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Intelligence Activity of the Russian Danube Army on the Eve of the Russo-Turkish Liberation War of 1877–1878.)

[Die nachrichtendienstliche Tätigkeit der russischen Donauarmee am Vorabend des russisch-türkischen Befreiungskrieges 1877–1878]

(Abstract)

The Russo-Turkish War of Liberation of 1877-1878 was the last large-scale military campaign led by Russia in the Balkans, culminating in the most decisive victory ever achieved by St. Petersburg over the Supreme Porte, whose political consequences largely predetermined the further history of Balkan Peninsula. Today, the history of this armed conflict continues to give rise to discussions both among historians and in the general public. Estimates of both St. Petersburg's political motivation and the purely military aspects of the conflict are various. Although of all the Russo-Ottoman wars, this was the shortest and most victorious for Russia, gaps in the intelligence and underestimation of the enemy are often cited as some of the weaknesses of the Russian army, leading to prolonged hostilities and additional casualties. The article examines the intelligence activities carried out by the headquarters of the Russian Danube Army during the period from its formation in November 1876 to the beginning of the hostilities in April of the following year. The focus is on the secret intelligence in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule, which were to become the main battle theatre in the looming conflict. Some documents may give the impression that on the eve of the war there was a large clandestine Russian intelligence network in the rear of the enemy. In practice, with the hesitant policy of St. Petersburg and the uncertainty at the headquarters of the Danube Army about whether the war would take place

at all, the organization and scope of intelligence even then included those shortcomings that would have to be overcome later in the context of ongoing hostilities and failed plans for a lightning victory.

Keywords: Russo-Turkish war of liberation 1878; Danube army; intelligence activity; intelligence