



Research Article

The “Iron Chancellor” as Perceived by Russian Scholars: The Image of Bismarck in the Works of Russian Historians of the Late 19th–Early 20th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

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This article looks at how Russian historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw Otto von Bismarck. It draws on the works of scholars such as Dzhivelegov, Kareev, Pertsev, Trachevsky, Tarle, Tatishchev and Vinogradov, as well as on memoirs and lectures of the period. The discussion begins with their portraits of his character, in which strength of will, diplomatic skill and a readiness to use any means appear side by side. It then turns to his domestic policy, including the struggle with the Catholic Church, the response to the socialists and the introduction of social legislation. The largest part of the article follows his dealings with Russia, from his years as envoy in St Petersburg and Russian neutrality during the wars of unification to the war scare of 1875, the Congress of Berlin, the secret agreement with Russia and the Bulgarian crisis. Colonial policy is also covered briefly. The historians disagreed about his motives and about how far his friendship with Russia was sincere, yet they agreed that he was one of the most important figures of his age. The article shows that the “Iron Chancellor” held a lasting place in Russian historical thought.

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In the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Russian Empire had a plethora of outstanding historians whose academic legacy has not yet been studied in detail. For us, it is not only their scholarly works that are important, but also their diaries, memoirs, and letters, which allow us to study the scholars’ opinions of the “Iron Chancellor” in more detail. Of particular interest is the research of scholars who continued their work even after 1917.

Rostov-on-Don native Alexei Karpovich Dzhivelegov (1875–1952) provided a characterization of Bismarck in several of his works. In his opinion, the German Chancellor was a decisive man, a “knight without prejudice”, who was excellent at managing the tasks at hand. Noting the Junker origins of the unifier of Germany, Dzhivelegov writes: “Possessing a great mind, an extraordinary literary talent, for which he was so valued by the *Kreuzzeitung*, a unique eloquence, where strength and accuracy replaced ornamentation and made one forget about his unpleasant, snippy manner, Bismarck was many heads above not only such amateur politicians as Brandenburg and Manteuffel, but also far surpassed the brilliant Radowitz and the indecisive Schwerin” (Dzhivelegov, 1908a, p. 241). The scholar was amazed at the “Iron Chancellor’s” ability to feel equally confident at meetings of government bodies, in his position as Prussian representative in foreign countries during his diplomatic service, and at various congresses, where he had to test his strength against the best political orators of Europe. In the historian’s point of view, Bismarck had a significant flaw, which was that he never pondered the choice of means to achieve

his goals, so he often had to deceive his interlocutors and threaten the opposition with reprisals. Moreover, he was not known for being particularly humane in wartime, which was confirmed during the siege of Paris. A.K. Dzhivelegov wrote: “He did not spare his enemies, and always sought to exploit friends in the name of whatever goal occupied his mind at any given moment. The only justification for this was that Bismarck could always forget his own interests and prejudices when it came to the interests of the state” (Dzhivelegov, 1908a, p. 242).

Reflecting on the famous politician’s unscrupulousness in choosing the means to achieve his goals, the historian was quick to point out that the “Iron Chancellor” distinguished himself with his restraint, resourcefulness, ability to maneuver, and great political talent, which significantly facilitated the resolution of contentious situations. Bismarck’s strength lay in his practical outlook and his ability to strategically seize opportunities.

Assessing the famous German politician’s professional abilities, Dzhivelegov stated: “Bismarck was an excellent diplomat, unrivaled among the fops of Austria, Russia, and France, whom he played like puppets. High politics was his favorite sphere, and in this area he had truly accomplished much” (Dzhivelegov, 1908b, p. 95).

The authors of *Essays on The Latest History (1815–1883)* gave the following assessment of the German Chancellor: “He was a man who was still little known to the public, but who had already managed to establish himself as a courageous political figure, with

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an unyielding will and a forthright, open character, devoted entirely to the cult of the external greatness and power of Prussia" (Grigorovich, 1883, p. 245). According to the authors of the *Essays*, Bismarck possessed courage and strongly pronounced conservative views.

Moscow University graduate Alexander Semenov Trachevsky (1838-1906) in his work *Germany on the Eve of the Revolution and Its Unification* expressed the original idea that all historians should be grateful to Bismarck for his distinctive personality, through which politics must be studied: The "Iron Chancellor" belonged to the category of destructive forces "who mercilessly wield the dominant, and indeed the most effective power—external force" (Trachevsky, 1898, p. 210). Their distinguishing features were as follows: the inability to notice anything other than force, indiscriminateness in choosing the means of victory, and also the cognizance of themselves as instruments of Providence, which, however, was their weakness. These "iron-willed" individuals, being practical politicians, ultimately do not earn the gratitude of the people and suffer the crushing failure of their projects. It seems that this statement is not valid in relation to Bismarck, as evidenced by his enormous popularity over more than a century. Noting the influence of his environment on the development of the "Iron Chancellor's" personal quality, A. S. Trachevsky wrote: "The Sobakeviches of history were naturally eliminated by the environment of the Brandenburg Junkers with its centaurish whims. In his youth, Bismarck was an old man, an inveterate retrograde" (Trachevsky, 1898, p. 214).

Over a long period of time, his character did not change—he continued to consider himself a "superman", despite his numerous shortcomings. According to the historian, this stemmed from Bismarck's vicious nature since the famous politician preferred the "iron and blood" tactic to all other diplomatic means. Trachevsky, while acknowledging Bismarck's formidable intellect, unbending will, and remarkable diplomatic talent, nevertheless placed greater emphasis on the "Iron Chancellor's" negative personal qualities.

A similar point of view can be found in the pages of a pre-revolutionary university textbook on the history of the modern era, republished in 1995. The authors included A.S. Trachevsky, Moscow University graduate Robert Yuryevich Vipper (1859-1954), and the prominent champion of university education, Ivan Petrovich Reversov. They accused the "Iron Chancellor" of duplicity, of trying to keep the world in a state of alarm, and also criticized the established system of "armed peace," which by no means brought peace to Europe, but, on the contrary, provoked the development of conflicts. According to the authors of the textbook, "Bismarck, a man of iron will and outstanding abilities, but at the same time a heartless admirer of extreme militarism, was not shy about the means he used to achieve his goals" (Vipper et al., 1995, p. 363).

Academician Yevgeny Viktorovich Tarle (1875-1955), comparing the success of Metternich's policies with the activities of his younger colleagues Gorchakov, Cavour, and Bismarck in his article "The English Anniversary 1827-1902 (On the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of George Canning's Death)," favored the latter because they "knew how to control themselves, take their time, and appear careless and disinterested in the eyes of the diplomatic world, even when their most ambitious undertakings hung by a thread, and when, of course, they opened every telegram with a pounding heart" (Tarle, 1957, p. 292). It should be noted that in

his works of the Soviet period, largely to accommodate Marxist ideology, Y.V. Tarle revised his views on the personal qualities of the "Iron Chancellor," demonstrating the reactionary nature of his views and his inability to understand the progressive ideas of his time.

A native of Kursk, Vladimir Nikolaevich Pertsev (1877-1960) published 20 scholarly works before 1917; we are interested in two of these: *The Hohenzollerns: Personal Characteristics and Overview of Political Activities*, as well as a small brochure, *Germany and Austria in the 19th Century*.

V.N. Pertsev considered the "Iron Chancellor" to be a person of strong, stable character, "an unusually powerful man, but at the same time an excellent diplomat, able to conceal a subtly conceived intrigue behind an outward roughness. However, Bismarck was guided in his actions by the principle that might prevails over right. Largely as a result of this, the German chancellor tolerated no opposition, guided solely by the practical significance of his actions" (Pertsev, 1917, p. 47). By calling the famous politician a supporter of ultra-conservatism and absolutism in his work *Germany and Austria in the 19th Century*, Pertsev contradicts his own conclusion in the book *The Hohenzollerns*, where he states that in Bismarck's character "there was no respect for old traditions, and he was ready to turn everything upside down when hoping for quick and decisive success" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 116). The author, apparently, had not yet decided on the answer to the question of what ideology the outstanding German statesman professed.

V.N. Pertsev emphasized that the "feudal convictions" acquired in early childhood did not prevent Bismarck from casting aside all prejudices and entering into alliances with a wide variety of social forces, provided they could bring real benefits. In this regard, V.N. Pertsev's opinion fully coincided with A.K. Dzhivelegov's assessment.

The author of the book *The Hohenzollerns* drew attention to the fact that the "Iron Chancellor" despised the German intelligentsia for its detachment from the needs and requirements of the people; he likewise despised the bureaucracy, seeing in it only an expression of "the spirit of meticulousness, accuracy and respect for rank, combined with complete ignorance of life" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 117). V.N. Pertsev raised doubts about Bismarck's unequivocal admiration for the "iron and blood" policy, arguing that such a sensible politician could not help but understand the danger of unilateral rule, contrary to constitutional norms,¹ and was sometimes the first to compromise, seeking to resolve an acute conflict more quickly. On the other hand, his imperious Junker nature sought not to untangle, but to cut through the complex knots of political relations, and no sound arguments from the opposition could force him to change his mind. Failures only roused the German Chancellor to further action, giving those around him a reason to be convinced of his amazing determination and enormous industriousness.

Analyzing the religious views of the German politician, V.N. Pertsev wrote: "Bismarck, like most of the Prussian politicians who preceded him, was quite indifferent to religion, but he was imbued with boundless admiration for power and therefore could not allow any obstacles to stand in the way of the victorious march of the state chariot" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 157).²

¹ For more on the "Iron Chancellor's" unique interpretation of the constitution, see Stepanova (1993, pp. 37–38).

² Modern Russian researcher Baev disagrees with Pertsev's point of view, citing the words of Bismarck himself: "If I were not a Christian,

I would not serve the king for a single hour... Take away my faith and you take away my fatherland... Without faith, I would not have become the chancellor that you know" (Baev, 2007, p. 319).

Platon Aleksandrovich Geisman, a Professor in Ordinary at the Nikolaev Academy of the General Staff, noted in his work "Where should we look for the beginning of Prussia's preparations for its successes in 1866 and 1870-1871?" that the German chancellor had rather strict views, which forced his interlocutors never to lose their vigilance for a moment. P.A. Geisman, in contrast to Y.V. Tarle, insisted on the famous politician's uniquely acute sense of the fundamental needs of the times. Providing a comprehensive characterization of Bismarck's personality, he wrote: "Iron persistence, the ability to stop at nothing on the way to his intended goal and amazing diplomatic dexterity are his distinctive features" (Geisman, 1897, p. 80).

The renowned historian and sociologist Nikolai Ivanovich Kareev (1850-1931) repeatedly addressed the figure of the creator of the German Empire in his multi-volume work *History of Western Europe in the Modern Age*. The scholar believed that it was not without reason that Bismarck had secured the famous nickname of "Iron Chancellor," since he was a powerful, energetic, and ambitious man. In addition, "possessing a sober, insightful, and practical mind, he knew people well, especially their weaknesses, which were most convenient to use; he accurately grasped the surrounding relationships, as far as they could serve his purposes, knew how to learn and quickly master new knowledge and concepts, did not neglect any sources of the latter, and like a skillful player, he calculated all his future moves in advance, mastering to the highest degree the art of not becoming flustered in unforeseen circumstances" (Kareev, 1916, p. 739). All this was successfully reinforced by good health, an impressive appearance, an extraordinary capacity for work, and a unique wit. It is no wonder that N.I. Kareev thought highly of Bismarck's diplomatic abilities, considering him a master of subtle intrigue, who nevertheless did not hesitate to express his political views quite frankly and even rudely, despite the fact that they sometimes shocked his interlocutors. The scholar criticized the German politician for instances when he resorted to outright lies to achieve his goals when he could have avoided doing so, given his extraordinary oratorical skills.

Kareev wrote about Bismarck as follows: "Being able to hate passionately and take revenge mercilessly, he did not stop at any means when he considered it possible to strike a blow at the enemy" (Kareev, 1916, p. 740). Emphasizing the idea that moral motives played no role in the policy of the German statesman, who recognized only one criterion of effectiveness—practical expediency, the scholar believed that Bismarck was one of the most consistent adherents of the idea that might prevails over right. According to N.I. Kareev, the chancellor's peculiarity was his excessive self-confidence, expressed as arrogance and haughtiness when communicating with other people, especially with those whom he considered his enemies, and therefore, the enemies of the German Empire. Thus, N.I. Kareev characterizes Otto von Bismarck as a person who was quite successful in his endeavors, and a distinctive political symbol of the second half of the 19th century.

The renowned historian and diplomat Sergei Spiridonovich Tatishchev (1846-1906) considered Otto von Bismarck a witty, energetic, yet caustic and distrustful man, with excellent oratorical skills, which, however, he often used to demonstrate his superiority over others. This peculiar form of arrogance, combined with his ultra-conservative views, gave him the reputation of a strong individual who feared no obstacles that stood between him and his goals. The scholar considered the unifier of Germany a superb diplomat who kept all the European capitals in suspense for two decades. Tatishchev quotes an interesting phrase from a letter Bismarck wrote to his wife in 1851: "All the things that people here are tormented by are mere trifles,

and these diplomats who put on airs while running in circles seem to me much more ridiculous than a deputy of the second chamber in the consciousness of his dignity" (Tatishchev, 1890, p. 522). It is astonishing to hear such reasoning from a man who would later raise diplomatic activity to the level of the highest art, but who, most importantly, would consider parliamentary work to be completely useless, even harmful to the state.

S.S. Tatishchev refutes the claim that the German chancellor was a supporter of the unification of all conservative forces in Europe: Bismarck called this unification a dangerous fiction, since national differences and differences in socio-economic development led to irresolvable differences between conservative political figures in different countries.

Calling the "Iron Chancellor" "the main political luminary of the era," the historian noted one peculiarity: he expressed his political views openly in conversations with opponents, without trying to clothe them in diplomatic terms that would have been considered proper on such occasions. Another quality that marred Bismarck's depiction as a great man was his extraordinary suspiciousness.

The renowned Russian scholar Pavel Gavrilovich Vinogradov (1854-1925) characterized the German politician as an ambitious man with enormous fortitude, and generally used the epithet "great" to describe him. However, according to the historian, the traditions of statecraft established by the "Iron Chancellor" "must be completely changed" (P. G. Vinogradov, 2008a, p. 469), so that international relations would place greater emphasis on achieving the goals of progress and justice, which were not characteristic of Bismarck's position.

According to a member of the famous family of scholarly brothers, historian Stepan Fedorovich Fortunatov (1850-1918), the "Iron Chancellor" possessed a brilliant mind, but was rather hot-tempered and cynical. Furthermore, "Bismarck had an extraordinary ability to deceive while telling the truth" (Fortunatov, 1915, p. 163).

Warsaw University Professor V.N. Aleksandrenko also pointed to the brilliant mental abilities of the architect of German unity. The scholar noted that the "Iron Chancellor" was characterized by insight, logic, and rich political experience, but also by irritability and the inability to empathize with the misfortunes of others.

All pre-revolutionary Russian historians acknowledged that Otto von Bismarck's domestic policy was less successful than his foreign policy; they explained this by stating that the unifier of Germany was a first-class diplomat, but lacked the qualities necessary for routine, everyday work. A.S. Trachevsky wrote: "The courageous diplomat constantly suffered defeat in the struggle with parliament: reaching a state of complete confusion, he would raise a cry to the whole world about the 'machinations' of the extremists and the 'invasion' of enemies, and then rush into his beloved foreign politics" (Trachevsky, 1898, p. 218).

V.N. Pertsev, noting that the struggle against the church's claims to secular power had its own rich traditions in Prussia, wrote that during the Kulturkampf, both sides went on the attack simultaneously. The scholar believed that circumstances forced the "Iron Chancellor" to take extreme measures in this struggle: firstly, Catholicism was increasingly losing its grip on the reins of secular power, and secondly, during the unification of Germany, the Catholic Church stood in opposition to Prussia, taking the lead in South German separatism. At the same time, the "conflict with the clergy forced Bismarck to get even closer to the National Liberals and even to the Progressives" (Pertsev, 1917, p. 52). The German Chancellor believed it was necessary to pursue a non-partisan policy, bringing one party closer or further away at the

right moment, without completely severing relations with anyone, in order to successfully achieve the tasks at hand. N.I. Kareev wrote: "Bismarck himself did not regard the May Laws as something eternal and immutable: in his eyes, they were merely a weapon and a temporary measure, like taking a strong medicine to cure a quickly passing illness" (Kareev, 1909).

V.N. Pertsev rightly pointed out that the Poles, who represented a national minority in the German Empire, with their revolutionary spirit forced the "Iron Chancellor" to pay close attention to the situation in their areas of residence. All pre-revolutionary Russian historians pointed to the imperial chancellor's negative attitude toward the Poles. A.K. Dzhivelegov wrote: "He had always hated the Poles, but his flirtations with Rome and the clerics, which resulted in the Kulturkampf, prevented him from punishing them as he wished" (Dzhivelegov, 1908b, p. 33).

There was no doubt that the "Iron Chancellor" had lost the difficult struggle against clericalism and was subsequently forced to seek rapprochement with the Catholic Centre Party and regain the Conservatives' former trust by introducing tariffs that restricted the import of cheap food into Germany. Bismarck needed an alliance with these two political forces to counter the Liberals and Social Democrats.

V.N. Pertsev argued that the Chancellor did not yield on all points: the law on state supervision of schools was upheld, as was the law banning Jesuits from entering the Empire; civil marriage and some minor restrictions on the rights of the Catholic Church were preserved. N.I. Kareev disagreed: "The main reason for Bismarck's eventual compliance was that the Kulturkampf weakened the German Empire both externally and internally—internally, in relation to socialism, which had made enormous strides in Germany in the 1870s, and its spread began to worry the Imperial Chancellor far more than the entire Kulturkampf" (Kareev, 1909, p. 266).

Until the early 1870s, the German Chancellor did not consider Social Democracy a real political force, although he did have several conversations, likely on political subjects, with one of its leaders, Ferdinand Lassalle. However, the Paris Commune in France and the formation in 1875 of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, which opposed the government, forced him to consider the new party with the utmost seriousness. According to V.N. Pertsev, Bismarck was frightened by the growth of the socialist movement. Since the ban on social democratic propaganda in the press failed to achieve the desired results, the creator of the German Empire was faced with a pressing question: how to justify the planned repressive measures? N.I. Kareev believed that "the two attempts on the life of the emperor in 1878, separated from each other by only three weeks, provided the pretext for Bismarck to begin a more decisive and persistent struggle against social democracy" (Kareev, 1909, p. 291).

The involvement of socialists in these assassinations remains a contentious historiographical issue to this day; however, the "Iron Chancellor" launched a widespread press campaign accusing the Social Democrats of these crimes.

Having pulled away from the National Liberals, he again drew closer to the Conservatives, and by repealing the most odious laws of the Kulturkampf, he secured the support of the Centre Party. The new elections brought Bismarck the desired majority, and he seized the opportunity to introduce a bill against the Socialists. The debates produced an exceptionally harsh anti-Socialist law that condemned them to a twelve-year struggle for existence. In A.K. Dzhivelegov's point of view, the German Chancellor "was too intelligent a man not to understand that the repressions against Social Democracy, just like the repressions against Catholics,

would ultimately lead to results that were not what he had hoped for in 1878" (Dzhivelegov, 1908b, p. 177).

That was precisely why Bismarck initiated the creation of social legislation, which in turn made his opponents accuse him of socialism. A.S. Trachevsky, scolding the German politician for boasting that state socialism had supposedly made the situation of workers in the Reich the best in Europe, accused him of a lack of humanity in relation to the country's population: "Bismarck fought against the people from the very beginning of the empire: he imprisoned their leaders, closed down their magazines, and proposed offensive laws against the press" (Trachevsky, 1898, p. 246). V.N. Pertsev agrees with A.S. Trachevsky that the main reason for the implementation of social legislation in the German Empire was not a humane desire to improve the lives of the working population, but rather the objective of distracting the workers from participating in social democratic activities. The "Iron Chancellor" was devoid of any democratic tendencies, and if he made concessions to the workers on one issue, he would inevitably tighten measures on another. Pertsev was also outraged by the fact that Bismarck opposed the introduction of a ten-hour workday for women and the ban on women and children working night shifts.

The researcher pointed out that German Social Democrats criticized the Reich Chancellor for equating the recognition of workers' primordial rights to a benefaction on the part of the state. The historian was in agreement with the members of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, noting that of all the government's promises, only workers' insurance was regularly implemented. Only N.I. Kareev argued that, although this policy was aimed at reducing the influence of socialist ideas among the working population, it included much-needed "state assistance to workers in cases of illness, accidents, old age, and disability" (Kareev, 1910, p. 77).

All the Russian historians shared the view that the emperor was strongly influenced by his prime minister, although the Kaiser was a fairly independent person. V.N. Pertsev also dismissed the arguments of some late 19th-century German historians who argued for the "Iron Chancellor's" subordinate position in relation to the Kaiser. N.I. Kareev believed that the head of the government always used the same trick when Wilhelm I resisted his projects: he asked for his own resignation, a request that the emperor always refused, since he understood the chancellor's leading role in governing the empire. According to the historian, "Bismarck knew his sovereign well and used this knowledge to completely subordinate him to his will" (Kareev, 1916, p. 739).

In *Essays on Modern History*, author and compiler I.I. Grigorovich, argued that the "Iron Chancellor" was less successful in domestic policy than in foreign policy, as exemplified by his failures in the Kulturkampf. This was one of the reasons why Catholics and courtiers took up arms against the prime minister, who, in search of support, turned his attention to the workers, to whom he promised all sorts of benefits and reforms. Another reliable bulwark for the unifier of Germany was the emperor's regard for him. Grigorovich wrote: "Bismarck's influence on King Wilhelm became increasingly extraordinary. Extremely unpopular with the people, unloved at court, the leader of Prussian politics was elevated to the rank of count as a reward for his diligent service" (Grigorovich, 1883, p. 252).

A.S. Trachevsky and N.I. Kareev unanimously asserted that the German Chancellor was in no way a parliamentary minister; on the contrary, he used the Reichstag and the Federal Council in every possible way to achieve his goals, taking advantage of a specially organized majority that, at several intervals, included various political parties. N.I. Kareev even claimed that at times Bismarck considered abolishing the Reichstag altogether,

claiming that the Germans were unable to use it as well as the British did their lower house of parliament, and therefore it was costing the state too much. A.S. Trachevsky wrote that the Chancellor wanted to use the legislative body to resolve foreign policy issues, which only alienated the deputies, who were irritated by this attitude; it also hindered the establishment of mutual understanding (although, in fairness, it should be noted that the Reichstag only had the right of legislative initiative, and the final say rested with the Chancellor and the Kaiser). The scholar pointed out that Bismarck skillfully used the national idea to strengthen the empire from within.

Clear evidence of this is Bismarck's policy on the Polish question. N.I. Kareev wrote on this matter: "For him, the Pole was an enemy of the empire, an enemy of the German people, an enemy particularly dangerous for Prussia, and appropriate measures were taken against him. Bismarck did not hesitate to contribute—as far as it was within his power—to the persecution of Poles outside of Germany."

Matvey Kuzmich Lyubavsky (1860-1936), a native of the Ryazan province, wrote: "For a short time after Bismarck's fall (in 1890), Prussian government policy shifted in a direction favorable to Poles, and some steps toward reconciliation were taken" (Lyubavsky, 1917, p. 440). The scholar implied that the Poles' situation under the "Iron Chancellor" was quite difficult.

Touching upon the socio-economic reforms created by the unifier of Germany, V.N. Pertsev wrote that the imperial chancellor was reluctant to undertake liberal reforms in domestic policy, having carried out only an administrative reform of the districts in 1872 and having adopted the Imperial Press Law in 1874. However, "the last years of Bismarck's reign were too clearly painted in the black color of regressiveness; his friendship with the East Elbian agrarians, persecution of the Social Democrats, and harassment of the press—all this clearly showed that the aging chancellor was increasingly returning to the feudal sympathies of his youth and was increasingly losing the ability he had acquired in his mature years to adapt to the conditions of the times and the interests of the most influential social groups" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 181). A.S. Trachevsky discussed how, in the 1880s, the "Iron Chancellor" introduced strict criminal laws in the army, as well as the so-called "rubber paragraph," which provided a very ambiguous interpretation of treason.³

P.G. Vinogradov, arguing that the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs P.A. Valuev was a mediocre politician, pointed out that Alexander II lacked a statesman like Bismarck, who, "although a Prussian Junker by birth and a conservative by conviction, demonstrated the fortitude to draw up a democratic constitution for the German Empire" (P. G. Vinogradov, 2008b, p. 316).

A.K. Dzhivelegov specifically addressed the issue of the relationship between Bismarck and Ferdinand Lassalle, dedicating a short brochure to this topic. According to the author, the Chancellor was being disingenuous when he claimed that his meetings with the head of the General German Workers' Union were casual and did not touch on political issues. Based on the sources at his disposal, Dzhivelegov argued that the meetings were quite frequent, and the conversations turned to political issues; it was thanks to these conversations that the "Iron Chancellor" decided to introduce universal suffrage, which brought him numerous benefits in addressing difficult issues. Dzhivelegov stated: "The course of events initially justified Bismarck's faith,

bringing triumph to the conservative elements, but subsequently Lassalle's calculations were even more brilliantly justified, when universal suffrage also raised the political significance of the workers' party" (Dzhivelegov, 1906, p. 44).

S.F. Fortunatov also mentioned these meetings in his lectures: "Bismarck and Lassalle both supported the unification of Germany; furthermore, they both had a negative attitude toward the bourgeoisie. During their negotiations, they tried to play cunning tricks on each other, and both noticed it" (Fortunatov, 1915, p. 161).

Turning to the characterization of Bismarck's actions for the unification of Germany, Russian historians (A.K. Dzhivelegov, N.I. Kareev and V.N. Pertsev) argued that the future arbiter of Europe's fate formed thoughts about Prussia's hegemony in that process during his stay in Frankfurt am Main as the Prussian representative in the Diet of the German Confederation. Suffering from the Austrians' contempt for the other members of the Diet, the Prussian commissioner rejected an alliance with Austria, recognizing that the two largest German states could not coexist within a united Germany; one of them would have to give in. "That was why all his efforts in the Diet were directed toward emancipating Prussia from being subordinate to the Austrian-led majority and toward consolidating Prussia's complete independence in German affairs," A.K. Dzhivelegov concluded (Dzhivelegov, 1908a, p. 231). The historian pointed out that Bismarck disdained no method of fighting for his cause. By pursuing the idea of German unification, he was able to cast aside the old prejudices of the 1848-1849 revolution. The renowned military historian Andrei Medardovich Zayonchkovsky (1862-1926) cites the Russian ambassador to Prussia, Andrei Fedorovich Budberg (1817-1881), who argued that even as early as the 1850s, the "Iron Chancellor" sought to contrast Prussian and Austrian policies regarding such questions as participation or non-participation in the war against the Russian Empire. Zayonchkovsky wrote: "Our ambassador particularly emphasized the role of Bismarck, 'whose influence in German affairs was, if not decisive, then at least very great.' Bismarck fought against the idea of solidarity between the interests of Germany and Austria 'with all the energy inspired by his ultra-Prussian convictions, not always devoid of Prussian ambition, albeit an unconscious one.'" (Zayonchkovsky, 2002, pp. 172-173). A.S. Trachevsky wrote that the anti-Russian disposition of the Federal Diet did not please the Prussian envoy because he was very afraid of Russia, and even more so of a Franco-Russian alliance, which, if concluded, would place Prussia between two fires. That was why he advised Friedrich Wilhelm IV and Minister-President Manteuffel not to speak out openly in favor of one side or another, but to promise everyone an alliance with Prussia, so that in case of danger they could secure the support of one of the warring powers.

S.S. Tatishchev pointed out that the "Iron Chancellor" had already turned his attention to the Schleswig-Holstein issue in the early 1850s and had at that time inquired about Gorchakov's and the French diplomats' opinions on the matter. He was pleasantly surprised to hear that France and Russia were unwilling to pay attention to such an insignificant issue. Thus, Bismarck had already tested the waters in advance of possible military action with Denmark over the principalities.

Fate favored Bismarck by sending him as envoy to the Russian Empire in 1859, where he managed to strengthen Russo-Prussian

³ In many cases, for example, in the interpretation or execution of contracts, the legislation of the German Empire applied vague criteria such as "good morals," "good conscience," etc. It was not without reason that the relevant clauses of the code were called

"rubber clauses." Their content was so flexible that judges could interpret and apply them in completely different ways, often instilling them with the opposite meanings.

relations, although at first the Prussian representative was clearly reluctant to leave his post in the Federal Diet. Only S.S. Tatishchev paid attention to this period in the life of the future "Iron Chancellor." He pointed out that after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856, Bismarck expressed concerns about the possibility of an alliance between Russia and France and called on his court to actively align with Napoleon III. Upon arriving in Russia, the Prussian diplomat was greeted like an old, trusted friend. This is how S.S. Tatishchev described his situation: "At court, Bismarck was received as an envoy from a kindred court, so to speak, without fuss or official ceremony. The Tsar invited him to go hunting; the Dowager Empress, whose favor he had already gained, invited him to Tsarskoye Selo and Peterhof, where he spent several days and, as he wrote to his wife, felt 'as if he were in his native land' (*heimatlich*)" (Tatishchev, n.d., p. 204). Courtiers and military circles saw him as the representative of a friendly power, whose strengthening would only benefit Russia. The Prussian ambassador succeeded in further strengthening relations between the two powers, considering that their respective thrones were occupied by relatives.

In 1863, Bismarck had another opportunity to gain favor with the Petersburg court: the European powers declared a diplomatic boycott of Russia for suppressing the Polish uprising, although, in doing so, they violated an unspoken agreement not to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states. The Prussian politician was the only one who expressed his willingness to support Russia not only in words but, if necessary, in deeds. Despite the fact that the "Iron Chancellor's" announcement of the Alvensleben Convention caused alarm and displeasure among the other great powers, especially France, the Prussian politician remained true to his chosen course. M.K. Lyubavsky wrote on this subject: "When Napoleon began to reproach Bismarck for the convention with Russia, the Prussian diplomat bluntly told him that if Russia abandoned Poland, Prussia itself would occupy it with its troops," while N.I. Kareev argued that Russia was now on Prussia's side, which freed the "Iron Chancellor" to unify Germany 'from above.' (Lyubavsky, 1917, p. 418).

The first step toward achieving the desired unity was a war waged in alliance with Austria against Denmark for the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. S.S. Tatishchev emphasized that even after the creation of a unified German Empire, Bismarck repeatedly expressed his pride in this first diplomatic campaign. The death of the Danish King Frederick VII was the pretext for the Prussian Minister-President to take decisive action. According to V.N. Pertsev, "the war began in the name of liberating the German provinces from the Danish yoke, but in his heart Bismarck was guided, of course, not by the principle of national independence, but by the desire for territorial expansion: the acquisition of Schleswig, with its access to the Baltic and North Seas, with its excellent harbor of Kiel, was too much in keeping with the traditions of Prussian politics and its attraction to the seas for him to miss this opportunity" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 129).

Military historian V. Chudovsky, in his work *The War for Schleswig-Holstein in 1864*, argued that the "Iron Chancellor" dreamed of owning seaports and, with his persistence, was able to convince not only the entire Berlin cabinet, but also the extremely cautious King Wilhelm I of the need to acquire them. Unfortunately, pre-revolutionary Russian historians have not addressed the activities of the Prussian Minister-President during the war. There is, however, an intriguing remark by the renowned historian Alexander Alexandrovich Kiesewetter (1866-1933), who wrote several years later that Alexander III, while visiting his relatives in Copenhagen, "found himself there in an atmosphere saturated with hostility toward Germany and still vivid memories of the grievances Denmark suffered under Bismarck's policies in

the 1860s" (Kiesewetter, 1996, p. 85). This quote is a clear example of the resonance that the war of the German states against Denmark evoked in the minds of Europeans.

The next stage on the road to German unity was the Austro-Prussian War. V.N. Pertsev noted that the "Iron Chancellor" sought to portray Austria as the aggressor, emphasizing its political and social backwardness compared to Prussia. According to S.S. Tatishchev's reports, "Austria was supported—with a few exceptions—by all the secondary states of the German Confederation. Bismarck did not hesitate to establish close ties with Italy, which had long been seeking an opportunity to assert its claims to the Venetian territory, a domain of the Austrian Emperor" (Tatishchev, n.d., p. 462). The Prussian Minister-President negotiated the neutrality of France, persuading Napoleon to put his demands for non-intervention in writing, which he later used against the French Emperor.

N.I. Kareev wrote that during the war with Denmark and Austria, the "Iron Chancellor" acted virtually alone, as the Chamber of Deputies did not support his methods. The renowned military historian Mikhail Ivanovich Dragomirov (1830-1905) echoed Kareev's sentiments, arguing that the head of the Prussian government always responded sarcastically to his opponents, and even occasionally made harsh statements or taunted his rivals. According to the scholar, Bismarck very nimbly ensured the neutrality of the European states and also gained the approval of popular opinion within Prussia. V.N. Pertsev added that the unifier of Germany skillfully played on the sentiments of German society and attracted influential industrial and financial circles to his side.

V.N. Pertsev assessed the results of the Austro-Prussian War as follows: "The Prussians' victory was complete, but Bismarck believed that destroying Austria would have been neither advantageous for Prussia nor even altogether possible. His only goal was to eliminate the resistance he invariably encountered from Austria on the path to the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 134). This position of the Minister-President provoked a fierce rebuff from King Wilhelm I and the Prussian General Staff, which the "Iron Chancellor" was able to overcome only by threatening to resign, but the monarch valued him too highly to allow this.

In his work titled *Essays on Modern History* I.A. Grigorovich identified an interesting problem regarding the role of chance in the foreign policy successes of the "Iron Chancellor." He wrote, in particular, that "if on the day of Königgrätz the Crown Prince's army had arrived an hour later, victory would not have remained Prussian, and Bismarck's name would have been cursed by the Germans, although his responsibility and merits would have been equal in both cases" (Grigorovich, 1883, p. 258). However, everything worked out well for the unifier of Germany, and it is because of this that public opinion, in its inclination to promote individual heroes, has made his name a symbol of German unity and power. Grigorovich also pointed out that the "Iron Chancellor" consciously sought to establish a republican regime in neighboring France, which, in his opinion, was more peaceful and safer for neighboring countries.

After the victory over Austria and the formation of the North German Confederation in 1867, which included all German lands except for the four southern German states that gravitated towards France, it became absolutely clear to the "Iron Chancellor" that the final stage in the unification of Germany would be a war with Napoleon III. According to N.I. Kareev, by the end of the 1860s the star of the French Emperor was fading, and the star of the Minister-President of Prussia was determined to take its place. The historian wrote: "Bismarck finally decided on war with France only when the Chief of the General Staff Moltke confirmed that

Prussia was at that moment better prepared for war than France was" (Kareev, 1909, p. 91). V.N. Pertsev emphasized that the "Iron Chancellor" was preparing for the struggle not only from a military point of view, but also from a diplomatic one, having promised certain concessions in exchange for the neutrality of other powers: to Russia, support in the restoration of the Black Sea Fleet; to Italy, recognition of Victor Emmanuel's rights to the Papal States. The British, following their policy of "splendid isolation," preferred not to interfere in continental affairs; moreover, the French were their age-old enemies. As for the Austrians, they had not yet recovered from their defeat in the war of 1866. Moreover, according to V.N. Pertsev, Alexander II had promised his uncle Wilhelm I that he would threaten the Viennese court if it sided with France. The head of the Prussian government managed to persuade the European powers' public opinion to be on his side by publishing the terms Napoleon III had made to Bismarck for France's neutrality during the Austro-Prussian War.

The "Iron Chancellor," as V.N. Pertsev rightly observed, prepared the pretext for war by participating in the dispute over the Spanish throne, proposing that Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a representative of a lateral branch of the Hohenzollerns, be made King of Spain. Naturally, this could not fail to outrage the French, as there was a danger of them being cornered between two states led by the hostile Hohenzollerns. By exerting diplomatic pressure on Leopold himself, Wilhelm, and his entourage, the French managed to force the Hohenzollerns to renounce their claims to the Spanish throne. As Nikolai Petrovich Mikhnevich (1849-1927), a Professor in Ordinary at the Nikolaev Academy of the General Staff, wrote, "This turn of events completely satisfied both sovereigns, Napoleon and Wilhelm, but was a blow to Bismarck and, at the same time, a brilliant and unexpected triumph of French diplomacy" (Mikhnevich, n.d., p. 6).

However, Bismarck was unwilling to admit defeat in the face of these obstacles: the French themselves came to his rescue, demanding that the Prussian king promise to renounce his claims to the Spanish throne. Outraged by this action, Wilhelm I, who nevertheless did not want war with France, forwarded the text of the French reply to his loyal chancellor, who transformed the unremarkable text into the famous Ems Dispatch. This document, containing statements from the German king that were provocative to France, could not help but arouse belligerent feelings in the French, who rashly hastened to declare war on the North German Confederation. It should not be forgotten that the French Emperor, who had made a number of domestic and foreign policy miscalculations, needed to reinforce his power. N.I. Kareev wrote that the "Iron Chancellor" explained the editing of the Ems dispatch by saying that he did not trust in the fortitude of his king, so he had decided to present him with a *fait accompli*.⁴

Mikhail Nikolayevich Annenkov (1835-1899), who was sent as an observer to the Prussian army, briefly mentioned the conversations between the "Iron Chancellor" and Napoleon III after the defeat of the French at Sedan, where the French emperor was captured. In essence, as V.N. Pertsev wrote, "the war, which was fought under the national banner of defense against foreign encroachment, ended more quickly than Bismarck and his allies had anticipated" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 148). According to the scholar, the unifier of Germany no longer behaved as he had during the wars with Denmark and Austria: he had greater confidence in his success, since his position within his country was strengthened in proportion to the successes of the Prussian army. In addition, by making concessions to the monarchs of the South German states,

he achieved his main goal—their inclusion in a unified German Empire. A.S. Trachevsky did not fail to mention the changes in the status of the newly minted chancellor during the war. He wrote: "In Versailles, at the ceremony of Wilhelm II's coronation, the Berlin majordomo, civil governor, and last magician of the Hohenzollern 'system,' Union Chancellor Bismarck, was promoted to lieutenant general" (Trachevsky, 1898, p. 202).

A.K. Dzivelegov's assessment of the famous politician's contribution to German unity at the beginning of the 20th century is interesting: "It was the beginning of a real revolution, through which Bismarck transformed the fragile German Confederation into a powerful German Empire, expelling Austria from it. This was Bismarck's great achievement. True, he was nothing more than the midwife of history, but it must be acknowledged that in the difficult situation in which he found himself, it would have been virtually impossible to act more skillfully" (Dzivelegov, 1909, p. 139).

After German reunification, the chancellor faced what was arguably an even more difficult task: preserving the German Empire within its 1871 borders. In his article "The Elsass-Lothringen Question on the Eve of the Great European War," Y. V. Tarle expressed his opinion on the methods used by the "Iron Chancellor" to save his brainchild from collapse: "Since the conquest of Elsass-Lothringen, which was declared 'imperial territory' and placed under the direct administration of a governor appointed by the emperor, several regimes have followed one another: while Bismarck was in power, a regime of suspicion, severity, forced Germanization, and meticulous persecution of the French language (in Lothringen) and French sympathies (in Elsass and Lothringen) prevailed; after Bismarck, this regime was sometimes replaced by temporary leniency, periods of moderate administrative liberalism" (Tarle, 1961, p. 433). A.K. Dzivelegov and V.N. Pertsev argued that after the Franco-Prussian War, the Chancellor of the German Empire found the nation to be fully saturated with its acquired territories, so it was necessary to regain the trust of the allied powers; otherwise, there was a threat of a coalition against the young Reich, which had clearly disrupted the European balance of power with its emergence. The most likely scenario seemed to be a rapprochement with Austria-Hungary and Russia, given that their politicians shared a belief in the solidarity of monarchist forces, which were destined to fight for the preservation of absolutist regimes in Europe. According to V.N. Pertsev, it was possible to direct the interests of Austria and Russia toward the Balkans, where they would inevitably clash, and so, Vienna and Petersburg would need Berlin as an arbitrator.

As a result of lengthy negotiations, on May 25, 1873, an agreement was signed between Russia and Austria-Hungary, which Germany joined on October 1 of the same year, marking the beginning of the League of the Three Emperors. Thus, the "Iron Chancellor" succeeded in realizing his plan. According to Pavel Nikolaevich Milyukov (1859-1943), a well-known student of V.O. Klyuchevsky, Bismarck dreamed of creating such an alliance "in order to make doubly sure of his Austrian ally by way of Russia" (Milyukov, 1991, p. 138).

Professor V.N. Aleksandrenko of Warsaw University argued that the German chancellor had always been afraid of the possibility of a Franco-Russian agreement, which, in the event of a conflict with them, could lead to a war on two fronts. That was why Bismarck used various means to prevent a rapprochement between Russia and France, in particular by raising the alarm about the simultaneous strengthening of the armies in both countries. The researcher was genuinely surprised by the opinion

⁴ On French politicians' underestimation of Bismarck, see K. K. Vinogradov (1985, p. 128).

prevalent in some circles of Russian society that the German chancellor had a peaceful attitude toward Russia. V.N. Aleksandrenko wrote: "In reality, neither Prince Bismarck's memoirs nor his foreign policy show any sign of his friendly disposition toward Russia. His international policy was never based on personal sympathies or antipathies; everywhere and always, he had one guiding principle—the national interests of his own fatherland, i.e., Prussia, and then Germany" (Aleksandrenko, n.d., p. 570). As evidence, the professor put forward the argument that the "Iron Chancellor," for the sake of Germany's security and dominance on the continent, was capable of forming alliances that were opposite in their goals and directions, such as the League of the Three Emperors (Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary) and the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy).

V.N. Pertsev believed that the first chancellor of the German Empire wanted to play a leading role in the Triple Alliance and sought to subordinate his allies to his own policies. The first crack in this agreement appeared in 1875, when the threat of a new conflict between Germany and France arose. France had managed to pay the five-billion-franc indemnity ahead of schedule and quickly rebuild its industry. According to V.N. Pertsev and another well-known historian, Evgeny Frantsevich Shmurlo (1854-1934), Otto von Bismarck wanted to crush France once and for all so that it would never again harbor revanchist sentiments. S.S. Tatishchev was less categorical: "In the spring of 1875, in diplomatic circles in Berlin and in the official German press, France's increased armament was presented as a desire to resume the struggle with Germany, while in Paris, Bismarck himself was suspected of intending to attack France before it had time to reorganize and strengthen its army and fortify its borders" (Tatishchev, n.d., p. 505).

Thanks largely to Russia's efforts, the threat of a new war was successfully neutralized. However, relations between the chancellors of the Russian and German empires, which had once been almost cordial, began to deteriorate, subsequently leading to an open rift and hindering dialogue between the two countries, which were in many ways forced to depend on the attitudes of their leading politicians. According to V.N. Pertsev, Russia's intercession planted the idea of a possible Franco-Russian alliance in the "Iron Chancellor's" mind, so his efforts were now directed toward reducing Petersburg's influence on European affairs. S.S. Tatishchev claimed that the German chancellor was harboring resentment toward his Russian counterpart, who had allegedly behaved arrogantly during the crisis between France and Germany, and that he planned to take revenge at the first opportunity. Thus, subjective grounds for deterioration in Russian-German relations began to emerge.⁵

Only three years later, fate gave Bismarck a chance to take revenge on Gorchakov for the insult as Russia became embroiled in the Eastern Crisis, which threatened to escalate into a major war involving the great powers. E.F. Shmurlo and his colleague Alexander Alexandrovich Kornilov (1862-1925) unanimously declared that by maintaining tension in relations between Austria and Russia in the Balkans, Bismarck was forcing them to depend on Germany, while he himself gained freedom of action with regard to France. S.S. Tatishchev added that during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Bismarck became very close to Austrian Chancellor Andrassy, while his relations with Gorchakov steadily deteriorated. However, the "Iron Chancellor" tried to make concessions to the Russian Empire on minor issues, which sometimes created the illusion of friendliness among the Russian

leadership. Analyzing the relations between the chancellors of Russia and Germany during this period, S.S. Tatishchev wrote: "In general, Bismarck speaks of Gorchakov with undisguised hostility and scathing sarcasm, recounting, among other things, that while listening to his ornate speech as chairman of the meeting, he, Bismarck, began to write with a pencil on a white sheet of paper lying in front of him: 'Rotrop, rotro, rotr, rot, ro!'" (Tatishchev, n.d., p. 665). S.S. Tatishchev and V.N. Pertsev claimed that during the war, the "Iron Chancellor" pushed Russia to take active measures, expressing a neutrality that was favorable to Petersburg in words, but in reality seeking to weaken Russia and drag Austria into the "Eastern Question." S.S. Tatishchev added that the "Iron Chancellor" knew in advance that the bloody war with Turkey would end without benefit for Russia, or at least not as successfully as desired. The scholar wrote: "How Prince Bismarck repaid his debt of gratitude to Russia is memorable to all Russian people. The Treaty of Berlin not only deprived Russia of the fruits of victory, bought at the price of precious Russian blood, but also encroached on her international dignity, insulting and humiliating her in her most sacred feelings, traditions, and beliefs" ("Politicheskoe obozrenie", 1891, p. 336). S.S. Tatishchev provides some interesting information: most Russian diplomats, including the ambassadors in Berlin and London, Ubri and Shuvalov, respectively, had boundless trust in Bismarck's assurances that he allegedly supported Russia in the Eastern Question, and only a few, including the German chancellor's main adversary, A.M. Gorchakov, claimed that such Russophile assurances were merely subtle tricks on the part of the seasoned diplomat. According to Tatishchev, the "Iron Chancellor" told Adjutant General Ignatiev that the war with Turkey satisfied Russia's legitimate desires and would also lead to the restoration of European equilibrium. It is not difficult to see that in fact the opposite happened. All such statements made by the luminary of German politics N.I. Kareev considered a stratagem and claimed that Bismarck wanted to weaken Russia.

The German chancellor had a chance to fulfill these desires once the European powers, dissatisfied with the successes and strengthening of the Russian Empire, declared the need to convene a congress to revise the articles of the Treaty of San Stefano. The German capital was chosen as the venue for the congress, and Otto von Bismarck was appointed its chairman. Perhaps no other issue in 19th-century Russian-German relations has given rise to as many controversial questions as the behavior of the chairman of the Congress of Berlin toward Russia in 1878.

S.S. Tatishchev, N.I. Kareev, V.N. Pertsev, R.Yu. Vipiper, and A.S. Trachevsky unanimously asserted that the "honest broker," who had promised to be impartial, did not support Russia's demands at the Congress of Berlin, or more accurately, supported Austria-Hungary. Reflecting on the pro-Austrian orientation of the "Iron Chancellor," S.S. Tatishchev cites the following lines by the well-known German publicist Moritz Busch to support his point of view: "Any reasonable and impartial person, reflecting on the essence of things in the context of Germany's population of 42 million, would prefer us to remain on good terms with both Russia and Austria. But if, as is now the case, we are forced to choose between our two neighbors, then those with an unclouded view will not hesitate long in their decision... Russia is strong enough on her own, and we can be of little use to her as allies" (Tatishchev, 1890, p. 552). Naturally, such statements could not fail to affect the attitude of Russian scholars toward Germany and its leaders. N.I. Kareev wrote that the resentment against the

⁵ Interestingly, Bismarck himself perceived Russia's signing of a peace treaty with Turkey as a sign of weakness on the part of Petersburg. For more details, see Bismarck (n.d., p. 224).

“honest broker” observed in Russian society in connection with his forgetfulness of Russia’s neutrality during the unification of Germany was never transferred to the person of Kaiser Wilhelm I. R.K. Vipper and A.S. Trachevsky also expressed some criticism of Russian diplomacy, which naively trusted the “Iron Chancellor” and ultimately ended up at a disadvantage. It was not Russia, which had suffered heavy casualties and financial losses, but countries that had not fired a single shot that managed to gain advantageous territorial acquisitions. S.S. Tatishchev suggested that a possible explanation for Bismarck’s behavior at the congress could have been his enmity with Russian chancellor Gorchakov. The historian puts forward this hypothesis because during one of the meetings between the “Iron Chancellor” and his Russian friend Pyotr Andreyevich Shuvalov, the German prime minister stated that he would not allow Gorchakov to control him. Analyzing the duality of the “honest broker’s” policy, Tatishchev wrote: “Speaking on behalf of Germany, Prince Bismarck expressed the opinion that, having reached an agreement on issues that had preoccupied Europe since the beginning of the century, and especially over the last 20 years, the great powers certainly did not want to create an ineffectual agreement, and that everyone should monitor the implementation of the congress’s resolutions, which formed a single whole from which one part could not be accepted while the rest was rejected. But the German chancellor does not believe that each individual state is obliged to enforce these decisions by force, nor that it is possible to place them under a universal and collective guarantee” (Tatishchev, n.d., p. 825). The scholar did not trust the demagogic statements of the “Iron Chancellor,” noting that the latter was ready to be the first to violate the articles of the Treaty of Berlin if necessary.

V.N. Pertsev expressed his conviction that Bismarck did not want a complete severance of relations with Russia, even though he began strengthening allied relations with Austria-Hungary almost immediately after the end of the meetings; these negotiations developed into a bilateral agreement in October 1879, becoming the first cornerstone in the building of the Triple Alliance.

A.A. Kornilov, N.I. Kareev, and S.S. Tatishchev believed that the Iron Chancellor’s goal was to draw Russian policy even further into Balkan affairs, since Alexander II still believed in the League of the Three Emperors, even though he complained to his uncle Wilhelm about his prime minister’s hostile actions toward Russia. The latter, in turn, according to Kareev, “attributed the assumption that Germany had aggressive tendencies, as manifested in the Triple Alliance to the ‘extraordinary stupidity and distortion of the truth in Russian public opinion and the press.’” (Kareev, 1910). According to the historian, Bismarck’s policy in the early years after the Congress of Berlin was characterized by a rift with Russia, alienation from France, and an unfavorable attitude toward England. It seems that the German chancellor reproached the Russian press for distorting the truth because he himself knew perfectly well how this was done. After all, Bismarck repeatedly manipulated facts through newspapers loyal to him, thus manufacturing the public opinion that was required.

Vyacheslav Petrovich Volgin (1879-1962), a graduate of Moscow University, analyzed the role of Britain in the politics of the “Iron Chancellor.” He believed that, despite some antipathy towards the “Mistress of the Seas,” Bismarck sought to establish good relations with her in the early 1880s, but mutual distrust prevented the two countries’ rapprochement. S.S. Tatishchev argued that the German chancellor was annoyed by the accusation of the “honest broker’s” betrayal, which was widespread in Russian society; they believed that he had too quickly forgotten the numerous and invaluable services rendered by Petersburg to Berlin during the German unification. Reflecting on Bismarck’s

actions at that time, the historian wrote: “He tasked the publicist Busch with responding to this accusation by citing several examples from recent history, from which he drew the conclusion that Russia owed Prussia more than Prussia owed Russia”.

The “Iron Chancellor” turned the Viennese court against Russia by intimidating Franz Joseph and Chancellor Andrassy with alleged aggressive intentions on the part of the Petersburg court. Tatishchev insisted that Russian society was able to distinguish between Bismarck’s disreputable behavior and the friendly and proven position of his Kaiser, Wilhelm I, who tried to atone for the guilt of his loyal servant before Alexander II and all Russian people.

Yet another test of the strength of Russian-German relations was the Bulgarian crisis of 1885–1887, as well as the Boulangerist crisis of 1887–1889. First, in Bulgaria, after the overthrow of Prince Alexander Battenberg, Stefan Stambolov’s regency council openly proclaimed an anti-Russian policy. In addition, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, and Germany wanted to see the German prince Ferdinand Coburg as the new Bulgarian ruler. A.A. Kornilov stated, “Nevertheless, Bismarck still failed to push Russia into more active involvement in Balkan affairs, which would have led to war between Russia and Austria, and perhaps the final breakdown of our relations with the whole of Europe” (Kornilov, 1993). V.N. Pertsev argued that the “Iron Chancellor” did not want a complete rift in relations with Russia, as he feared a war on two fronts in the event of a conflict with France or Russia. He understood that he himself was partly to blame for the rapprochement between Petersburg and Paris, but doubted that absolutist Russia, ruled by Alexander II, would enter into an alliance with republican France.

Nevertheless, the creator of the German Empire hastened to conclude a secret agreement with Russia in June 1887—an accord that became known as the Reinsurance Treaty. P.N. Milyukov, known for his pro-Western views, wrote the following lines about the consequences of the expiration of this treaty in 1890, after Bismarck had already resigned: “This was the date on which the old rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Russia in the Balkans recommenced” (Milyukov, 1991, p. 272).

Unfortunately for Bismarck, signing the secret treaty did not restore Russia’s former trust. In addition to the “customs war” between the two countries, the Petersburg court did not allow a new Franco-German war to break out. Such a conflict had seemed quite likely in 1887 against the backdrop of revanchist sentiments in France, fueled by the demagogic statements of the popular General Georges Boulanger. V.N. Pertsev wrote that one of the reasons for the “Iron Chancellor’s” resignation was his pro-Russian position in a dispute with the young Kaiser Wilhelm II. The monarch claimed that the Russian army’s exercises on the western border were nothing more than a ruse, and that Russia was actually preparing for a possible war with Germany. The chancellor, however, argued that these were merely routine military maneuvers, nothing more. Analyzing the deterioration of Russian-German relations under the new chancellor, Caprivi, V.N. Pertsev expressed his opinion about his predecessor’s true feelings toward Russia: “Bismarck sought to maintain friendship with Russia and quite successfully maneuvered between the courts of Vienna and Petersburg, although, of course, his friendship with Austria at that time significantly exceeded his friendship with Russia” (Pertsev, 2003, p. 221).

In his memoirs, military historian Nikolai Alekseevich Epanchin (1857-1941) touched upon the problems of the German chancellor’s relationship with Russian emperors. In particular, the author noted that the Germans’ hostile attitude toward Russia manifested itself even before the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, when Wilhelm I, guided by Bismarck, played a double-dealing

game against Russia, on the one hand persuading his nephew Alexander II of his unconditional support, and on the other deliberately directing Russian policy towards the Balkans.

Epanchin noted Alexander's astonishment at Wilhelm II's words about the imminent resignation of the "Iron Chancellor." In this regard, the historian wrote: "Emperor Alexander II valued Bismarck as a man with whom it was possible to come to an agreement without sacrificing our interests, but also without encroaching on the interests of Germany. The sovereign believed that Bismarck, as German Chancellor, was obliged to pursue German policy, and he did not share the views of those Russians who, after the Congress of Berlin, accused Bismarck of not supporting Russian interests" (Epanchin, 2001, p. 206). The scholar argued that Alexander II blamed the Russian representatives for their diplomatic defeat in Berlin.

According to Epanchin, Alexander II was indignant because Wilhelm II had put him in an awkward position: the German Kaiser had not informed Bismarck of his resignation, and Bismarck, in conversation with the Russian Tsar, began to outline his plans for strengthening relations between the two countries. When a surprised Alexander told the "Iron Chancellor" that Wilhelm II had dismissed him, the unifier of Germany was very surprised, and the Russian tsar, according to Epanchin, allegedly said to the palace commandant P.L. Hesse: "If he, [Wilhelm II], treats Bismarck this way, how will he treat Caprivi, and how can we negotiate with a new chancellor whom Wilhelm can dismiss at any moment even more abruptly than he did Bismarck?" (Epanchin, 2001, p. 207).

N.I. Kareev and A.K. Dzhivelegov believed that colonial conquests were a measure taken by "Iron Chancellor" out of necessity, while V.N. Pertsev, on the contrary, noted his aspiration to acquire overseas territories. A.K. Dzhivelegov wrote: "At the beginning of his career, Bismarck's attitude to the question of colonies was quite indifferent, and if by the end of his chancellorship Germany had nevertheless become a major colonial power, the initiative here was not his" (Dzhivelegov, 1908b, p. 128). According to the historian, Germany was forced into various kinds of acquisitions by industrialists and financiers, whose opinions even the imperial chancellor could not ignore. N.I. Kareev added that the "Iron Chancellor" was not a supporter of the French colonial system, under which soldiers and officials were sent to the occupied territory first, and only then did settlers follow. He was even prepared to defend the acquired territories from adjacent neighbors and other colonial powers. Nevertheless, Kareev noted: "However, while supporting all these endeavors, Bismarck did not want Germany to acquire any 'colonial provinces,' as he himself put it: the whole point was to provide imperial protection for trading companies, which were issued special protection certificates" (Kareev, 1910, p. 57). V.N. Pertsev disagreed with his colleagues and argued that the German chancellor was not satisfied with European power alone, which was why in the last years of his reign he sought to turn Germany into a world power. Despite all his assurances that he had no colonial ambitions, Bismarck was highly attuned to everything related to the country's commercial prosperity, and colonial policy had the potential to play a huge role in economic development. As a result, he embarked on a path of colonial conquests, annexing vast territories in Africa and Oceania to Germany.⁶ However, even Pertsev acknowledged certain limitations of the "Iron Chancellor's" colonial policy. The scholar wrote: "In his opinion, Germany's colonial power had to be based on private enterprise,

and the role of the state should have been limited to providing incentives and support to those who would travel overseas at their own risk to engage in industrial or commercial activities" (Pertsev, 2003, p. 178). Nevertheless, Pertsev insisted that Germany had become a major colonial power whose overseas possessions were many times greater than the territory of the metropolitan state.

R.Yu. Vipiper, giving a summary assessment of the first German chancellor's foreign policy, pointed out that he kept Europe in a state of constant alarm with his system of "armed peace" and his desire for numerous alliances as he experienced the notorious "nightmare of coalitions."⁷

In conclusion, the figure of German chancellor was a very important topic for the discussions among Russian historians of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th century, taking into consideration his role in the world and European affairs, and also his diplomatic activity and relations with the Russian political elite.

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⁶ Subsequently, a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean was named after him as the Bismarck Archipelago.

⁷ K. K. Vinogradov writes that Russian Minister of War D. A. Milyutin also experienced a similar "coalition nightmare." For more details, see K. K. Vinogradov (1991, p. 138).

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