

European Politics and Diplomacy before the World War One 1908 – 1914

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Abstract

Following the failure of the alliance with Germany, Great Britain was dissatisfied. The British politics having a long experience in international affairs; as the most experienced country in politics, reported and accounted that the further strengthening of Germany and consequently of the Central Europe was to the detriment of British interests. For this very reason it showed signs of getting close to France and Russia in 1904. While in the world it started to get close to Japan. As though unnoticed, to the rest part of the world, not to Great Britain, an international alliance was being formed in order to neutralize the Central Block. In this paper I tried to offer and present a scientific argument and by using the advanced, research and comparison methods as well as the deductive method, to divide the article into chronological, historical and research manner.

Key words: Europe; Germany; Britain; France; Serbia;

1. Introduction

In 1900 Europe was in a situation when it found Germany, created in 1871, unprepared and not fully formed in the field of politics, more precisely in the field of international relationships.

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This immaturity and bad management of the period after Bismarck's Germany, chancellors brought Germany in a situation to be surrounded by two powerful countries, England and France, and this brought defeat to Germany. It was impossible for Germany to be compared with England and France that in the field of world diplomacy had reached the peak! It is worth mentioning here the law of power balance which if turned to you it would have meant self-destruction. The weak country that does its calculations based only on military power without including the other issues such as politics, etc., i.e. an adequate imbalance brings destruction, respectively loss! Europe was in such a situation when the leaders of the powerful countries at that time reached the level of great enmity in the Continent that would cause great wars and at the same time Europe would lose its significance that used to have in the world diplomacy of that time. The ones that suffered mostly were not the ones that directly caused these failures and destructions but the people and the future generations of many nations in Europe.

2. The first political problems in Balkans following annexation of Bosnia

On October 6, 1908 when the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was announced, the Italian Prime Minister Tomaso Titoni (November 16, 1855 – February 7, 1931), in his speech held in Carate Brianza expressed his belief that the harmony between the great powers would be restored despite the problems in the Balkan Peninsula.

“In any case, Italy can calmly wait for the occurrences despite their development and will never be caught unprepared or isolated. The position of Italy among the great powers enables her to efficiently control her every interest and at the same time give necessary contribution in maintaining peace. But it is not to be surprised if some actions that seem as ingenious and place diplomacy de jure and de facto against situation to resist time. Only one thing worries us, peace should not be endangered and possible changes in the Balkan Peninsula not to overturn the balances of interests in our detriment.

How we will react to the currently created situation, I will speak only when the moment comes. Perhaps the occurrences will speak themselves before I doing such a thing.

When just several months ago the matter of the Balkan's railways was suddenly raised, I asked the Parliament to wait calmly and with confidence for the government for its reaction about this event. Today also the government asks

the public to wait calmly and to confide in the mandate they have given the government” (Boriçi, 2012, p. 7).

This speech in fact is a failure that Italy was purposefully making in violation of the international treaties and raising the Italian hopes that the annexation would be compensation to the Apennine country. But this was simply Titoni’s dream. There was suspicion that he didn’t understand any of the Austrian politics and that he was completely kept in the dark regarding the Austrian plans by the minister Ahrenthal. Very soon it was learned that the Italy’s compensation would simply consist of Austria giving up Sanxhak that by the Italian political class was considered as an insult and an avalanche of critics and threats to overthrow the prime minister came upon the prime minister as he fell in the trap of the Austrian diplomacy and politics. Titoni should have acted vigorously to prevent the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina since this severely damaged the Berlin treaty and it was a blow to the interests of the Central Block. Another significant element for Titoni was the secret move of Austria by only consulting Germany and totally disregarding Italy (Boriçi, 2012, p. 8).

On the morning of October 7, 1908, Titoni began his workday by calling to audience the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome, Lytzov, who had just had a meeting with the Emperor Franz Josef during the weekend. In Vienna he had received necessary instructions to be prepared as best as possible for the inevitable audience by the Italian Primeminister.

The aims of the minister Ahrenthal to give an ultimatum to Serbia and to follow the ultimatum with a punishment expedition came to the ears of Izvolsky while he was preparing to create a new entente between Russia and Great Britain on February 15, 1909. Russia’s intention was not to remain passive at all if Austro-Hungary would attack Serbia. The method of diplomacy making of Austria incited the British foreign minister Grey on February 19, 1909 to propose the idea of Great Powers undertaking joint actions especially those of the Entente Block if Serbia would be attacked by Austro-Hungary. Russia, France and even Italy supported Grey’s idea while Germany rejected it. Germany went even further by stating that if Austria would attack Serbia this would not come from a provocation of Vienna but from Belgrade itself who is interested in declaring war to the dual monarchy. To the idea of Great Britain as always France reacted in a moderate manner and attracted Russia to use all her authority to maintain peace in the Balkans (Boriçi, 2012, p. 9).

But his moderate stand of France infuriated Izvolsky. At a meeting that Nicholson had with the British ambassador in St. Petersburg he said:

“The attitude of France is improper and unacceptable. It seems she will break the alliance with us. We have been a worthier ally to France than France was to us” (Hoijer, 1922, p. 122).

Not having the necessary support of her ally, Russia told Serbia to give up for the moment the request for compensation of territories following annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as none of the Great Powers would support her. For the moment it was Serbia’s interest to continue to maintain a moderate stand and not to hasten and take military measures to prevent by any means the rising of further tensions with Austria that would lead to a comprehensive conflict. Izvolsky knew very well that if Austria would advance further Serbia would totally be in its mercy to survive. As Russia’s representative, Izvolsky was the only one who supported Minister Grey’s idea who in turn called the Russian minister an excellent statesman (Boriçi, 2012, p. 12).

3. Involvement of great powers in Morocco Agadir crisis

According to the Franco -German agreement of February 9, 1909, respective governments of both countries would carry out the agreement in the territory of Morocco and the surrounding areas (Boriçi, 2010, p. 47.) Exploitation of minerals, construction of public works and railways would be carried out with accuracy and without misapplication by both countries. Difficulties to win over Morocco were great and this fact represented a difficult obstacle to France. In March 1911 the insurgent tribes of the zone were threatening the city of Fez and the Turkish Sultan who until then was the legal ruler of Morocco called upon the French and not the Germans for assistance. The French were ready to assist but came across a strong opposition of Berlin.

The Germans saw the French advancement in Morocco as a threat to their interests and a flagrant violation of the Algecir’s agreement of 1909 (Hauser, 1929, p. 670). The occupation of Fez by France was seen as an alarm in Germany and all the political and diplomatic caste thought that this step would be the end of Morocco and it would fall under complete French domination. On March 1, 1911, Théophile Delcassé the French

foreign Minister directly accused the German Press for pouring gas into fire to start an unnecessary war between France and Germany (Boriçi, 2010, p. 47).

But the German political reaction was not violent. Kiderlin who in June 1910 replaced Schoen at the post of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs advised his government to maintain calm and presented to the chancellor the note that Jules Cambon had sent him on April 5, 1911 explaining the French reason for intervention in Fez (VonSiebert, 1924, p. 378.) According to the note they called upon the German government not to be concerned as everything was developing in the spirit of the Algecira's agreement. The German response to the note arrived in Paris on April 28, 1911, the day on which there would be a camping in Fez. Its content was ambiguous, neither a protest nor an agreement. This is for the fact that in Berlin a detailed analysis of the situation was conducted. Kaiser and the chancellor thought that in this maneuver France was forced to remove a part of her troupes from the Rhine border, thus weakening the defense from a possible German attack. The incapable German chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was thinking only about the war with France. His sense was darkened by the economic power of Germany. The only suspicion of the chancellor was how long French would stay in Fez with their army.

The French campaign in Fez lasted two months. The French army entered the city on May 21, 1911. France claimed that the occupation of Fez would simply be temporary. Following occupation, the French military instructors would stay there to organize the army and to continue communication routes with the capital. At this instance Kiderlin thought that it was time to act. A meeting he had with the French ambassador in Berlin and later on June 21 at a meeting with Jules Cambon, he asked France for territorial compensation in Kongo. Cambon asked for time and went to Paris for instructions while Kinderlin on June 26 didn't wait for Cambon's reply and immediately asked for Kaiser's permission to act. The Kaiser's response was quick:

"Permission granted." (Asquith, 1923, p. 76.) Two big battleships set off immediately to Mogador and another two to Agadir. The first German battleship positioned in Mediterranean was a Panther and it anchored first in Agadir on July 1, 1911 (Boriçi, 2010, p. 49).

At that time, in France the government of the Prime Minister Josef Caillaux was in power. Despite the harsh protests of the French nationalists for this act of Germany the prime Minister was prudent and immediately contacted the German Ambassador Schoen stating that France was willing to reach an agreement with Germany, but not allowing any part of Morocco to be seceded. France was willing to offer Germany Congo, parts of Togo and Cameroon. At this moment Kiderlin was naive and seeing French concessions he thought of raising his voice turning it into a threat. But the Kaiser Wilhelm seeing and pursuing carefully the course of the events ordered Kiderlin not to undertake any threatening acts until the political Council of Germany would take a decision. Cambon feeling the growing demands of Germany raised his voice and told Kinderlin that none of their demands for agreement would be considered if Germany continued to threaten. The situation between two countries became very tense and a war was expected to start. At this moment Great Britain decided to intervene.

4. The assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand

On the most sacred day of the Serbs, that of Vidovdan on June 28, 1914, the sun was shining over Sarajevo. (Borići, 2010, p. 133.) This date commemorate the day of the war in the field of the blackbirds that in history is known as the Battle of Kosovo. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand with Archduchess Sofia, after taking part at the Sunday Sacred Mass, they took the train to Sarajevo for an official visit to the city. It was 10 o'clock in the morning when the convoy of the cars accompanying the Archduke and his wife set off in the direction of the Town Hall. The convoy of the cars was led by the Mayor of the City and the Chief of Police. In the second car were the Archduke and his wife together with General Potiorek who was the Governor of Bosnia. On the passenger seat was Count Harrach.

On the way to the Town Hall they went alongside the river Miljacka that usually is dry in summer. Near the bridge Cumurija three members of the organization "Crna Ruka - Black Hand" were standing. They were Muhamed Mehmedbasic, Vasa Cubrilovic and Nedeljko Cabrinovic. A little further down the road was stationed Cvijetko Popovic and near him was Danilo Ilic who was the coordinator of the assassination attempt. On the other side of the Latin Bridge was Gavrilo Princip. At the third bridge

called “The Empress” was Trifko Grabez. After the assassination the Archbishop of Sarajevo said that...

“...for the Archduke to come out of the city alive was possible only after he would have greeted all this cue of assassins” (Mousset, 1930, p. 129).

The first one to start the attack with a bomb was Cabrinovic who threw the bomb in the direction of the Archduke’s convertible (Boriçi, 2010, p.134). This time Franz was lucky as the bomb hit an electrical pole which served as a shield and did not hit the convertible. The bomb blew up and just scratched Archduke’s neck a little. The blowing power of the bomb wounded the passengers of the third car accompanying the Imperial couple wounding Cornel Erich von Merizzi who was the assistant of Potiorek. Sensing the danger Archduke ordered to stop his car and to see what happened to the others. In the meantime, even though he tried to jump into the river Carbinovic was arrested and taken to the police station.

After arriving at the Town Hall, seeing that his wife was slightly injured, Franz Ferdinand wanted that the ones responsible to be punished as soon as possible and tried to calm down the Duchess telling her that something like that would not be recured. At the moment when the Mayor was welcoming the Archduke, he stopped him and said:

“Mister Mayor, I came here for a visit and they welcomed me with bombs. This is unforgivable. Now you can continue” (Sosnoky, 1929, p. 205).

Harrach in a low voice told someone that from investigations resulted that, that someone was General Potiorek:

“After the bombs the bullets will fly around us” (Sosnoky, 1929, p. 207).

Following the meeting at the Town Hall the Archduke was advised that his wife should not ride in the same car with him, but she should go straight to the hotel (Konak). But she refused saying that she wanted to be by the side of her husband. Harrach decided that if necessary he would protect Archduke with his own body. But General Potiorek and the chief of police were not expecting that another assassination attempt would take place after the failure of the first one. What happened on the way it is a real conspiracy. The question arises: Why didn’t the driver take the road he was

ordered to but changed direction going into the Franz Josef Street and in the direction of the Latin Bridge towards the pier? Who gave the orders to change direction? Precisely at that road where Gavrilo Princip was standing “sadly”, the bird came into his hand exposed and unprotected? For an experienced assassin like Gavrilo Princip it was a piece of cake to shoot someone at that close distance.

At the trial the investigators called their attention to the bomb of Cabrinovic saying that it was simply a diversion to force the delegation to change their route. But who gave the orders to change the route?

Nobody knows how many bullets Gavrilo Princip shot. From the expertise the first bullet hit the Archduke in the neck and another one hit him in the stomach. Gavrilo Princip fired from a distance of two steps.

5. Great Britain wants peace by any means

After Russia announced the general mobilization, Great Britain was the most concerned country. Minister Grey decided to make the last effort before the disaster. Grey wanted to prevent the war before the Austrian forces would occupy Belgrade (Boriçi, 2010, p. 279). The most plausible person to negotiate with the English was Kaiser’s brother, the Prince Heinz of Prussia. At a meeting he had with King George V of Great Britain he talked to him about the meeting he had with his brother:

“Wilhelm is doing the impossible to maintain peace in Europe. But due to the mobilization in Russia he gave orders to do military exercise more often which was incited by the exercises in France. This means that the war in Europe could start any moment now. If you intend to prevent the war, I suggest that you exercise your influence in the political circles in France and Russia so that they would remain neutral to the dispute between Austro-Hungary and Serbia. I dare say that both our countries (Germany and Great Britain) should remain neutral because this way only the war can be avoided. Believe me, Wilhelm is very sincere when he says that peace must be saved, but the military exercises of his neighbors can force him to give the order against his will and he will do this in order to protect his country and not to attack the others” (Albertini, 2005, p. 637).

This appeal of Prince Heinz can be comprehended as an indirect demand made to France and Russia to remain neutral to the mediation of

England in the Austro-Serbian conflict. But the thing that Prince Heinz didn't comprehend was that with the defeat of Serbia, Russia was at the same time defeated too. On July 31 the response of King George V was sent to Heinz probably with the suggestions of Minister Grey:

"I am very happy that Wilhelm is trying by all means to save the peace. I also am in anguish until this war is completely avoided that stands upon us like a shadow. My government is doing everything possible to convince France and Russia to stop their military exercises on condition that Austria does not occupy Serbia, but to keep her under pressure until her demands are met satisfactorily. I believe that Wilhelm will convince Austria not to take another step forward after the declaration of war and will reason and negotiate and allow Germany and England to deal with this matter. I also as Wilhelm pray that peace in Europe is saved (Boriçi, 2010, p. 279-280).

This telegram of the English King was almost the same as the instructions that Grey had sent to the ambassador Buchanan in St. Petersburg. But, Britain as the keeper and guardian of the balance of powers in Europe could not agree with the hypocritical politics of Germany who simply was trying to buy time. Minister Grey thought that the smartest thing that Great Britain could do was to sincerely and openly declare her support to France and Russia. Perhaps this was the only way for Germany to withdraw from supporting Austro-Hungary in the shadow. If war was unavoidable then Great Britain would have no reason to withdraw. England was not inciting the war. Germany was. Then why Great Britain had to play the role of the ignorant and to endlessly negotiate with Germany when the latter was not even intending to stop?

6. Conclusions: whose fault was it for the first European war?

When countries like England and a Minister with experience like Grey declare war, they should share the responsibility of such an act. In his book of memoirs he brought a multitude of justifications that hardly convince anyone about his unaccountability that he could have done a lot more to avoid the war.

"The request made to France and Russia for restraint could not have been done faster than that. To ask them by his initiative without consulting the

government cabinet could not be considered at all. If he would have acted differently it would have been a crime and a worthless thing. In the earlier days the cabinet was not prepared to take such a step despite the positive feeling that existed with the people and the parliament. If they would have given their word to France and Russia without clarifying the matter to the end, the cabinet would be divided in two. When the violation of Belgium would have occurred they would find themselves facing this fact as a disunited and not a united cabinet. When he turns his head back to those fatal days he is convinced even more that it was the only way to involve Britain in war after all the others, with a broken heart, but a practical unity“ (Grey, 1940, p. 294).

These sentences, if properly read seem to say that we steered England towards peace, not towards war and in order to maintain peace the word should not have given to France and Russia immediately, but the opposite should have been done, they should have been warned in time about the consequences of their decisions. For many days France, Russia and Germany faced the hope of the enigma of English neutrality and intervention. Grey tries to justify himself by saying that the path that Great Britain took was indisputably the rightest path taken towards Germany. In fact, based on the other researchers and on the recollections of the German ambassadors, they blame Berlin about the imprudent steps it took towards Britain. Since 1901 when the possibility of making an alliance with England failed, Germany went on making mistakes over and over. In his memoirs Grey goes on saying that Germany would prefer they wouldn't get involved in war. Everything the Germans counted on were the days, weeks, months and perhaps years that the war would last for and not on their capacity to be neutral. If they would have thought it that way, they would have been frightened and wouldn't declare war to France or Russia.

It is known that Great Britani is called so since it has a great fleet, a great army and a great economy. All these elements would make the German leaders think that it would be better to reach an agreement than to make war with England. August 4, 1914 was the beginning of all enmities. The alliances have already been made and England declared which side she would be on. I must close this short chapter about the accountability of war with the very meaningful words of Lloyd George that leave no account for suspicions to all those that saw and considered the intervention of Great Britain in the crime, he said that he had never suspected that if the Germans would have intervned in the integrity and independence of

Belgium it would have been their honor to fulfill all of their obligations they undertook towards that country.

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