

# On the edge of the precipice of war<sup>1</sup>

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„We were to die.  
We could choose the way of dying  
and we chose the most horrible.”  
Ottokar Count Czernin

The development and consequences of Balkan Wars (1912–1913) undoubtedly contributed to considerable worsening of international position of Austria-Hungary, and in late spring 1914, multiple evidences of the fact that the Foreign Minister of the monarchy, “count Berchtold ... faced complete bankruptcy of his Balkan policy and the borders of Austria-Hungary were endangered by movement that was actually highly life-threatening”.<sup>2</sup> The growing fears even led top representatives of the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy to criticize the policy of Central Powers. For example on 8 May 1914, Szápáry, the new ambassador to Petersburg, sent to Vienna a strictly confidential message<sup>3</sup> criticizing very sharply the policy of the German ally towards Russia and expressed serious doubts about the function of Central Powers. Szápáry stated that the German prestige in Russia had dropped markedly due to long lasting weak policy towards Petersburg, and “In the era of Bethmann Hollweg, Germany had gradually cleared all positions it had obtained against Russia”.<sup>4</sup> The defensive approach in Balkan matters had led, according to the ambassador, to a situation in which “Central Powers ... could not include any certain factor into its calculations”.<sup>5</sup> Szápáry expressed the opinion that in preceding years, the importance of Central Powers at the

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2 STIEVE, Friedrich, *Die Tragödie der Bundesgenossen, Deutschland und Österreich-Ungarn 1908–1914*, München 1930, 164.

3 Szápáry's message from 8 May 1912, No. 21 D, in: *Österreich-Ungarns Außenpolitik von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914. Diplomatische Aktenstücke des österreichisch-ungarischen Ministeriums des Äußern (herinafter referred only as ÖUA) Vol. VIII, Ludwig BITTNER – Alfred Francis PRIBRAM – Heinrich SRBIK – Hans UEBERSBERGER (eds.), Wien, Leipzig 1930, No. 9656, 25–27.*

4 *Ibidem*, 25.

5 *Ibidem*, 26.

international scene had decreased very dangerously. The diplomat stated with considerable dose of sceptic irony that in the existing situation, the Central Powers are about to "struggle for survival in Central Europe".<sup>6</sup> Also the conclusions of Czernin, ambassador to Bucharest were alarming, as he understood correctly Nicholas II's visit to Constanța in mid-June as final proof of Romania's departure from Central Powers.<sup>7</sup> "There is no doubt that the Constanța day constitutes a landmark in the life of the Romanian state – and perhaps also of the monarchy," he wrote in a private letter to Berchtold; "Romania's departure towards Triple Entente took place in Constanța before the eyes of the public".<sup>8</sup> The ambassador concluded that in case of a war conflict, Romania would oppose Austria-Hungary. He saw the main cause of its international position in the behaviour of the monarchy during the Balkan Wars, as it convinced Europe that it was "condemned to extinction and division... and that a European auction of the Habsburg Monarchy will take place in near future".<sup>9</sup> According to him, France and Russia profit from it in the "most infamous, mendacious and perfidious way", trying to convince the European states not to attach themselves "to a body condemned to death ... to leave the ship as long as there is time to do it... and not to connect their fate with the Monarchy".<sup>10</sup> The ambassador expressed the opinion that the monarchy was encircled step by step and that a new Balkan association was arising under French-Russian patronage and directed against the monarchy. In such situation, he considered extraordinarily important that Berlin should take note of the critical situation of the partner, as "the Germans had to understand that we are facing most serious danger and that all our army could be bound in fight against Romania and Serbia and they would have to engage alone in fight against Russia and France."<sup>11</sup>

The issue of military cooperation with Germany in case of a conflict did not calm Vienna either. Four weeks from mid-April 1914, Colonel General Moltke, chief of the Prussian Great General Staff sojourned for treatment in Karlovy Vary. On 12 May, he met Conrad von Hötzendorf, chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, who could not be very encouraged by the confidential talk with his German counterpart. Moltke's information that the amount of German armed forces would not outperform the French army undoubtedly disquieted the chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff. Both agreed that they could not keep relying on Romania as an ally but rather had to consider it an opponent. "Each waiting implies decrease of our chances. As for number of people, Russia is unrivalled,"<sup>12</sup> such conclusion certainly got Conrad's consent, but the statement that Germany was "unfortunately expecting a declaration of England not to intervene. But England will

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6 Ibidem.

7 For more details on the Constanca meeting and departure of Romania see: Typoskript der Memoiren Berchtolds, Vol. VIII, records from 15, 19 and 22 June 1914. Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien (Dynasty, Court and State Archive in Vienna hereinafter referred to only as HHStA), Politisches Archiv (hereinafter referred to only as PA) I / 524 a (Nachlass Berchtold).

8 Czernin's private letter to Berchtold, 22 June 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 9902, 173.

9 Ibidem, 174.

10 Ibidem.

11 Ibidem, 175.

12 Franz CONRAD von HÖTZENDORF, Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906–1918. Vol. III, Wien 1923, 669.

never issue such declaration,"<sup>13</sup> was not very encouraging. The basic problem of mutual relations in military sphere consisted in the question of how long after the declaration of war it would take to Germany to move the core of its armed forces from France to the East, to fight against Russia. "We hope to do away with France within six weeks after the beginning of the operations, or to be at least as far as to be able to move our main forces to the East,"<sup>14</sup> Moltke answered that time. Conrad understood his statement correctly – the Austro-Hungarian army would have to face the attack of the Russian "steamroller" without adequate German support for six weeks at the minimum.

The visit of German Kaiser Wilhelm II to Konopiště, so frequently reminded and surrounded with so many legends, probably did not contribute much to harmonization of mutual relations either (the visit took place on 12–14 June 1914 and Wilhelm II was hosted by Archduke Franz Ferdinand). According to the statements of the Austrian press, it was a completely private visit. The facts that the Kaiser was accompanied by Admiral Tirpitz, father of the German marine arms program, and that one day after Wilhelm's departure, Konopiště was visited by Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, stimulated diverse speculations, even extraordinarily bizarre, both at their time and later. The above stated negotiations were often linked to the beginning of World War I, and diverse authors presented its outbreak as consequence of the "Pact of Konopiště", allegedly entered into by Wilhelm II and Franz Ferdinand. An undoubted peak in this regard consisted in the phantasmagoric fabrication served in February 1916 to British readers by Henry Wickham Steed, correspondent of *The Times*, based on an alleged message of an anonymous informant.<sup>15</sup> According to Steed's version, Wilhelm II presented a grandiose plan of transformation of the map of Europe and of the conditions of power on the continent to the Successor to the throne. He allegedly wanted to win him primarily by the idea that his sons, Maximilian and Ernest, would get two newly created Central European empires. After won war, the former Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine were to be joined into one state, with Franz Ferdinand on its throne and his older son as successor. Later, the younger son would assume government of the empire consisting of the Czech countries, Hungary and Balkan area up to Thessaloniki. The Austrian countries and Trieste would pass to Archduke Karl, the legitimate heir (future Successor and Kaiser), and they would be integrated into the German Empire as a federal state. The above stated two new formations would then enter into military alliance and permanent economic union with Germany and such alliance would become arbitrator of Europe. As the plans, allegedly, could not be kept secret from other members of the Habsburg family, it was decided that the "traitor" Franz Ferdinand would be eliminated by force, which resulted in the Sarajevo assassination. It was surprising that the above stated fiction, actually unsupported by anything, was taken over by a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 670.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 673.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Wickham STEED, *The Pact of Konopischt*, in: *Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. 79, 1916, 253–273. Steed repeats his version of the Pact of Konopiště also in his other work. Compare: STEED, Henry Wickham, *Through Thirty Years*, Vol. I., London 1924, 396–403.

number of authors, particularly French,<sup>16</sup> in different variations after World War I, while the Anglo-Saxon historiography dissociated itself relatively soon from similar fabrications.<sup>17</sup> At present, no serious researcher attaches any weight to Steed's unsupported statements and overcomplicated combinations, particularly if there are plausible testimonies of participants of the Konopiště meeting available with regard to the development of the negotiations.<sup>18</sup> After all, also a number of generally known facts disprove similar interpretation – except for Tirpitz, no other important high officer was present at the Konopiště meeting. From the Austrian side, Colonel Bardolff, chief of the Successor's military office was the highest officer, which was really very little to enter into any military agreements. Apart from that, the alleged "war council" at Konopiště was attended by about thirty guests, including a lot of women, and the Kaiser and the Successor stayed alone for only very short time during the meeting. Some role was probably played also by the mistake of several European newspapers that identified Count Wilczek as German Chancellor Bethmann Holweg and Count Waldstein as Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Berchtold at the common photograph.<sup>19</sup> The main topic of the Konopiště talks consisted again in the interior situation of the Habsburg monarchy;<sup>20</sup> the Kaiser tried to eliminate the unfavourable impression provoked in the Successor by Kaiser's enthusiasm in favour of Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza who was accused by Franz Ferdinand of "driving the neighbouring Romania to Russia's arms and weakening the great-power value of the Reich by his stubborn effort for a Hungarian national army".<sup>21</sup> Both men further discussed partial issues of the Balkan politics and the relation to Italy. Their discussion touched the Serbian issue only marginally, and Kaiser Wilhelm II even gave an evasive answer to the question whether Austria-Hungary could count with full German support in case of war with Serbia. But there is no plausible evidence available about the Konopiště talks concerning the above mentioned conspiracy or immediate preparation of triggering war.

Berchtold who arrived to archduke's residence one day after the Kaiser had left<sup>22</sup> was probably disappointed by the results of the Konopiště meeting, as they did not bring any unambiguous promise from the German side with regard to the Balkan development. Therefore the minister decided to carry out diplomatic activity that would prevent further

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16 Antoine DEBIDOUR, *Histoire diplomatique de l'Europe*. Vol. II, Paris 1918, 229; Alfred DUMAINE, *La dernière ambassade de France en Autriche. Notes et souvenirs*. Paris 1921, 126 a. ff.; Jules CHOPIN, *La prémediation austro-hongroise*, in: *Mercure de France*, 115, 1916, 432, 577–599; Jean POZZI, *Les Roses de Konopischt*, in: *Le Correspondant*, 93, 1921, 5, 822–844.

17 Sidney FAY, *The Origins of the World War*. Vol. II, New York 1928, 32–43.

18 Andreas von MORSEY, *Konopischt und Sarajewo*, in: *Die Kriegsschuldfrage* (hereinafter referred to only as KSF), Vol. XII, 1934, 486–499. Private letter and enclosure to the letter by von Treutler, envoy accompanying the Kaiser, to state subsecretary Zimmermann, 15 June 1914, in: *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914* (hereinafter referred to only as GP), Vol. XXXIX, No. 15736, Johannes LEPSIUS – Albrecht MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY – Friedrich THIMME (eds.), Berlin 1926, 365–369.

19 MORSEY, 488.

20 REDLICH, Josef, *Schicksaaljahre Österreichs 1908–1919. Das politische Tagebuch Josef Redlichs*. Hg. Fritz FELLNER, Vol. I, Graz, Köln 1954, 232–233 (record from 13 June 1914).

21 ŠUSTA, Josef, *Světová politika v letech 1871–1914*. Vol. VI, Praha 1931, 346.

22 For Berchtold's record of the visit to Konopiště see: *Typoskript der Memoiren Berchtolds*. Vol. VIII, record from 15 June 1914. HHStA, PA I / 524 b (Nachlass Berchtold).

weakening of the international position of the Monarchy; in the first place, more distinct support of the German ally had to be achieved. In context with that intention, he asked Section Councillor Franz von Matscheko to make an elaborate memorandum<sup>23</sup> to evaluate thoroughly the situation in the Balkans and to explain the inconstant Germans to what extent the Monarchy position was endangered by the development of a new association of Balkan states whose creation will lead to complete encirclement of Austria-Hungary in South-West. "If comparing today's situation with the situation reigning before the Great Crisis (the author means the Balkan Wars – A. S.), we must state that the total result, considered both from the perspective of Austria-Hungary and from the perspective of Central Powers, cannot be characterized as favourable in any case,"<sup>24</sup> the minister's confidant declared just at the beginning of the document. He considered its defensive character one of the main reasons of bad position of Central Powers, while the existing course of France and Russia was aggressive.<sup>25</sup> Matscheko suggested forcing Romania to a clear statement; if Bucharest did not do it, the Monarchy would have to start realizing defensive actions in Transylvania. He called the isolation of Bulgaria in the Balkans dangerous, as promises of territorial profit in Macedonia could finally return Sophia among Russian clients. He saw a solution in elimination of friction areas between Romania and Bulgaria, leading to creation of an alliance of both states that could finally form an attachment with Turkey, and the whole group would gradually concentrate on Central Powers.<sup>26</sup> He saw distinct danger to the position of Central Powers both in the turn of Romania and in Russian pressure against Turkey, as well as in the tendencies to union of Serbia and Montenegro. In this context, the activities of Hartwig, the Russian envoy to Belgrade are frequently mentioned; he stated the following during a conversation with the Romanian envoy to Belgrade during the first Balkan War, in mid-November 1912 already: "Russia will certainly not let Serbia down; at present, Turkey is being split now; soon the same fate will strike Austria-Hungary." In this context, he spoke about the "mighty Serbian empire that will include also Montenegro, Bosnia and South Hungary. Romania could take its share in Transylvania."<sup>27</sup> A key problem consisted in the possible creation of a new Balkan association, inspired by France and Russia and directed unambiguously against the Habsburg monarchy. As for Serbia, the author of the memorandum actually expressed doubt on any possible reconciliation with that country; but on the other hand, he did not mention any possibility of solving the problem through the force of arms. The end of the memorandum contains the surely most substantial ideas that were to influence the German ally. "If viewing the development of Russia of recent two centuries, the enormous growth of its population, territory, economic and military power, and if considering that that large empire is still cut off from free seas

23 Memorandum of Section Councillor Franz von Matscheko, not dated, created before 24 June 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 9918, 186–195. The text was reworked by Matscheko at some day between 24 and 28 June 1914 based on Berchtold's remarks, but the modifications were actually only stylistic. The third version comes from the time after the Sarajevo assassination (1 July 1914) and reflects the new situation already.

24 Ibidem, 186.

25 Ibidem, 187.

26 Ibidem, 188.

27 Typoskript der Memoiren Berchtolds. Vol. IV, record from mid-November 1912. HHStA, PA I / 524 a (Nachlass Berchtold).

by its position and by treaties, then it can be understood why the Russian policy has had a necessarily strange aggressive character since a long time ago"<sup>28</sup> – this conclusion of the Section Councillor has not lost its validity to great extent, similarly to the statement that "the policy of Russia is conditioned by specific unchangeable situation and, in consequence of it, is stable and long lasting."<sup>29</sup> "The end goal of distinct encircling tendencies of Russia as against the monarchy, that does not cultivate any world policy, consists in preventing Germany from opposing the realization of its goals and resisting its political and economic supremacy," Matscheko used that explanation to persuade the Germans that they were in no less danger than Austria-Hungary and concluded: "For these reasons, the leaders of foreign policy of Austria-Hungary are convinced that the Monarchy and Germany have a mutual interest in opposing timely, in the present stage of the Balkan crisis, the development planned, followed and asserted by Russia, as it could be irreversible in future."<sup>30</sup>

Berchtold was still studying Matscheko's document and considering modifications of individual formulations when on 28 June 1914 at a quarter to ten a.m., the shots of Gavrilo Princip, a high school student, fired in Sarajevo, "put an end to modern times". The very act, regardless of it was prepared in any way, constitutes undoubtedly a classical demonstration of action of chance in history.<sup>31</sup> The most significant point did not consist in immediate circumstances of the action but in another fact – the group of the young assassins who were actually victims of manipulation succeeded in "shifting time", or accelerating its run, respectively. The essence of the problem consisted in the fact that confrontation had been imminent for quite a long time already, but at the time of the assassination, none of the future conflict participants was considering war immediately, as most countries had not finished the planned preparations of armed forces and of the relevant armament programs yet. But on the other hand, it seems that war was anticipated not only by the capitals of the great powers but also by their "clients", as is evidenced by some declarations. For example Giesl, the Austro-Hungarian envoy to Belgrade had, only several days before the Sarajevo event, "a long conversation with the Montenegrin envoy to Belgrade, mentioning also the sensitive issue of union of Serbia and Montenegro." The Montenegrin diplomat allegedly stated in that context that "all these issues will be solved by a great world war once and away and perhaps soon."<sup>32</sup>

28 Memorandum of Section Councillor Franz von Matscheko, not dated, created before 24 June 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 9918, 195.

29 Ibidem.

30 Ibidem.

31 For more details on the assassination compare Lavender CASSELS, *Der Erzherzog und sein Mörder*. Sarajevo, 28. Juni 1914, Wien, Köln, Graz 1988, 205–259; Vladimir DEDIJER, *Sarajevo*, Bratislava 1969; Michael G. EKSTEIN – Zara STEINER, *The Sarajevo Crisis*, in: *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, Francis H. HINSLEY (ed.), Cambridge-London 1977, 397–410; Rudolf KISZLING: *Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand von Österreich-Este. Leben, Pläne und Wirken am Schicksalsweg der Donaumonarchie*, Graz, Köln 1953, 218–312; MANDL, Leopold, *Zur Warnung Serbiens an Österreich*, in: *KSF*, Vol. I-II, 1923–24, 108–111; MORSEY; Aleš SKŘIVAN, *Sarajevo*, 28. červen 1914, in: *Historický obzor*, 5, 1994, 7/8, 146–150; Theodor von SOSNOSKY, *Franz Ferdinand. Erzherzog-Thronfolger. Ein Lebensbild*, München, Berlin 1929, 167–214; August URBANSKI von OSTRYMIECZ, *Conrad v. Hötzendorf und die Reise des Thronfolgers nach Sarajevo*, in: *Kriegsschuldfrage/Berliner Monatshefte* (hereinafter referred to only as *KSF/BM*), Vol. VI, 1929, 463–471.

32 Typoskript der Memoiren Berchtolds. Vol. VIII, record from 16 June 1914. HHStA, PA I / 524 b (Nachlass Berchtold).



Rather than the proverbial “last straw” that broke, the assassination constituted the factor that changed substantially the perspectives of the situation; the opportunity to solve problems in the “long run” suggested by Tisza ceased to exist so to say immediately.<sup>33</sup> Vienna was dominated by the feeling that the Monarchy had to act “now or never” in order to preserve its great power position. The terrorist act could hardly be responded to by diplomatic effort that could – but could also not – bring a favourable result after a long time, as Matscheko had suggested in his memorandum. Sometimes we can meet the opinion that Vienna misused the assassination more or less to try to settle accounts with Serbia. This archaic “Entente” explanation ignores one basic fact – before the assassination, in summer 1914, Austria-Hungary considered restoration of balance of forces in the Balkans in the form existing before the Balkan wars, but it definitely did not intend to achieve such goal by arms. If Vienna had chosen such step in the times of peace, it could by far not be certain about the support from the German ally, without which such solution by use of power was unthinkable.

The first news about the Sarajevo assassination reached Vienna one day after the tragedy.<sup>34</sup> Conrad, the Chief of the General Staff,<sup>35</sup> and Krobatin, the Minister of War, wished immediate armed intervention; even some diplomats criticized Berchtold’s course. For example Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, designed successor to Count Szögyény at the ambassador position in Berlin, reproached the Foreign Minister for weakness and threatened to refuse the appointment. Tisza, on the other hand, suggested patience and it seems that, at least in the beginning, his position had considerable influence on the Kaiser who asked Berchtold to discuss the situation primarily with the Hungarian Prime Minister. But both politicians were well aware that to hesitate with potential action was dangerous to the prestige of the Monarchy; besides, it would not be good to let subside the shock provoked in Europe by the terrorist act. Tisza, when speaking with the Kaiser on 1 July 1914, described Berchtold’s thesis that “the act of violence of Sarajevo should be used as impulse to settle accounts with Serbia”<sup>36</sup> as wrong and refused to bear responsibility for the suggested process. He expressed the opinion that without evidence of complicity of the Serbian government, the Monarchy could get into unflattering light and “be embroiled in a great war under unfavourable circumstances.”<sup>37</sup> He also suggested that Austria-Hungary should try once more, together with Germany, to move Romania to openly claim allegiance to Central Powers. But that indication was, in view of the preceding Hungarian policy in Transylvania,

33 For more details on the July crisis compare Holger AFFLERBACH, *Der Dreibund. Europäische Großmacht- und Allianzpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2002, 813–848; Lüder MEYER-ARNDT, *Die Julikrise 1914: Wie Deutschland in der Ersten Weltkrieg stolperte*. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2006; Christopher CLARK, *Náměsíčníci. Jak Evropa v roce 1914 dospěla k válce*, Praha 2014.

34 It is expressed in two telegrams of land chief of Bosnia, field armourer Potiorek to the Common Minister of Finances who administered both lands, from 28 June 1914. See in: ÖUA, VIII, No. 9939 and 9940, 208 and 209.

35 For more details on Conrad’s attitude and evaluation see: Franz CONRAD von HÖTZENDORF, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906–1918*. Vol. V, Wien 1925, 13–216; John Henry MAURER, *Conrad von Hötzendorf and the Outbreak of the First World War. Nationality Conflict, War Planning and Strategic Decision Making in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1906–1914*, Ann Arbor 1996; Lawrence SONDHAUS, *Conrad von Hötzendorf. Architekt der Apokalypse*, Wien, Graz 2003, 149 a.ff.

36 Hugo HANTSCH, *Leopold Graf Berchtold. Grandseigneur und Staatsmann*. Vol. II, Graz, Wien, Köln 1963, 561.

37 *Ibidem*.

a little questionable. The terrorist act faced the Monarchy with a difficult decision but the actual death of the Successor did not provoke much sorrow in decisive political circles. "There are deep antipathies towards the Archduke in broad classes ... God meant well with Austria when sparing them such a Kaiser!,"<sup>38</sup> Josef Redlich, a well known Austrian politician and lawyer wrote in his diary on the day of the assassination. On 2 July, Franz Joseph I invited Berchtold to Schönbrunn and asked him to give an opinion on Tisza's statements. The Foreign Minister suggested waiting for the outcome of the Sarajevo investigations, but at the same time declared that "if waiting were too long, the still impressive moment of immediate effect of the despicable homicidal act on public opinion in Europe, while full ignoring of the bloody drama... could equal to waiver of our great-power position with all resulting political and moral disadvantages."<sup>39</sup>

As for the first international responses to the assassination, the rulers, heads of states and ministers condemned the terrorist acts, sending condolences to Vienna. But some statements indicated clearly that in some countries, the death of the Austro-Hungarian Successor to the throne provoked at least some relief. For example in Rome, Marchese di San Giuliano, the Foreign Minister, stated that Archduke's clericalism had been directed against Italy. Both chambers of the French Parliament condemned the assassination, but the Successor's death dispelled some fears of his bond to Kaiser Wilhelm II. The influential Russian newspaper *Novoye Vremya* wrote directly that Franz Ferdinand had not been a friend of Russia, which was a little disputable, in view of the Successor's reflections on potential restoration of the League of the Three Emperors. But the Tsar, grand dukes and ministers expressed deep condolence to Franz Joseph I through the Austro-Hungarian embassy. Even Serbian King Peter I and Successor to the throne Alexander expressed their condolences to the Austrian ruler.<sup>40</sup> But the Serbian population celebrated the assassination and the press explained it as consequence of Austrian policy towards the Slavs.<sup>41</sup>

In that situation, the attitude of Germany was of course essential to Austria-Hungary. But the first reactions of the ally were wary and a little unsure. During the conversation with Berchtold, on 3 July, German Ambassador Tschirschky stated that "only resolute steps towards Serbia could lead to a goal,"<sup>42</sup> but otherwise, he gave rather reserved statements. State Subsecretary Zimmermann assured Ambassador Szögyény to "find vigorous and resolute steps of the Monarchy against Serbia completely understandable," but at the same time recommended great caution and advised "not to submit Serbia any humiliating demands."<sup>43</sup> Similar attitudes could not satisfy Vienna; therefore it was decided to take steps that should lead the ally to a more specific statement. In a personal letter to Wilhelm II from 2 July, Kaiser Franz Joseph I summarized his attitudes; subsequently, Berchtold

38 REDLICH, 235 (comment from 28 June 1914).

39 HANTSCH, 562.

40 Telegram of Legationary Councillor Storck No. 118, 30 June 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 9941, 209–210.

41 Storck's reports No. 97 A (29 June 1914), No. 98 A (30 June 1914), No. 98 B (30 June 1914) and translated article from the Belgrade newspaper *Stampa* from 30 June 1914, enclosed to report 98 B, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 9943, 9951, 9952, 210–212, 218–219, 219–220.

42 Berchtold's report on conversation with the German Ambassador, No. 3095, 3 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10006, 277.

43 Szögyény's telegram No. 236, strictly confidential, 4 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10039, 295.



finished Matscheko's memorandum by replacing the original project of long lasting common diplomatic actions in the Balkans by a plan of immediate action. On 4 July 1914, Count Hoyos, chief of Berchtold's cabinet, was sent to Berlin with both documents.<sup>44</sup> The main goal of his mission consisted in finding out whether Germany would support its ally if the ally is attacked by Russia due to intervention against Serbia.<sup>45</sup> The old ruler expressed the belief that "the assassination committed on my poor nephew is direct consequence of campaigning of Russian and Serbian Panslavs whose only goal consists in weakening the Central Powers and destroying my empire... it is a well organized conspiracy with connecting lines leading to Belgrade;"<sup>46</sup> he admitted that alliance with Romania was actually ineffective and that Austria-Hungary wished to "eliminate Serbia from the position of a power factor in the Balkans."<sup>47</sup> The end of the memorandum was conceived in similar spirit: "Austria-Hungary was not missing good will and obligingness to achieve a supportable relation to Serbia. But now it shows that the effort was completely in vain and that the Monarchy will have to expect stubborn, implacable and aggressive hostility of Serbia also in the future."<sup>48</sup> When, on 5 July, Ambassador Szögyény handed over the letter of his ruler and the memorandum brought by Hoyos, Wilhelm II initially expressed very careful statements, declaring that "he has to consider serious European complications, so that he cannot give any final answer before consulting the Chancellor."<sup>49</sup> Then, probably led by effort to placate his guest, he told Szögyény that the Habsburg Monarchy can count with German support in the last resort, because he "does not doubt in absolute that Mr. von Bethmann Hollweg will agree to his opinion."<sup>50</sup> Further, the Kaiser expressed the opinion that "this action (i.e. intervention against Serbia – A. S.) must not be postponed," as "Russia is not... prepared for war in any case and will surely think twice about using weapons."<sup>51</sup> That statement evidenced that Wilhelm II, to some extent, was not understanding the essence of the situation, which could hardly contribute to reassure Vienna. On next day, when Szögyény visited the Chancellor together with Hoyos, he found, according to his own words, that "the German government had understood the dangers resulting for Austria-Hungary and for Central Powers from the Russian plan of the Balkan association" and that also Bethmann Hollweg "considers our immediate intervention against Serbia the most radical and best solution of our problems in the Balkans."<sup>52</sup> The German preference

44 For more details on the Austro-Hungarian memorandum to Germany see: M. B. A. PETERSON, *Das oesterreichisch-ungarische Memorandum an Deutschland vom 5. Juli 1914*, in: *Scandia*, Vol. 30, 1964, 138–190; HANTSCH, 567 a.ff.

45 Although the Germans strived to give the impression that Berlin is absorbed in calm period of summer holidays (Chancellor Berthmann Hollweg, State Secretary Jagow, Secretary of Marine Office Tirpitz and Chief of Great General Staff Moltke were actually spending time outside Berlin), some opinions suggest that they had come to essential decisions before Hoyos' arrival already, on 2 or 3 July 1914. Compare FISCHER, Fritz, *Krieg der Illusionen. Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914*. Düsseldorf 1969, 686–688.

46 Franz Joseph I's letter to Wilhelm II, Vienna, 2 July 1914, in: *ÖUA*, Vol. VIII, No. 9984, 251.

47 *Ibidem*.

48 Reworked version of Matscheko's memorandum from 1 July 1914, in: *ÖUA*, Vol. VIII, Annex to No. 9844, 261.

49 Szögyény's telegram No. 237, 5 July 1914, in: *ÖUA*, Vol. VIII, No. 10058, 306.

50 *Ibidem*.

51 *Ibidem*.

52 Szögyény's telegram No. 239, strictly confidential, 6 July 1914, in: *ÖUA*, Vol. VIII, No. 10076, 319–320.

for an immediate radical action had undoubtedly logical and rational background – if the Habsburg Monarchy attacked Serbia immediately after the assassination, when the psychological effect of the terrorist act was still strongly acting upon the public opinion and on the governments in Europe, the cabinets of Paris and London would only difficultly assert going to war side by side with Russia that would support its Balkan client with weapons. In other words, potential fast intervention of Austria-Hungary established some, although by far not certain assumption that the war would take place only as local conflict, without intervention of Russia and without general conflagration. The opponents to such assumption submitted not less compelling and logical counter-arguments – the defeat of isolated Serbia would constitute warning and lesson to other Balkan states; Petersburg would hardly go on considering constitution of their association against the Habsburg Monarchy; and danger gradual elimination of all Russian influence in the Balkans would arise. In view of such facts, Russia could not back away and had to go to war.<sup>53</sup>

But the world was to be heading to disaster only slowly, as the Habsburg Monarchy did not find sufficient determination to resolute action in time. On 7 July, at the session of the Council of Ministers for common matters<sup>54</sup> the presiding Berchtold stated that “such decisive attack should not be led without diplomatic preparations,” although “both Kaiser Wilhelm II and Mr. von Bethmann Hollweg have assured us with every emphasis that Germany would provide unconditional support in case of war with Serbia.”<sup>55</sup> The Foreign Minister admitted that “armed conflict with Serbia could lead to war with Russia”<sup>56</sup> whose policy is, in the long term, directed to creation of a bloc of Balkan states to be used against the Monarchy at an opportune moment.<sup>57</sup> The participants of the session were still not able to make the royal Hungarian Prime Minister to change attitude. Tisza admitted that the Sarajevo investigations of the assassination and the reactions of the Serbian press had changed the situation, but kept refusing to assume responsibility for an armed action without sufficient diplomatic preparation, in spite of the positive results of Szögény’s and Hoyos’ negotiations in Berlin. At that occasion, the Hungarian Prime Minister specified the issue of an ultimatum to Serbia. “We should unconditionally formulate demands towards Serbia and proceed to an ultimatum if Serbia does not satisfy them. The conditions should be hard, but not unrealizable. If Serbia accepts them, we will achieve a brilliant diplomatic success and our prestige in the Balkans will grow. If our demands are not accepted, he (i.e. Tisza – A. S.) would also favour an armed action; but it must be confirmed in advance that it will be aimed at reduction and not complete destruction of Serbia... as Hungarian Prime Minister, he would never agree that the Monarchy annexes a part of Serbia ... it is not Germany’s business whether we should or should not strike Serbia now”<sup>58</sup> – such are the

53 Francis Roy BRIDGE, *The Habsburg Monarchy among the Great Powers*. New York, Oxford, Munich 1990, 336.

54 Record from session of the Council of Ministers on 7 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10118, 343–351.

55 Ibidem, 343.

56 Ibidem.

57 For more details on Tisza’s attitude and the stance of the Hungarian political scene compare: Norman STONE, *Hungary and the Crisis of July 1914*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1, 1966, 3, 153–170; József GALÁNTAI, *Die Außenpolitik Österreich-Ungarns und die herrschenden Klassen Ungarns*, in: *Österreich-Ungarn in der Weltpolitik 1900 bis 1918*, Fritz KLEIN (ed.), Berlin 1965, 261–266.

58 Record from session of the Council of Ministers on 7 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10118, 344.

attitudes of the self-assured Hungarian politician, recorded in the minutes of meeting, that evidently disprove the sometimes passed opinion that, in the period from the assassination to the outbreak of war, the politics of Austria-Hungary was under unambiguous influence of Berlin. The motives of Tisza's opposition to extreme solution were quite understandable – in case of defeat in European war, the very foundations of the Hungarian state could be endangered, while victory could revive the centralization efforts of Vienna and annexing of other South-Slavic regions could bring trialism ideas closer to reality. Any of those options would mean, in final consequence, a threat to the Hungarian superiority; therefore Tisza insisted on his attitudes, passing them to the Kaiser on 8 July 1914.<sup>59</sup>

In the first weeks of July, the Serbian diplomacy tried to demonstrate in European capitals that Belgrade did not bear any responsibility for the Sarajevo assassination. The Russian diplomacy acted similarly; Hartwig, the Russian envoy to Belgrade, made considerable effort in this connection. His sudden death at the Austrian legation, on 10 June – he passed away of heart failure in the arms of envoy Giesl<sup>60</sup> – provoked some speculations at the Serbian side, which nevertheless were completely unfounded.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, it could hardly be denied that Hartwig's death represented some advantage to Austria-Hungary in the given situation. "When speaking to me, the Subsecretary of State touched the issue of Mr. von Hartwig's death, expressing the opinion that it was a lucky event from political point of view, as in the current situation, Hartwig would certainly incite Serbia against the monarchy and its government with more and more strength," Szögyény referred from Berlin, adding with an openness unusual of a diplomat that "if the same fate overtook Mr. Izvolsky,<sup>62</sup> it would not be any tragedy either".<sup>63</sup> Hartwig's share in inciting Serbia against the monarchy is unquestionable. On the other hand, Morsey's statement, relying on an alleged draft document captured by the Bulgarians during World War I and stating that the Russian envoy had been informed of the Serbian intentions in connection with the Sarajevo assassination in advance, can be considered hardly demonstrable.<sup>64</sup>

Vienna tried hard to demonstrate complicity of the Serbian Government in order to get foundation to justify potential action. To accelerate the investigation, Section Councillor Friedrich von Wiesner from the Foreign Ministry was sent to Sarajevo; but on 13 July, after having studied the relevant materials obtained through interrogation of the perpetrators, he came to the conclusion that in the given situation, it cannot be unambiguously demonstrated that the Serbian Government had known about or even participated in the preparation of the assassination.<sup>65</sup> Berlin started manifesting impatience, as it was

59 ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10146, 371–374.

60 Giesl's telegram No. 143 (10 July 1914) and Giesl's message No. 115 A (11 July 1914), in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10170 and 10193, 386–387 and 396–398.

61 Giesl's telegram No. 145, 11 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10191, 396.

62 Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky, former Russian Foreign Minister (1906–1910), later Russian ambassador to Paris (1910–1917), from the Bosnian Crisis in 1908–1909 very vehement supporter of resolute policy towards Austria-Hungary.

63 Szögyény's telegram No. 249, 11 July 1914. HHStA, PA III / 171-1,2 (Berichte, Weisungen, Varia 1914; Berichte 1915).

64 MORSEY, 490.

65 Compare two Wiesner's telegrams from 13 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10252 and 10253, 436–437.

dominated by the opinion that “now the right time has come to act vigorously against Serbia and it is so opportune that it will not come along again easily.”<sup>66</sup> Szögyény reported repeatedly to Vienna that Kaiser Wilhelm II and the German politicians were decided to meet consistently the allied comments and that they shared the belief that “England is not ready to act as cat’s paw for Serbia or for Russia”.<sup>67</sup> The Germans undoubtedly had some realistic motives to believe that Great Britain would not intervene in potential conflict of continental superpowers. They relied on the fact that the British-German cooperation during the Balkan Wars had proved successful; the recent agreement on Baghdad Railway from 15 June 1914 constituted a proof to Berlin that problems that had burdened the relation of both powers for years could be eliminated. Moreover, the Kaiser was confident that Russia was not ready yet and that the Tsarist regime would not go to war for the sake of Serbia. In that way “Wilhelm II’s optimism with regard to the Tsarist Empire and Bethmann Hollweg’s optimism with regard to Great Britain”<sup>68</sup> merged, and the wrong estimate of the Entente solidarity and readiness to mutual support finally led to unfounded notions that the war against Serbia would pass off as a local conflict. The people at Wilhelmstraße meant that the opportune time under the impression of the assassination should not be missed; therefore they urged Vienna to pluck up the courage to act. The German pressure was probably also the most important factor making Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza to finally change his attitude.<sup>69</sup> Before 19 July 1914, when another session of the Council of Ministers for common matters was to take place,<sup>70</sup> they assembled in Vienna the materials that should serve as base to formulate final demands against Serbia. At that session, the dies were finally cast by approval of the text of the note that was sent to Envoy Giesl to Belgrade on 20 July<sup>71</sup> but was to be handed over only on Thursday, 23 July 1914 at five o’clock p.m. The Serbians got a period of 48 hours during which they were to accept the conditions of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. The delay of handover of the Note in Belgrade was due to the fact that on 20–23 July, French President Poincaré was visiting Petersburg and Vienna wanted that the Entente allies had no opportunity of immediate mutual consultations; therefore they waited until 23 July when Poincaré had set out for the journey back to his homeland and found himself on sea at the time of handover of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. The note included very hard demands that were partially completely unusual in international practice. Vienna required in ten points, among other

66 Szögyény’s telegram No. 243, 8 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10127, 357.

67 Szögyény’s message No. 60, 12 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10215, 408.

68 STIEVE, 178.

69 Szögyény’s telegram No. 259, 16 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10296, 458.

70 Record from session of the Council of Ministers for common matters on 19 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10393, 511–514.

71 Instruction to Belgrade No. 3400, 20 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10395, 515–518; the instruction with regard to handover of the Note and further steps was contained also in the private letter to Giesl from 20 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10396, 518–519. Legationary Counsellor Alexander Musulin von Gomirye is considered the main author of the text; he had worked at the ministry since November 1908, with the title of extraordinary envoy and empowered minister. See: Robert A. KANN, *Kaiser Franz Joseph und der Ausbruch des Weltkrieges. Eine Betrachtung über den Quellenwert der Aufzeichnungen von Dr. Heinrich Kanner*, Wien 1971, 12.

things, public apology, dissolution of irredentist associations, punishment of Serbian officers and clerks involved in the conspiracy leading to the assassination, suppression of any propaganda aimed against Austria-Hungary and – surely a hardly acceptable extreme – the opportunity of co-operation of Austrian authorities in suppression of anti-Austrian movement and investigation of the assassination by Austrian authorities on the territory of Serbia.<sup>72</sup> “This means a European war!” Russian Minister Sazonov exclaimed when he got acquainted with the text of the Austro-Hungarian note a day later.<sup>73</sup> But the procedure had been approved by the Kaiser who, according to some evidences, had considered war inevitable for quite a long time, unlike the deceased Successor. For example common finance minister Bilinski states several times the information that, actually from the Scutari Crisis in spring 1913, Franz Joseph I had expected an armed conflict, not only at local extent, for example with Serbia or Montenegro, but a European war.<sup>74</sup> Ottokar Czernin, Austro-Hungarian envoy to Bucharest and Foreign Minister during World War I, mentions in his memoirs the statement made by the Kaiser when speaking to him in summer 1913: “Bucharest Peace is unsustainable; we are walking towards a new war. Please God that it remains localized to the Balkans.”<sup>75</sup> “Your Majesty has approved a serious act now, that can incite a European war, in my opinion,” Bilinski stated when speaking to the Kaiser after the approval of the decision of the Council of Ministers from 19 July. “Definitely; Russia cannot tolerate this note,”<sup>76</sup> the eighty-four years old Monarch allegedly answered, according to the Minister’s testimony.

President Poincaré assured the Russians during his visit that in case of war of Russia with Germany, France would meet its commitments. The promise made final decision of Petersburg easier. On Saturday 25 July, the Council of Ministers resolved that the Tsarist Empire would provide Serbia with military assistance if Serbia was attacked.<sup>77</sup> In the afternoon of the same day, before expiry of the fixed period, Austrian Envoy Giesl received the Serbian answer to the Note from 23 July – the Belgrade Government had accepted all points except for the point in which Vienna demanded participation of Austrian authorities on the Serbian territory.<sup>78</sup> That could be expected, as the fulfilment of the above stated demand would contradict Serbian sovereignty. “Due to insufficient answer of the Serbian Royal Government to our demands from 23 day of this month, I have declared the diplomatic relations with Serbia interrupted and left the Belgrade Embassy together with the staff,”<sup>79</sup> Giesl telegraphed to Vienna on the same day. It is relatively little known that the first

72 ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10395, 516–517.

73 Hans ÜBERSBERGER, Österreich zwischen Rußland und Serbien. Zur südslawischen Frage und der Entstehung des Ersten Weltkrieges. Vol. I, Köln, Graz 1958, 225.

74 Compare: Leon BILINSKI, Wspomienia i dokumenty 1846–1916. Vol. 2, Warszawa 1924.

75 Ottokar CZERNIN, Im Weltkriege. Wien, Berlin 1919, 11.

76 KANN, 12.

77 Special record from session of the Russian Council of Ministers from 25 July 1914, in: KSF/BM, Vol. VII, 1929, 610–611.

78 Private letter of Serbian Prime Minister Pashic to Envoy Giesl, 25 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10648, 660. Text of the Note of Serbian Government to Austro-Hungarian Embassy, without date, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, Annex to No. 10648, 660–663.

79 Giesl’s telegram, without number, 25 July 1914, in: ÖUA, Vol. VIII, No. 10647, 660.

reaction of Berlin to the Serbian answer was markedly different from unambiguous attitude of Vienna. The information on the contents of the Serbian Note arrived to the German capital on 27 July 1914. "After reading the Serbian answer, which I received this morning, I came to the conviction that the wishes of the Danubian Monarchy are met in essence. Several Serbian reservations to individual points can be cleared by negotiations ... every motive to war is dropped,"<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm II wrote to State Secretary Jagow in the morning of 28 July, suggesting that Austria-Hungary should occupy a part of the Serbian territory to guarantee the fulfilment of its demands and considering acting as mediator. But at the time of creation of the letter, after repeated preceding German assurances of support and calls to immediate resolute action, the realization of the suggestion of the German Monarch could not be considered any more. On Monday 27 July the evening newspapers in the capital of the Habsburg Monarchy brought the news of the Envoy's return, informing the public that Belgrade had not met the demands of the note from 28 July. On Tuesday 28 July 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia; Belgrade was cannonaded on the subsequent day already. A mortal avalanche that was going to bury millions of human lives got moving. The nineteenth century ended definitively.

Both from general perspective and in partial context, the Germans had several serious motives to provide Vienna with the necessary support in summer 1914. On the other hand, the opinion that "in the July crisis 1914 ... German objection would have prevented Austrian action against Serbia"<sup>81</sup> is reasonable in essence, but simplified to certain extent, as it leads to the impression that the key to possible settlement of the crisis was exclusively in the hands of Germany. It is indisputable that the top military representatives of the central powers had been aware for a long time that in the area of military readiness, time worked against Germany and Austria-Hungary, but the conclusion that "Germany decided long before July 1914 that war – defensive, preventive or localized – was necessary and should be fought sooner than later" can hardly be accepted.<sup>82</sup> It cannot be alleged that Germany had decided in favour of armed confrontation "long before 1914" if as late as during the Balkan wars, the practice once determined by the famous Bismarck's statement on the "bones of the Pomeranian musketeer" was revived in multiple respects; in other words, at that time, Berlin had deviated from Bülow's policy of unreserved support to the Habsburg Monarchy back to "direct non-involvement" in the Balkan politics of the ally from the times of the Iron Chancellor and at times even coordinated its activities with the Entente powers against Austria-Hungary. But in summer 1914, Berlin could not keep practising such line, influenced by the effort for cooperation within a concert of great powers, particularly with Great Britain, if it did not risk that it would lose the only reliable ally or that it would stop behaving like a great power and, in fact, become rather a burden on Germany. Moreover, Austria-Hungary, if lacking German support, could start seeking solution in direct negotiations with Russia and in orientation on the Entente. Loss of the ally would impose final isolation on Berlin and, in spite of military readiness and economic

80 Wilhelm II's letter to Jagow, 28 July 1914. See: Alfred von WEGERER, *Deutschlands Haltung im österreichisch-serbischen Konflikt*, in: KSF/BM, Vol. VI, 1928, 496.

81 Richard J. CRAMPTON, *The Balkans as the Factor in German Foreign Policy 1912–1914*, in: *Slavonic and East European Review*, 55, 1977, 3, 370–390.

82 *Ibidem*, 390.



superiority on the continent, the international position of the Empire would become hopeless in essence. On the other hand, Berchtold – which is irony of fate to some extent – when asserting resolute steps against Serbia, argued that “Germany might despair of Austria-Hungary and abandon her for lost”, so that the impression could be provoked that “in the final crisis, the solidarity of Dual Alliance Powers was more the product of their mutual mistrust than of »deutsche Treue«”.<sup>83</sup>

Also the issue of the Austrian “decision in favour of war”, instead of virtually permanent effort by Conrad and a part of top military representatives, is complicated and can certainly not be dismissed by vague statement that “at some point between December 1912 and August 1913, Berchtold came to the conclusion that agreement with Serbia was not possible and that war with that country was unavoidable in the long term.”<sup>84</sup> As for the fatal decisions from July 1914, a somewhat paradoxical situation set in – some historians even speak of dependence of the stronger Germany on the weaker Austria-Hungary.<sup>85</sup> In other words, Germany, the strongest great power of the continent, had no choice and could prevent its own total isolation only by absolute support to Vienna. That is why “viewing of the leading politicians of the Habsburg Monarchy as mere puppets in the hands of a more powerful ally” must logically be considered a simplification.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, the conclusions that “the carelessness with which the Austro-Hungarian Government launched its country after short hesitation into the war is demonstrated by all diplomatic files” seem at least very controversial.<sup>87</sup> The basic factor that influenced the steps of Vienna consisted in fear of further substantial deterioration of the international position of the Habsburg monarchy. But the country definitely was not launched into the war “with carelessness and after short hesitation”. On the contrary, the hesitation caused by repeated thinking about the fatal step and by the opposition of the Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza was too long and thwarted the German calculation that Austria-Hungary would intervene quickly and the war could be held in local framework. The polemic on the causes of the beginning of World War I started during its course already and has not been concluded to date, to certain extent.<sup>88</sup> Immediately after the war, the discussion was motivated primarily by the effort to find and “reveal” the culprits who had millions of human lives on their conscience. Only in the course of time, after leaving the level of mutual disputes, the historians focused at investigating the issue of the causes of the conflict and at the roles of individual great powers in its outbreak. From a century’s distance, the whole issue can be judged without emotions. Some older theses were abandoned quite unambiguously – for example, virtually no serious researcher of the present tries to seek one of the main motives in the rivalry in the sphere of colonial and extra-European interests of the great powers. It can be stated

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83 BRIDGE, 339.

84 Karl von SCHWENDENMANN, Grundzüge der Balkanpolitik Österreich-Ungarns von 1908–1914. BM/KSF, Vol. VIII, 1930, 217.

85 Fritz KLEIN, Probleme des Bündnisses zwischen Österreich-Ungarn und Deutschland am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges, in: Österreich-Ungarn in der Weltpolitik 1900 bis 1918, Fritz KLEIN (ed.), Berlin 1965, 155–162.

86 Ibidem.

87 Leo VALIANI, Die internationale Lage Österreich-Ungarns 1900 bis 1918, in: Österreich-Ungarn in der Weltpolitik 1900 bis 1918, Fritz KLEIN (ed.), Berlin 1965, 54–83.

88 Compare: John W. LANGDON, July 1914. The Long Debate, 1918–1990, New York, Oxford 1990.

that each of the great powers had compelling reason to enter the conflict at the time of the cardinal decision. Great Britain had been very alarmed by the economic growth and by the military force of Germany for long time before the outbreak of World War I; it feared disruption of European balance; that is why it finally decided to support France and Russia with full weight. France had pursued relatively moderate and balanced foreign policy in last years before World War I and in its case, it is actually not possible to speak of the need of decision making, as it was attacked by Germany. But in each case, Paris was decided to meet its allied commitments and not to endanger the alliance with Russia by potential hesitation. As for the expansion of the conflict to European extent, the key role is justifiably assigned to Russia. But it is not only about the issue of Russian mobilization that moved Germany to fast counter-action. It can hardly be doubted that "it was Russia rather than Austria who was the expansionist power in south-eastern Europe. The Annexation Crisis was the exception not the rule. Under ordinary circumstances, Austria had considerably more to fear from Russia's Balkan ambitions than Russia had from Austria" and, after all, "Saint Petersburg was giving Serbia as much reason to rely on Russian support as Berlin was giving Austria to rely on that of Germany".<sup>89</sup> But it must be understood that the Russians were not willing to retreat and to suffer another humiliating defeat like at the time of culminating Bosnia annexation crisis in 1909, so that they actually had no choice. The motives of the steps of Austria-Hungary are obvious – the decisions of the Monarchy were influenced primarily by the fear of potential loss of position of a great power, of danger to the Empire integrity and of hopeless deterioration of the situation in the Balkans. In other words, Vienna did not have any acceptable alternative in summer 1914 either. Germany, as was stated above, could not fail to support its ally in the crisis situation. If it had failed to do it, it could stand alone against the whole of Europe in short. Thus in summer 1914, a vicious circle was closed, so to say – the politicians in the capitals of all great powers came to the conclusion that willingness to retreat in the given situation could harm the position of power of their countries forever, and that is why they finally preferred the extreme solution.

## Abstract

The submitted study presents and analyzes the development in the international scene in last weeks before outbreak of World War I. The primary attention is focused on the steps of Austria-Hungary, whose position was markedly weakened due to the Balkan Wars and anti-Austrian activities of Russia. The author focuses noticeably on assessment of the relations of the Habsburg Monarchy to the allied Germany in context with negotiations of military representatives, the famous Kaiser Wilhelm II's visit to Konopiště in mid-June 1914 and at diplomatic level. Considerable attention is paid to so called Matscheko's memorandum, a document that analyzed in great detail the international position and the outlooks of the Habsburg Monarchy. The study, of course, evaluates the circumstances and the significance of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand d'Este, Successor to the throne, including the reactions in Europe and in Austria-Hungary. Adequate attention is paid also to the effect of the main factors that influenced the decision of individual great powers to enter the war.

<sup>89</sup> Joachim REMAK, 1914 – The Third Balkan War. Origins Reconsidered, in: *Journal of Modern History*, 43, 1971, 3, 358–359.

## Keywords

International position of Austria-Hungary, activities of Russia, Conrad–Moltke Jr. negotiations, Wilhelm II's visit to Konopiště, Matscheko's memorandum, Sarajevo assassination, reaction of Europe, attitude of Germany, decision of individual Great Powers in favour of war

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