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## **О ПРИЧИНАХ НЕПРОДЛЕНИЯ ДОГОВОРА ПЕРЕСТРАХОВКИ В 1890 году**

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*Аннотация.* В статье рассматриваются причины, по которым в 1890 г. не был продлен Договор перестраховки между Россией и Германией, заключенный ими в 1887 г. В исследовании используются методологические подходы «традиционной» политической истории, в основе которой лежит история государств и дипломатии, основывающаяся на примате внешней политики, а также исследование действий государств и их важнейших представителей, причем для этого автором избрана нарративная форма. В предлагаемой работе анализируются важнейшие особенности политики Бисмарка в отношении России, а также то, каким образом повлияла на них и в конечном счете на отказ от продления договора его отставка. В статье выясняется, как эти изменения сказались на международной политике, а также устанавливаются причины начавшейся интенсификации отношений между Россией и Францией. Разделяется точка зрения тех ученых, которые считают, что изменения во внешней политике Германии привели к так называемой «революции альянсов». Основываясь на обнаруженных им архивных материалах, автор делает вывод, что послебисмарковская дипломатия негативно повлияла на международное положение Германии, так как в результате ее действий началось активное сближение Франции и России, у Германии же остался лишь такой слабый союзник, как Австро-Венгрия. Также в статье делается вывод, что эти изменения свидетельствовали о неверных действиях германской дипломатии, для которой теперь были характерны неточные расчеты, неудачный анализ и ошибочные прогнозы.

*Ключевые слова:* Договор перестраховки, русско-германские отношения, Бисмарк, Александр III, Вильгельм II.

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### **On the Reasons Why the Reinsurance Treaty Was not Renewed in 1890**

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*Abstract.* The article is aimed at discussing the reasons for the non-renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty between Russia and Germany in 1890. It analyses the fundamental traits of Bismarck's foreign policy towards Russia and subsequently deals with the impact of Bismarck's resignation. It further details the shift in attitudes towards Russia prompted by Bismarck's replacement in order to understand why the Treaty was not renewed. The article also determines how this shift influenced international politics and

lists the reasons for French and Russian relations growing. The study uses methodological approaches of “traditional” political history, meaning history of states and diplomacy based on “the primacy of foreign policy” and research fields aimed at actions of states and their highest political representatives. Based on the methodological approaches, an analysis has been conducted of “highest policy” and a “realistic” insight into the history of foreign policy is presented in narrative form. The author agrees with the opinion that the changes in German foreign policy led to the so-called “revolution of the alliances”. Based on unpublished sources found during archival research, the study concludes that the post-Bismarck diplomacy negatively impacted Germany’s international position since its actions brought France and Russia closer and left Germany with the weakest ally, i.e. Austria-Hungary. The study further concludes that these changes symbolized a huge loss for Germany’s diplomacy. The author assesses that the new diplomacy did not prove itself, calculated falsely, analyzed incorrectly, and predicted wrongly.

*Keywords:* Reinsurance Treaty, Russian-German relations, Bismarck, Wilhelm II, Alexander III.

In March 1890, the first German chancellor and Prussian prime minister Otto von Bismarck handed in his resignation. Afterwards, Emperor Wilhelm II spoke among others with the Austro-Hungarian ambassador who allegedly assured Franz Joseph I of Austria that “foreign policy remains unchanged to how it was implemented by Wilhelm I”<sup>1</sup>. Despite declaring loyalty to old objectives, Bismarck’s resignation constituted a turning point for European politics, which was later reflected in the abandonment of the close cooperation between German and Russia.

When studying such crucial changes, we must analyze several issues.

1. It is necessary to determine fundamental traits of Bismarck’s foreign policy towards Russia at the end of the 1880s.
2. Evaluate the influence of Bismarck’s resignation and subsequent personnel changes on German foreign policy.
3. Analyse the attitudes of the new government towards Russian and to the renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty.
4. Understand how German policies changes after the Reinsurance Treaty was not renewed.

The conclusions of the study are primarily based on unpublished sources from the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz [Secret State Archives of Prussian Cultural Property], Berlin-Dahlem, concretely the Brandenburg-Prussian Home Archive, Repository 53, Emperor Wilhelm II and Family. They are also based on the correspondence of Austro-Hungarian ambassadors archived in the House, Court and State Archive of the National Archives in Vienna, namely Department II (Prussia). Both archives also provided many contemporary publications, special prints, and flyers. Published personal sources were also used, especially memoirs, diaries, and correspondences of key German politicians, such as Wilhelm II, Otto von Bismarck-Schönhausen, Philipp, Prince of Eulenburg and Hertefeld, Friedrich von Holstein, etc. For the analysis of foreign policy, there were used the editions “Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914” [Greater Politics of European Cabinets 1871–1914] and “Documents diplomatiques français 1871–1914” [French Diplomatic Documents 1871–1914]. Scientific literature for this study consisted primarily of German, Anglo-Saxon<sup>2</sup>, Russian<sup>2</sup>, and Czech historiography.

In the study, there were used methodological approaches of “traditional” political history, meaning history of states and diplomacy based on “the primacy of foreign policy” and research fields aimed at actions of states and their highest political representatives. Based on the methodological approaches, an analysis has been conducted of “highest policy” and a “realistic” insight into the history of foreign policy is presented in narrative form.

<sup>1</sup> Imre Széchényi’s telegram to Kálnoky. 22 March 1890, Berlin // House, Court and State Archive (hereinafter HCSA). HCSA. Politisches Archiv. Department III (Prussia). Box № 138. (Weisungen, Varia 1889, Berichte I.-IV. 1890) (hereinafter: HCSA. PA III). Fol. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Russian historiography in connection to analyzing Bismarck’s policies was brilliantly analyzed by A.S. Medjakov from the Lomonosov Moscow State University. *Медяков А.С. «Наш Бисмарк»? Россия в политике и взглядах «Железного канцлера» Германии // Российская история. 2015. № 6. С. 63–84.*

German foreign policy in 1871–1890 made use of Germany being the strongest continental power. It managed to stop the formation of anti-German blocs. The “Iron Chancellor”, Bismarck, saw the unified Empire as a “saturated” power without goals that would justify starting a war, and as a stabilization factor for Europe. His diplomacy represented peace and preservation of European power equilibrium also because it provided the newly formed state with enough time to stabilize. He understood that unifying Germany changed the European power constellation to such a degree that further expansion on the continent would lead to being surrounded and isolated. Berlin allied with Vienna. At the same time Berlin did not decline cooperation with London or St. Petersburg, on the contrary, it contributed to a status quo in which the remaining quarreled powers needed its good will. Germany functioned as an equalizer and skillfully managed to stop the formation of an antagonistic grouping. Bismarck preferred to focus on the relations with St Petersburg, not only for the sake of “traditions” but also to prevent war on two fronts – the Western front against France, the Eastern front against Russia. Medjakov points out the fact that “Bismarck was not a Russophile in the sense of sympathizing with Russia. The idea of him being especially fond of Russia came into being over the course of his life due to the combination of several factors: policies that he aimed towards Russia, the St Petersburg chapter of his life, the fact that he spoke Russian, and finally a number of famous historical jokes that emotionally stained his stance towards the neighboring Empire”<sup>3</sup>.

Towards the end of the 1880s, all powers with the exceptions of France were either German allies or cooperators. The so-called Mediterranean Agreements managed to tie Great Britain to the Triple Alliance; the Reinsurance Treaty from 1887 renewed the contractual basis of German-Russian relations after the dissolution of the second League of the Three Emperors. Even after the ascension of the new Emperor, Wilhelm II, Bismarck continued his previous course of foreign policy<sup>4</sup>. In 1889, he offered the British government to conclude an alliance treaty. Its rejection did not have catastrophic consequence since the offer served more as a “warning” to Russia who Germans wanted to push into a closer relation with Berlin via long-term diplomatic and economic pressures. Bismarck conveniently maneuvered in Russian-Austrian and Russian-British disputes. For example, when pressuring Russia, he leaned on his alliance with Austria-Hungary and cooperation with Britain. The chancellor’s system operated within a broader time horizon, meaning that if relations temporarily cooled off with one power, it did not mean complete estrangement and hostility. Bismarck’s policies avoided big gestures and have not become unviable even on the brink of 1890s.<sup>5</sup>

During his entire career, Bismarck had political opponents. Anti-Bismarck opposition had two centers. The *Militärpartei* [Military Party] was well known domestically and abroad, the other center that consisted of diplomats acted in secret. Only after Wilhelm II had ascended to power, the opposition gained support from the new monarch, was active in immediate vicinity of the monarch, significantly influenced him, and via him wanted to correct the “wrong” policies of the Chancellor. The opposition decided to slowly politically isolate Bismarck and force him to resign. Without dramatic actions that could cost them the trust of the new Emperor.

Alfred von Waldersee was the head of the *Militärpartei* whose pro-Russian attitude the Emperor shared completely<sup>6</sup>. The Party rejected Bismarck’s diplomacy, alliance with Austria-Hungary, and peace policy towards Russia. On the contrary, it continuously started discussion about a preventive war with Russia and France. One of Waldersee’s cooperators wrote about national and

<sup>3</sup> Там же. С. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Röhl J.C.G. Wilhelm II. Vol. 2. Der Aufbau der Persönlichen Monarchie 1888–1900. München, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Zur Geschichte und Problematik des deutsch-russischen Rückversicherungsvertrags von 1887 / hg. H. Hallmann. Darmstadt, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Bismarck tried to explain his negative attitude towards a potential war with Russia to Wilhelm already when he was the crown prince. Cf. Bismarck to Wilhelm, (undated), concept // Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914. Sammlung der Diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes / hg. von J. Lepsius, A. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, F. Thimme. Bd. 6. Nr. 1341. Berlin, 1922. S. 304–307; Wilhelm to Bismarck, 10 May 1888 // Ibid. S. 307–309. Cf. Власов Н.А. Альфред фон Вальдерзее // Вопросы истории. 2018. № 8. С. 26–42.

political reasons for Russian hostility towards Germany that resulted from the participation of Berlin's diplomacy on the organization of the Eastern question in 1878 and from pan-Slavic ideology<sup>7</sup>. According to him, France never forgot 1871, its power grew from year to year, and according to the generals sooner rather than later it would ally itself with St Petersburg. They wanted to solve this severely unfavorable situation by starting a preventive war<sup>8</sup>. Waldersee wrote that the old Bismarck would not dare such a move and did not want "to risk his fame and position"<sup>9</sup>. Waldersee's influence on the young Emperor was made apparent by the Emperor comment on the report by the Russian ambassador about the statement of the Russian minister of foreign affairs who was convinced that the Russian-German relations would stay positive for a long time. The Emperor simply noted: "I do not"<sup>10</sup>. Russian historian Ipatov stressed that the Emperor was irritated by Bismarck's desire to maintain peaceful relations with Russia at all costs. Russia according to Wilhelm in 1890 was preparing to attack Germany allegedly proven by maneuvers of Russian troops at the Western border<sup>11</sup>.

The head of the political department of the German Foreign Office Friedrich von Holstein became the coordinator of the anti-Bismarck operations of the German diplomats and court members<sup>12</sup>. He was the most important opponent of the Chancellor when it came to foreign policy. Opinions on his political importance vary among historians. Publishers of his estate based on documents state that he indirectly set the stage for Bismarck's resignation<sup>13</sup>. He achieved this by overtly criticizing Chancellor's diplomacy, pointing out his amount of power, or by withholding documents at the Foreign Office. Holstein saw the existing German-Russian relations as complicated, confused, and audacious. He fought against the Reinsurance Treaty that according to him blocked German freedom of action in foreign policy. From the Russian-Austrian rivalry in the Balkans, he summarized that the Tsar's Empire would want to get rid of its rival via war: "Russia will not abandon its anti-Austrian plans, we cannot let Austria to be destroyed because then we would be the only ones standing between Russia and France"<sup>14</sup>. Some historians rightfully thought that his dismissive attitude towards Russian could have been motivated personally<sup>15</sup>.

The dismissal from all functions of the first German chancellor was orchestrated by the anti-Bismarck opposition who used the young and ambitious Emperor Wilhelm II and some current domestic political issues to "seize power" and dominate the state apparatus. Who replaced Bismarck General Leo von Caprivi was appointed<sup>16</sup> as the new Chancellor of the Empire and Prussian Prime Minister in March 1890, a moderate politician, and former Chief of the Admiralty.

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<sup>7</sup> Aus dem Briefwechsel des Generalfeldmarschalls Alfred Grafen von Waldersee. Bd. I. Stuttgart – Berlin – Leipzig, 1928. S. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm to Bismarck, 10 May 1888 // *Bismarck O. Gedanken und Erinnerungen*. Stuttgart – Berlin, 1928. S. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aus dem Briefwechsel... Bd. 1. S. 251.

<sup>10</sup> Schweinitz to Bismarck, 12 January 1889 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 6. Nr. 1221. S. 123.

<sup>11</sup> *Инамов А.М. Политика Александра III в отношении Германии // Панорама*. 2016. Т. 22. С. 29. Cf. *Stellner F. Der erste Staatsbesuch des deutschen Kaisers Wilhelms II in Wien // Prague Papers on History of International Relations*. Vol. 5. Prague, 2001. S. 75–83.

<sup>12</sup> Most important monographs: *Rogge H. Holstein und Hohenlohe. Neue Beiträge zu Friedrich v. Holsteins Tätigkeit als Mitarbeiter Bismarcks und Ratgeber Hohenlohes*. Stuttgart, 1957; *Rich N. Friedrich von Holstein. Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, 1965; *Richter G. Friedrich von Holstein. Ein Mitarbeiter Bismarcks*. Lübeck – Hamburg, 1966.

<sup>13</sup> *Die geheime Papiere Friedrich von Holstein / hg. von N. Rich, M.H. Fisher, W. Frauendienst*. Bd. 1. Göttingen, 1956. S. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Cit. according to: *Rogge H. Op. cit.* S. 150.

<sup>15</sup> At the Berlin Congress, he as a member of the German commission played a pitiful role, Gorchakov and Shuvalov knew about his failures. Cf. *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Botschafters Joseph Maria von Radowitz / hg. von H. Holborn (hereinafter: Radowitz J.M. v. Aufzeichnungen...)*. Bd. 2. Stuttgart, 1925. S. 23, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of Appointment from 20 March 1890 archived in: Secret State Archives of Prussian Cultural Property, Berlin – Dahlem // Brandenburg-Prussian Home Archive. Repository 53. Emperor Wilhelm II and Family. № 159 (hereinafter: SSA PCP. BPH Rep. 53, Emperor Wilhelm II and Family). № 433.

One of the Emperor's confidants wrote about him: "I liked Caprivi for his calm, refined, objective understanding of things. I did not discover any genius political opinions or vice versa"<sup>17</sup>. The press portrayed him as "a great organizer, statesman with far-ranging insight"<sup>18</sup>, however, it was widely known that he lacked deep political experience, especially in the field of foreign policy. The disappointed Bismarck sarcastically commented on the lack of political experience of his successor stating that the Emperor named his best statesman a general and his best soldier the Chancellor, hinting at his own naming of Field Marshal General in March 1890. Caprivi was not directly associated with Prussian Junkers or any political party. However, he had been meeting with the anti-Bismarck since the 1880s.

Wilhelm II thought that Caprivi as general would be the right man to solve the political crisis accompanying Bismarck's removal from highest functions. Later, he wrote about him in his book: "After taking all this into consideration, it was decided to choose a man belonging to Prince Bismarck's generation, who had held a leading position in the wars and had already filled a Government position under him. Hence Caprivi was chosen. His age was a guarantee that he would be a careful and calm adviser for the "orphaned" young Emperor"<sup>19</sup>. In this sense, he called him "the greatest German after Bismarck" in a letter to the Austrian Emperor"<sup>20</sup>. Franz Joseph I replied: "An important guarantee for the future is in my eyes that you chose General Caprivi who is led by wise supra-partisanship and clever judgement despite at some point in history having different opinions than You"<sup>21</sup>. When it came to the attitude of the new Chancellor to the Emperor, one diplomat called it "overtly devoted and an obedient servant"<sup>22</sup>. This statement is not completely true. Despite the General being basically "planted" into his role, he did not follow blindly the Emperor's commands and did not go down in history as "a mindless puppet" or a weak epigone.

The Foreign Secretary Herbert count von Bismarck refused to stay in office. He explained to the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador: "My father and I are in a sense twins. When one goes, the other must follow"<sup>23</sup>. A "diplomacy novice" took his spot - Adolf Hermann Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein who previously was the Ambassador of Baden in Berlin. He did not have any previous experience with managing foreign policy, neither was he familiar with Bismarck's diplomatic machinery. How could he give advice to the Chancellor, a General without experiences in foreign policy? The British Premier Minister Salisbury said about him in 1891: "Obedient, organized but lacking initiative, a simple servant to the Emperor"<sup>24</sup>. He owed his office to Holstein and Eulenburg<sup>25</sup>, both helped him with managing foreign policy. It can very clearly be stated that the new State Secretary was dependent on Holstein.

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<sup>17</sup> P. Eulenburg to Holstein, 9 March 1890 // Philipp Eulenburg politisches Korrespondenz / hg. von J.C.G. Röhl. Bd. 1. Nr. 341. Boppard am Rhein, 1976. S. 485 (hereinafter: PK. I.).

<sup>18</sup> Berliner Tageblatt. 20.III.1890.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm II, The Kaiser's Memoirs. Wilhelm II Emperor of Germany 1888–1918. New York – London, 1922. P. 54 (hereinafter: *Wilhelm II. The Kaiser's Memoirs...*).

<sup>20</sup> Wilhelm II to Franz Joseph I, 3 April 1890. Berlin // HCSA. PA I. 468. Secret Files XXI. Fol. 356.

<sup>21</sup> Franz Joseph I to Wilhelm II, 12 April 1890, Vienna, cit. according to: Briefe Kaiser Franz Josephs I. und Kaiser Wilhelms II. über Bismarcks Rücktritt / hg. von H. Schlitter // Österreichische Rundschau. Bd. 58. Wien, 1919. S. 108.

<sup>22</sup> Eckardstein H. Lebenserinnerungen und politische Denkwürdigkeiten von Botschaftsrat a.D. Hermann Freiherrn von Eckardstein. Vol. 1. Leipzig, 1919. S. 130.

<sup>23</sup> Széchényi's telegram to Kálnoky, 20 March 1890. Berlin // HCSA. PA III. 138. Fol. 297.

<sup>24</sup> Cit. according to: Eyck E. Das persönliche Regiment Wilhelms II, Politische Geschichte des deutschen Kaiserreiches 1890–1917. Erlenbach – Zürich, 1948. S. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Holstein to P. Eulenburg, 26 March 1890 // PK. I. Nr. 368. S. 511–512; P. Eulenburg to Wilhelm II, 26 March 1890 // Ibid. Nr. 369. S. 513. The fact that Marschall's appointment was not a simple matter and that there were several proposals is also evidenced by correspondence of the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in Berlin. Széchényi's telegram from 24 March 1890 announced the appointment of von Alvensleben (HCSA. PA III, 138, fol. 351), one day later, it was announced that Marschall was appointed. Cf. Széchényi to Kálnoky, 25 March 1890. Berlin // HCSA. PA III. 138. Fol. 375.



Among the diplomats and court members, Eulenburg enjoyed the favor of the Emperor — Prussian Ambassador to smaller German states. His contemporaries were aware of his negative influence on the Emperor. The Bavarian Ambassador Lerchenfeld wrote that “he impudently flattered the Emperor and significantly contributed to Wilhelm II’s self-confidence increasing even more, thereby becoming more convinced that he is grand”<sup>26</sup>. Lady-in-waiting Spitzemberg called him a creature<sup>27</sup>. The Austro-Hungarian Ambassador stated in 1889: “His Majesty is thinking about visiting the Duke in Oldenburg. This visit is more so however to his friend, the former Prussian Ambassador Count Eulenburg”<sup>28</sup>.

Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter was an important person at court, being a close associate of Holstein, and later became the State Secretary (1910–1912). During the Emperor’s travels, he became the “Deputy” of the Foreign Office for the “Supreme Master”<sup>29</sup>.

Changes of key functions at the Foreign Office made possible significant increase and stabilization of Holstein’s influence. It is right to argue that he was one of the most experienced and hardest working officers who also had enough information that he gained from carefully studying private and official correspondences. However, he by himself could not shape German foreign policy. He often created documents and drafts that after being signed by the State Secretary, the Chancellor, and the Emperor eventually became outlines for diplomatic activities in practice. Unfortunately, he was often carried away by personal feelings, vengeful feelings, and emotional outbursts<sup>30</sup>.

Count Monts stated that “Bismarck did not create his own school unlike Moltke”<sup>31</sup>. Until his last moments in office, the Chancellor used to formulate the concepts of foreign policy himself, personally dictated crucial messages, kept extensive official and unofficial correspondences with diplomats all over the world. At the end of his time in office, his closest associate was his son, he never tried to name someone his “heir”. This could explain the fact why the Foreign Office in 1890 lacked independent and creative personnel. The “personnel” debilitation during the post-Bismarck era was caused by the “Iron Chancellor” himself. Additionally, when choosing diplomats, he preferred aristocrats. L. Cecil stated: “At the Wilhelmstraße, style was significantly more important than intellectual abilities. Bismarck called it “gentleman’s perspective””<sup>32</sup>.

Caprivi outlined his vision for German foreign policy by saying: “To act calmly, clearly, openly, and without diplomatic risks”<sup>33</sup>. When it came to foreign policy, the new German leadership had to solve the issue of renewing the Reinsurance Treaty between Germany and Russia that had been signed in 1887. It obliged St Petersburg to remain neutral in case of war between France and Germany unless the contractual partner was the aggressor. Berlin obliged to do the same in case of an Austro-Russian conflict<sup>34</sup>. Without a renewal, the contract was set to expire in 1890.

Bismarck started the negotiations already in February 1890. On 17 March, the Russian Ambassador, Count P. Shuvalov returned to Berlin. H. Bismarck told the Emperor on March 20 that Shuvalov reacted to Bismarck’s dismissal by cancelling the meeting about the treaty’s

<sup>26</sup> *Lerchenfeld-Köfering H.G.* Op. cit. S. 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Am Hof der Hohenzollern.* Aus dem Tagebuch der Baronin Spitzemberg 1865–1914. München, 1979. S. 197.

<sup>28</sup> Széchényi to Kálnoky. 14 April 1889 // HCSA. PA III. 137. Fol. 596.

<sup>29</sup> *Andreas W. Kiderlen-Wächter.* Randglossen zu seinem Nachlass // *Historische Zeitschrift.* Bd. 132. 1925. S. 255 ad.

<sup>30</sup> *Stellner F.* Poslední německý císař. Praha, 1995. P. 82–85.

<sup>31</sup> *Erinnerungen und Gedanken des Botschafters Anton Graf Monts* / hg. von K.F. Nowak, F. Thimme. Berlin, 1932. S. 187.

<sup>32</sup> *Cecil L.* Der diplomatische Dienst im kaiserlichen Deutschland. Das diplomatische Korps / hg. von K. Schwabe. Berlin – Boston, 2019. S. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Cit. according to: *Herm G.* Deutschland-Russland. Tausend Jahre einer seltsamen Freundschaft. Hamburg, 1990. S. 304.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Elzer H.* Bismarcks Bündnispolitik von 1887. Erfolg und Grenzen einer europäischen Friedensordnung. Frankfurt a. M. et al., 1991; where there is an extensive list of additional sources and studies on the topic. For an overview of Russian diplomacy see e.g.: *Рыбачёнок И.С.* Россия в Берлинской системе международных отношений. 1878–1914 годы // *Новая и новейшая история.* 2013. № 6. С. 79–100.

renewal. H. Bismarck intentionally misrepresented what Shuvalov said. He probably wanted to give the impression that without Bismarck, the treaty could not be renewed<sup>35</sup>.

Wilhelm II was in support of renewing the treaty and based H. Bismarck's conversation with the Russian Ambassador commented that the Tsar probably wants to renew the treaty for six more years. "I agree and I task you with informing Shuvalov"<sup>36</sup>. Later, he wanted to prove that he could conclude the treaty even without the Bismarcks. On 21 March, he informed Shuvalov that Bismarck's dismissal would not change Berlin's intentions: "Please tell the Majesty that I am absolutely willing to renew the treaty and that my foreign policy will remain as it was during the reign of my grandfather"<sup>37</sup>. Alexander III commented on Shuvalov's telegram about the meeting with the Emperor: "There could not have been a more satisfactory result. Absolutely reassuring"<sup>38</sup>. The Russian Ambassador expected the confirmation of his powers but before he received a positive answer, the persons surrounding the Emperor managed to sway his willingness.

The most influential persons spoke out against the treaty's renewal. Caprivi feared that by making public the secret treaty, Germany could be compromised<sup>39</sup>. He agreed with Holstein that it was necessary to reject Bismarck's complicated and bold diplomatic game<sup>40</sup>. He wanted to lead a clear, simple diplomacy. The new Baden Ambassador noted that not renewing the treaty "was solely the making of Holstein"<sup>41</sup>.

The State Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office M. von Berchem also supported the refusal. He pointed out the one-sided advantages that Russia would gain from the treaty<sup>42</sup>. First Quartermaster-General Waldersee continued to persuade the governing powers that Russia wants to lead local war and is preparing for it<sup>43</sup>. It is interesting to note that even "Bismarckian" Ambassadors in Vienna and Constantinople agreed with the Chancellor's opinion<sup>44</sup>. The long-time Ambassador to Russia, General H.L. von Schweinitz, supported Caprivi by agreeing with him. He stated that Caprivi could not remain in office if the treaty was renewed against his will<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. H. Bismarck to Wilhelm II, 20 March 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914. Sammlung der Diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* / hg. von J. Lepsius, A. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, F. Thimme. Bd. 7. Nr. 1366. Berlin, 1924. S. 3.

<sup>36</sup> H. Bismarck to Wilhelm II, 20 March 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1366. S. 3; also: *Radowitz J.M. v. Aufzeichnungen...* Bd. 2. S. 323–324.

<sup>37</sup> Briefwechsel des Botschafters General v. Schweinitz / hg. von W. von Schweinitz. Berlin, 1928. S. 265.

<sup>38</sup> Cit. according to: *Nichols J.A. Germany After Bismarck: The Caprivi Era, 1890–1894*. Cambridge, 1958. P. 54; Cf. Schweinitz to the Foreign Office, 2 April 1890 // *GStA PK. III. Hauptabteilung, Preussisches Ministerium des Auswärtigen. Preussische Gesandtschaft in Dresden*, Nr. 1058, Fol. 209–210 (letters sent to the Prussian Ambassador in Saxony).

<sup>39</sup> Caprivi's entry from 28 March 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1396. S. 11. Cf.; also: Caprivi's interpretation to Wilhelm II, 22 May 1890 // *Ibid.* Nr. 1379. S. 30–33. The Ambassador in Vienna, prince Reuss assured Holstein that "Kálnoky does not know anything specific" about the Reinsurance Treaty. Reuss to Holstein, 18 April 1890, *Geheime Papiere*. Bd. 3. S. 302.

<sup>40</sup> Holstein's entry from 20 May 1890 // *Ibid.* Nr. 1374. S. 22–24; also: *Geheime Papiere*. Bd. 1. S. 126.

<sup>41</sup> *Brauer A. Im Dienste Bismarcks. Persönliche Erinnerungen* / hg. von H. Rogge. Berlin, 1936. S. 331.

<sup>42</sup> Berchem's entry from 25 March 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1368. S. 4–10.

<sup>43</sup> *Denkwürdigkeiten des Generalfeldmarschalls Alfred Grafen von Waldersee* / hg. von H.O. Meisner. Bd. 1. Stuttgart – Berlin, 1923. S. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Heinrich VII Prince Reuss to Marschall, 4 June 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1381. S. 35–37; Heinrich VII Prince Reuss to Holstein, 5 June 1890 // *Geheime Papiere*. Bd. 3. S. 304, Radowitz to Caprivi, 9 June 1890 // *Ibid.* Nr. 1383. S. 41; Schweinitz to Caprivi, 25 June 1890 // *GStA PK. Bd. 3. Hauptabteilung, Preussisches Ministerium des Auswärtigen. Preussische Gesandtschaft in Dresden*. Nr. 1058. Fol. 226–227.

<sup>45</sup> *Denkwürdigkeiten des Botschafters General von Schweinitz*. Bd. 2 / hg. von W. von Schweinitz. Berlin, 1927. S. 404 ad. The Ambassador later returned to St. Petersburg where he was informed about the definite non-renewal of the treaty by the Germans. As a longtime supporter of friendly relations with Russia, he did no longer wish to remain in office and was replaced in 1892 by B. von Werder. Cf. F. von Pourtalés to Caprivi, 25 June 1890 // *GStA PK. 3. Hauptabteilung, Preussisches Ministerium des Auswärtigen. Preussische Gesandtschaft in Dresden*. Nr. 1058. Fol. 203–231.

The Emperor did not forget about the wish of his “great” grandfather Wilhelm I who urged his grandson to keep friendly relations with Russia. Due to the pressure of the Chancellor and other officers, he changed his decision. He feared the most that the potential renewal could endanger the Triple Alliance, namely the relation to Austria-Hungary. He saw the Treaty between Germany and Austria-Hungary as “the true partnership between two German courts, in which however Berlin now was entitled the leading spot”. He corrected his decision by with a sigh: “In that case, it is sadly not possible”<sup>46</sup>. The Emperor similarly explained Shuvalov’s reasons for not renewing the treaty in January 1895. At that point he stated that after Bismarck was dismissed, the new Chancellor “put a knife to his throat”, and he was in no position to be able to afford a new government crisis<sup>47</sup>. The available opinions show that the main protagonists of German foreign policy did not wish for the Reinsurance Treaty to be renewed. Later in emigration, the Emperor tried to blame the non-renewal on Russia writing: “The much-discussed nonrenewal of the reinsurance treaty with Russia, already touched upon by me, is not to be considered so decisive as to have influenced the question of whether there was to be war or peace. The reinsurance treaty, in my opinion, would not have prevented the Russia of Nicholas II from taking the road to the Entente; under Alexander III it would have been superfluous”<sup>48</sup>.

In April, the Germans stopped negotiating with the Russian Ambassador. Despite the Tsar’s comment that “personally I am very glad that Germany does not wish to renew the Treaty, and I do not really regret that it does not”<sup>49</sup>, Russians were very upset about the non-renewal. Anxiety in St Petersburg grew when the Russian Foreign Minister N. K. Giers failed to get reassurance from Germany that Berlin would not incite Austro-Hungarian aggression in the Balkans and would abide by the Straits Convention. In May, Holstein commented these Russian motions<sup>50</sup> by saying: “The moment the Russians will be sure that no one will be able to pass through the straits, they will do as they please in the Black Sea”<sup>51</sup>.

Russia’s motivation to secure its Western boarder by renewing the Reinsurance Treaty can be also explained by the change in priorities of Tsar’s foreign policy. German diplomacy did not notice in time the shift in interest from South-East Europe to Central Asia that also entailed the effort to lower the tension with Germany. Due to this error, German diplomats were counting on Russian expansion to the Balkans and the Straits. Subsequently blaming the non-renewal of the Treaty on Chancellor Caprivi was unjustified.

Arguments for his decision were formed by the Foreign Office and the prerequisites for the decline of Russian-German relations had been developing even before he ascended to office since Bismarck did not allow the economic situation to gravely influence international relations. With his coercing economic policy, he “pushed” Imperial Russia into the arms of French capital. Before Bismarck was dismissed, there technically was economic war between Russia and Germany. It can be said that the non-renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty did not symbolize the start but the end of the distorted relations between St. Petersburg and Berlin<sup>52</sup>. Russian historian Abezgauz concludes that: “The history of the inception, existence, and non-renewal of the Treaty is an example of the increasing importance of economic relations between states in Europe.

<sup>46</sup> Holstein’s report from 10 June 1904 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1392. S. 49.

<sup>47</sup> Shuvalov to Lamzdorf, 17 January 1895 // *Дневник В.Н. Ламздорфа, 1886–1890* / отв. ред. Ф.А. Ротштейн. М. – Л., 1926. С. 21–22.

<sup>48</sup> *Wilhelm II. The Kaiser’s Memoirs...* P. 329.

<sup>49</sup> *Виноградов К.Б., Гостенков А.В. Дни и дела Фридриха Гольштейна* // *Новая и новейшая история*. 1984. № 2. С. 155.

<sup>50</sup> Schweinitz to Caprivi, 15 May 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1372. S. 17–19.

<sup>51</sup> Holstein to Hatzfeldt, 16 May 1890 // *Botschafter Paul Graf von Hatzfeldt Nachgelassene Papiere 1838–1901* / hg. von G. Ebel, M. Behnen (hereinafter: Hatzfeldt, NP). Nr. 462. Boppard am Rhein, 1976. S. 777.

<sup>52</sup> Interesting questions about Bismarck’s role in later isolation of Germany were asked f.e. by *Schölgen G. Die Macht in der Mitte Europas. Stationen deutscher Außenpolitik von Friedrich dem Großen bis zur Gegenwart*. München, 1992. S. 32–48.



Foreign trade and financial transactions dictated the development of international relations”<sup>53</sup>. Transferring large financial amounts into French banks was next to foreign policy reasons the main impulse for Russia and France growing closer. Alexander III commented on Giers’ report from 11 June 1890: “There is no doubt that Germany changed its policy, we must be prepared for all possibilities”<sup>54</sup>. Despite the distorted economic relations, the Russians were ready to co-operate with Berlin and the alternative alliance with the French Republic had at first little support from Russian court members, diplomats, and politicians. Later German policies failed to stop Russia and France growing closer, quite the reverse, it contributed to its acceleration.

The German Emperor continued the standards contacts with the Russian court. In August 1890, he traveled to Russia for an official visit and tried to “calm down” the Tsar as much as possible and charm him by being adorable. Alexander III felt neither calm nor charmed after the Emperor left. Alexander III did not harbor any illusions about the Emperor, he despised him. When receiving a letter from the Emperor that stated that “he could not come because he was dealing with exterminating social democracy”, he burst out laughing and showed the letter to his confidant saying: “What else is there to say on this matter?”<sup>55</sup>. During the visit, there were no detailed political consultations taking place. The visit ended by mutual reassurance of remaining friendly<sup>56</sup>. The Russians tried to put on paper the “friendly conversations” but the Germans refused. According to one of the key Russian diplomats this “was the point when our secret treaty with Germany was finally laid to rest”<sup>57</sup>.

After Bismarck’s system of “juggling five balls at once” fell apart due to the non-renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty, Caprivi had to create an alternative “construction” of Germany’s international position. After resolving the “question of Russia”, Caprivi’s foreign policy goals shifted to forming a close alliance with Great Britain, maintaining calm relations with France, and strengthening the Triple Alliance. Austria-Hungary remained Berlin’s key partner since it needed German support for its politics in the Balkans. The Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, G. Kálnoky (1832–1898) mentioned in his circular to the Ambassadors Bismarck’s dismissal as a “terrible ending”. The demission did not surprise him since it was inevitable due to Bismarck’s old age and health. Kálnoky saw no reason to doubt Germany’s foreign policies and the continuation of the Dual Alliance. Similarly, Count Deym tried to calm London stating, “Emperor Wilhelm is as much of a supporter of the Triple Alliance as Bismarck”<sup>58</sup>.

After the relations between Germany and Russia cooled off and the threat of Russian and French alliance arose, the only alternative for Berlin was London. British-German relations seemed to be great in 1890. An essential impulse for not renewing the Reinsurance Treaty was the impression of German diplomats that Great Britain would want to give up its “great isolation” and would want to join the Triple Alliance<sup>59</sup>. Further development showed that such impression was wrong.

<sup>53</sup> *Абезгауз С.А.* Влияние экономических отношений на договор «перестраховки» 1887 года между Россией и Германией // Труды исторического факультета СПбГУ. 2012. № 9. С. 85.

<sup>54</sup> Cit. according to: *Манфред А.З.* Образование русско-французского союза. М., 1975. С. 315. About the Tsar’s opinion on the negotiations about the renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty cf. *Дневник В.Н. Ламздорфа...* С. 43.

<sup>55</sup> *Lerchenfeld-Köfering H.G.* Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Persönlichkeit und Herrscher / hg. von D. Albrecht. Kallmünz, 1985. S. 21.

<sup>56</sup> Schweinitz to Caprivi, 25 August 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1611. S. 351–352; Wilhelm II reaffirmed the apolitical nature of the visit to Kiderlen-Wächter even before leaving. Kiderlen-Wächter to Holstein, 15 July 1890 // *Geheime Papiere*. Bd. 3. S. 309; About the unfavorable reaction in London cf. Hatzfeldt to Salisbury, 18 August 1890 // Hatzfeldt. NP. Nr. 484. S. 799–800; Salisbury to Hatzfeldt, 22 August 1890 // *Ibid.* Nr. 485. S. 800–801; and Hatzfeldt to Marschall, 27 August 1890 // *Ibid.* Nr. 486. S. 801–802.

<sup>57</sup> Briefwechsel des Botschafters General v. Schweinitz. S. 270. Caprivi’s entry about the negotiations with Giers from 8 September 1890 // *Die Grosse Politik*. Bd. 7. Nr. 1612. S. 352–353.

<sup>58</sup> Deym to Kálnoky, 27 March 1890, London // *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv*. PA VIII. 110. Fol. 125.

<sup>59</sup> *Denkwürdigkeiten des Botschafters General von Schweinitz*. Bd. 2. S. 396–403; cf. *Cecil L.* Wilhelm II, Prince and Emperor, 1859–1900. London, 1989. P. 188.

After the Reinsurance Treaty was not renewed, Russia started to work on forming an alliance with France. In summer, the maneuvers in Narva were attended by a French delegation. The French and Russian Chiefs of Staff in secret began to discuss concrete military cooperation. The French Ambassador in Russia wrote on this event to Paris: “Closer ties between France and Russia that seemed like an illusion... are now step by step becoming real and solid”<sup>60</sup>. The majority of influential German diplomats continued to dismiss the premise that an alliance between Russia and France could happen which is the visit of French squadrons at the Russian navy base in Kronstadt in 1891 was even more surprising for Germans. The fact that the Russian autocrat listened to the revolutionary anthem Marseillaise bare headed on the deck of a French ship felt like a bomb exploding. Moreover, in the same year, a military convention was signed between Russia and France. Caprivi afterwards admitted the negative impact of not renewing the Reinsurance Treaty: “Would we have renewed this treaty, Kronstadt would not have been such a celebration”<sup>61</sup>.

The German historian D. Geyer pointedly called the changes “revolution of the alliances”<sup>62</sup>. Instead of cooperating with Russia that “protected” Germany from a Russo-French alliance, Russia did indeed end up allying with France which left Germany in the worst foreign political situation being allied with the weakest power — Austria-Hungary. It symbolized a huge loss for Berlin’s diplomacy after spending many years cooperating with Russia. The new foreign policy of Germany significantly differed from Bismarck’s. With hindsight, the new diplomacy did not prove itself, calculated falsely, analyzed incorrectly, and predicted wrongly. On the other hand, the question remains: were Bismarck to remain in power would he have been able to stabilize political and economic relations with St. Petersburg?

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<sup>60</sup> Laboulaye to Ribot, 24 August 1890 // Documents diplomatiques français 1871–1914. Т. 7. Paris, 1929. Nr. 160. P. 150.

<sup>61</sup> Cit. according to: *Canis K.* Bismarcks Außenpolitik 1870–1890. Aufstieg und Gefährdung, Paderborn, 2003. S. 991.

<sup>62</sup> *Geyer D.* Das russische Imperium / hg. von J. Baberowski, R. Lindner. Berlin — Boston, 2020. S. 253.

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