

The Japanese people were most grateful for the many courteous and friendly acts which Great Britain had shewn them, and would never forget the great sympathy which the British people had evinced in many ways towards them in their hour of trial. Turning to me, the Prime Minister said, "I should like you to express to Your Government that Japan and the Japanese Government are entirely satisfied with the extremely correct manner in which England has carried out her obligations as a neutral, and the particularly friendly manner in which she has, without overstepping the bounds of neutrality, fulfilled her obligations as an ally."

I have, &c.

CLAUDE M. MACDONALD.

III.—THE STRAITS QUESTION AND THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER FLEET, 1903-1904.⁽¹⁾

[*ED. NOTE.*—The question of the passage of Russian Warships through the Dardanelles had already been raised early in 1903. In August, 1902, the Russian Government asked permission to send four torpedo-boats through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus to join the Black Sea Fleet. On September 19, the Sultan granted the request on condition that the boats should not carry armaments or a war crew; that they should fly the commercial flag; that they should pass the Straits separately with an interval of twenty-four hours; and that they should comply with the rules applicable to merchantmen. These conditions were accepted. On January 6, 1903, Sir N. O'Connor presented to the Porte a British note dated January 1, complaining of a breach of treaty obligations, and announced that Great Britain would demand the same privilege if occasion arose. See, generally, Coleman Phillipson and Noel Buxton: *The Question of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles* (1917), pp. 167-70. For the bearing of the Treaty of 1856 on this question, v. Sir Charles Hardinge's memorandum, pp. 58-60, *Ed. note*. It seemed necessary to collect the material here, though the passage of the Straits by the Russian Volunteer Fleet during the war naturally accentuated matters. For the Straits question (1899-1903), v. *G.P. XVIII*, I, ch. 119, and for these incidents, *XIX*, I, ch. 132. v. also S. A. Adamov: *Constantinople i prolivi*. Moscow (1925). 2 vols.]

No. 92.

Sir R. Rodd to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 9.) Confidential.

My Lord,

Rome, D. January 9, 1903.

R. January 15, 1903.

I have the honour to report that, on receipt of Your Lordship's telegram No. 12, of the 7th instant,⁽²⁾ I lost no time in seeing the Minister for Foreign Affairs and conveyed to him the substance of Your Lordship's message, urging, in view of the

⁽¹⁾ [The Volunteer Fleet was created during the war with Turkey in 1877-8, when Great Britain was expected to intervene. The ships carried the mercantile flag in times of peace, though they were usually employed as transport between the Black Sea and the Far East. Their crews were subject to naval training and discipline, and the two chief officers of each vessel were commissioned by the Government.]

⁽²⁾ [Not reproduced. It was sent to Sir R. Rodd as No. 12, and to Sir F. Plunkett as No. 3. It contained the following message for the Ministers for Foreign Affairs at Rome and Vienna.

"You should speak at once to Minister for Foreign Affairs and say that while H[is] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernment] have deferred to objections raised by Austrian Gov[ernment] to an identic or simultaneous communication they feel strongly that the effect of entire absence or long postponement of Austrian and Italian support will be deplorable.

H[is] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernment] have been led to believe that both Austria and Italy attached great importance to the maintenance of the rule of the Straits, and were anxious for the discussion of a joint policy in the Mediterranean based on the maintenance of the *status quo*. If on this occasion they leave us unsupported it will be necessary for us to reconsider our position in regard to the whole question.

It will be impossible to refuse information to Parliament as to the cooperation which we were encouraged to expect, and the impression produced by a retreat from the assurance we received will be most unfortunate."

engagements given by the Austrian and Italian Governments, that the representation made by His Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople respecting the passage of the Dardanelles by Russian torpedo-destroyers should not be left any longer unsupported, and pointing out the inevitable results which would be entailed by a withdrawal from the line of policy which the two Governments had agreed to adopt.

Signor Prinetti begged me to assure Your Lordship that he had in no way contemplated any modification in the action he had agreed to take; the Italian Ambassador in Constantinople had his instructions on which he would act without any alteration or delay, the moment the conditions preliminary to such action were fulfilled.

But his undertaking to make a representation in the terms agreed upon had been given on the understanding that not only His Majesty's Government but also the Austro-Hungarian Government would take similar action, and, as I should remember, Italy had agreed to present her communication to the Porte immediately after the Austrian communication had been made.

He had recently had a conversation with the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador here, and he gathered that the Austrian Government was conscious of the obligations resting on them. In view of the general understanding between the Austrian and Russian Governments which had resulted from Count Lamsdorff's visit to Vienna, Count Goluchowski no doubt found himself somewhat awkwardly situated, but the impression he had derived from this conversation was that if pressure were exercised at Vienna the Austrian Government would act up to its undertakings.

I remarked that the representation it was proposed to make was after all couched in very moderate terms and was, it seemed to me, in no way hostile to Russia. Signor Prinetti replied that to remind Turkey of her Treaty obligations in this matter, had certainly no colour of hostility to Russia, so long as the representations made had a more or less collective character, which, he maintained, they would have so long as the three Governments in question acted together. Germany had assumed the pose of being disinterested in the Eastern problems. France followed the lead of Russia for obvious reasons. There remained Great Britain Italy and Austria-Hungary as Powers directly interested, and entitled to act together in the sense agreed upon. If Austria fell out it made a considerable difference, and rather accentuated the action of any other power which made a protest against the exceptional treatment accorded to Russia. In such an eventuality, he would have to seriously consider once more the line which Italy ought to adopt. He would not definitely refuse to act, and would prefer for the present not to pronounce himself in one sense or the other, because he still felt every hope that the Austrian Government would not refuse to carry out their obligation. But had Austria been unwilling from the first, he could not conceal from me that he would have reflected much longer before he accepted the idea of joining in a remonstrance over this particular point.

Nevertheless, the policy of Italy was, and is, the maintenance of the *Status quo*, and he was ready and even anxious to enter upon an exchange of views with the British and Austrian Governments as to the best means for maintaining it. He gathered that the Austrian Government were now endeavouring to make out that their readiness to engage in such an exchange of views, was confined to the particular point of the passage of the Dardanelles. He had not understood it in this limited sense, and he was prepared, if Austria withdrew, to exchange views on the whole situation established by the existing treaties with His Majesty's Government alone, with a view to upholding the maintenance of the *Status quo* in the East. He believed there was no divergence of view between the policy which found favour in Italy and that which would have the support of His Majesty's Government, with whom it was his desire to act in harmony. I have transmitted the substance of this despatch to your Lordship by telegraph.

I have, &c.
 RENNELL RODD.

Sir F. Plunkett to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 10.)

My Lord,

Vienna, D. January 9, 1903.

R. January 19, 1903.

Your Lordship's Telegrams Nos. 2 and 3⁽¹⁾ reached me the night before last. I called yesterday on Count Goluchowski and informed him that His Majesty's Ambassador had made already some days ago a remonstrance to the Porte against the permission granted for the passage of Russian Torpedo Destroyers. This remonstrance had been made by Sir Nicholas O'Connor in the terms already known to the Austro-Hungarian and the Italian Governments, but nevertheless their Ambassadors so far had not taken any action in support of the British remonstrance, as the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador was still without instructions, and the Italian Ambassador, being instructed to act in concert with his British and Austro-Hungarian Colleagues, had not yet made any representation.

I told Count Goluchowski that I had received a telegram from Your Lordship desiring me to say that, while His Majesty's Government deferred to the objection raised by His Excellency to an identic or simultaneous representation being made to the Porte in regard to the passage of these Russian Torpedo Destroyers, they felt very strongly that the effect of the entire absence or long postponement of Austro-Hungarian and Italian support would be deplorable.

I said that Your Lordship had fully expected, both from what first Count Mensdorff and afterwards Count Deym had said in London, and from what His Excellency himself had said to me last November, that the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador would also make some kind of representation to the Porte against the passage of these vessels.

Count Goluchowski replied that he had never taken any engagement to make representations at any special moment; he said he had undertaken to examine the question and to call the attention of the Porte at a suitable time to the serious objections which exist to the Sultan's permitting the passage. He claimed that he had always insisted that he objected to any joint or identic action in a matter of such relatively small importance, and had always reserved the right to examine the matter more thoroughly and to take action when he judged the moment opportune. He added that he had since carefully examined the legal aspect of the question, and he had been led to think that the Sultan might claim that the letter of the Treaties, as subsequently altered in 1871, justified his present action, however great might be the political objections to his exercising his right on this occasion.

I need not record in detail the long discussion which took place, in the course of which I laid great stress on the fact that, if His Majesty's Government did not now receive the support which they had been given reason to expect from that of Austria-Hungary, they might be forced to reconsider their position in regard to the discussion of the joint policy in the Mediterranean which His Excellency had advocated.

His Excellency assured me that he was still ready and anxious to come to an understanding with Great Britain for the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean, and he rejected the imputation that Austria-Hungary was in any way leaving His Majesty's Government in the lurch by not having so far made representations to the Porte about the Russian Torpedo Destroyers. His Excellency maintained that this was a question of very minor importance in comparison to that of preventing, if possible, the outbreak of insurrection this spring in Macedonia. The whole world knew that an effort was now being made by the Governments of Austria-Hungary and of Russia to elaborate a draft of scheme for improving the Turkish administration of the Macedonian provinces. When this scheme had been completed, which he hoped would be soon, it would be communicated to the Powers who had signed the Treaty of

⁽¹⁾ [v. *supra*, p. 41, No. 32, note ⁽²⁾.]

Berlin, and meanwhile the attention of the Porte had been sufficiently called by the English note to the objections which exist to allowing the passage of small unarmed Russian vessels through the Dardanelles. Therefore, he must continue, in spite of all I had said, to think that this was not an opportune moment for Austria-Hungary to make the same representations, but he reserved to himself to make these representations later if he saw the utility of doing so. His Excellency said he had seen with pleasure that the British Ambassador had made his representations, for this act constituted a public proof that Great Britain still takes a serious interest in the affairs of the Near East, a point on which European Cabinets had latterly entertained considerable doubt.

I again impressed strongly on Count Goluchowski the very bad effect produced in London by the absence of Austrian support on this occasion, but I could obtain nothing further from His Excellency than an expression of regret at the misconception which had arisen and a vague statement that he would examine whether the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador at Constantinople could still offer any useful assistance to his British Colleague at this stage of the affair. I reminded him that the question was urgent and that there was no time to be lost.

I have, &c.
F. R. PLUNKETT.

No. 34.

Sir R. Rodd to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 11.) Confidential.

My Lord,

Rome, D. January 10, 1903.

R. January 17, 1903.

With reference to my despatch No. 9 of the 9th instant⁽¹⁾ on the subject of the passage of the Dardanelles by Russian torpedo-destroyers and the proposed remonstrance to be communicated to the Porte, I have the honour to inform your Lordship that I have had this morning a further interview with the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the subject of the present attitude of Austria. I will endeavour for clearness sake to recall the substance of His Excellency's remarks in a succinct and continuous narrative, without troubling Your Lordship with my own share in the conversation.

Signor Prinetti began by reading me a passage from an article in the "Pesther [sic] Lloyd"—of what date he did not inform me—on the subject of Great Britain's renewed interest in the Eastern question, the patronising tone of which, not to use a stronger expression, had he said, made a disagreeable impression upon him, seeing that the journal in question was looked upon as receiving official inspiration. The attitude of the Austro-Hungarian Government, in the matter of the remonstrance, was, he admitted, unfortunate. He had already explained to me that, so far as Italy was concerned, he had been quite prepared to let her be one of three powers acting together at Constantinople in the sense suggested. But he was reluctant that she should be one of two only, because action by a minority seemed to accentuate the appearance of hostility to Russia, which he was desirous not to display in view of the excellent relations now existing between the Italian and Russian Governments.

The Italian Chargé d'Affaires in London had telegraphed a suggestion put forward by Your Lordship that he should join in using his influence at Vienna to induce the Austro-Hungarian Government to act up to their engagements. This Signor Prinetti said he would willingly do for every reason. He would see the Austrian Ambassador today and would urge upon him how unfortunate an effect it would have if Great

(¹) [v. *supra*, pp. 41-2, No. 32.]

Britain were left isolated in her action at Constantinople. He preferred to work through the Austrian Ambassador here, who had in an interview a few days before used language which encouraged him to take up the subject again, because the Italian Ambassador at Vienna was not in good health and might be unable to take action personally without delay, and also because he thought he could bring stronger influence to bear by himself dealing with the matter here. He thought, if the Austrian Government were unwilling now to abide by the prearranged representation, it would not be absolutely necessary that they should do more than mark in some way their sense of the new precedent created. This at any rate would suffice to enable him to act. It would even be enough if they merely asked for explanations of the circumstances under which the sanction had been given. If this were done he would instruct the Italian Ambassador at Constantinople to lose no time in making the message agreed upon in its original form.

He could see no reason why the Austrian Government should not, if they thought it desirable to deprecate any semblance of hostility, explain to the Russian Government the grounds for their action, which were in reality rather in the nature of a protest to the Porte against the assumption that Turkey could, without consulting the other Powers, take it upon herself to interpret Treaties, to which those powers are parties. That was the way in which he regarded the matter and he would have no hesitation in telling the Russian Government so.

Signor Prinetti then went on to say that since he had seen me two days ago, he had reflected not a little on the question of an exchange of views between the British and Italian Governments—assuming that Austria-Hungary was now disposed to withdraw from the position adopted by Count Goluchowski previous to Count Lamsdorff's visit, as he, not less than Your Lordship, had understood it. The more he had thought it over the more favourably the idea had impressed him. He was convinced from the news he had received from Vienna that Russia and Austria had come to an understanding based on the maintenance of the *status quo*, at any rate for the immediate future. He had reason to believe that Count Lamsdorff had convinced Count Goluchowski that Russia was sincere in the adoption of this policy, which Austria was bound to welcome, and what was now going on with regard to the Dardanelles question at Vienna, confirmed him in this view.

What was the position of the other Great Powers? France in all such questions as these would, he felt sure, blindly follow the lead of Russia. Germany had publicly proclaimed an attitude, which she had found it suited her material interests at Constantinople to assume, of disinterestedness in Balkan questions.

Great Britain and Italy, so far as he could see had both the same object in view. The policy of Italy with regard to the Balkans might be summed up as follows; "*L'Italie n'a pas de convoitises mais elle s'opposera aux convoitises des autres.*" Therefore her interest was the maintenance of the *status quo* for as long a period as possible. Should the course of events however make a disturbance inevitable, then his motto was, "the Balkans for the Balkan populations."

I was not a little interested to hear from Signor Prinetti's lips so clear and categorical a pronouncement. For the action of Italy of recent years in Albania has given colour to the supposition that she was there engaged in preparing the ground for any eventuality by the extension of her influence through the medium of schools and post offices. At the same time Signor Prinetti's language has always been consistent in maintaining that Italy's real aim and object was to combat the dissemination of Austrian influence in Albania, because she could never view with indifference the extension of a powerful empire to a seaboard in close proximity to Italian shores where she might exercise a preponderating influence in the Adriatic.

Signor Prinetti went on to say that Italy's relations with Russia were now extremely cordial. He was anxious to foster and maintain this cordiality and believing as he did that Russia and Austria were now in agreement, it appeared to him that, if England and Italy could define their position by a friendly exchange

of views, it might become possible for Italy to render service in the character of a conciliating intermediary, and that it was perhaps not too much to hope that a concert of the four powers might result, which would offer the best guarantee for the preservation of order and become a powerful instrument both for the guidance of the Turkish Government, and for keeping the Balkan principalities in hand. He was anxious that Great Britain, with whom Italy desired as far as possible to fall into line, should maintain her active interests in these questions, and felt that the present moment might well be an opportune one for the removal of misgivings and misunderstandings, and if the four Powers could thus range themselves together an useful purpose would be served.

Signor Prinetti's tone throughout was marked by the most cordial feeling towards Great Britain, and in this attitude, he has often assured me he represents the general spirit of the country. I have for some time past felt there were certain appreciable symptoms here of a tendency towards a *revirement* in the foreign leanings of this country. If I am not mistaken, there has of late been less public courting of French goodwill, and there is at the same time no evidence of rekindling enthusiasm for the other partners in the Triple Alliance towards which Italian feeling has sensibly cooled. With all deference therefore I venture to submit that the present time may perhaps afford a happy opportunity for the reaffirmation by an exchange of views of that community of sympathies and interest which is both traditional and acceptable here.

I have, &c.

RENNELL RODD.

No. 85.

Sir N. O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Constantinople, January 14, 1903.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

D. 8.40 P.M.

Tel. (No. 7.)

R. 10.0 P.M.

A Russian torpedo-boat destroyer passed here last night without stopping.

No. 86.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir R. Rodd.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

Foreign Office, January 15, 1903.

Tel. (No. 28.)

D. 4 P.M.

Your tel[egram] No. 8 (of Jan[uary] 13).⁽¹⁾

Thank M[inister for] F[oreign] A[ffairs] for his desire to meet our wishes. A reply upon the lines which he has indicated to you would be desirable. We still however hope that Austria and Italy will find a suitable opportunity for addressing warnings to the Porte.

⁽¹⁾ [Not reproduced. It describes an interview between Sir R. Rodd and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The latter said notice had been given in the Chamber of a question as to Italy's action. Sir R. Rodd suggested replying in the following sense if Lord Lansdowne agreed: "that if Italy had remained silent, it was not to be interpreted as signifying that the action taken by His Majesty's Government (? group omitted), and that her policy in upholding the condition laid down by existing Treaties remained unaltered, and needed no confirmation."]

No. 87.

Mr. Whitehead to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 89.) Confidential.

My Lord,

Constantinople, D. January 26, 1903.

R. February 2, 1903.

With reference to Sir Nicholas O'Connor's despatch Number 1 of the 1st instant, I have the honour to report that Mr. Block has heard from a reliable source that on the 7th instant the Ottoman Ambassador at St. Petersburg telegraphed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs stating that having in accordance with instructions asked Count Lamsdorff for his opinion and advice on the question of the passage of the Straits raised by His Majesty's Government, His Excellency had replied that he had already heard of the matter from Monsieur Zinoview, and had added "que l'autorisation accordée par Sa Majesté le Sultan pour le passage de ces coques de navire n'était nullement en contravention des traités existants; les quatre modèles de navires russes, n'étant pas armés et portant pavillon de commerce ne sauraient être considérés comme faisant partie des navires de la catégorie désignés dans la Note de l'Ambassade d'Angleterre."

Count Lamsdorff further assured the Turkish Ambassador "que le cas qui s'était présenté pour le passage des quatre coques en question ne se renouvellera jamais à l'avenir, et que les traités existants concernant les détroits sont et seront toujours respectés aussi bien par la Russie que par les autres Puissances."

I understand that Monsieur Zinoview has used similar language and has given similar assurances to the Porte.

I have, &c.

J. B. WHITEHEAD.

No. 88.

Mr. Whitehead to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

Tel. (No. 25.)

Pera, February 5, 1903.

D. 8.5 P.M.

R. 10.30 P.M.

Your telegram No. 20.⁽¹⁾

I saw the Minister for Foreign Affairs this afternoon. His Excellency repeated to me in almost the same words the information as to Russian explanations and assurances given in my despatch No. 89,⁽²⁾ and promised to let me have it in writing as an *aide-mémoire* for communication to your Lordship.

⁽¹⁾ [Not reproduced.]⁽²⁾ [v. immediately preceding document.]

No. 89.

Sir N. O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 91.)

My Lord,

Constantinople, D. February 21, 1903.

R. March 2, 1903.

With reference to Mr. Whitehead's despatch No. 75 of the 11th instant,⁽¹⁾ I have the honour to enclose the text of a telegram dated the 8th of January last from the

⁽¹⁾ [Not reproduced. It describes an interview between Mr. Whitehead and Tewfik Pasha in which the latter had reported the views of Count Lamsdorff in the same sense as the telegram from the Turkish Ambassador at St. Petersburg printed on p. 48.]

Ottoman Ambassador at St. Petersburg, on the subject of the passage of the Dardanelles by four Russian torpedo-boat destroyers, which has been communicated to this Embassy by the Imperial Minister for Foreign Affairs.

I have, &c.
N. R. O'CONNOR.

Enclosure in No. 39.

Text of Telegram from Turkish Ambassador at St. Petersburg.

Monsieur le Comte Lamsdorff, ministre des affaires étrangères en Russie, a répondu que les quatre carcasses de navires pour lesquelles l'autorisation de passage par les détroits avait été accordé par S[a] M[ajesté] I[mpériale] le Sultan n'était aucunement en contravention avec les traités existants, ces coques de navires n'étant pas armées et portant pavillon de commerce ne peuvent être considérées comme des navires de la catégorie désignée dans la note de l'ambassadeur d'Angleterre. Son Excellence a déclaré également que la teneur des traités concernant le passage des détroits sera toujours et intégralement observée et respectée aussi bien par la Russie que par les autres Puissances. Le ministère Russe des affaires étrangères a assuré en outre que le cas qui s'est présenté pour le passage de ces quatre modèles de navires ne se renouvellera jamais à l'avenir.

8 Janvier 1903.

No. 40.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir C. MacDonald.⁽¹⁾

F.O. Turkey 5448.
Tel. (No. 26.)

Foreign Office, January 30, 1904.
D. 1-30 P.M.

I told the Japanese Minister on Jan[uary] 27 that I was able to inform him in confidence that the Cabinet had approved the Statement I made to him on Jan[uary] 11, namely that we should undoubtedly regard the passage of the Russian Black Sea Fleet through the Dardanelles in the event of war breaking out, as a grave violation of the Treaty engagements entered into by Russia with us and other Powers, although I could not undertake to say what action we might think it necessary to take by way of response. We were however decidedly of opinion that the contingency was not one which was likely to arise, and there were absolutely no indications that any such action was contemplated.

⁽¹⁾ [A somewhat fuller version was telegraphed the same day to Sir Charles Scott at St. Petersburg, v. *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, pp. 241-2, No. 285. It was Tel. No. 33 of January 30.]

No. 41.

Sir C. Scott to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.
(No. 47.) Confidential.
My Lord,

St. Petersburg, D. February 4, 1904.
R. February 8, 1904.

With reference to the subject of Your Lordship's telegram No. 33 of the 30th ultimo,⁽¹⁾ and to the evident apprehensions of the Japanese Government that, in case of an outbreak of hostilities in the Far East, the Russian fleet in the Black Sea might be ordered to force a passage through the Dardanelles and join the Russian

⁽¹⁾ [v. immediately preceding document.]

naval forces in the Pacific, I have the honour to report that there is not the slightest indication here of any such intention on the part of the Russian Government.

The Austrian Ambassador in conversation a few days ago, replying to an enquiry as to what effect he thought the implication of Russia in hostilities in the Far East would have on the efficacy of her assistance in case of an outbreak of war in the Balkans, said "none at all," that Russia would certainly keep her present naval forces in the Black Sea strictly within the limits of that sea and ready for any emergency there.

It is possible that the report that Admiral Skrydloff, who is in command of the Black Sea fleet, was coming to St. Petersburg may have given occasion for some comment.

I understand however from Captain Calthorpe that, when he met Admiral Skrydloff last summer in the south of Russia, the Admiral spoke of his intention, if he could get a few weeks' leave of absence, of coming with his wife to St. Petersburg for the Court season, and it is very possible that the Russian Admiralty, knowing the experience acquired in his service in the Far East by Admiral Skrydloff, who is regarded as one of the most efficient Admirals in the Russian service, may have been anxious to consult him in regard to eventual operations in the Pacific.

I shall, however, not fail to keep in mind Your Lordship's instructions in case any occasion should arise for my acting on them.

I have, &c.

CHARLES S. SCOTT.

No. 42.

Question asked in the House of Commons, February 15, 1904.

Parl. Deb., 4th Ser., Vol. 129, p. 1336.

Mr. Gibson Bowles, I beg to ask the First Lord of the Treasury has the Russian Government approached His Majesty's Government with a request or suggestion that they should consent to Russian men-of-war passing from the Black Sea through the Bosphorous and Dardanelles; in view of the fact that such a passage would be a violation of European Treaties, what attitude will His Majesty's Government take on this point, and can any Papers be laid?

Answer by Mr. Akers Douglas (for Mr. A. J. Balfour).

His Majesty's Government have not been approached with any such request or suggestion. There is no reason whatever for supposing that the Russian Government contemplate a step which would involve a distinct violation of their treaty obligations to the European Powers.

[*ED. NOTE.*—No other Power in fact seems to have protested, and it does not appear that any further steps were taken by Great Britain.]

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir E. Monson.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 229.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, April 29, 1904.

The French Ambassador said a few words to me to-day upon the subject of the relations of Great Britain with Russia. . . .⁽¹⁾ There seemed to me, indeed, to be only one point which might, although I did not think that this was likely, give rise to really serious trouble. I referred to the possibility of an attempt on the part of the Russian Government to send their Black Sea fleet through the Dardanelles. It would be quite impossible for us to acquiesce in such a step, and, if it were taken, we should be driven to meet it by adequate measures which might render a collision inevitable. We had always insisted upon the view that the passage of the Straits must be denied to ships of war, and we had on several occasions protested against minor infractions of these Treaty obligations. The passage of the Straits by a Russian squadron for the purpose of attacking our ally in the Far East could not therefore be tolerated by this country. I rejoiced however to say that, so far as I was aware, there were no signs of any such intention on the part of the Russian Government, and I was indeed under the impression that for many reasons they would be unlikely to wish to send their ships out of the Black Sea at the present time.

I am, &c.

LANSDOWNE.

⁽¹⁾ [This despatch is quoted as a whole in *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, p. 401. It is there printed from a draft in F.O. France 8663, and shows the amendments made in it by Lord Lansdowne. The first part of it, referring to King Edward's suggestion of an Anglo-Russian Entente, is also quoted in this volume, p. 189, *Ed. note*. For King Edward's views on the Straits question, expressed in conversation with Sir Charles Hardinge, v. note at the end of the latter's memorandum, p. 60.]

Sir N. O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Pera, May 29, 1904.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

Tel. (No. 95.)

D. 8.25 P.M.

R. 10.50 P.M.

The British steam yacht "Nemesis" was stopped at Dardanelles on the 22nd May on the ground that she carried two Hotchkiss cannon. Upon my representing the matter to the Grand Vizier, he said that if the cannon were landed the yacht would be allowed to pass. I agreed, and he undertook to give orders accordingly, but owing to some delay in their transmission, the yacht was detained three days. I have thus a good excuse for addressing a *note verbale* to the Porte, taking note of Grand Vizier's declaration. It may be useful in future. Does Your Lordship approve?

MINUTE.

Nothing could be more opportune—act as proposed.

L.

No. 45.

Sir F. Plunkett to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Vienna, June 5, 1904.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

D. 12.45 P.M.

Tel. (No. 42.) Secret.

R. 3.10 P.M.

My desp[atch] No. 189/May 31.⁽¹⁾

Japanese Min[iste]r gave me yesterday translation of two documents which had reached him secretly from St. Petersburg, which proved that on April 25th already Russia had approached Turkish Gov[ernmen]t in order to obtain assent of the latter for the passage of ships of the Black Sea Squadron in the Mediterranean. Commander in Chief was told that the Porte had evaded giving a categorical answer but they have given Russia to understand that if operation is carried out with discretion and secrecy they would not make any protest. Commander in Chief was therefore instructed to prepare at once one first-class cruiser, two gunboats and one destroyer, whose names were given, for this Service.

Japanese Min[iste]r asked me whether Japan could rely for certain on the Powers preventing a proceeding in direct contradiction to treaty. I said I had no authority for giving him an official reply, but I felt sure England at all events would view such an attempt with the greatest disfavour.

MINUTE BY KING EDWARD.

*Communications should be made with Russian Gov[ernmen]t on this subject.**E.R.*

⁽¹⁾ [Not reproduced. It described a conversation between Sir F. Plunkett and M. Makino of May 29. In answer to a question from M. Makino as to whether he "believed there was no danger of Russia sending her Black Sea Fleet through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean," Sir F. Plunkett replied that "Russia could not take such a step, as it would be directly contrary to the Treaties."]

No. 46.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir N. O'Connor.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

Foreign Office, June 7, 1904.

Tel. (No. 104.)

Sir F. Plunkett's Tel[egram] No. 42⁽¹⁾ repeated to you.

If these statements are correct it is most important you should take every opportunity of impressing upon the Turkish Gov[ernmen]t that we are closely watching their conduct. Their action in stopping the Yacht Nemesis and compelling her to land her armament implies a most important admission of their obligations to act up to the Treaty.

You should take an early opportunity of saying that the language used by you (see your tel[egram] No. 95 of May 29⁽²⁾) has been approved by H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] and that we shall certainly expect Turkish Gov[ernmen]t to follow precisely the same course in regard to armed vessels of any other nation attempting to pass the Dardanelles.

I call your attention to the language used by me to French Amb[assado]r on this subject (see my desp[atch] No. 229 of April 29⁽³⁾ to Sir E. Monson sent to you May 10). I have spoken in similar terms to the Russian Amb[assado]r.

⁽¹⁾ [v. immediately preceding document.]⁽²⁾ [v. supra, p. 50, No. 44.]⁽³⁾ [v. supra, p. 50, No. 43.]

No. 47.

Sir N. O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Pera, June 8, 1904.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

D. 6.55 P.M.

Tel. (No. 101.)

R. 10 P.M.

(Russian Black Sea fleet.)

In accordance with instructions of your Lordship's telegram No. 104,⁽¹⁾ I informed Minister for Foreign Affairs to-day that your Lordship approved of the note I had sent to Porte on 30th May, respecting the refusal of the Ottoman Government to allow British Yacht "Nemesis" to pass the Straits of the Dardanelles with cannon on deck,⁽²⁾ that His Majesty's Government had taken cognizance of Grand Vizier's declaration and of procedure followed with regard to British vessels that they were closely watching the Turkish Government's conduct, and that they would certainly expect them to follow precisely the same course in regard to armed vessels of any other nation attempting to pass the Straits.

In reply to my inquiry as to whether a request had been made by a foreign Power for armed ships or ships of war to pass the Straits, the Minister for Foreign Affairs said that no such request had been made since the Russian torpedo-boat passed Straits in January 1903. His Excellency authorized me to repeat his statement to your Lordship, and intimated that the Ottoman Government were fully aware of the obligations imposed upon them by international Treaties.

It is very unlikely that the Sultan would allow any ships of Black Sea fleet to pass the Straits without consulting his Minister for Foreign Affairs, but I think it not improbable that the information of the Japanese Minister at Vienna, reported in Sir F. Plunkett's telegram No. 42,⁽³⁾ may be connected with volunteer steamers "Smolensk" and "Petersburg," which were said by His Majesty's Consul-General at Odessa, in his telegram No. 27, to be arming and ready for sea.

(1) [*v. immediately preceding document.*]

(2) [*cp. supra, p. 50, No. 44.*]

(3) [*v. supra, p. 51, No. 45.*]

[*ED. NOTE.*—On June 14 the Turkish Government officially denied the statement in the *Daily Mail* of June 11 that they had authorized the passage through the Straits of 4 Russian battleships and 2 cruisers.]

No. 48.

Sir N. O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Japan 627.

Therapia, D. August 4, 1904, 11 P.M.

Tel. (No. 12.) Treaty.

R. August 5, 1904, 9 A.M.

My tel[egram] No. 11 Treaty.⁽¹⁾ Russian volunteer fleet.

Turkish Ambassador at St. Petersburg telegraphs that Count Lamsdorff after an interview with the Czar gave him the most positive assurances that the vessels for passage of which permission was demanded were exclusively vessels of the volunteer fleet, that they would not change that flag during the whole of their voyage and that they would transport neither arms nor munitions of war.

(1) [Not reproduced.]

Count Lamsdorff declined however to give a written declaration as he considers formality superfluous inasmuch as the declaration in question is by Emperor's order made by him to Sublime Porte as also by Russian Ambassador at Constantinople and ought therefore to be considered as fulfilling all necessary formalities.

I hear that Porte is inclined to insist on written declaration.

No. 49.

Sir N. O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Japan 628.

Therapia, D. August 8, 1904, 11.55 P.M.

Tel. (No. 13.) Treaty.

R. August 9, 1904, 7 A.M.

Russian Volunteer steamers.

The Russian Ambassador, for the reasons already given in my telegram No. 12, Treaty,⁽¹⁾ refused a written declaration respecting the passage through the Straits of the Volunteer steamers, and threatened that ships would pass without further formalities if the Porte delayed their answer. Thereupon the Government decided not to insist further, but to take act of the Ambassador's verbal declaration. The Minister for Foreign Affairs accordingly addressed the following note to the Russian Ambassador this afternoon :—

- “ Following on the exchange of views which had taken place between the Sublime Porte and the Imperial Embassy respecting the passage through the Straits of the ships of the Volunteer fleet, your Excellency did me the honour to declare to me, by order of and in the name of your Government, that the said ships passing the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles will fly during their whole voyage, as hitherto (‘ hisseront pour tout le temps de leur voyage comme par le passé ’), the commercial flag; that they will not contain either munitions of war or armaments, and that they will not be changed into cruisers (‘ transformé en croiseurs ’).

“ The same declarations having been made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs at St. Petersburg to Husni Pasha, the Imperial Government hasten to take act of that same, and will instruct the (? proper) authorities to allow the said ships to pass according as the Imperial Embassy shall notify their arrival in the manner indicated.

“ It is also understood that, in conformity with the understanding come to, these ships shall not pass by the Straits together (en groupes), but one after the other, at a sufficient interval to allow of one to have passed the Dardanelles by the time the other arrives at the entrance to the Bosphorus.”

⁽¹⁾ [v. immediately preceding document.]

No. 50.

Sir C. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

St. Petersburg, D. October 28, 1904.

(No. 535.)

R. November 1, 1904.

My Lord,

It is officially announced in the Russian press today that the Emperor has ordered the steamers of the Volunteer Fleet “ Smolensk ” and “ Petersburg ” to be added

as cruisers to the Russian fleet, and to receive respectively the names of "Rion" and "Dniepr."

They will be included in the category of cruisers of the second class.

I have, &c.

CHARLES HARDINGE.

MINUTE.

v. memo. as to views of the Cabinet,⁽¹⁾ and my conversation with Russian Ambassador of today.⁽²⁾

L.

8/11.

⁽¹⁾ [The following is the text of this memorandum: Case of the "Smolensk" and "Petersburg." *vide* Sir Charles Hardinge's despatch No. 535 of October 28th.

It was decided by the Cabinet that ships of the Russian Volunteer Fleet might be allowed to leave the Black Sea if they fulfil the conditions described in Mr. Townley's telegram No. 13 Tr[eaty] of the 8th Aug[ust]: and that we should not even be able to object to their being thereafter fitted out as cruisers at Libau. Their case, in such an event, would seem to be indistinguishable from that of a German or English merchant steamer, bought in the Black Sea, brought out unchanged into the Mediterranean and subsequently equipped in some Russian port in the Baltic:—a proceeding which would clearly not be an infringement of the Treaty of London. The case of these two ships however presented much greater difficulty. They are, we understand, to be re-named, and it is apparently intended that they should sail from Libau as cruisers and take an active part in naval operations. Our general feeling was that, as these vessels left the Black Sea fraudulently in the guise of peaceful vessels, in spite of the fact that they had their guns on board, and were immediately afterwards transformed into ships of war, it was impossible to admit that they could purge their offence simply by going to Libau, altering their names, and obtaining a fresh commission. Some of our colleagues thought that the two ships, in order to purge their offence, should return to the Black Sea equipped as merchantmen, after which they would presumably be in the same position as the other Volunteer Ships now said to be on the point of sailing and might be permitted to pass the Dardanelles on the same condition. It was felt however that it was not easy to defend the contention that while a voyage to Libau was *not* sufficient to purge their offence, a voyage to Libau and back to the Black Sea *was* sufficient to purge it. The more sustainable view seemed to be that these vessels, having committed a fraud, were disqualified for employment as ships of war until the end of the war. It was felt that their re-appearance on the scene in the guise of ships of war after refitting at Libau, particularly if they interfered with British shipping, would create a feeling of the utmost indignation in this country.

The feeling of the Cabinet was that a solution of the difficulty might perhaps be found if we could obtain from the Russian Government an assurance that the two ships would be used as tenders, but would not be allowed to take prizes, or at any rate British prizes.]

⁽²⁾ [*v. infra*, p. 55, No. 52.]

No. 51.

Mr. Townley to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Pera, November 3, 1904.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

Tel. (No. 20.)

D. 1.35 P.M.

R. 2.5 P.M.

Treaty.

The Sultan has sent special messenger to tell me His Majesty has acceded to request of Russian Ambassador for permission for five ships of the Volunteer Fleet and two of the Russian Steam Navigation Company to pass through the Straits a proviso being made that the terms of exchange of views as reported in Sir N. O'Connor's telegram No. 13 of August 8th⁽¹⁾ shall be scrupulously observed.

Special reference is made in Sultan's reply to conditions that only one ship shall be in the Straits at the same time and that they shall not have guns and munitions of war on board nor change the flag.

⁽¹⁾ [*v. supra*, p. 53, No. 49.]

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir C. Hardinge.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

(No. 397.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, November 3, 1904.

I told the Russian Ambassador today that I had heard from a trustworthy source that the Volunteer Steamers "Smolensk" and "Petersburg" had been renamed, and were about to sail from Libau as cruisers. I thought it my duty to mention to His Excellency, although I did not desire to raise the question officially at this moment, that this intimation seemed to me most alarming. We both of us wished, I knew, to do all that lay in our power for the purpose of avoiding complications between our two countries. Here was a case which seemed to me calculated to lead to a very dangerous outbreak of public opinion in this country. These two ships had emerged from the Black Sea under the mercantile flag but being in fact ships of war being built to carry guns and having guns on board, and in such a state that they were able to transform themselves almost immediately into cruisers and to harry our commerce. His Excellency would remember the feeling of indignation occasioned by their proceedings. We had happily succeeded in averting the danger thus created, but what would be said when the same two ships, under newly assumed names, reappeared upon the scene and resumed their operations against the commerce of neutrals? His Excellency said that the fact of their having been recommissioned at Libau seemed to him to alter their legal position. I said that I ventured to differ, but that I did not wish to argue the case upon legal grounds but upon the broader grounds of public expediency. I would for the present only ask His Excellency to consider what I had said, and whether it was not possible that we should arrive at a reasonable understanding upon the matter. It might perhaps, for instance, be arranged that these two ships should be employed as tenders to the Russian Fleet, but should not interfere with neutral commerce. His Excellency promised to consider my suggestion. He observed that we were continually throwing obstacles in the way of the Russian Navy in its attempts to put a stop to the carriage of contraband articles, and he dwelt upon the manner in which the Russian Government had conceded some of our demands. I told His Excellency that, while I admitted the considerate manner in which the communications upon this subject had been conducted, I was afraid we could not claim to have achieved much in the interests of British commerce. I said that I had been engaged during the last few days in drafting a letter upon this subject to the London Chamber of Commerce, that I had done my best to show that something had been accomplished, but that, all told, it did not come to much. The views held by the Russian Government upon the subject of contraband of war still remained far in excess of any which the British Government had ever professed or accepted.

[I am, &c.]

L[ANSDOWNE].

MINUTE BY KING EDWARD.

App[rove]d.—E.R.

[ED. NOTE.—Between November 6 and 11 the following steamships of the Russian Volunteer Fleet were reported as having passed the Straits, "Yaroslav," "Voronej," "Vladimir," "Tambo V," "Kiev." Two ships of the Russian Steam Navigation Company also passed the Straits "Jupiter," on November 11; and "Merkuria," on November 14.]

No. 53.

Mr. Townley to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Turkey 5448.

Constantinople, D. November 7, 1904.

(No. 40.) Treaty.

R. November 14, 1904.

With reference to Your Lordship's telegram No. 148 of the 4th instant,⁽¹⁾ I have the honour to transmit to Your Lordship herewith, copy of a Memorandum which I caused to be left with the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the 5th instant, taking note of the communication made to me by the Sublime Porte of the conditions under which His Majesty the Sultan had acceded to the request of the Russian Ambassador that certain ships of the Volunteer fleet and two vessels chartered from the Russian Navigation Company might be allowed to pass through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

I have, &c.

WALTER TOWNLEY.

Enclosure in No. 53.

Memorandum.

Constantinople. 5 Novembre 1904.

LE Gouvernement de Sa Majesté Britannique prend acte par le présent des déclarations faites en vertu des ordres de Sa Majesté Impériale le Sultan, au Chargé d'Affaires d'Angleterre le 3 Novembre, 1904, par Son Excellence Noury Bey au nom de la Sublime Porte, concernant les conditions dans lesquelles devra s'effectuer le prochain passage par les détroits du Bosphore et des Dardanelles de cinq bâtiments de la flotte volontaire Russe et de deux navires de la Compagnie de Navigation à vapeur Russe, à savoir, que ces bateaux n'auront à bord ni canons ni munitions de guerre, et battront le pavillon de commerce pendant toute la durée de leur voyage.

⁽¹⁾ [Not reproduced.]

No. 54.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir E. Monson.

F.O. Russia 1781.

(No. 574.) Confidential.

Sir,

Foreign Office, November 15, 1904.

. . . .⁽¹⁾ During the course of our conversation, M. Cambon mentioned to me that the French Government had heard from their Chargé d'Affaires at St. Petersburg that arrangements would probably be made for the purpose of preventing the four Volunteer Ships about to leave Libau as cruisers from doing anything likely to produce incidents of a disturbing character. I observed that the only two transformed ships as to which we felt serious anxiety were the "Smolensk" and the "Petersburg." His Excellency said that four ships had been spoken of in the communication which he had received. The Russian Government were under the impression, derived from something which I said to Count Benckendorff, and which Sir Charles Hardinge had said to Count Lamsdorff, that in our opinion it was sufficient for a Volunteer Ship to visit Libau and be recommissioned there in order to enable it to re-appear upon the scene as a ship of war. I said that we had not made this admission in regard to the "Smolensk" and the "Petersburg," whose antecedents placed them in a category of their own. His Excellency told me that

⁽¹⁾ [The first two paragraphs of this despatch deal with the Dogger Bank incident and are printed above, r. p. 38, No. 27.]

whilst Count Lamsdorff had every desire to deal with this question in a considerate fashion, his difficulties were inconceivably great. As an illustration of this, he told me that the "Smolensk" and the "Petersburg" had received orders to convert themselves into ships of war immediately after entering the Mediterranean, from the Grand Duke Alexander, who wished to put a little more life into the proceedings of the Russian Navy, and that not only Count Lamsdorff but the Grand Duke Alexis was entirely unaware that such orders had been issued.

[I am, &c.
LANSDOWNE.]

No. 55.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir C. MacDonald.⁽¹⁾

F.O. Turkey 5448.
(No. 210.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, November 16, 1904.

The Japanese Minister made to me today a statement to the following effect with regard to the Russian Black Sea Fleet :—

On the 27th July he had expressed to me, in view of a remark which I had made to him in January last⁽²⁾ to the effect that, in case of Russia's violation of the Dardanelles Treaties, Great Britain would not sit by quietly, the earnest desire of the Japanese Government that H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] should decide to take in good time such steps as would be calculated effectively to prevent the possibility of the Black Sea Fleet passing the Straits.

I had then said that I did not for a moment believe that, having regard to the action of H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] in the case of the Volunteer Ships "Peterburg" [*sic*] and "Smolensk" and its results, the Russian Gov[ernmen]t would be likely to attempt to send the Black Sea Fleet through the Straits, and that as to this, I remained of the opinion which I had expressed in January last.

Viscount Hayashi had now to inform me that the Imperial Government trusted that no such attempt, even if it were made by the Russian Government, would be allowed to be carried out.

But, in view of the successive passages being now made through the Straits by the Volunteer Fleet Steamers, and having regard to the reported preparation of the Black Sea Fleet for a voyage, Viscount Hayashi was once more to draw my attention to the serious aspect of the question, and state that the Japanese Gov[ernmen]t earnestly desired that H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] would vigilantly watch the movements of the Fleet and take suitable steps should circumstances require it.

I told him that we had not ceased to watch the movements of the Black Sea Fleet, and that I was happy to be able to tell him that our latest information was to the effect that the report that it was about to leave the Black Sea was unfounded. We had, on the contrary, recently heard that the Fleet had been paid off.

Our policy in regard to this question remained, I said, unchanged.

[I am, &c.]
L[ANSDOWNE].

⁽¹⁾ [The substance of this despatch was telegraphed as No. 189 of November 17 to Sir C. MacDonald.]

⁽²⁾ [*v.* Telegram of Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir C. MacDonald, No. 26, of January 30, 1904, p. 48, No. 40.]

[*ED. NOTE.*—The following Memorandum is printed here for convenience, in view of its references to past negotiations, notably in 1903.

Confidential.
(8968.)

Memorandum by Sir Charles Hardings.

Memorandum respecting the Passage of Russian War Vessels through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus.

Foreign Office, November 16, 1906.

The following are the formal Treaty stipulations on the subject of the passage of vessels of war through the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus:—

By the Convention of the 30th March, 1856, attached to the Treaty of Paris:

“Article I. Sa Majesté le Sultan, d'une part, déclare qu'il a la ferme résolution de maintenir à l'avenir le principe invariablement établi comme ancienne règle de son Empire, et en vertu duquel il a été de tout temps défendu aux bâtiments de guerre des Puissances étrangères d'entrer dans les Détroits des Dardanelles et du Bosphore; et que tant que la Porte se trouve en paix Sa Majesté n'admettra aucun bâtiment de guerre étranger dans les dits Détroits.”

The other Signatories undertook to respect this determination of the Sultan, and to conform to the principle laid down.

The London Treaty of the 18th March, 1871, says:—

“Art. II. The principle of the closing of the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, such as it has been established by the Separate Convention of the 30th March, 1856, is maintained, with power to His Imperial Majesty the Sultan to open the said Straits in time of peace to the vessels of war of friendly and allied Powers, in case the Sublime Porte should judge it necessary in order to secure the execution of the stipulations of the Treaty of Paris of the 30th March, 1856.”

By Article LXIII of the Treaty of Berlin, the Treaty of Paris of 1856, and the Treaty of London of the 18th March, 1871, are maintained in all such of their provisions as are not abrogated or modified by the Berlin Treaty.

At the 18th Sitting of the Berlin Congress, Lord Salisbury made the following declaration on behalf of England:—

“Considering that the Treaty of Berlin will modify an important part of the arrangements sanctioned by the Treaty of Paris of 1856, and that the interpretation of Article II of the Treaty of London, which is dependent on the Treaty of Paris, may thus become a matter of dispute:

“I declare, on behalf of England, that the obligations of His Britannic Majesty relating to the closing of the Straits do not go further than an engagement with the Sultan to respect, in this matter, His Majesty's independent determinations in conformity with the spirit of existing Treaties.”

At the 19th Sitting, Count Schouvaloff made the following counter-declaration:—

“The Plenipotentiaries of Russia, without being able exactly to appreciate the meaning of the proposition of the second Plenipotentiary of Great Britain respecting the closing of the Straits, restrict themselves to demanding, on their part, the insertion in the Protocol of the observation that, in their opinion, the principle of the closing of the Straits is an European principle, and that the stipulations concluded in this respect in 1841, 1856, and 1871, confirmed at present by the Treaty of Berlin, are binding on the part of all the Powers, in accordance with the spirit and letter of the existing Treaties, not only as regards the Sultan, but also as regards all the Powers Signatory to these transactions.”

The only exceptions authorized by Treaty (1856) are two gun-boats for each Power for the Danube, and light despatch-boats for the service of the foreign Embassies at Constantinople, the size of such vessels being limited by Regulations issued by the Porte the 7th April, 1859, to 50 mètres in length and 800 tons in bulk.

In consequence of frequent applications from foreign Powers for a relaxation of the Treaty rule, the Porte, in 1868, issued a Circular in which it said:

“Aussi a-t-elle décidé que désormais il n'y aura absolument d'autre exception que pour celui des bâtiments de guerre sur lequel se trouverait un Souverain ou le Chef d'un Etat indépendant.”

In practice, however, this rule has been openly relaxed for the visits of Princes and some other distinguished persons, and such exceptions have not given rise to protests.

As regards the passage through both Straits of Russian vessels of war or vessels of the Volunteer fleet, conveying troops or munitions of war, our policy had been to call attention to any cases in which the provisions of Treaties appear to have been disregarded, and to warn the Porte formally that if occasion should arise we should claim similar treatment. This course was taken in June 1888, when the Russian war vessel "Zabiaka" had been allowed to pass again in August 1890, when permission was given for the passage of three Russian torpedo-boats, and on subsequent occasions, especially in August 1892, and September 1893, when questions arose as to granting special privileges to Russia for the conveyance of munitions of war through the Straits.

Although there have been several instances of evasion of the Treaty of Berlin by the Russian Government in time of peace, it was only during the Russo-Japanese war that the question of the passage of the Black Sea fleet into the Mediterranean became acute. The subject was widely discussed in the Russian press, and the Russian Government were urged to disregard the likelihood of any action on the part of His Majesty's Government to prevent the passage of the Dardanelles. At one moment there were indications of preparations with this intention at the naval ports in the Black Sea. Warnings were given to Count Benckendorff and the Russian Government that such a proceeding, being contrary to Treaty, could not be permitted. The necessary steps to frustrate the junction of the Black Sea fleet with the Russian fleet in Far Eastern waters, or with the Baltic fleet on its way to the East, were considered by His Majesty's Government, and a decision taken as to the measures to be adopted. The idea of any action of this kind, if ever seriously contemplated by the Russian Government, was eventually abandoned.

It was during the recent war that the Russian Government found themselves for the first time hampered by the provisions of the Treaty of 1856 relating to the Dardanelles. They had hitherto succeeded in evading, in isolated instances the Treaty stipulations, and although on each evasion a protest had been addressed to the Porte by His Majesty's Government it was not anticipated that any other Government would support Great Britain, or that His Majesty's Government would ever do more than to protest. When the Russian Government realized that their anticipations were mistaken, they found themselves seriously handicapped in not being able to utilize the services of two first-class cruisers and one battle-ship of the Black Sea fleet, these being the only efficient vessels in those waters. The necessity was then fully recognized by the Russian Government and the press of introducing by negotiation some modification of the Treaty clauses relating to the Dardanelles which would be more advantageous to them in the event of future conflicts with foreign Powers other than Turkey.

Previous to the outbreak of the late war the Russian Government had been fairly satisfied with the *status quo* of the Dardanelles which they had been able to successfully evade on certain occasions, and which they greatly preferred to the only other proposals hitherto made—viz., the opening of the Straits to the war-ships of all Powers.

It is probable that the Russian Government will now desire a modification of the *status quo*, and if it is thought desirable to make some Concession to Russia in return for other advantages to be obtained during the pending negotiations, and if this is a concession upon which they set store, it would be possible to promise to the Russian Government our support in obtaining the consent of the Powers to a modification of Article II of the Treaty of London in the sense of the declaration made by Lord Salisbury at the 18th Sitting of the Berlin Congress. (See earlier portion of this Memorandum.)

By a change in this sense the Russian fleet would, *with the consent of the Sultan*, be able to freely navigate the Straits without hindrance; and although we and the other Powers would enjoy the same facility, the Russian Government would be in a better position than other Powers to exert pressure upon the Sultan to give to their fleet the requisite permission, and to withhold it from the ships and fleets of other Powers. It is possible, however, that the Russian Government might demand a specific statement that the right of free navigation of the Straits should be conceded to their ships and denied to all others.

This eventuality has already been discussed by the Committee of Imperial Defence, and I quote here an extract from their Report giving the conclusions at which they arrived, together with an opinion given by the Director of Naval Intelligence on the same subject :—

Extract from Defence Committee Paper 1 B (Report by Mr. Balfour of the Conclusion arrived at on the 11th February in reference to Russia and Constantinople, February 18, 1903).

"The subject of the Dardanelles and Constantinople was discussed on the 11th February in connection with two different but closely allied problems.

"The first of these may be stated as follows :—

"What difference would it make to the balance of power in the Mediterranean if Russia were to obtain, through possession of Constantinople, free egress from the Black Sea through the Dardanelles, these remaining closed, as at present, against other Powers?

"The answer to this question unanimously accepted by the Committee was that, while Russia would no doubt obtain certain naval advantages from the change, it would not fundamentally alter the present strategic position in the Mediterranean."

"Extract from Defence Committee Paper 2B (*The Effect on our Naval Strategic Position in the Mediterranean of a Russian Occupation of Constantinople.*—Director of Naval Intelligence, February 1903).

"It may be stated generally that a Russian occupation of the Dardanelles, or an arrangement for enabling Russia to freely use the waterway between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, such as her dominating influence can extract from Turkey at her pleasure, would not make any marked difference in our strategic dispositions as compared with present conditions."

From these extracts it is evident that it is, if desirable, possible to make an important concession to Russia in relation to the Dardanelles without fundamentally altering the present strategic position in the Mediterranean.](¹)

C. H.

(¹) [*cp.* the conversation between King Edward and Sir Charles Hardinge on April 22, 1904, in Sir Sidney Lee: *King Edward VII* (1927), II, pp. 289-90. Both are reported as of opinion that "there did not appear to be any reason for preventing the passage of the Dardanelles by Russian warships as we have endeavoured to do in the past," and that "this concession of an unopposed passage might prove a very useful asset in the event of the general negotiations for an arrangement with Russia being resumed. It would be a useful *quid pro quo* to have in hand." A memorandum by Sir E. Grey upon the question of the Straits, dated October 14, 1908, is printed in *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. V, p. 441, No. 377, v. also pp. 451-2, No. 387; 452-3, Nos. 888-9; 454-5, No. 391. For further references to the Straits in Vol. V, v. Subject Index, pp. 881-2, *sub Straits—Bosphorus and Dardanelles, Question of Egress and Ingress.*]

IV.—SUMMARY OF BRITISH CLAIMS ON RUSSIA IN CONNEXION WITH THE WAR, 1904-6.

No. 56.

Extract from the Annual Report for Russia for the Year 1906.

(Enclosure in Despatch No. 4 from Sir A. Nicolson, of January 2, 1907.)

British Claims.

F.O. 371/918.

Outstanding British claims.

20. Little desire has been shown on the part of the Russian Government to satisfy the claims which have been presented on behalf of British Companies and subjects during the past two years, a fact which may perhaps be attributed to the dilatoriness of Russian methods and to the lack of ready money and the present financial crisis in Russia. Little progress can therefore be said to have been made during 1906 in the outstanding British claims, while a large increase is to be noted in their number owing principally (1) to the war in the Far East; and (2) to the recent internal disorders in Russia.

Claims arising from the Russo-Japanese war.

21. Among these claims by far the largest and more important are those arising from the Russo-Japanese war, which are of two descriptions, namely, shipping claims and claims arising from loss of property in the war area, *e.g.*, Port Arthur and Dalny.

Shipping claims.

22. The shipping claims can be divided into four categories:—

(a.) Claims in which the Russian Government has in principle agreed to pay compensation (the "Malacca" and the "Ardova") but has requested further documentary evidence. During the past year the documentary evidence required on behalf of these ships, together with that relating to the "Formosa" (presented for the first time this year and for which the claim is similar to that of the "Malacca") has