INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND PLACE OF THE RUSSIAN–NEapolitan–sicilian DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN THE POLICY OF ALEXANDER 1 (1801–1825) PURSUED IN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS – EXAMINED IN THE LIGHT OF PUBLISHED RUSSIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS SOURCES

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The aim of this paper is to explore the diplomatic relations of the Russian Empire maintained with the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples in the first quarter of the 19th century. The choice of the topic can be confirmed by the fact that in the Hungarian and international historiography this question has so far received not much attention. The dissertation shall not be restricted to the introduction of diplomatic relations between the two countries, it is going to examine the subject from a broader perspective. Therefore, its goal is to present the development of the relations between the Russian Empire and Southern Italy during the reign of Alexander I (1801–1825) in the context of the Russian Empire’s responses given to the events, challenges and tendencies unfolding in the international arena.

As the sources report, in the period between 1801 and 1825 Alexander I’s main goal was to achieve an inner stability, as well as an independence from the foreign influence in the kingdom in Southern Italy. The Russian foreign affair sources confirm the researcher’s assumption that the Russian–Neapolitan relations did not have the same importance in the Tsarist foreign policy as, for instance, the Eastern Question or the war against Napoleon’s France had received, however it is clear that for the Russian foreign policy the question of Italy constituted an organic part of European affairs, as a vital issue of the European balance of power. The sources of the examined period confirm that although the Russian Empire did not strive to acquire a direct influence within the peninsula, but still wanted to prevent an increase of influence of any of the Great Powers in the region, since it would upset the balance of power. The policy of the Tsar’s Cabinet in relation to Italy was always closely connected with its policy maintained with the other Great Powers. In accordance with the Russian foreign affair concepts given in response to international challenges, in the history of Russian–Neapolitan–Sicilian relations there were periods with apparent close cooperation as well as periods with less political activity.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLIED METHODS

The resources of the doctoral thesis are based on the published sources compiled from the documents of the Russian Empire’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the monumental multivolume sourcebook called “Внешняя политика России XIX и начала XX века. Документы Российского министерства иностранных дел”, containing numerous series of volumes. The dissertation relies on the foreign affairs documents related to the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples (from 1816 referred to as: Kingdom of the two Sicilies), which can be found in the
first (1801–1815) and second (1815–1830) volumes, and which cover the entire period of Alexander I’s reign.

The dissertation is a basic research based on source basis, revealing the development of the diplomatic connections between the two countries in the context of international events, in accordance with the traditions of classic diplomatic history, using chronological narrative. With regard to the fact that the topic has not been thoroughly examined so far, the author of this paper presents the development of the Russian–Neapolitan–Sicilian inter-state relations in the light of sources, starting from the Napoleonic Wars through the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) and the Neapolitan Revolution of 1820–1821, until Alexander I’s death. The treatise does not intend to give a historical review of bilateral relations, it rather aims to present the concepts inherent in the Russian Empire’s foreign affairs policy during the examined period, with an attempt to explore the Russian diplomatic activity enfolding with full consideration of the complex nature of responses given to the policy of the Great Powers affecting the European balance of power. All related sources and data of international literature have been used during the research.

The paper focuses on the interrelations between the Russian Empire and Kingdom of Naples, with an outlook to the relationship with the Sardinian-Piedmont Kingdom, which being the other significant state of the Apennine Peninsula, gives further nuance to the role of Italy in the Russian diplomacy pursued in European affairs.

III. NEW SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS OF THE TREATISE

1. The place of the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples in the Russian diplomacy in the period between 1801 and 1807

The examined sources confirm that during the indicated period the relationship maintained with the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples constituted a key topic of the Russian Empire’s policy in the Mediterranean Sea. The political course of the Mediterranean Sea appeared in the Russian foreign policy during the reign of Catherine II, and throughout the ruling of Paul I it remained one of the most significant issues of the Russian Empire. During the reign of Alexander I until the signing the Treaties of Tilsit (summer of 1807), the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea constituted an essential and complex question of the Russian foreign policy, in which Russian endeavours to prevent the French expansion, to protect the Ionian Islands as well as to secure Russia’s southern borders and trade were all closely interlinked. Therefore, the Russian Empire’s foreign policy in the Mediterranean Sea incorporated a
complex set of problems, for the successful resolution of which, due to geopolitical reasons, the conclusion of the Russian–Ottoman treaty of alliance securing the use of the Black Sea straits was vital, just like the English–Russian friendly relations enabling the passage of the Baltic Fleet through the Strait of Gibraltar out to the Mediterranean Sea. The endeavours of the Russian diplomacy to resolve this complex problem can be well reconstructed from the sources, while in the meantime, one of the Russian Empire’s main goals was to achieve the withdrawal of the French forces from Southern Italy, since their presence in the region involved a possibility of an attack against the Balkan Peninsula, the Ionian Islands, the Greek territories and the Ottoman Empire. The research revealed that the withdrawal of French troops from the territory of the Kingdom of Naples played an important role in the determination of the active foreign policy replacing the Russian isolation policy established at the beginning of Alexander I’s reign, as well as during the Russian–French negotiations for acknowledging Napoleon’s title as Emperor of France. The documents of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflect that the presence of French units in Southern Italy significantly contributed to the establishment of the Third coalition, in the course of which in the autumn of 1805 the Anglo–Russian troops disembarked in Southern Italy. They could not achieve significant results, since after the defeat in Austerlitz on 2 December 1805, Alexander I recalled the expedition forces back to Russia. However, the sources clearly show that the issue of Naples and Sicily still remained an important question for the Russian Cabinet, and the Russian–French Peace treaty signed by P. Ja. Oubril on 20 July 1806 was not ratified by Alexander I due to the fact that its provisions would adversely affect Russia’s foreign policy in the Mediterranean Sea. After the failure of the Third coalition, The Kingdom of Southern Italy was split in two kingdoms: on the continental part the Kingdom of Naples was formed under French influence, while the island of Sicily under the protection of the English fleet became the Kingdom of Sicily. Due to the military defeat the Russian Empire was forced to conclude a truce with France, and during the peace negotiations the Russian party had to admit that was not able to achieve the restoration of Ferdinand IV’s reign in Naples, but still wanted to guarantee the monarch’s adequate compensation for the lost territories. In accordance with the agreements of the Treaties of Tilsit, the Ionian Islands, which served as a base for the disembarkation in South Italy, became a French territory, Alexander acknowledged Bonaparte’s title as king of Naples, but the approval of his title as king of Sicily Alexander linked to the condition of the Balearic Islands, Crete or other similar territory becoming domain of Ferdinand of Bourbon. As a result, the Treaties of Tilsit constituted a sharp boundary in the relations of the Russian Empire maintained with the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples.
The research of the Russian foreign affairs sources confirm that during the period between 1801 and 1807 Russia cultivated close relations with the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples, based on protection of mutual interests of the parties and characterized by a cooperation responsive to the international challenges.

2. Southern Italy in the military concept of the Russian Cabinet

The preconditions of the Russian military operations were the Alliance agreement with the Porte guaranteeing the passage of the Russian Naval Forces trough the straits, as well as the cooperation with Great Britain, possessing a strong naval fleet in the Mediterranean Sea.

According to the peace concluded by the 1801 Treaty of Florence, the French troops received permission to invade the strategically important ports of the Kingdom of Naples, therefore the Neapolitan Cabinet between 1803 and 1805 on several occasions requested Saint Petersburg’s approval for military operations similar to the expedition of A. V. Suvorov and F. F. Ushakov in 1799. In the scope of the convention renewing the Russian–Neapolitan Alliance agreement of 1798 concluded on 10 September 1805, in November 1805 English and Russian troops landed at the port of Naples, but no significant manoeuvres took place, since after the defeat in Austerlitz, having made arrangements to secure the protection of Korfu, Alexander I recalled his troops to Russia. During 1806–1807 the Queen of Naples, Maria Carolina, on several occasions requested Alexander I to send troops to Naples, but due to the unfavourable military situation the Tsar refused to comply with her request. On the spring of 1807 the Russian Cabinet set up the plan of another disembarkation in Southern Italy, but since Great Britain’s aspiration was to turn their protectorate, Sicily, into an English base in the Mediterranean Sea similar to Malta, they refused to support the execution of the Russian proposal. In 1807 the Anglo–Russian relations, then at the beginning of 1808 the relations between Russia and Sicily came to an end, therefore the Russian landing in Southern Italy could not be carried out with an English assistance. In the autumn of 1806 the Porte closed the Black sea straits for the Russian fleet, while at the end of the year a Russo–Turkish war began, which blocked the passage of Russian Naval vessels to the Mediterranean Sea.

The value of Southern Italy in the Russian military plans became evident again in the first part of 1812. In February Alexander recommended to launch an Anglo–Russian troop from Sicily to Naples, therefore in the spring of 1812 Russian admiral A. S. Greig travelled to Sicily for negotiations with the English general and commander of the English fleet in the Mediterranean Sea, William Bentinck, in order to prepare their joint manoeuvres. Great-Britain refused the Russian proposal, since considered it more reasonable to transfer his units
from Sicily to Spain, so as to support Russia with bigger and stronger troops (war of the Pyrenees), rejecting the minor manoeuvres in Southern Italy. After the battle of Borodino on 7 September 1812, Bentinck proposed a joint Anglo–Russian expedition, which did not take place in the end. The execution of another Russian landing in Southern Italy became less probable due to the fact that the Treaty of Bucharest signed on 28 May 1812, brought the Russo–Turkish war to an end, however, since no alliance agreement was concluded, the Russian Fleet at the Black Sea was not permitted to use the straits and enter the Mediterranean. And by the time of the Western European military campaign of the Russian army in 1813–14, the plan of a disembarkation in Southern Italy was completely taken off the agenda.

After the outbreak of the revolution in Naples, Ferdinand I, King of the Two Sicilies (Naples and Sicily) requested the intervention of the allied forces negotiating in Troppau then in Laibach. Alexander I, who by that time had given up his liberal principles, in January 1821 ordered mobilization of Russian corps of 100,000 soldiers for the support, if necessary, of the Austrian troops sent there to suppress the revolution in Naples and then in Piedmont. These Russian forces did not cross the border of the Russian Empire, but the mobilization was a message from Alexander I that he does not wish any further growth of the Austrian influence in the Apennine Peninsula, and willing to send military forces to Italy for the sake of securing the balance of power.

Based on the examination of sources it can be concluded that during the reign of Alexander I no endeavour similar to that of 1799 took place, and that between 1805 and 1807 the Russian presence in the Mediterranean Sea was less prominent than during the Second coalition. Although the Russian Cabinet considered the possibility of a landing in Southern Italy, the circumstances did not facilitate the realization of another grandiose Russian enterprise in Italy.

3. Relationship of the Russian Empire with the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples between 1808 and 1815

Since the Sicilian Court remained faithful to their alliance with Great-Britain even after the French occupation, after the signing of the Russo–French Treaties of Tilsit (treaties of peace and alliance), in 1808 a breakup took place between the Kingdom of Sicily and the Russian Empire.

Although the Sicilian envoy to Saint Petersburg, Antonio Maresca, Duke of Serra Capriola resigned from his diplomatic tasks, as a private person he remained in the Tsar’s
capital and acted as unofficial intermediary in the Russian Court. In accordance with the examined documents, both states regarded this breakup a forced step, provoked by the circumstances, and no estrangement took place in the Russo–Sicilian relations, until in August of 1812 the diplomatic connections between the two countries were restored again. In 1814 the Russian Cabinet rejected the acknowledgement of Ferdinand’s claims for the Kingdom of Naples, with an aspiration to determine the future fate of the region in the conference of the Allies, urging the Sicilian ruler to carry out reforms and alterations in Sicily instead.

The Russian Cabinet maintained moderate relationship with the Kingdom of Naples ruled by Joseph Bonaparte, then Joachim Murat. At the end of 1812 Murat initiated negotiations with Austria, in which respect Saint Petersburg wanted to explore the Austrian concepts in connection with the Kingdom of Naples. Therefore, the relevant Russo–Austrian negotiations took place, and as the sources reflect, the Russian Cabinet ranged Southern Europe within Habsburg sphere of influence, by that urging the hesitant Austria enter the Sixth coalition. On 10 August 1818 Austria declared war to France, and Murat entered new negotiations concerning the defection. On 11 January 1814 an agreement was concluded between Naples and Austria, and the Austrian government recommended Russia to join the alliance and set up a contract proposal. Alexander I did not regard Murat’s defection as an issue of great importance, and after Napoleon’s resignation on 6 April 1814, the Russian Cabinet ceased the alliance negotiations concerning Naples, however Saint Petersburg tried to avoid a formal breakup in diplomatic relations, as part of their wait-and-see-policy.

On the Congress of Vienna the Russian Empire was engaged with the issues of Saxony and Poland, and their concepts concerning the Apennine Peninsula were limited to aspirations of a French presence in Italy, functioning as a counterbalance to Austria. The sources reveal that the Russian Cabinet – based on the previous agreements concluded with the Neapolitan Bourbons and with regard to the European stability – supported the acknowledgement of Ferdinand’s claims for the throne of Naples, since for the Russian Empire it represented the consolidation of the principles of legitimism as well as a support of the French restoration. Alexander I preferred the constitutional governing of the former Neapolitan dynasty, which could strengthen the relationship of the French and Neapolitan Bourbons and by that could serve the cause of the European peace.

After Napoleon’s escape from Elba, Saint Petersburg gave his support so Murat’s troops fought on the side of the Coalition, but unofficially was in favour of the restoration of the Neapolitan Bourbons. With signing the Austro–Sicilian alliance agreements of 29 April and 12 June 1815, Naples and Sicily returned to the Bourbons, however the Kingdom fell under strong Austrian influence. With regard to the European balance of power, in this situation the
Russian Cabinet in the case of Eugène de Beauharnais in the autumn of 1815 took the position that for the loss of the Kingdom of Italy the Duke should be reimbursed by the Kingdom of Sicily, either by territorial or financial compensation.

At the beginning of 1816 the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, related to Southern Italy decided to fully comply with the provisions of the Treaties of Vienna and Paris and preserve the borders of the Italian states, while all other participation in Italian matters was considered to be avoided by the Empire.

4. Basic features of the Russo–Sicilian relations in the last few years of Alexander I’s reign (1820–1825)

Related to the revolution in Naples, which started on 2 July 1820, the Russian cabinet pursued a careful policy, wishing to negotiate the subject on the congress of the Great Powers, since it was not in the Empire’s interests to give a chance to Austria to increase their influence on the Apennine Peninsula with an intervention in Naples. With regard to the revolution in Naples, the Russian diplomatic documents reveal the standpoints of the Great powers on the Congress of Troppau (1820) and Laibach (1821), the differences in opinions between the Russian Foreign Affairs state secretary I. A. Kapodistrias and Austrian chancellor Metternich, as well as the distancing of Alexander I from his former liberalistic policy.

In the period after Ferdinand I’s restoration the Russian diplomacy consequently fostered the inner stability of the kingdom, in order to secure the withdrawal of the Austrian intervention troops as soon as possible, avoiding the outbreak of another Neapolitan revolution. Alexander I rejected to support the claims of Ferdinand I to become the Spanish regent for the same reason, in order to maintain the European balance. According to the examined sources, Saint Petersburg did not want to risk the existing order because of the claims of the ruler of Sicily. He urged Ferdinand to preserve his loyalty toward the allies and to accomplish the internal reforms he undertook in Laibach and Verona. He supported the king’s request to recruit a corps of Swiss guards, and also fostered that Ferdinand as soon as possible was able to maintain peace and order in the Kingdom, without the presence of foreign forces.
5. The restorations of Alexander I and Ferdinand of Bourbon (1815, 1821)

The diplomacy documents confirmed the assumption that Alexander I, in order to protect the principle of legitimism as well as in the interests of strengthening the French restoration, supported Ferdinand IV in regaining his lost Kingdom of Naples. At the same time, the Russian ruler recommended Ferdinand the constitutional transformation of his kingdom. Although Saint Petersburg did not intervene directly in the Italian affairs, the main goal of the Cabinet was the protection of the Paris and Vienna decisions as well as the maintenance of the balance of power and the status quo. As a consequence of the provisions of the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), the Austrian and British influence has grown in the Kingdom of Naples. In order to counter balance the growing influence of Great Britain in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, the Russian Empire supported Spain, at the same time cultivating friendly relations with Southern Italy. The agreement between the Kingdom of Sicily and Austria in 12 June 1815 further strengthened the Austrian positions in Southern Italy, therefore the Russian Cabinet during the period was not able to give the same type of support to Naples as to the state of Sardinia-Piedmont, which managed to bypass the conclusion of the alliance treaty proposed by Austria, with Russian help. Alexander I regarded France as the dominant element of the balance of power, so in order to secure the European stability proposed cooperation for the Neapolitan and French Bourbons.

On the Congress of Laibach Ferdinand requested the intervention of the Great Powers, and Alexander I showed willingness to send Russian troops to Italy. After the suppression of the revolution in Naples the Tsar recommended Ferdinand to introduce reforms and execute constitutional governing. The Russian Cabinet emphasized the temporary nature of the Austrian occupation of the Kingdom and was unhappy with the wave of terror which emerged as a result of the retaliation of the uprising.

Based on Russian foreign affair documents it can be stated that Alexander I supported the restoration of Ferdinand, the King of Naples, and at the same time supported the creation of inner stability of the kingdom.

6. Key participants of the Russian–Neapolitan–Sicilian relations between 1801 and 1825

The reign of Alexander I (1801–1825) was the most active period of the relations of the Russian Empire maintained with the Italian states and based on the sources it can be established that the king paid attention to the Italian events throughout his reign. Since the moment of his enthronement, Alexander assigned an important role to strengthening the
secondary states (e.g. Sardinia-Piedmont and the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples), and this policy with the consequent consideration of changes of the international situation characterized the entire duration of his reign. Alexander I during his entire reign maintained good relations with Ferdinand of Bourbon (1759–1825) and the Queen of Naples, Maria Carolina. The sources show that the relations of the two monarchs were characterized by cooperation and solidarity. Ferdinand on several occasions asked for Alexander’s support to protect the neutrality and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Naples, which given the circumstances, was accomplished by Alexander. The Russian ruler on multiple occasions suggested that Ferdinand should introduce reforms which would guarantee the European peace, since he regarded the stability of the kingdom as a key issue of European peace. For Ferdinand the Russian Empire was a strong and influential ally, who had no claims for territorial expansion.

During the reign of Alexander I the position of envoy of the Kingdom of Sicily to Saint Petersburg was filled by Antonio Maresca, Duke of Serra Capriola (between 1793–1807 and 1812–1822). After the official Sicilian–Russian diplomatic relations were interrupted, Maresca with Alexander’s permission stayed in the Russian capital city, and the Russian cabinet on many occasions entrusted him with unofficial mediation tasks. Serra Capriola represented his court and entire Italy in the Russian Empire with great tact and determination; he was one of the respected diplomats of the Saint Petersburg diplomatic corps.

The paper examined the diplomatic relations between the two countries until 1825, which was not only the year of Alexander I’s and Ferdinand I’s death, but also terminated a quarter-century period of friendly relations maintained between the Russian Empire and Southern Italy.
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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapters (4)


Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

7. **Bodor, M.**: Tradíció és modernizáció a XVIII-XX. században.
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**List of other publications**

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8. **Bodor, M.**: A keleti kérdés és a Balkán az orosz külpolitikában a 19. század első felében.
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