there were no professional and political divisions in it. Regarding the armament, it

was considered that it was at an almost equal level, but that the Bulgarian side had better quality artillery because it had already acquired rapid-fire artillery weapons, and at the time of the preparation of the war plan, it was expected that the rest of the ordered modern artillery weapons would soon arrive in Bulgaria. Bulgaria had the advantage in its transport network, which was claimed to be more modern and developed than Serbia's and Bulgaria had the Danube available as an extremely important waterway, two parallel railways – one in the south and the other in the north of Bulgaria, which crossed its national territory in the east-west direction, which all could be used for concentration of troops. Four Bulgarian divisional areas were near the Danube, while the railway lines intersected and connected all its divisional areas. Although, due to the organization of the main communication lines, Bulgaria was much longer than Serbia from east to west, it was considered that due to the favorable condition of its railway network, Bulgaria would be in a situation to concentrate its troops on the border front towards Serbia before could do the same. The war plan was made under the assumption that Serbia could go to war against Bulgaria alone or in alliance with another power or against Bulgaria which would be in alliance with another country. In the event that Serbia enters a war alone with Bulgaria, it would initially have to give up offensive actions and stick to the defensive with reliance on the Pirot and Zaječar fortifications, so that its main force would be freed for maneuver while waiting for a suitable moment to switch to a counter-offensive. It was assumed that the Bulgarian side, as militarily stronger, would engage the bulk of its forces at the Sofia – Nišava front towards Pirot in order to advance towards Niš and further into the interior of Serbia. The possibility of penetrating to Zaječar and further down Chestobrodica into the interior of Serbia at the Vidin – Timok front towards Zaječar was also not ruled out. By concentrating its main forces on the Sofia – Nišava front, the Bulgarian army would depart from the center of its base by the shortest concentration route, advancing towards its first geographical and strategic object, Niš. If it decided to proceed in that direction, the Main General Staff considered that it would be the easiest for the Bulgarian army to secure its communications, but that it would have to overcome the strongest resistance at the same time⁷. On the other hand, if it were to concentrate its main forces on the Vidin – Timok military base, the Bulgarian army, trying to operate via Zaječar and Cestobrodica, would start from the top of its concentration base and aim to descend into the Velika Morava valley. It would have to continue towards Kragujevac or turn towards Niš or else head towards Belgrade as the first more pronounced geographical and strategic object. In the case of action towards Belgrade and Niš, the direction of action would be shorter, but in no case would the Bulgarian troops be secured, but would be permanently exposed to actions from the direction of Niš. That is why it was decided that it was most likely and most natural that in the event of a conflict, Bulgaria would concentrate its main forces on the Sofia-Nišava front, and its auxiliary forces on the Vidin – Timok front.

The possibility of concentrating the main forces at the Vidin – Timok and auxiliary forces at the Sofia – Nišava front was also not ruled out. The second possibility was considered realistic only in the case of the Bulgarian feeling of extraordinary military superiority that would guarantee certain prospects of success.

In accordance with those variants of the concentration of the Bulgarian army, as well as due to the determination to switch to a counteroffensive at an opportune moment, it was considered that the bulk of the Serbian military force should be concentrated in the place that would give it the most chances for success both in defense and in a possible counteroffensive. The Derven – Pandiralo – Bela Palanka area was chosen as the most suitable concentration zone for the realization of such an intention, because Bela Palanka and Pandiralo were one, and Derven one and a half day's march from Pirot, i.e. close enough that the main Serbian forces could approach Pirot where a decisive battle was expected. That combination was valid only for the variant in which the main part of the Bulgarian forces would operate on the Sofia – Nisava front and if they would launch an attack towards Pirot. In that case, the crew of the Pirot fortifications would have the task of holding back the advancing Bulgarian forces and creating the necessary time for the main Serbian forces to approach Pirot. On the other hand, Bela Palanka, Pandiralo and Derven, given their difficult possibility and easy suitability for the defense of the border zone, are far enough from the border that the Bulgarian forces, if they finished their concentration faster, would not be able to threaten the concentration of Serbian troops. In addition, Derven and Pandiralo were two and Bela Palanka two and a half days' march from Zajecar, which was not considered far if those forces were forced to deploy towards Zajecar, where they would participate in the main clash between the two armies if the Bulgarian military forces directed their action, i.e. gave primacy to the Vidin – Timok front. It was considered that the crew of the Zaječar fortifications could create enough time for the main body of the Serbian army to move towards Zaječar. In that case, the supply of troops near Pandiralo would be done from Bela Palanka because it was closer than Niš⁸.

In case that Serbia entered into a war with Bulgaria in an alliance with another country, then Bulgaria would certainly be forced to divide its military forces and be weaker compared to Serbia, so it was considered that in that case it would be best for Serbia to carry out a strong offensive from Pirot through the Dragoman Gorge, from the east, encompassed the fortified positions of Slivnica and attacked the Bulgarian capital Sofia, wedged between the Sofia – Nišava and Vidin-Danube fronts. Such an approach was considered the most expedient from a geographical and strategic point of view. In a political-strategic sense, it was believed that it would be good to direct from Pirot operations aimed at capturing the left wing of the Slivnica positions. In the case of offensive operations, it was thought that it was most convenient to carry out a concentration in the Pandiralo – Derven – Bela Palanka area without staying at those points for a long time, but that once the

concentration has been completed, the offensive should be undertaken immediately. In case that Serbia, entered a war against Bulgaria in alliance with a certain country, which would be in allied relations with another country, it was considered that the balance of power would be the same as in the first case, as if Serbia itself were at war against Bulgaria, so the concentration would be carried out in that manner. The case in which Bulgaria would attack Serbia, in alliance with another country, was considered the most difficult and the most unfavorable case for it, so the concentration of the Serbian army would be the same as in the first case, only smaller forces of the Serbian army would be concentrated on the front towards Bulgaria, than it was planned in the first case.

In accordance with the given assumptions, a plan for the concentration of Serbian forces was drawn up. On the Vlasina there would be the Vlasina detachment, which would consist of 6 battalions, 6 cannons and one third of the cavalry squadron. Near Vranje, there would be supplementary battalions of the 1. Infantry Regiment of the first and second calls. At Daščani Kladenac, there would be a Daščani Kladenac detachment of 15 battalions and 18 cannons with less than two cavalry squadrons. At Babušnica, the Babušnica detachment would be formed by the Moravian Division of the second call without those units that would be sent to Vlasina, Daščani Kladenac and Sveti Nikola with 4 battalions, one squadron and five batteries attached (12 battalions, 2 squadrons and 30 canons).

The Moravian Division of the first call with the outnumbered 2. infantry regiment of the first call, the Cavalry Division and the Pirot detachment of the city artillery (22 battalions, 17 squadrons and 66 guns) would be gathered near Pirot. The Sveti Nikola detachment was supposed to be at the Sveti Nikola pass. Its composition was suppose to include 12 battalions, a third of a cavalry squadron and 18 cannons. In Knjaževac, it was planned to assemble supplementary battalions of the 14. infantry regiment of the second and third calls, and in Kadibogaz there was supposed to be a Kadiboga detachment (7 battalions, a third of a squadron and 6 cannons).

In Zaječar, it was planned to form a higher command and gather the Timok Division of the first call with the 5. over numbered infantry regiment, the Timok Division of the second call, except for those parts of it that would be deployed in Sveti Nikola, Kadibogaz and near Negotin and a Zaječar detachment of the city artillery with a reserve pioneer company of the second call (29 battalions, 5 squadrons and 54 cannons). Near Negotin, there would be a Negotin detachment with a strength of 11 battalions, 1 squadron and 6 cannons. The Kladovo detachment, that is, the 1. battalion of the 9. infantry regiment of the third call and the necessary part of the Zaječar detachment of the city artillery, would be concentrated near Kladovo.

The bulk of the Serbian forces would be assembled as follows: near Pandiral, the Drina Division of the first call with the 3. over numbered infantry regiment, the Drina Division of the second call and the Howitzer Regiment (28 battalions,

3 squadrons, 54 guns and 28 howitzers); near Pandiral, the Danube Division of the first and the Danube Division of the second call (32 battalions, 6 squadrons and 72 cannons); near Derven: Šumadija division of the first and Šumadija division of the second call (32 battalions, 5 squadrons and 72 cannons). The Headquarters of the Supreme Command would be near Niš.

It was considered that this kind of concentration of the main part of the Serbian army, leaning on the Pirot and Zaječar fortifications, enables a safe maneuver along internal operational lines, i.e. if the main part of the Bulgarian army was concentrated on the Sofia – Nišava front and directed its operations towards Pirot, the Serbian army, with a strength of about 8 divisions could go on the attack directing its action towards the flank and right wing of the Bulgarian forces. If the main part of the Bulgarian troops were concentrated on the Vidin – Timok front with a direction towards Zaječar, the Serbian main force would be able to attack within two and a half days with the strength of 8 divisions acting on the left flank and rear of the Bulgarian troops. In both cases, 8 infantry and one cavalry division could be used for the attack. In case that the Bulgarian army attacked with forces of equal strength at the same time on both camps, threatening Pirot and Zaječar, then the bulk of the Serbian army would be in a position to attack first one and then the other Bulgarian grouping with superior forces, while at the first moment it would attack that part of the Bulgarian a troop that would be directed towards Pirot because it would be physically closer to it. Since it was considered that the war with Bulgaria would require great efforts, it was also planned to mobilize troops of the last defense, which would be gathered in the headquarters of the divisional areas. Particular care was taken to ensure that Bulgaria did not surprise Serbia with its mobilization and concentration, that is, that it did not get in a position to attack one of the Pirot and Zaječar fortifications, which there was a high probability of. It was planned to take all measures in order to keep the Sveti Nikola passage and thus enable unhindered communication between the Sofia – Nišava and Vidin – Timok fronts. To this end, it was planned to prepare “La Hit” cannons for the Knjaževac artillery company of the second call in Knjaževac so that they can be quickly used on Sveti Nikola to support the troops there the roads in the area of Niš, Svođa, Babušnica, Sveti Nikola, Knjaževac, Zaječar, Negotin, Boljevac, Brestovacka banja and Aleksinac had to be repaired and maintained in the best possible condition, as well as the road Niš – Knjaževac – Boljevac which should have been completed. New roads should have been made around Pirot and Derven to strengthen the existing road network and facilitate the possible maneuver of Serbian divisions from Derven to Pirot.

In contrast to the Serbian one, the Bulgarian war plan was basically based on the “G” war plan, which the Bulgarian General Staff elaborated in 1908 in case of an armed conflict with Serbia, and under the assumption of the outbreak of war due to rivalry in Macedonia. The basic idea of the war plan consisted in an offensive action towards Niš and an outbreak in the Moravian Valley, after which the operations

would be continued towards the Serbian-Turkish border in order to cut the land link between Serbia and Macedonia. The war plan was made in the conditions of the numerical superiority of the Bulgarian army over the Serbian army. To that end, the Bulgarian General Staff planned to group its troops into two army groups: the South, which would include the First (1., 2., and 7. Divisions) and the Second (3., 4., 5., and 8. Divisions) armies, with the Sofia Fortress Battalion, while the Northern Group would consist of the Third Army (the 6. and 9. Infantry Divisions with the Vidin Fortress Battalion). The Sofia, Vidin and Shumen fortress battalions were not planned for more active combat operations, but exclusively as crews of fortified areas. Only militia battalions were planned for the defense of the border front towards Turkey, which was the main flaw of the Bulgarian war plan (Životić 2019, p. 292 – 293).

Conclusion

Serbian war plans for the event of a war with Bulgaria were drawn up in conditions of major military and political tensions in the Balkans. They were created based on assessments of the real geopolitical situation. Depending on the current circumstances, they envisioned offensive and defensive operations. The envisaged war plan for a conflict with Bulgaria was never realized. They started from the assumptions that disagreements regarding Macedonia could escalate into a war between the two neighboring states. The war circumstances of the Second Balkan War in 1913 dictated a completely different approach and a different concentration of Serbian and Bulgarian troops (Skoko 1968, p. 132 – 158). The nature of the conflict related to the territorial dispute in connection with the newly liberated areas dictated the military confrontation on the territory of Macedonia, and not along the old interstate borders, where in the first part of the war the auxiliary and not the main forces of the conflicting countries operated. The basic ideas from this war plan were tried to be implemented by the Serbian Headquarters of the Supreme Command during the second phase of the war when, after the victory at Bregalnica, it tried to transfer the center of gravity of its operations to the Sofia-Nišava military base as an operationally and strategically more favorable area for advancing towards the Bulgarian capital as the most important geographically strategic object in that area.

NOTES

1. *The concentration plan of our army towards the Eastern front*. In: Popisnik 2, b. 3, f. 1, d. 23. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.
2. *The concentration plan of our army towards the Eastern front*. In: Popisnik 2, b. 3, f. 1, d. 23. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.
3. *The concentration plan of our army towards the Eastern front (against Bulgaria)*. In: Popisnik 2, b. 3, f. 1, d. 24. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.

4. *Serbian and Bulgarian army*. In: Popisnik 2, b. 3, f. 1, d. 28. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.
5. *Background arrangement for the Eastern front*. In: Popisnik 2, b. 3, f. 1, d. 32. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.
6. *Serbia's war plan with Bulgaria from 1906*. In: Popisnik 2b. 3, f. 1, d. 36. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.
7. *Serbia's war plan with Bulgaria from 1906*. In: Popisnik 2b. 3, f. 1, d. 36. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.
8. *Serbia's war plan with Bulgaria from 1906*. In: Popisnik 2b. 3, f. 1, d. 36. At: Military Archive Belgrade, Belgrade.

REFERENCES

- MILIĆEVIĆ, M., 2002. *Reforma Vojske Srbije 1897 – 1900*. Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod. ISBN 86-335-0112-0.
- SKOKO, S., OPAČIĆ, P., 2018. *Vojvoda Stepa Stepanović u ratovima Srbije (1876 – 1918)*. Novi Sad: Prometej. ISBN 978-86-515-1383-4.
- SKOKO, S., 1968. *Drugi balkanski rat*. Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut.
- RATKOVIĆ-KOŠTIĆ, S., 2007. *Evropeizacija srpske vojske 1878 – 1903*. Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut.
- ŽIVOTIĆ, A., 2019. *Putnikova škola ratne veštine. Glavni đeneralštab Vojske Kraljevine Srbije 1903 – 1914*. Beograd: Medija centar “Odbrana”. ISBN 978-86-335-0677-9.

✉ **Prof. Aleksandar Životić, PhD**

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-3237-7518

Web of Science Reasercher ID: GQI-3226-2022

University of Belgrade, Serbia

E-mail: aleksandar.zivotic@f.bg.ac.rs