



Review Article

Bismarck's Foreign Policy from The Formation of The German Empire to the 1878 Congress of Berlin as Reflected in Russian Public Opinion

Alena Eskridge Kosmach

Professor of History, Francis Marion University, Florence, SC, USA



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ABSTRACT



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The paper provides an analysis of Bismarck's foreign policy from the establishment of the German Empire in 1871 to the Congress of Berlin in 1878, viewed through the lens of Russian public opinion. Throughout this period, Bismarck aimed to preserve equilibrium in Europe while prioritizing German strategic interests, particularly by thwarting the establishment of an anti-German coalition. The Three Emperors' League, comprising Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, first presented an image of collaboration; nevertheless, it ultimately demonstrated ineffectiveness throughout the Balkan crises. The Herzegovinian insurrection of 1875 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 revealed significant tensions between Austria-Hungary and Russia, but Germany sought to navigate its alliances without substantial direct engagement. Gradually, Russian public opinion began to regard Germany as a dependable partner and recognized a clear diminishment of Bismarck's influence due to the absence of German support during the Eastern Crisis. The study elucidates the understanding of German policy by Russian publications and political spheres, ultimately concluding that Bismarck prioritized German interests over alliance obligations. In 1878, the Congress of Berlin exacerbated Russian grievances as German diplomacy imposed unfavorable geographical modifications contrary to Russian interests. The data clearly demonstrates the profound fragility of European alliances in the 19th century and the insufficiency of diplomatic agreements to resolve geopolitical conflicts.

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Introduction

The formation of the German Empire fulfilled by Bismarck was one of the most important events of the second part of the 19th century in Europe. The unification of Germany was accomplished by Bismarck through military means and it caused a lot of response in the Russian public opinion of the different political directions.

At the beginning of 1871, the German Empire found itself practically in a state of diplomatic isolation and was seen by most states with apprehension and distrust. It seemed natural that this country, whose sudden rise in the center of Europe after many impressive victories came as a surprise to many, would keep striving to expand its borders.

S.V. Obolenskaya has analyzed the attitudes of Russia's public opinion towards the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 in her work (S.V. Obolenskaya, 1977).

Russia's leading publications of the time kept the outcome of the war and the post-war balance of power in Europe at the forefront of their attention.

As early as January 1871, when no one had any more doubts about the outcome of the Franco-Prussian War, a discussion on the future political development of the German Empire unfolded

on the pages of the magazine *Vestnik Evropy*. The question was what role would this empire play on the international stage: would it become "a bulwark of peace" (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, p. 410) or would it maintain "its former system of 'lording it over' entire populations, against their explicit will" (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, p. 411).

The magazine saw two potential paths of development: if German society could exert its influence on Germany's foreign policy, the country could renounce its aggressive politics and establish "peaceful internal development and true freedom" (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, p. 414). In the magazine's opinion, much worse for Germany and "more worrisome and dangerous for her neighbors" (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, p. 414) would be the other option, when the former system of Prussian militarism would triumph, along with the violence and nationalist fervor that lay at the core of its foundation. The diplomacy of the new empire in its inherent nature "does not present any guarantee of liberal self-moderation," and it too is pervaded with militarism. A vivid illustration of this, in the editors' opinion, was the fact that "a great statesman, at the height of his historic greatness and glory, aspires to be granted a military rank" (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.1 Kn.2, 844). Only the German people could stand against the conservatism of the Prussian monarchy, and the people's political

*Corresponding Author:

Email: AEskridgeKosmach@fmarion.edu (A. E. Kosmach)

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freedom was “the pillar that supports true civilization” (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.2 Kn.4 ,867) .

The liberal hopes of *Vestnik Evropy* did not come to fruition. German society itself had neither the wish nor the capability to alter Bismarck’s foreign policy, while Bismarck, as the magazine admitted, skilfully used “the national aspirations, of course, only the ones that led to increasing the power of the Berlin government” (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.2 Kn.3 ,215). Bismarck was finalizing Prussia’s 170-year journey towards becoming the most powerful military state in Europe.

Thus, the magazine regarded the victorious German Empire as a contributing factor to instability in Europe and as a potential participant in new military conflicts, juxtaposing the militaristic endeavors of the state with the peace-loving sentiments of the people.

The position of the newspaper *Golos*, a liberal publication, is notable for its extremely strong reaction to Prussia’s victories in the course of the war in 1870-71. The editors believed Prussia’s and Bismarck’s goal was not only the unification of the country, but also dominion over all of Europe (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 1 (January 1 (13), 1) . At the same time, the newspaper pointed to Russia’s key role in this process: “the Prussian government had no doubts about Russia’s goodwill,” and Russia has with its course of action rendered Prussia “a great service making it easier for her to dispose of all her military forces against the enemy” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 1 (January 1 (13), 1) . *Golos* gave an unambiguous answer to the question of how advantageous the post-war situation was for Russia and for all of Europe: the coming peace would serve both opponents only as a means to prepare for a new combat, (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 1 (January 1 (13), 1) that is, another clash between France and Germany is inevitable. The newspaper saw a new path for Europe “under Prussia’s hegemony” as entirely plausible; Prussia “would even be able to create a new philosophical system now, laying the theory of ‘blood and iron’ at its foundation” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 13 (January 13 (25), 1) . The interpretation *Golos* provided of events happening at the time supported its apprehensions. The newspaper pointed out that “the Prussians’ policy is distinguished by a thirst for conquest the likes of which has not been seen in Europe since the times of Napoleon I” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 17 (January 17 (29), 1871): 1.). *Golos* stated straightforwardly that the goal Prussia set for itself was not to ensure its safety from France, but rather the destruction of that empire and the establishment of its own hegemony in Europe (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 17 (January 17 (29), 1)

In light of this, *Golos* called for the swiftest intervention by the neutral powers, supported by the mobilization of armed forces, with the goal of preventing France from becoming “a tributary of the Germans” and Prussia from obtaining “a decisive advantage in Europe” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. 27 (January 27 (February 8), 1) . Thus, *Golos* went further than the other publications: it did not simply point out Prussia’s dangerous rise, but also advocated for active counter-measures, including military intervention. In other words, the newspaper highlighted the destabilizing influence of Prussia’s victory over France and feared for the preservation of European peace in the future. In the formidable nation of Prussia, it saw a new center of power, a new hegemon of continental Europe.

The immediate consequence of Prussia’s victory and France’s weakened position was, according to the newspaper, the possible emergence of a natural alliance between Prussia, England, and Austria against Russia (*Golos*, 1871, pp. 17 (January 17 (29), 1) .

The editors presented the idea of an armed conflict with Germany in this figurative fashion: Prussia rechristens herself as Germany and places a cross on herself “not with wind and water, but with iron and blood;” “the cross has already been placed in the

north, south, and west, on her face, chest, and left shoulder: all that remains is to touch the east, to stretch her right shoulder—and Germany will be ready for that great enlightening mission long since dreamt about by her poets, philosophers, pastors, and generals” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22), 1) . In this interpretation, Germany’s attack on Russia seemed predetermined and inevitable, for it lay in the logic of the birth and rise to greatness of the German Empire. The newspaper did not believe the conflict between the Germans and the Slavs would occur hastily; the reason for this was the following concept of interrelations between these two tribes. It is first necessary to note that such views are completely out of character for a liberal publication, and *Golos* was seen as such by its contemporaries, as well as by scholarly studies on the history of Russian journalism. Similar themes have appeared in M.N. Katkov’s conservative publication (*Moskovskie vedomosti*) and in the famous slavophile newspaper *Rus*, published by I.S. Aksakov, only in the first half of the ‘80s. Russia was presented as a sort of German India, a colony that provided the Germans with a vast stage “for the grateful and profitable placement of their ideal and natural capital, and for the manifestation of their administrative, legislative, military, scientific, banking, mercantile, and all sorts of other talents” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22), 1) . The Germans, in the newspaper’s opinion, could still rule over Russia without war, through the strength of their intellect. Having dubbed Russians a nation of slaves, “they have made it their historical goal to turn the Slavs into ethnographic material for the development of German culture” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22), 1) . Between these two peoples “lies a deep and bottomless chasm into which all previous attempts at mutual reconciliation have plummeted and which makes a solid and lasting peace between them impossible” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22), 1) . *Golos* was still of the opinion that it would be a long time before the peace was broken since the Germans would try to salvage their advantageous situation by going to war and annexing certain Russian territories only in the case of a “shipwreck”; the rebellion of the Russian people against such conditions, which seemed unlikely. (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22), 1)

It is evident that in this case there was no precise and balanced analysis of the political situation; rather, relations between the two states were considered in the spirit of an intercivilizational conflict. In these discourses there was no room to discuss the balance of power, the conflict of interest, or the attempts at rapprochement—the newspaper spoke directly of an uncompromising struggle that had to result in the destruction of one of the opponents. The fact that these sorts of ideas were discussed in a liberal publication testifies to their prevalence in a broad cross-section of Russian society.

Moreover, another idea was consistently put forward, that of a potential Russian ally against the Germans, “the French nation, which deflected away from us and took upon its chest a formidable blow that could have hurt us in the long term” (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22), 1.).

The newspaper underscored Russia’s role as the only remaining worthwhile opponent for Germany in Europe. Russia, *Golos* claimed, did not seek any territorial acquisitions, but a possible attempt by Germany to annex Czechia in case of Austria’s dissolution could provoke Russia into military intervention (*Golos*, 1871, pp. no. 54 (February 23 (March 7),1) . The newspaper also pointed out the disparity in the economic and commercial interests of the two empires; particularly, it noted that “commercial competition has begun between Prussian and Russian Baltic ports” (*Golos*, 1871, p. no. 256 (September 16 (28)1).

Thus, one can conclude that throughout 1871 the newspaper *Golos* was extremely outspoken in its anti-Prussian and later anti-German position. It highlighted the destabilizing influence of Prussia's victory, which called into question the possibility of a long-lasting European peace. The rise of Prussia posed a significant danger for Russia due to the civilizational and economic contradictions between these two empires.

The significant strengthening of Germany's international positions on account of its victory over France was also noted by one of the extremely conservative journals, *Grazhdanin* (*Grazhdanin*, 1874, p. 1087).

It appears that under the circumstances, the German chancellor and head of foreign policy believed that his main task was to persuade the governments and the public of the neighboring states that Germany's policy following the Treaty of Frankfurt was a balanced and peaceful one. As it will be shown below, he succeeded. It is no coincidence that Bismarck himself, when summing up his career, remarked that "it was precisely the peaceful character of German policy after the astounding proof of the nation's military might that greatly contributed to the foreign powers and internal adversaries reconciling themselves faster than we had expected with the new German might" (Bismarck, 2002, p. 173).

1.1 Bismarck's foreign policy in the first half of the 1870s as reflected in Russian public opinion

Bismarck's foreign policy goal following the formation of the German Empire was to arrange an international system that would exclude the possibility of an anti-German union being formed. According to Bismarck's own assessment, the international "situation demanded an attempt to limit the possibility of an anti-German coalition by way of ensuring strong treaty relations with at least one of the great powers" (Bismarck, 2002, p. 250). In other words, Germany's foreign policy goal had a defensive character: Germany had to take part in coalitions to avoid turning back into Prussia.

The main intended network of coalitions had to become a sturdy geopolitical association that exceeded all other alliances in the sum of its power. "The choice could only be made between Austria and Russia" (Bismarck, 2002, p. 250). An alliance with the former, as the experience of the Danish war showed, guaranteed supremacy in Central Europe. Bismarck observed: "Austria and Prussia, acting as one, constitute such a force that none of the other powers would be disposed carelessly to attack it" and "the combined domain of the two Germanic powers has turned out to be imposing enough to restrain the other empires from possible attempts at intervention" (Bismarck, 2002, pp. 460-61).

Despite their recent rivalry over influence in the German Confederation and the war it provoked in 1866, rapprochement with Austria-Hungary was not a completely unfeasible goal. It is unknown whether Bismarck had worked this out in advance in 1866, but the Prague peace treaty of August 23, 1866 had a significantly "tournament-like" spirit, did not strongly wound Austria's pride, and did not create insurmountable tensions between the two Germanic states in the future. The relatively lenient terms of the peace treaty can be explained not only by the diplomatic pressure put on Prussia by France but also by Bismarck's own position; he clashed with the commanding officers of the army and with the king himself in order to insist on the quickest end to military action and the signing of the peace treaty on the conditions of Austria's territorial integrity: "There is no way to foresee how future wars for the preservation of what we have acquired will turn out, but in any case the following was important: will the mood in which we leave our opponent be implacable, and would the wounds we inflict upon their pride be

unhealable? This consideration was my political basis for preventing rather than encouraging a triumphant entry into Vienna in the manner of Napoleon" (Bismarck, 2002, p. 570).

Bismarck's analysis of the situation in Europe after the formation of the German Empire led him to the conclusion that it was necessary to form ties with the eastern monarchies in order to obtain stability in Europe. The role of ally could not be played by England—according to Bismarck's own assessment, "the English constitution does not allow the signing of unions for a specific duration," nor by Italy since "a union with Italy could not serve as a sufficient counterweight to the coalition of the three remaining great powers" (Bismarck, 2002, p. 250). In the situation that had emerged, France would no doubt seek revenge, so it was very important to deprive it of allies in the east, and the best way to do that was to become their ally. At the same time, German diplomacy had to avoid the danger of falling too much under Russia's influence—with the existence of a standing conflict between France and Germany, Russia played the role of arbiter and would be able to dictate terms. This is why Bismarck began a gradual rapprochement with Austria-Hungary, which would play the role of a counterweight to Russia.

This rapprochement did not go unnoticed in Russia. Analyzing Bismarck's new "Austrian" policy, the magazine *Vestnik Evropy* singled out two aspects that dictated Bismarck's necessity to improve relations with Austria. First, the right moment to divest Austria of its German provinces and annex them to the German Empire had not yet arrived. That is, in the magazine's opinion, it would have been far more advantageous for Bismarck to cross Austria off the list of Germany's potential adversaries than to try to broaden his borders at its expense.

Second, in a similar configuration, Austria could be regarded as an instrument of Bismarck's foreign policy. For Germany, it was "more profitable to keep Austria as the ground for new, peaceful conquests of German culture" through the German minority, "which holds in its hands Austria's industrial powers" (*Evropy*, 1871, p. 451). At the same time, Bismarck did not wish "to deprive himself of the lower Danube basin in the future" Thus Austria-Hungary as a political construction kept its multi-national population (which also included Slavs) on the path of a united, Germany-friendly policy and guaranteed its advancement towards the Balkans; (*Evropy*, 1871, p. 451) it could not avoid sharing the political and economic dividends of this advancement with Germany. The article "Germany's eastern policy and Russification" stated that for Bismarck, "any expansion by Austria to the south would have been helpful—it would prepare an inheritance for Germany" (*M T-ov*, 1872, p. 649). It was an important circumstance that it was not Germany that made the advance into the Balkans, Russia's traditional sphere of influence, but Austria-Hungary, Russia's long-time adversary. Germany had no desire to clash with its powerful neighbor to the north, and thus Bismarck and Germany were innocent in relation to Russia.

Austria was forced to follow the path of Bismarck's policy not only out of national sympathy—"while France is weak, Austria cannot follow any other policy than that of subordination to Germany" (*Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.1 Kn.1, 366).

Without placing too much emphasis on it, the magazine proposes the idea that Bismarck's rapprochement with Austria is one of a temporary, tactical nature; nevertheless, such a blatant reconciliation between Austria and Germany could not help but cause some concern in Russia.

The alignment of Germany and Austria was also reflected on the pages of the liberal newspaper *Golos*. This topic was not as broadly discussed here as it had been in *Vestnik Evropy*, but nevertheless the newspaper clearly outlined its position.

Austria, having been edged out of Germany and Italy, “was consumed with the thought of making acquisitions in the east” (Golos, 1871, pp. no. 14 (January 14 (26),1). It had become an extension of Germany and would not have any other goals or tasks in the future but those dictated to it from Berlin (Golos, 1871, p. no. 73 (March 14 (26))); on the other hand, with its movement towards the east, it was capable of luring the German Empire “onto the sort of path on which our confrontation with this great power would be inevitable” (Golos, 1871, pp. no. 73 (March 14 (26),). All the more so since Austria’s loyalty was bought by Berlin “through significant promises of aid in case of entirely possible conflicts in the east,” (Golos, 1871, pp. no. 256 (September 16 (28),1) where Austria would have sought compensation for its losses in the west.

That is, in the Austrian-German alignment, *Golos* saw the possibility of these powers clashing with Russia in the future due to Austria’s infiltration of Russia’s traditional sphere of influence, the Balkans.

The ideological opponent of *Vestnik Evropy*, which belonged to the liberal-bourgeois camp of the Russian press, (Baluev 1971) the leading conservative publication of the 1870s-80s, the newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti* likewise devoted some attention to this issue.

Analyzing the nature of the emerging union, the editor of *Moskovskie vedomosti*, M.N. Katkov suspected that Bismarck’s goal was “Germany’s ultimate devourment of all the Austrian lands subject to German claims” (Katkov, 1871, pp. No,36, 103) . “Germany’s friendship with Austria is the friendship of a predator that clings tightly to its prey;” (Katkov, 1871, pp. No,36, 103) he wrote sarcastically. However, it was not yet time for Bismarck to take that step. Prussia first had to master the already significant results of its recent conquests: “Prussia has enough business in Elsass-Lothringen, southern Germany, Schleswig, and Posen to stop it from rushing into the material annexation of Cisleitaniien” (Katkov, 1871, pp. No, 74, 229) . The young empire was obligated at that moment only “to direct the course of events so that sooner or later it would happen on its own” (Katkov, 1871, pp. No,74, 229). The main goal of Bismarck’s “Austrian” policy was to fetter the independence of the Danubian monarchy, forcing it to constantly follow the course of German policy by excluding it from membership in any potential anti-German coalitions. This was only one aspect of Bismarck’s foreign policy, the main goal of which was “to immobilize Europe using its current situation and prevent any maneuvers that could put the gains made by Germany into question” (Katkov, 1871, pp. No 85, 158) .

This was exactly what the talks between the emperors and foreign ministers in Ischl, Gastein, and Salzburg were meant to facilitate. Austria had turned into “Germany’s outpost in south-eastern Europe,” (Katkov, 1871, pp. NO 184, 554) stated M.N. Katkov.

Having drawn such an unfavorable conclusion for the Danubian monarchy, M.N. Katkov pointed them towards a possible alternative that would allow them to escape being devoured: Austria could become “genuinely a mostly Slavic empire,” thus transforming into Russia’s natural ally (Katkov, 1871, pp. No36, 103).

As one can imagine, under the historical circumstances at that time, a significant strengthening of the Slavic element in Austria at the cost of the weakening of the Germanic or Hungarian ones could hardly be possible.

Within the framework of this study, it is the argumentation of the editor of *Moskovskie vedomosti* that is interesting. He reasoned that “an unstoppable and natural ambition leads Germany onto the path of conquest,” while juxtaposing Germany with Russia, which, on the other hand, is forbidden from pursuing an

aggressive policy by the law of its existence, especially in Europe (Katkov, 1871, pp. No 36, 103). Thus, Austria did not have to be wary of its Slavic elements being conquered by Russia; being a Russian ally, “a Slavic Austria, independent from Germany, would save the balance of Europe by saving itself” (Katkov, 1871). Germany, in these arguments by M.N. Katkov, acted as a highly aggressive disruptor of European peace that had to be neutralized.

The role of Austria-Hungary in Europe, despite its defeat in 1866, remained quite significant, and the possibility of its alignment with other powers was, in M.N. Katkov’s opinion, Bismarck’s constant worry: “The German Empire cannot consider its position completely secure and exercise full freedom of action without settling its relations with Austria in one way or another” (Katkov, 1871, p. 199). The main problem of Bismarck’s foreign policy was how to exclude a possible attempt at revenge by France, or the preservation of the post-war status quo in Europe. Its solution was the following: to oppose France not with a 40-million-strong but with a 70-million-strong Germany, that is, Germany together with Austria-Hungary. In this way, “the transformation of Austria into a vassal of Germany” was “France’s death sentence and a guarantee of the further existence of the German Empire—this was M.N. Katkov’s analysis of the situation (Katkov, 1871, p. 229). The existence of a broken but not-yet-destroyed France stipulated the special consideration Bismarck gave to relations with Austria-Hungary in his foreign policy. Thus, M.N. Katkov encapsulated yet another postulate of Bismarck’s foreign policy: “The interests of the German Empire demand establishing amity between it and Austria by any means necessary” (Katkov, 1871, p. 199) .

It is worth noting a certain peculiarity in the union between Germany and Austria, which M.N. Katkov pointed out: Germany made provisions to protect itself “against a real danger in the west,” while in exchange offering Austria only defence “against an imaginary danger that supposedly threatens her from Russia” (Katkov, 1871, p. 199). This is one of the methods Bismarck used to implement his foreign policy: maintaining a certain level of tension and animosity between his allies in order to enable himself to maintain control over the situation. In this scheme, Russia played the role of a political scarecrow, the constant threat of which made Austria-Hungary continue being loyal to Germany and refrain from any sort of alignment with France. The editor underscored that “any type of rapprochement between Russia and France is dangerous for Germany, but any direct alignment between Austria and Russia is just as disadvantageous to her” (Katkov, 1871, p. 185). The optimal solution to this problem for Germany is to stand between both empires “under the guise of peacekeeping mediation, but in fact in order to divide them and reign over the general state of affairs” (Katkov, 1871, p. 185).

In 1871 this distribution of power did not instill in Katkov any serious concern; he was confident in the friendship between Germany and Russia. His analysis of the situation suggested that “Germany fears nothing from Russia and feels completely secure in her friendly disposition” (Katkov, 1871, p. 274) since their “union is based on a mutual assessment of their rights and forces, and on mutual trust and respect” (Katkov, 1871, p. 274). This position did not change in May of 1872: “as far as relations with Russia are concerned, Prussia currently appreciates her friendship more than ever before” (Katkov, 1871, p. 131).

Thus, the German-Austrian alignment did not go unnoticed by the Russian periodical press. The representatives of various ideological leanings of Russian public opinion accurately identified the role of Austria-Hungary in Bismarck’s calculations: it had to become his reliable ally for many years to come and follow the foreign policy course designated by Berlin. Moreover, as early as 1871, the press pointed out the possibility of future

conflicts of interest between Austria-Hungary and Russia in the Balkans.

Apprehensions regarding the emerging alignment between Germany and Austria were calmed by the meeting of the three emperors in Berlin, which took place in September 1872: some began to talk about reinstating the Holy Alliance. Liberal magazine *Vestnik Evropy* criticized the idea of restoring the Holy Alliance, pointing out the fundamental differences between it and the recently formed League of Three Emperors: the concept of “conservative principles” was interpreted ambiguously in the 1870s; therefore, it was impossible to choose an overall program or an overall principle for the union (*Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.5 Kn.10, 840).

Vestnik Evropy highlighted the absence of “positive, undeniable data for identifying any kind of unified program of action between the three states” (*Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.5 Kn. 9, 414) since “the interests of the three empires are far from identical—except for their mutual interest in keeping the peace” (*Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.5 Kn. 9, 414). The magazine came to the conclusion that it was Bismarck who profited the most from this situation. For Russia, the value of peace consisted of peace itself, the possibility of avoiding a pan-European war, while Germany secured for itself the smooth establishing and development of a new system, and a guarantee that two of the five great powers of Europe would not enter into any potential coalition against it.

Not having any reliable information about the content of the negotiations over the course of the meeting of the three emperors, the magazine decided to take heed of Bismarck's own assessment of the proceedings and agreed with the conclusion that “a demonstrative acknowledgment of good will from the three empires is already important in itself” (*Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.5 Kn. 10, 842)(62).

The magazine's Berlin correspondent pointed directly to the addressee of this diplomatic missive from Bismarck (having in mind the meeting of the three emperors in Berlin): “the French, (based on the previous encounter) should finally be convinced that they should not count on the union of both neighboring Germanic empires for which they had hoped, to their disadvantage, for so long during the previous war” (*Evropy*, 1871, pp. T.5 Kn. 10, 876).

Thus, the magazine hailed the encounter of the three emperors in Berlin as a testament to the peaceful intentions of the three great powers. However, not finding any coinciding interests among the three empires, *Vestnik Evropy* expressed certain reservations regarding the soundness of this union if the international atmosphere were to change, bringing about changes to the goals of the union members. It remarked on Germany being the greatest beneficiary of the union and the anti-French slant Bismarck strove to add to the meeting in Berlin. On the whole, the further development of events confirmed that *Vestnik Evropy* was correct in its conclusions: the disagreements between Austria-Hungary and Russia in the Balkans proved too strong; the union was something of a formality and did not work at times when international tensions were high.

Golos, which had shown a highly negative attitude towards Germany's new, stronger role after the creation of a unified empire, gradually softened the tone of its discourses by the end of 1871. The rapprochement between Russia and Germany, brought to fruition by the meeting of the three emperors, found full support from the newspaper, which saw it as a guarantee against possible revenge attempts by France and the breach of European peace (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 90,2). The newspaper highlighted that this was not a matter of reinstating the Holy Alliance, which it saw as a deception that had brought Russia no benefit. *Golos* kept to the opinion that it was in Russia's interest to support European

peace, which would allow it, “calmly and without pause, to continue the pursuit of developing internal reforms, which had begun on the great day of the 19th of February, 1861” (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 90,2). This is why the framework offered by Bismarck did not give rise to any objections—it ensured the fulfilment of the aforementioned goal, and *Golos* hailed the Russian sovereign's participation in the meeting of the monarchs, which allowed him to dispel the rumors of a possible war between Russia and Germany over the Baltic provinces and to organize a constructive partnership with Austria on the issue of Balkan politics. The newspaper was confident in the like-minded actions of the three powers on questions of international European politics; it also believed that recent disagreements between them could be eliminated, and moreover, it especially underscored the union's lack of animosity towards anyone, its only goal being to support and solidify peace in Europe (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 118,1).

The newspaper noted that in a certain sense the union was of an informal nature, and that it lacked a defensive or offensive goal (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 3,1). The guarantee of friendly relations and lasting peace was seen first and foremost in the friendship among the emperors (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 103,1). And this guarantee seemed so substantial that Russia, in the newspaper's opinion, could “calmly behold the strengthening and development of the German Empire since this strengthening poses no threat to her interests” (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 103,1). Emperor Wilhelm's visit to Petersburg only reinforced these sentiments.

Analyzing the goals of both empires, the newspaper emphasized the necessity of having a guaranteed eastern border as one of Germany's main needs so that it could “placidly devote itself to the business of its final unification”; as for Russia, it needed to follow the path of reform and to defend its interests in the East (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 116,1). Thus, the newspaper made the inference that both empires were interested in maintaining peace in Europe since neither Russia nor Germany had any cause for confronting each other. Remarking on the history of mutual relations between the two states, the newspaper pointed out that the friendship between them “has previously brought benefits that were not insignificant, though far from equal, to both of them” (*Golos*, 1872, pp. No 116,1).

In the early '70s, M.N. Katkov spoke out as a proponent of an alliance between Russia and Germany, or, to be precise, he believed in the possibility of such a union, justifying its necessity “not only for the well-understood interests of both empires, but also for the good of Europe” (*Katkov*, 1871, p. 190). Underscoring the exceptionally peaceful nature of Russia's foreign policy, M.N. Katkov asserted that the country's presence “in any political combination at the present time can only be an element that is calming rather than rousing, neutralizing rather than activating” (*Katkov*, 1871, p. 190). Russia's international policy had “an essentially conservative character,” and its “urgent concerns” confined its activities to its own borders (*Katkov*, 1871, p. 489).

Analyzing the emerging alignment between the three northern empires, the editor especially highlighted the purely conservative, defensive nature of this union, which should have been hailed by anyone “who values conservatism in international relations” (75) since its aim was to maintain the status quo between Germany and Austria, that is, the preservation of peace in Europe.

What was the basis of the agreement between the three states, in M.N. Katkov's opinion? Could it be Bismarck's shrewd politics and pragmatic calculations—no, none of these answers satisfied M.N. Katkov: “no amount of diplomacy could have created this element” (*Katkov*, 1871, p. 220). His position clearly showed his monarchical worldview, which greatly idealized the events happening at the time. He asserted that the trust and sincerity

between the governments of Russia and Germany were “based on the personal affection and kinship of their monarchs,” (Katkov, 1871, p. 10) and the sincerity of their interrelations was the consequence “only of a personal decision” (Katkov, 1871, p. 79). Obviously, the personal relations between monarchs are a highly unstable and unreliable basis for building a strategic foreign policy course: Bismarck had already remarked on this in 1857 (Bismarck, 2002, p. 241). Through the example of M.N. Katkov, who was both a transmitter and a creator of public opinion in Russia, one can see the existence of such views, which spread into Russia’s official circles as well. The disillusionment of Russia’s social circles would be all the greater when in 1878 it would become clear that Germany easily preferred its concrete national interests over dynastic solidarity and turned out to be not such a reliable and adamant ally as it had seemed in the first half of the 1870s.

Thus, after the Franco-Prussian war, M.N. Katkov perceived the situation as follows: “complete mutual trust and agreement among the three powers,” on which “now rest the tranquility and balance of Europe” (Katkov, 1871, p. 1). M.N. Katkov was certain of the reliability of the configuration that had come about (Katkov, 1871, p. 64) and that the union served not only the profit of the participating states but also the good of all Europe, establishing peace on the continent (Katkov, 1871, p. 106).

In this way, the Union of the Three Emperors was, on the whole, favorably accepted by Russia’s public opinion since it appeared to be a solid guarantor of peace in Europe. The members of the conservative camp dedicated special attention to the union’s protective character in international relations, while those of the liberal camp hoped Russia would continue its reforms under peaceful conditions. From the very beginning, the press pointed out the potential ineffectiveness of the union in a crisis situation.

The “war alarm” situation of 1875 helps us understand the real attitudes of Russia’s public opinion towards Bismarck’s foreign policy.

As we know, in March of 1875, France’s National Assembly passed a law that envisaged an increase in the size of its army. This law, along with France’s quick economic recovery following the early payment of reparations to Germany, seriously alarmed Bismarck, who understood that France, following the war of 1871, had become a lifelong enemy of the fledgling empire and was ready to use any excuse to exact revenge for the humiliation it had suffered. The question of France’s possible plans of aggression spilled out across Germany in a sensational newspaper campaign, which began with an article in the *Post* newspaper (April 9, 1875)—“Is War to Be Expected?” Bismarck’s official statement in the newspaper *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* about the groundlessness of such rumors did not put many people at ease. Information appeared in Paris regarding unofficial talks by several leading German statesmen, von Moltke in particular, discussing the issue of a preventative war against France (Nurnberger R, 1991). The French side viewed the newspaper campaign as an informational and propagandist preparation for a German attack and tried to muster support for itself from European powers. It succeeded in enlisting the support of Russia and England. On May 10th, Alexander II and Gorchakov arrived in Berlin, and Bismarck assured them that he “would sooner go into retirement than have a hand in a war that had no other goal than to not let France catch her breath and gather her strength” (Bismarck, 2002, p. 169). In his memoirs, Bismarck assessed these events as “a theatrical staging,” a “circus show,” a joint French-Russian conspiracy directed against him personally, and he felt very hurt by Gorchakov, who out of “senile vanity” wanted to play the role of the “angel of peace” at his expense (Bismarck, 2002, p. 176).

The “war alarm” of 1875 had traditionally been considered by Russian historiography as a real attempt by Bismarck to

orchestrate a new war with France that was only nipped in the bud thanks to Russia’s decisive diplomatic intervention. German historians assert a different opinion, envisaging the situation as a French provocation intended to set Bismarck and Russia against each other, and a successful one at that.

Contemporaries were not inclined to dramatize these events. The controversy in German, French, and English newspapers did not provoke apprehensions about the fate of European peace. Publishers assessed the situation as an Anglo-French provocation directed against the allied relationship between Russia and Germany.

Vestnik Evropy highlighted the fact that the whistle-blowing article in the *Times*, which spoke about the rumors circulating in French society of Germany’s plans to attack France, appeared before Alexander II’s arrival in Berlin, and according to the reports of the Berlin correspondent, everyone in Germany supposed that the timing of its publication was calculated to create the impression that “Emperor Alexander’s visit had a pacifying effect, and that Prince Bismarck abandoned his martial plans only under the influence of Russia” (Evropy, 1875, pp. T.3 Kn.6, 867). By the end of 1875, the veil of mystery drawn over the events of that spring had not been lifted, and the newspaper drew its main conclusion by saying that “only history can elucidate whether the peace was truly in danger of being broken in March and April of the past year, or if it was only a false alarm” (Evropy, 1875, pp. T.3 Kn.6, 827). For the current study, it is only interesting to note that the magazine did not accuse Bismarck of harboring any aggressive plans regarding France and did not make any assumptions about a new war; that is, it did not abandon its prior assessment of League of Three Emperors as a union that ensured peace and stability in Europe, and moreover, provided Russia with significant foreign policy advantages (Evropy, 1875, pp. T.3 Kn.6, 389).

The “war alarm” attracted the attention of the newspaper *Golos*, which once again went further than other periodicals in its conclusions. At the same time, the transformation of the newspaper’s position is curious since this change evidently happened as new information became available. Thus, as the crisis unfolded, its meaning sometimes appeared to be an attempt by the Berlin stock market speculators to make a profit off alarmist rumors (Golos, 1875, pp. no. 97 (April 7 (19), : 1.), or at other times, the intrigues of “the opponents of a peaceful alignment between Germany and Russia” (Golos, 1875, p. no. 123 (May 5 (17): 1.), which was a reference to certain forces within England, whose aim was to point out the fragility of European peace, to insult the national pride of the German people, and to arouse in them hatred for a power “on which Germany is, supposedly, fully dependent and without whose authority she would not even dare to think about fulfilling her cherished desires” (Golos, 1875, p. no. 123 (May 5 (17): 1.). Step by step, the newspaper laid out its assessment of the League of Three Emperors as a guarantor of peace and tranquility in Europe (Golos, 1875, p. no. 109 (April 21 (May 3): 1). A war between France and Germany, according to *Golos*, was unlikely, based on the facts. On one side, France had not had time to reform its army and acquire dependable allies, without which, opposing Germany would be suicide. As for Germany’s safety, it was completely assured by the League of Three Emperors—and this is precisely why this union was more advantageous to Germany, since neither Russia nor Austria-Hungary had any obvious enemies at that moment. Recognizing the existence of militant sentiments in particular circles within Germany, the newspaper underscored their unofficial, non-dominant nature (Golos, 1875, p. no. 126 (May 8 (20): 1).

Thus, *Golos* shared the opinion of other publications, which refused to believe in the reality of Germany’s aggressive plans and

did not attach much importance to the “war alarm.” Bismarck and Germany were perhaps not entirely above suspicion, but certainly not subject to any sort of accusation.

A cardinal reconsideration of this view suddenly occurred. Although the May 12th article was filled with a sense of confidence that the League of Three Emperors had put an end to the “disturbing apprehensions” (Golos, 1875, p. no. 130 (May 12 (24): 1)(94), thus playing a conciliatory role and dispelling the alarmist clouds looming over Europe, the article published on May 29th was of a completely different nature. The possibility of a new war appeared to be completely real, especially considering the corresponding sentiments in the highest circles of Berlin society (Golos, 1875, p. no. 147 (May 29 (June 10)): 1). The newspaper raised the question of the Austro-German-Russian union’s reliability and its ability to withstand Germany’s warlike ambitions; it declared directly that it was specifically Germany that would need a war since its particular situation made it the world’s most militant empire (Golos, 1875, p. no. 147 (May 29 (June 10)): 1).

It is interesting to note the conclusion *Golos* drew from this: “a conservative frame of mind, a desire to preserve peace in Europe”—all of this dictated the necessity to negotiate on all issues and make an alliance with England. In point of fact, this was a return to the newspaper’s point of view in the first half of 1871, when Germany had been regarded as an aggressor and a potential threat to peace, the only difference being that England instead of France was now considered as a potential ally.

In its subsequent articles, the newspaper developed these ideas. If the League of Three Emperors appeared to be a reliable guarantee of peace in Europe, and thanks to it, Russia could “without restriction pursue her cause of internal transformation,” (Golos, 1875, p. no. 154 (June 5 (17)): 1.) then Germany’s preparation for war (all of the reparations paid by France were used towards armaments; moreover, new fortifications were built predominantly on Prussia’s eastern border) gave rise to bewilderment. The newspaper came to the entirely reasonable conclusion that “Germany is not too reliant on its union with Russia” (Golos, 1875, p. no. 154 (June 5 (17)): 1. It stressed the idea that Russia should not compromise its peaceful policy by taking part in a union one of whose members is observed to have “war-mongering tendencies”. The newspaper once again put forth the idea that Russia, even while being a part of the League of Three Emperors, had free rein in international relations and was perfectly capable of developing ties with England (Golos, 1875, p. no. 154 (June 5 (17)): 1.).

It appears that in this case the newspaper was being used to put pressure on Germany by pointing out the fact that the League of Three Emperors brought more benefits to Germany rather than to Russia, and that Russia had at her disposal other alternatives for developing foreign relations.

Moskovskie vedomosti clearly defined their position. Based on their analysis of French newspapers, the editors came to the conclusion that fears of a new invasion by Germany were not widespread in France to the same degree as the *Times* made it appear (Katkov M. N., 1875, pp. g., no. 109 (May 1)). The reason for this agitation, in M.N. Katkov’s opinion, was that “in England, they generally have a very unfriendly view of the peaceful league of the three northern empires. He stressed that such rumors regularly appeared on the pages of British newspapers on the occasion of any new meetings between sovereigns, and their goal was to “shake people’s belief in the strength of this union” and to revive “doubts in the reliability of the league of the three empires when it came to providing general peace” (Katkov M. N., 1875, pp. g., no. 135, May 29). This goal, in the newspaper’s opinion, had not been achieved (Katkov M. N., 1875, pp. g., no. 119, May 12).

Thus, M.N. Katkov likewise did not believe in Bismarck’s aggressive plans; he saw the whole situation as an English subterfuge that aimed to disrupt the friendship between the two countries. It is necessary to note that over time M.N. Katkov adjusted his assessment: for example, in an overview of the international situation for 1875 he pointed out that “the alarm was quite a serious one, and such misunderstandings are always dangerous”. However, while recognizing this danger, he did not accuse Bismarck of intending to start a war and highlighted that the union of the northern empires did not fall apart, but rather “found in itself a new affirmation due to recent events” (Katkov M. N., 1875, pp. g., no. 1 (December 31, 1876).

The “war alarm” of 1875 had become an occasion for the representatives of Russia’s public opinion to voice their assessment of Bismarck’s foreign policy. A prevailing theme in the Russian periodical press was a feeling of trust towards Germany. However, accusations of aggressive intentions towards France were also expressed, and appeals were made to consider the possibility of forging an alliance with England. Notably, this opinion was expressed by a newspaper that was close to the ministry of international affairs.

1.2 Germany’s policy during the Balkan events of 1875-1876 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 in the commentary of Russia’s public opinion

The incipient Herzegovinian crisis once again raised the profile of the League of Three Emperors, which, according to *Golos*, played a positive role in the diffusion of hostilities thanks to the joint action of the three great powers (Golos, 1875, p. no. 250 (September 10 (22))). But it was these same difficulties in the Balkans that revealed significant contradictions in the allies’ positions, which later led to an increase in tensions between them.

In the beginning of July 1875, a rebellion arose in two Turkish provinces that bordered on Austria-Hungary—in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the military support of Serbia and Montenegro. It is necessary to note that this rebellion played into the hands of the German chancellor. As Bismarck himself stated, following the Franco-Prussian War, “Elsass-Lothringen and the Balkans are two focal points of any conceivable European conflicts” (Skazkin, 1974). Accordingly, the Eastern Crisis distracted the great powers from the situation in central Europe that was connected with the aftermath of the Unification of Germany wars. Moreover, Germany itself had no interest in the eastern question at that time; as Bismarck himself put it so graphically, the issue was not worth “the healthy bones of even one Pomeranian musketeer”. Germany could remain above the skirmishes, playing the role of arbiter, while realizing its main foreign policy goal—preventing the creation of any anti-German coalition. The interests of both of Germany’s allies—Austria-Hungary and Russia—collided in the Balkans. Bismarck was interested in maintaining a constant rivalry between them in this region, whereby both of them would strive to draw Germany to their side, but at the same time, he feared escalation into armed conflict, in which case he would not be able to remain neutral. Making a choice in favor of one of his allies would mean the other would move towards a union with revenge-minded France. The tsar’s question about whether Germany would act towards Russia the same way that Russia had acted during the Franco-Prussian War, i.e. “would we remain neutral if Russia declares war on Austria” (Bismarck, 2002, p. 219) gave Bismarck serious cause for concern. Following the victory of the Turkish forces over Serbia, the situation in the Balkans deteriorated to such an extent that Russia began to prepare for military intervention. In this respect, it foresaw strong opposition from Austria-Hungary, and Petersburg confronted Berlin with the necessity to choose: which of its allies’ interests

would it support. This critical situation was extremely revealing of the way Bismarck wanted to maintain equilibrium between the three empires. Bismarck's general analysis of the situation was written down by Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst. Bismarck believed that a conflict between them would be highly disadvantageous for Germany; after all, if Germany remained neutral, the defeated country would never forgive it. If Austria were destroyed, this would not be profitable to Germany; although it could annex the Germans, it would be unclear what to do with the Slavs and Hungarians. To wage a war against Austria in concert with Russia would not have been permitted by German public opinion. Russia would become dangerous for Germany if Austria were annihilated. Only together with Austria could Germany keep Russia in check (Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, 1907, p. 212).

Bismarck advanced this same idea in his instructions to his ambassador to Russia, von Schweinitz. These instructions defined Germany's position in the following way: "our foremost requirement is the preservation of friendship between the great monarchies that would lose more as a result of revolution than they would win from war among themselves." He especially highlighted the fact that Germany could not allow one of the allies to sustain "such heavy damages and losses that its position as an independent and great power with significance in Europe would be threatened," (Bismarck, 2002, p. 222) i.e. Bismarck, in effect, refused to guarantee Germany's neutrality in case of war between Russia and Austria-Hungary. To a large extent, it was precisely this position taken by Germany, as well as the fear of ending up in a situation of diplomatic isolation before the united front of the "Crimean coalition," that forced Russia to begin talks with Austria-Hungary about outcomes of a possible Russo-Turkish war that would be acceptable to both sides. The two sides came to an agreement during a meeting between Alexander II and Franz Joseph on July 8, 1876 at the Reichstadt. If Turkey was to prevail over the rebelling population of the Balkan part of the Turkish Empire, both powers agreed to oppose Turkey; if the Turkish Empire disintegrated, Austria would get part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Russia would reclaim the part of Bessarabia it had lost in 1856, and Bulgaria and Rumelia would become autonomous. The possibility of creating a large Slavic state in the Balkans was excluded; Constantinople was supposed to become a free city (Russko-germanskie, 1922, pp. 37-39). These agreements were formalized in a secret convention conducted by Russia and Austria in Budapest on January 15, 1877. According to Article 2 of the Budapest Convention, Austria was obligated to remain benevolently neutral towards Russia if the latter was to go to war against Turkey (Russko-germanskie, 1922, pp. 51-57).

Russia undertook two attempts to solve the problems in the Balkans in a peaceful way. In December of 1876, the countries that had signed the Treaty of Paris gathered for a conference in Constantinople and developed a program of reforms for Turkey, which comprised, among other things, a demand to make Bosnia autonomous. The sultan, being under the influence of English diplomacy, refused to implement this program. He likewise rejected the so-called London Protocol, a program of reforms developed in February 1877 and signed by the representatives of the six great powers. On April 24, 1877, Russia declared war on Turkey.

Bismarck outlined his own assessment of the international situation and his vision of an outcome to the Eastern Crisis that would be advantageous to Germany in a memorandum that he dictated during his stay at the Kissingen resort (Kissinger Diktat) on June 15, 1877.

Bismarck did not hope for "any sort of territorial acquisitions" for Germany, but rather for the formation of "a general political

situation in which all the powers except France would have need of us, and if possible, are restrained from forming a coalition against us by their relationships among themselves." "Coalitions against us could form on the basis of the participation of one of the Western European powers joined by Austria," but even more dangerous, in Bismarck's estimation, would be an Austro-Russian-French coalition; "with significant rapprochement between two of the aforementioned powers, the third would thus receive the means to exert very strong pressure on us." Considering these circumstances, Bismarck hoped that over the course of the Eastern Crisis the focus of "Russian and Austrian interests and their rivalry" would shift to the East. Russia would have to gain "a strong defensive position in the East and on its shoreline" and thus have continued need of a union with Germany. Relations between Germany's allies would have to develop in such a way as to make it difficult for them "to jointly draw up an anti-Germany conspiracy," i.e. they should come to an agreement on certain issues regarding the situation in the Balkans, but tensions between them should persist. It would be in Germany's best interest, in Bismarck's opinion, if "a compromise was reached between England and Russia" regarding the conditions of acquiring "Egypt by the former and the Black Sea by the latter" with the expectation of both of these countries having friendly interactions with Germany. If both powers were to reach an agreement on the basis of a satisfactory status quo in the Near East, their "interest in maintaining the existing conditions would be equal to ours." Despite partial mutual concessions, according to Bismarck, new conflicts should arise in the East over the course of the Russo-Turkish War so that none of the three powers could make an alliance with France against Germany.

This document allows us to draw the following conclusion: Bismarck did not wish for the Eastern Crisis to escalate into a European war into which all the powers would be drawn, and which would threaten the very existence of the German Empire. He tried to prevent this by calling on the interested parties to conduct talks and make mutual concessions. At the same time, he strove to maintain the sort of relations between the leading European powers that would exclude the possibility of their joint opposition to Germany, make them interested in the existence of a strong empire, and force them to seek a union with it. One could draw the conclusion that his foreign policy actions in this period were aimed at stabilizing Germany's position in the system of international relations and ensuring its security. Here, it would be impossible to omit the words of Bismarck himself, who wrote in his memoirs: "In the European card game, we must reserve the last move for ourselves, and we should not allow any impatience, any complaisance at the expense of our country, any vanity or friendly provocations to force us prematurely to move from the waiting stage to the stage of action." The goal of this policy was "to ease the discontent caused by our transformation into a great power" (Bismarck, 2002, pp. 294-95).

The incipient Herzegovinian uprising activated the discussion of the international situation on the pages of Russian periodicals. For instance, *Vestnik Evropy* magazine pointed out the new circumstances of the Eastern Crisis in its analysis: the weakening of the Porte's traditional allies—England, France, and Austria—and the growth in significance of Germany and Russia. The magazine highlighted that Germany, out of fear of losing Russia's friendship, possibly "might agree to make all sorts of concessions in the Eastern Question." It did not exclude the possibility that France, wishing to attract Russia to its side, would make similar concessions to it. In this case, according to the magazine, it would be more advantageous for Russia to work in concert with Germany because then Austria too would follow the course of their policies. Overall, it concluded that an opportune moment had come in terms of solving the Eastern Question, and that

Russia had to play a significant part in this (Evropy, 1875, pp. T.5 Kn. 9 :398-400). Moreover, the magazine saw the joint action of the three eastern powers as the key to success since they could “break down this status quo as soon as they wish” (Evropy, 1875, p. T.6 Kn.12).

The continued course of events made some adjustments to the magazine's position. In particular, the magazine pointed out that the League of Three Emperors limited itself only to neutralizing the militant actions of its member states; in this sense, it served as a guarantee of peace but hampered Russia's actions.

In the opinion of *Vestnik Evropy*, Germany was ready to make concessions in the Eastern Question only in response to Russia's agreement to the fragmentation of France, something to which Russia would never agree. However, if a situation arose where “the Eastern Question cannot serve Germany policy as a means of achieving its goals in the West,” Bismarck was more inclined to support the interests of Austria—the representative of Germanism in southeastern Europe and the vehicle of German colonization and trade. Seeing no way to obtain significant concessions from Russia, he “prefers to act in concert with Austria on various types of secondary and distant interests, rather than help Russia for nothing, with the sole prospect of strengthening the influence of this already powerful ally of Germany”. Thus, the magazine came to the general and inauspicious conclusion that “the union of the three empires does not produce anything” (Evropy, 1875, p. T.1 Kn.2 (1876)).

Vestnik Evropy expressed its opinion on this subject quite clearly: once again pointing out that “Germany does not wish for the status quo in the East to change substantially in favor of Russia without the status quo in the West changing in favor of Germany,” (Evropy, 1876, p. T.3 Kn.6) the magazine expressed the hope that such promises and concessions would never be given to Germany. The same thought is repeated in the next book: “Germany does not promise us her agreement for nothing, but the price she might ask for it is something we cannot pay” (Evropy, 1876, p. T.4 Kn.7: 381).

The level of tension felt at the time is illustrated by the magazine's discussion of the possibility of war between Germany and Russia over the Herzegovinian question, that is, if Russia were to try solving the Eastern Question single-handedly. *Vestnik Evropy* did not believe in the possibility of such a war, considering that Germany's potential losses would be far more significant than those of Russia, and that Russia had more freedom in its choice of allies (Evropy, 1876, pp. T.3 Kn.5 : 418-419).

The writers again raised the question of whether an alliance with Prussia-Germany was advisable. A reference to recent history made it possible to clearly demonstrate the benefits received by Germany: Russia's support in the years 1864, 1866, and 1870 facilitated the creation of the German Empire; while Russia, in exchange, received “two dispatches, two papers—no more,” (support in 1863 and the repudiation of the well-known articles of the Paris Treaty of 1856) which the country could not have done without. The magazine formulated the expectations it had of the alliance with Germany: “justice would demand that this alliance should now also ensure our safety from the possibility an anti-Russian coalition” (Evropy, 1876, p. T.5 Kn.9).

The editorial position was fortified by L.A. Polonsky's article (Polonsky, 1876). The author pointed out that conquests in European Turkey were impossible for Russia while being in an alliance with Germany and Austria since to give Germany “our consent to the fragmentation of France in order for Germany to go to war with us against the European coalition would mean that in case of success after the great war, we would be putting ourselves into the hands of Germany”. Domestic conditions, such as “the state of the mass of our people, our finances, our trade, our

domestic development, our reforms” (Polonsky, 1876, pp. 408-09) likewise dictated that Russia should pursue a restrained foreign policy.

Considering the aforementioned circumstances, as well as the fact that “the inadequacy of the economic situation and the recent elections to the Reichstag, which challenged the government's majority and tripled the number of socialist sympathizers in this Sejm” were developments in view of which a war with France could seem to Germany's ruling circles “even more desirable than it had been two years ago in order to create a distraction from domestic affairs and a new ‘rallying’ of German unity,” the magazine highlighted that Russia should be “free in this case to utter a weighty word” . It is precisely in this sense that *Vestnik Evropy* pointed out the positive significance of the League of Three Emperors, which, while it constrained Russia in the Eastern Question, also constrained Germany “in relation to the western ‘question,’ which she continues to keep open for discussion” (Evropy, 1877, p. T.1 Kn.2 :838)since it is this very union that determined the war's localization (139) and Germany's non-alignment with Russia's adversaries (Evropy, 1877, pp. T.3 Kn.6 :829-31).

Thus, the magazine advocated extreme restraint and discretion in Russia's answer to the Eastern Question, and the impermissibility of one-sided militant actions outside of the accords framed by the League of Three Emperors, actions that could provoke Germany to take military action against France.

Golos, remarking on the positive role the League of Three Emperors played in resolving the Herzegovinian crisis, highlighted two problems that were becoming increasingly pressing: first, the belief that had become widespread among the Germans that German culture should inevitably penetrate into the East and reign there; second, the existence of friendly relations between the three empires only “on the condition of evading any practical resolution of the question and maintaining the current status quo” (*Golos*, 1875, p. no. 250 (September 10 (22))). Nevertheless, the newspaper did not draw much attention to these issues.

It pointed out that Germany could not take precedence in resolving the conflict since the uprising did not directly affect its interests; it was Russia who could rightfully take the initiative on this issue, naturally, with the aid of its allies (*Golos*, *Golos*, 1875, p. no. 260 (September 20 (November 2))).

The League of Three Emperors, in the newspaper's opinion, completely suited Russia's interests; after all, as soon as Europe could see that Germany and Italy were on Russia's side, the other powers hurriedly abandoned all attempts to hinder the intentions of the Russian government (*Golos*, 1876, p. no. 287 (October 17 (29))). This was due to the fact that Germany, “having no direct interest whatsoever in this bloodbath, by her own repeated declaration,” was ready to join Russia in counteracting Muslim fanaticism (*Golos*, 1876, p. no. 223 (August 14 (26))).

Germany, proclaiming itself to be disinterested in the Eastern Question, remained neutral, and by virtue of this neutrality, acquired the decisive authority of an intermediary (*Golos*, 1876, p. no. 4 (January 4 (16))). However, the move from a neutrality that was favorable to Russia towards an absolute one provoked *Golos's* criticism. Thus, Germany's position at the Constantinople Conference, when it was ready to join any majority of the powers' representatives, even if it was to the detriment of its historical ally, Russia, provoked harsh reprimands from the newspaper, even to the point of accusing Germany of betrayal (*Golos*, 1876, p. no. 13 (January 13 (25))).

Germany's lack of interest in a peaceful solution to the question by means of putting joint pressure on Turkey was based

on Germany's intention to incite a war between Russia and Turkey. An eastern war was necessary for Germany's plans to distract and weaken its loyal ally, Russia, which could turn into an enemy in case of war in Western Europe (Golos, 1876, p. no. 19 (January 19 (31))).

According to *Golos*, in a situation where the League of Three Emperors was not an effective mechanism for the realization of Russia's interests (considering Germany's virtual indifference to the Eastern Question), Russia needed to advance its search for alternate allies since a traditional friendship "does not hinder that independence and that freedom of international actions that Germany stipulates for herself and that we desire on a par with her for our fatherland" (Golos, 1876, p. no. 30 (January 30 (February 11))).

Despite the aforementioned negative instances of assessing Germany's foreign policy, at the onset of the action phase—just before the start of the Russo-Turkish War—it once again turned into a reliable ally in the eyes of the newspapers. This was, first of all, due to the fact that no other great power was ready to support Russia's actions against Turkey (even in the form of a benevolent neutrality). Germany, however, "imbued with a feeling of gratitude for the friendly services Russia rendered to her in 1870, will not fail, if the need arises, to take measures that would be even more apt to convince Austria-Hungary of the advantages of a union with Russia (Golos, 1876, p. no. 87 (March 30 (April 11))). Thus, a union with Germany guaranteed that Russia would not face the same situation as that of the Crimean War of 1853-1856, when it had to oppose a coalition of European powers.

Golos also stated that despite all the rumors, in Bismarck's foreign policy "we see before us only incontrovertible and sincere evidence of his affection for our fatherland" (Golos, 1876, p. no. 88 (March 31 (April 12))) and that he could not in any way be faulted for taking care of Germany's interests first in his relations with other states.

At the start of the Herzegovinian uprising, M.N. Katkov had no doubts about the reliability and effectiveness of the League of Three Emperors as a guarantee of maintaining European peace (Katkov M. N., 1875, pp. g., no. 305 (November 29)) and highlighted the solidarity of Russia's and Austria's diplomatic actions in their attempts to resolve the conflicts between the insurgents and the Turkish authorities (Katkov M. N., 1875, pp. g., no. 244 (September 24)). He stressed the absence of any sort of antagonism between Russia and Germany, and the fact that the interests of both powers were basically reconcilable (Katkov M. N., 1876, pp. g., no. 56).

However, as of the spring of 1876, the newspaper began to identify a factor that hindered joint operations in the framework of the League of Three Emperors; it turned out that Austria was this limiting factor, while Germany, "not directly interested in one solution or another to this issue," was ready to follow Russia's lead (Katkov M. N., 1876, pp. g., no. 85). M.N. Katkov called upon Russia to show initiative to improve conditions for Turkish Christians, asserting that Germany "does not have any interests that could place it in direct conflict with Russia (Katkov M. N., 1876, pp. g., no. 230)," (155) and therefore, Russia could count on its support.

The interim assessment of the League of Three Emperors, thus, did not inspire optimism. According to the newspaper, all efforts stemming from the League turned out to be fruitless and led to nothing. The union "did not evince any creative power and did not yield any helpful results, but positively paralyzed Russia on everything that constitutes her historical vocation, and bound her hand and foot at a time when the incredible suffering of her tribal kinsmen on the Balkan Peninsula called upon her to fulfill an obligation that Russia cannot renounce without at the same

time renouncing herself" (Katkov M. N., 1876, pp. g., no. 258). It is noteworthy that M.N. Katkov did not blame Bismarck or Germany's foreign policy for this: he did not have the slightest doubt that "Count Andrassy was the main paralyzing force here" (Katkov M. N., 1876, pp. g., no. 260). The newspaper assessed Germany's position as one worthy of the title of an ally of Russia, especially considering the information the newspaper had received about how Germany, in the course of secret talks with England, refused to support the English position and expressed its intention to abide by its neutrality in case of war. An analysis of Bismarck's speech in the Reichstag and his utterances at the chancellor's parliamentary dinner allowed the editor to come to the conclusion that Germany truly intended to keep its neutrality in case of war between Russia and Turkey, and that the League of Three Emperors had not lost its meaning. Without expressing doubt in the reliability of the friendship between Germany and Russia, M.N. Katkov reacted critically to Germany's extremely reserved position on the Eastern Question, a position that adhered to neutrality "between its own policy and the foreign one opposing it," that is, between the policy of Russia, which was considered one of Germany's allies and had the support of its emperor and chancellor, and a hostile one, opposing it. According to the editor, the reason for Germany's weak participation in the common cause was that the country saw nothing of interest to itself there, and he made the point that both powers' interests should be considered in advance (Katkov M. N., 1876, pp. 309,316). Thus, noting the extreme "'realism' of German policy, which does not undertake anything without the prospect of tangible benefits," and pointing out its negative consequences, M.N. Katkov treated it as one of the factors that had to be taken into account when building a relationship with Germany.

Moskovskie vedomosti highlighted the main danger of the war in the East in the same key as *Vestnik Evropy*: Germany, giving Russia the opportunity to operate in the East in alliance with Austria, would have complete freedom of action in the West. Meanwhile, Russia, tied up with Austria, would not make great progress in the East and could not become a hindrance to Germany's actions in the West (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 29).

Nevertheless, an analysis of the international situation showed that an agreement with Germany was the most natural configuration, and the only option for Russia's foreign policy. *Moskovskie vedomosti* underscored the necessity to strengthen the alliance with Germany and to seek elements of fruitful cooperation precisely in this alliance since this power "itself has important reasons to maintain its friendship with us". Out of all the great European powers, in M.N. Katkov's estimation, it was only with Germany that Russia's interests did not clash significantly and could be "accorded to the point of solidarity" (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 89).

One could imagine that this sort of position was due to the incipient Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, in the course of which, the great powers took on a highly hostile position in relation to Russia. In that situation, a union with Germany, which provided the neutrality of Austria-Hungary and the security of Russia's western border, was necessary.

In the course of the Russo-Turkish War (declared by Russia on April 24, 1877), Russian society was pervaded with the notion that Germany played quite an important role in the unfolding events. *Vestnik Evropy* recognized that the other European powers did not come to Turkey's defense "only owing to the personal friendship that binds the venerable German monarch with our sovereign" (Evropy, 1877, p. T.5 Kn.10). The magazine associated the prejudice against Russia, which was widespread in the European kingdoms, first and foremost with the lack of understanding and the disbelief that Russia did not strive for

conquests in the Balkans; according to the magazine, this problem could be solved by continuing to follow the path of reform, which should have led to “the cancellation of that heavy moral coalition of all Europe against us, which has manifested itself hitherto and which is also reflected in the current unanimous hostility of the Western European press towards us”.

The magazine’s Berlin correspondent reported that Bismarck made a statement guaranteeing the neutrality of Germany and Austria under the conditions of war. Here we must underscore that none of the Russian publications ever demanded anything more from Germany. Russia was interested in the containment of the war with Turkey to prevent a situation similar to the Crimean War from recurring. Germany’s professed position completely corresponded to the interests of Russia as it entered the war.

The exceptionally peaceful policy that Bismarck pursued starting in 1871, in the magazine’s opinion, aimed at strengthening the new state structure and eliminating economic difficulties; this policy was seen by the magazine as praiseworthy (Evropy, 1878, p. T.1 Kn.2).

Thus, the magazine drew the conclusion that Germany was going to continue to adhere to strict neutrality and that Bismarck envisaged the possibility of taking part in a war only in an extreme scenario (protection of the independence and unity of the state). Let us stress that in March of 1878, this position did not provoke harsh criticism from *Vestnik Evropy*; it recognized Bismarck’s right to act in the interests of Germany. It placed the responsibility of pursuing a policy that was in Russia’s interest on Russian diplomacy, which, in the magazine’s opinion, had not yet achieved “brilliant results the likes of which our generals have achieved” (Evropy, 1878, p. T.3 Kn.5).

Golos’s assessments primarily did not diverge from the opinions of other publications: considering the newly begun war, it was precisely the friendly neutrality of Germany that the newspaper regarded as “the best guarantee of the impossibility of an Anglo-Austrian union” (Golos, 1877, pp. no. 152 (July 13 (25),). *Golos* highlighted the growth of Germany’s important international status; the country could contain the war or turn it into a pan-European one; however, Germany itself, in light of its political and commercial interests, was motivated to bring the quickest possible end to the war, to stop it from escalating, and to prevent Austria-Hungary from supporting England. The newspaper pointed out that Germany’s attitude towards Russia was a friendly one, occasioned by moral impulses, and did not limit itself to simple neutrality. *Golos* insisted on the real existence and functioning of the League of Three Emperors, which, under the current circumstances, was undoubtedly beneficial to Russia by keeping England isolated in its attempt to organize collective pressure by the European powers on Russia (Golos, 1878, pp. no. 4 (January 4 (16),).

Bismarck’s declaration in parliament regarding Germany’s intention to keep a strict state of neutrality and its readiness to serve as an intermediary between Russia and England with the goal of peacefully resolving the conflict was met with approval by the newspaper. The absence of any objections on the part of Germany to the peace terms offered by Russia and the non-admittance of western powers’ interference in eastern matters—Russia could demand nothing more of Germany, in the newspaper’s opinion, since the aforementioned actions would provide an effective solution to their political difficulties (Golos, 1878, pp. no. 41 (February 10 (22),). Moreover, if Germany had gone further, if its position held the slightest hint of patronizing Russian interests, then this would have been considered an affront to the powerful country, which was capable of defending its own interests (Golos, 1878, pp. no. 42 (February 11 (23),).

Bismarck’s position in the time of the Russo-Turkish War received positive comments, on the whole, from *Moskovskie vedomosti*. It was the distinct diplomatic pressure Germany exerted on Austria-Hungary that forced this power, in the newspaper’s opinion, to maintain “genuine neutrality with respect to Russia” (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 186 (July 25,).

In this course of action, M.N. Katkov saw Germany’s return of the service rendered to it by Russia in 1870. Germany also rejected England’s offer of the great powers’ intervention in the Russo-Turkish war and called for direct negotiations between the warring parties; the newspaper saw in this the recognition by Germany of Russia as the sole judge in the event of war or peace and “the best sign of the sincerity and the strength of friendly relations that bind us with our neighboring power” (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 274 (November 4),).

Germany’s support, which protected Russia from a hostile coalition, was important in the current situation and provided a clear indication that Germany “stands firmly on our side in its sympathies and its policies” (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 279 (November 9,). Let us remark the following: *Moskovskie vedomosti* also asserted that Russia did not wish for any greater favors from Germany (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 279 (November 9,). Again, the nature of the union between Germany and Russia was confirmed: “close political unity, held together not only by the absence of any reason for rivalry and discord,” but also “by powerful interests in regard to which both countries can and must walk hand in hand” (Katkov M. N., 1877, pp. g., no. 285 (November 16,).

Conclusion

Germany was considered by Russian public opinion to be a dependable ally despite the fact that its victory over France gave rise to certain apprehensions: several publications underscored the destabilizing influence of Prussia’s victory over France on Europe’s international situation and expressed their doubts about peace being preserved in the future. They perceived mighty Prussia as a new center of power, a new hegemon of continental Europe, and a potential participant in future military conflicts. This was notwithstanding its suspicious alignment with Austria-Hungary, which, according to Bismarck’s plans, was meant to become his reliable ally for many more years and to follow the foreign policy path dictated to it from Berlin. At the same time, as early as 1871, they pointed out the possibility of future conflicts of interest between Austria-Hungary and Russia in the Balkans.

Russia worked to maintain its alignment with Germany and joined the League of Three Emperors; this action was favorably received by Russian public opinion, which saw the alliance as a dependable guarantee of peace in Europe. At the same time, the representatives of the conservative camp devoted special attention to the defensive nature of the union in international relations, while those on the liberal side hoped for the continuation of domestic reforms in Russia under peaceful conditions. Let us remark that from the moment the League was created, journalists pointed out its potential ineffectiveness in case of a crisis, which was fully confirmed in the course of events in the Balkans in 1875-1878. Nevertheless, the prevailing sentiment in the responses from the Russian press was that of trust in relation to Germany’s policy, a feeling that was confirmed by the assessments of the “war alarm” of 1875. Obviously, at the moment of crisis in the Balkans, the League of Three Emperors played quite an important role in the eyes of the representatives of Russian public opinion. However, Russia did not receive any significant support from its allies: the league did not act in Russia’s favor; moreover, it hindered the implementation of Russia’s policies. *Vestnik Evropy*, *Golos*, and *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, that is, the representatives of all the ideological currents of Russia’s public opinion perceived that

the reason for this state of affairs could be that Germany was not properly motivated to provide effective assistance to Russia. However, all the aforementioned publications categorically spoke out against offering this sort of motivation by providing Bismarck freedom of action against France. Thus, the League tied not only Russia's hands, but also Germany's. Aside from this, the press remarked that there simply did not exist any other possible international configurations for Russia at that moment. With the beginning of the Russo-Turkish War, when Russia was once again threatened by diplomatic isolation and the possibility of a hostile coalition of European powers, all that could be expected of Germany was that it would provide the neutrality of its allies. The League of Three Emperors fulfilled this task, and had thus played a positive role in the eyes of Russian society.

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