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**POLITICS OF RUSSIA IN EUROPE 1870-1875  
(END OF NEUTRALIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA.  
LEAGUE OF THE THREE EMPERORS)**

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**Abstract:** The Treaty of Paris signed on 30 March 1856 was humiliating for Russia. Especially grave were the articles of the Treaty that concerned the Black Sea. The provision on the neutralization of the Black Sea forbade Russia to have a fleet in its waters, as well as to build forts and infrastructure. In the Treaty of 15 April 1856 Great Britain, France and Austria pledged to supervise if Russia would honour the conditions of the Treaty of Paris, which created the “Crimea Coalition.” After the defeat in the Crimea War Russia did not “lose the status of a great country,” but it was forced to give up on its earlier role in Europe, which weakened its international position. After taking over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alexander Gorchakov defined the aim of the Russian external politics: “I am looking for a man who will annul the provisions of the Treaty of Paris which refer to the issue of the Black Sea... I am looking for him and I will find him.” Thus, after the Paris Congress Russian politics had a unique purpose – it intensely sought the revision of the Treaty of Paris excluding everything else. Since France was not prepared to support Russia, St. Petersburg turned to Prussia, which showed good will to change the provisions on the Black Sea. This mutual rapprochement conditioned the subsequent formation of the League of the Three Emperors between Russia, Germany and Austria.

**Keywords:** Russia, Europe, 19th century, League of the Three Emperors, Bismarck, Gorchakov.

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“Between France and us there will never be peace,  
with Russia war will never be necessary,  
under the condition that the circumstances are not changed  
by liberal nonsense and dynastic absurdities.”  
(Otto von Bismarck)

**T**he end of the war between Austria and Prussia in 1866 did not end conflicts in Europe, but foreshadowed “fundamental changes in the balance of power.” After successful wars against Denmark and Austria Prussia decided “to challenge French hegemony in Europe.” Namely, under the auspices of Berlin the North German Confederation was created on 10 August 1867 and it included 22 German states. Russia had to decide, not only because of the fact that the victory of France, as they believed in St. Petersburg, would consolidate the position of Napoleon III on the continent, but also

because this implied a new “impulse to the Crimea coalition.” The Russian government believed that it would open up a path to the alliance between France and Austria. St. Petersburg estimated that, in case that succeeded, France would not agree to changes in the Treaty of Paris, whereas Prussia hinted it was ready to “pay the price” and support Russia in their intention to change the provisions on the neutralization of the Black Sea. Gorchakov could only note with pleasure that “all the countries are now directed towards west” and that it was necessary to use that circumstance in order to solve “vitally important interests in the east.”<sup>1</sup> In November 1866 the Prussian heir to the throne Wilhelm visited St. Petersburg and on that occasion they re-confirmed the agreement regarding the support of Prussia to Russia concerning the changes of limitations imposed by the Treaty of Paris.

The Russian-Prussian rapprochement, which Gorchakov did not accept, “became a fact.” At the Special Counselling, held during the presidency of Alexander II in November 1866, Gorchakov suggested a unilateral declaration in which Russia would revoke the realization of articles of the Treaty of Paris regarding the neutralization of the Black Sea. However, this proposal did not get any support, whereas against it were the great prince Constantine Nikolayevich, the minister of defence Dimitri Milyutin and the finance minister M. H. Reytern, who spoke of the fleet and the army being unprepared, as well as the finances of the country in case of the possible deterioration of international relations. The emperor added that he fully agreed with the vice-chancellor but was forced to lean towards the will of the majority. In April 1867 Gorchakov supported Prussia by saying that Russia was ready to create “serious trouble” for Vienna in case there was an alliance between France and Austria. After that Bismarck sent a dispatch to St. Petersburg in which he hinted that “Prussia could support the desires and intentions of Russia” in relation to the Treaty of Paris. In 1867 Alexander II and Gorchakov visited the World Exhibition in Paris, where they stayed from 1 until 11 June, whose “shine could not hide the cracks in the edifice of the imperial France.” Their intention was to start negotiating with Napoleon III, but the meeting of the two emperors was not successful even though Gorchakov said upon the arrival to France: “I brought with me the entire office to create new deeds.” Napoleon III refused to talk about the changes in the provision on the neutralization of the Black Sea, which indicated that Russia could not count on the support of France. Gorchakov was led to conclude that “a serious and decent agreement with Prussia is the best combination.”<sup>2</sup>

The departure of the Russian emperor happened at the moment when isolated France was forced to forsake the pretensions over Luxembourg. The conference held in London in May 1867 recognized its neutrality, so the Prussian garrison was taken out of the fort and then it was demolished. Russia and France then again tried to find a common ground, but “no deeds,” as Gorchakov put it, followed. Russian-French relations were again overshadowed by “the seal of the Polish issue.” Before Emperor Alexander departed for

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<sup>1</sup> Even when it came to France Bismarck tried to “give a good twist to the Eastern issue” so in January 1867 he suggested that it should be made “available and peaceful” through a system of compensation in the Middle East. However, the initiation of the Eastern issue could not reconcile French interests on the Rhine, instead it made it even more acute. Napoleon III refused the Prussian offer of friendship in the Middle East without any compensations in the west with the following words: “You offer us lands without salt and Luxembourg has salt.” This ended the negotiations between Prussia and France without any success.

<sup>2</sup> AVPRI: 1866-1867, лл. 12–15, 95–96; Ignatev 1997: 75.

France, at the suggestion of the head of the gendarmerie corps count Peter A. Shuvalov, the participants of the 1863 uprising were amnestied. Alexander II signed the act of amnesty on 29 May 1867 just before he went to France. This measure was taken “counting on good reception” in France of “its Polophilic liking and a significant Polish colony.” However, these expectations were not confirmed, because during his visit to the Court of Justice in Paris the emperor was met with the cries “Long live Poland!” Two days later, on 6 June, in the Bouis de Boulogne Beresovsky attempted an assassination on Alexander I. His trial then turned into a demonstration of the French support of Polish revolutionaries. The results of the negotiation of Gorchakov with Napoleon on 3 June 1867 were also not encouraging because the most important issue for Russia – the changes in the status of the Black Sea – was not mentioned in a single word.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the journey of Emperor Alexander and Gorchakov to Paris did not lead to an improvement of the Russian-French relations. At the end of 1867, when he summed up the results of the ten years of attempts to solve the problem from 1856 with reference to the cooperation with Paris, Gorchakov was forced to admit: “The cooperation with the Tuileries cabinet was, to be honest, insincere and quite limited.”

After returning from Paris the Emperor and Gorchakov began to act much more decisively in the terms of rapprochement with Prussia. At the same time, Bismarck did everything to convince Russia of the benefits of the alliance with Prussia. In February 1868 in a letter to Wilhelm I Alexander II expressed his desire “to continue an agreement made during the reign of Alexander I and Friedrich Wilhelm III” with Prussia. It was a signal to begin the negotiations between the two countries, which encouraged Russia to seek support from Prussia to change the Paris Treaty regarding the neutrality of the Black Sea. Bismarck promised Gorchakov that he would “support Russia’s main request in exchange for benevolent neutrality in the event of a war with France and the obligation to paralyze the main military forces of Austria.” The consent of the chancellor regarding the key issues made it possible for the two countries to make a general agreement in March 1868. The agreement stipulated that in the case of the Prussian-French war Russia would maintain neutrality and would “demonstratively send to the borders of Austria an army of 100,000 soldiers,” with which Emperor Alexander II agreed on 13 December 1868. A formal alliance was not concluded – both sides restricted themselves to an oral agreement. In return, Prussia officially confirmed the earlier promise to support Russia in its efforts to change the provision of the Paris Treaty on the Black Sea. As before, the entire foreign policy of the government in St. Petersburg was dedicated to this goal, while Bismarck knew better than Napoleon how to use that. In August 1868 Bismarck told St. Petersburg that Russia could count on the support of Prussia in changing the Paris Treaty. “We will gladly do everything possible for it,” the chancellor said. When in the wake of the French-Prussian war Alexander met Wilhelm I and Bismarck in Ems for four days from 1 to 4 June 1870 “there was no mention of the war against France. No insurance was requested, nor was any given. The meeting was basically anti-Austrian, but certainly not anti-French.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thus, the main purpose of Gorchakov’s foreign political programme remained unattained although already on 16 June 1867, on the occasion of his fifty years in diplomacy, he received a promotion to the position of the state chancellor.

<sup>4</sup> Tatischev 1902: 474–475; Obolenskaya 1977: 58–73.

Overestimating his military power, Minister Leboeuf said that the Prussian army “does not exist and that he does not recognize it.” After that, on 19 July 1870 France declared the war on Prussia.<sup>5</sup> On 27 July Russia unveiled the *Declaration of Neutrality*: “His imperial Majesty is determined to preserve strict neutrality in relation to the warring states, but only until the war endangers the interests of Russia.” The Declaration also emphasized that “the imperial government is always ready to provide the most sincere assistance to any endeavour aimed at limiting the situation of war, to shorten their duration, and to bring Europe the benefits of peace.” A message was then sent from St. Petersburg to Vienna and Paris that, if Austria-Hungary entered the war, Russia would follow its example. Gorchakov told the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in St. Petersburg: “If Austria joins mobilization, Russia will do the same; if it takes part in the war, we will be able to protect our own interests.” On 23 July Alexander II warned the Austrian ambassador, saying that he regarded the Polish issue as “the main interest of Russia” and that it would be raised immediately in case Austria took a hostile position against Prussia: “Then I will be obliged to forsake armed neutrality and I will send an army to your border.” Furthermore, on behalf of the King of Prussia, Alexander guaranteed the inviolability of the Austrian border, which was also confirmed by Bismarck. Vienna subsequently took a neutral position, as did Britain and Italy. In August 1870 Bismarck informed St. Petersburg that he could count on the support of Prussia with respect to the Paris Treaty. “We will voluntarily do everything possible for it.” Prussian army proved superior on the battlefield. After the disaster of Sedan on 2 September 1870, when Napoleon III was captured along with his army, France was practically defeated. The official body of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs *Journal de St. – Petersbourg* responded to that with an article whose author, with the approval of

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<sup>5</sup> France counted on its own strength and on the old “political combinations tested by time,” but the politics of Napoleon III led the Second Empire to a complete isolation. Having missed the possibility of an agreement with Russia, France also lost Britain’s favour. In addition, France was the only country standing on the path to the final union of Italy. Its garrisons secured the existence of the Pope’s authority in Rome, so Paris could not count on the benevolent neutrality of its Italian neighbour. When Austria was concerned, which would also very quickly show, Napoleon greatly overestimated the ability of that partner. In such extremely unfavourable circumstances France entered into a new crisis which was opened up by the revolution in Spain. When Queen Isabel was banished from the country in September 1868, the Provisional Government decided to offer the crown to a new dynasty. On 6 June 1869 a new Constitution was introduced in Spain and the crown was offered to Leopold von Hohenzollern. French diplomacy decided to use the Spanish question as a cause to start a war since Napoleon III was in need of a “little war victory.” On 28 June King Wilhelm I stated that he did not oppose the takeover of the throne from Prince Leopold. Subsequently, on 9 July France’s ambassador to Prussia Benedetti, on the occasion of his reception, handed over to the Prussian King a request to demand Leopold to renounce the Spanish throne. The request was non-tactical and humiliating, representing a “public provocation of the war.” Wilhelm did not want to risk a new war with a country like France that had a solid military organization. On 12 July 1870 Prince Leopold renounced his claim to the Spanish crown, but on 13 July Bendetti met again with the king in Ems and handed him the new demands of Paris. King Wilhelm was supposed to approve the resignation of Prince Leopold and to assume an obligation not to allow him to change his decision. The king was shocked by the request, but he promised that he would revisit that issue, after which he travelled to Berlin. The king’s response, as well as transcripts of talks with Benedetti, were then sent to Bismarck, who had lunch with the Minister of the Military von Ron and Chief of general staff von Moltke. Having read the text in front of them and having been reassured that in the event of a war France would be defeated, Bismarck “extracted” the final part which spoke of the possibility of continuing negotiations and then sent a telegram whose meaning was completely changed. It was the famous “forgery of Ems,” which gave Paris the long-awaited cause for war.

Gorchakov, emphasized the results of what had happened. Russia could not look forward to changing the European balance, but “words do not help here” – France was paying for its political mistakes and “its national vices.” It did not let Europe “live peacefully” since the time of Napoleon I, “... 1807 ... caused 1870.”<sup>6</sup> General dissatisfaction in France led to the formation of the government of the National Defence, the overthrow of Napoleon and the proclamation of the republic on 4 September 1870. In St. Petersburg “they did not expect such a rapid defeat of France” and were “unpleasantly surprised by Prussia’s claims to the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.” Emperor Alexander wrote to the Prussian King suggesting that he would not impose a humiliating peace on France, but Wilhelm I replied that “public opinion would not allow him to give up annexation.”

On 4 September the citizens of Paris occupied the building of the Legislative Assembly and demanded immediate dethronement of Napoleon III and his dynasty. The second empire collapsed and the rule went to the hands of the government of the National Defence. On 6 September the government made a statement that it would hand over to the Germans “not an inch of their land nor a stone from their fortresses.” Following the decision of the government, Thiers was sent on a journey to the capitals of European countries. He first went to London on 27 September 1870 and then to Vienna.<sup>7</sup> When the President of the French Republic Thiers visited St. Petersburg, Gorchakov told him “to have courage and make peace.” At the end of the conversation he added: “We will later deal with the rapprochement of France and Russia.” On 29 September 1870, in a conversation with Thiers Emperor Alexander pronounced the words that announced the future alliance between Russia and France, which was concluded twenty years later. “I would much like to create such an alliance with France. An alliance of peace, not an alliance for the sake of war and conquest,” said the emperor during the talks.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, his plea for Russia to stand up for France did not meet with support – “Russian diplomacy could not go below the borders of civility.” The Russian Emperor only chose to advise Wilhelm I to show moderation when dictating the conditions of future peace. Austria-Hungary and Great Britain did not even do as much while Italy benefited from the departure of the French army from the Papal State. On 20 September 1870 its troops occupied Rome and after that the Italian kingdom did not show the desire to interfere with such a dangerous conflict. On 20 October Thiers returned to France “empty-handed” – his mission ended in failure. The north-western part of France was occupied by the Prussian army – Paris was under siege. In the fortress of Metz under siege were 73,000 French soldiers under the command of Marshall Bazin. The garrison in Metz surrendered on 27 October, after which France remained without an army. It was not possible to create a new army at that moment.

The interest in supporting Berlin in terms of the Paris Treaty did not allow Emperor

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<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of August the French Army of the Rhine, which had around 120,000 soldiers, under the command of Marshall Mac Mahon started advancing with the aim to help the army of Marshall Bazin, which was surrounded in the fort of Metz. The success of that quest could have been France’s chance of salvation but between 29 and 31 August the Army of the Rhine was stopped, defeated and suppressed to Sedan. The Prussian army under Moltke’s command began the siege of the fort on 1 September and on 2 September Sedan capitulated. They captured around 300,000 French soldiers and officers.

<sup>7</sup> Howard 2003: 225, 336, 353, 433.

<sup>8</sup> Narochnickaya 1978: 71–96; Shneerson 1976: 91–122.

Alexander II to oppose the Prussian demands. Thus, the war between Prussia and France indicated to St. Petersburg the right moment to change the articles in the Paris Treaty, which restricted their rights in the Black Sea. After Sedan, Gorchakov believed that the moment had come “to wash away the stain that remained on Russia since the Crimean War.” Gorchakov then told the emperor that it was time to raise the question of the “justifiableness of the demands” of Russia. Gorchakov’s proposal was discussed on 27 October 1870 at the Council of Ministers, but there was no single opinion.<sup>9</sup> Although Chancellor Gorchakov felt that the opposition of European states would only be reduced to the “war on paper,” the Russian minister claimed that the opportunity was extremely favourable because France, as one of the guarantee powers of the Paris Treaty, “was down” and without it Austria-Hungary “could not risk standing against Russia.” Because of the change in the balance of powers, “it was highly unlikely that Turkey would stand up against Russia.”<sup>10</sup> Only United Kingdom remained, but it was now in “a certain isolation.” It was therefore necessary for Russia to act quickly, while support was still important to Prussia. Emperor Alexander II, who presided over the council, supported Gorchakov’s proposal.<sup>11</sup>

Gorchakov made the first step with a decision of 7 September, which hinted at Russia’s intentions regarding the further implementation of the Paris Treaty. On 31 October 1870 the Russian Chancellor sent a circular<sup>12</sup> to diplomats accredited in the capitals of the signatory states of the Paris Treaty. In the circular Gorchakov reminded everyone that Russia consistently fulfilled all the articles of the contract, as did other countries, and emphasized that under the changed circumstances it “could not allow for the contract, violated in many individual and general articles, to remain binding in those articles which are concerned with its interests.” “The fifteen-year experiment proves that this principle [neutralization], which the security of the borders of the Russian Empire depends on in its entire length on that side, has only a theoretical meaning.” Russia, therefore, returned to itself the right to hold a fleet in the Black Sea and did not oppose giving the same right to

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<sup>9</sup> The council was held in the imperial court and was presided by Alexander II. There they discussed the issue of the possible directions of action of Russia. The emperor came forth with the opinion that it was necessary to change the difficult provisions of the Paris Treaty and, this time, like in November 1866, the Minister of Finances M. H. Reytern suggested taking a very careful position. He was supported by the Minister of the Interior A. J. Timashev. The Minister of the Military D. A. Milyutin recommended that Russia be limited only to the statement on establishing rights in the Black Sea, which would not lead to force in case Romania decided not to agree with the solution. Finally a suggestion was accepted which did not concern the issue of south Besarabia and demilitarization of the Åland Islands. Ignatev 1999: 176-177.

<sup>10</sup> In August 1870 the Russian ambassador in Turkey Count N. P. Ignatyev, while negotiating with the Grand Vizier Ali-Pasha, raised the issue of the changes in the borders in the Black Sea on the basis of the Russian-Turkish agreement. The Turks did not rush with the response – the Grand Vizier, remaining oriented towards France, obviously did not expect its defeat. On the other hand, Gorchakov did not want to wait for the ending of the French-Prussian war because he did not believe in Bismarck’s benevolence. The Russian chancellor hurried to solve the issue which stemmed from the treaty provisions from 1856. In the report to Alexander II Gorchakov wrote: “To build a political score on sentimentality implies giving over to illusions.”

<sup>11</sup> AVPRI: 1870, ll. 24–25; Bushuev 1961: 91–98; Ignatev 1997: 77.

<sup>12</sup> After the circular Gorchakov was considered the “saviour of the country” in Russia. Prince Gorchakov wrote this circular in French. In a talk with Kiselyev prince Gorchakov again formulated his politics by saying that he “looked for a man who would help him annul the paragraphs of the Paris Treaty which concern the fleet in the Black Sea and the borders of Besarabia...”

Turkey. So the agreement brought Russia to a disadvantageous and dangerous position, which is why the Russian government, Gorchakov warned, no longer consider itself bound to respect the provisions that limited its sovereign rights on the Black Sea. He, therefore, demanded of the Russian diplomatic representatives to clarify with the governments with which they were accredited that the aim of his demarche was only to protect the security of Russia – with the promise that Russia would “consistently fulfil” all other articles of the Paris Treaty – which meant that it would not “open the East issue either.”

This was done at the time of the capitulation of the French army in Metz, which “confirmed that France was eliminated as a factor of opposition to Russia.” Britain and Austria-Hungary remained and they resolutely opposed Russia’s intentions, but did not have the realistic possibilities to prevent anything. Great Britain vigorously protested, but since it did not have a continental ally, it could not do anything. Not being able to count on the active attitude of Paris and Vienna and not wanting to risk the war, London turned to support Berlin. What followed was a categorical refusal and the question of the possible neutrality of Berlin in case of the deterioration of English-Russian relations was followed by a completely vague answer. The result was that Great Britain had to reconcile with the politics of the *fait accompli* and then enter negotiations. The United States of America supported Russia, however, of the highest importance was the behaviour of Prussia. Emperor Alexander had previously revealed to the Prussian King the “hidden thought” concerning the modification of the provision on the neutralization of the Black Sea and contacted him on 31 October 1870 with a request for support.<sup>13</sup> Bismarck later claimed that in 1870 he supported Russia because the prohibition of free navigation in “their own sea was unacceptable for him:” “We gladly sided with Russia ... to release it from the constraints imposed by the Treaty of Paris. They were unnatural and the ban on navigation along its own seashore was unsustainable for a longer period for such a state as Russia because it was humiliating.” Bismarck discovered the real meaning later when he said that for Germany it was more desirable that Russia turn to the East than to the West.<sup>14</sup>

In Europe this circular was a surprise. English Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Russian government should not have come forward with a unilateral statement, but that it should have addressed the other states which signed the Paris treaty with a proposal for the change of its provisions. Chancellor Bismarck, although unhappy as he spoke about Gorchakov “untimely” outburst, was determined to fully keep his promise to Russia. King Wilhelm was of the same opinion when he told his advisor Schweinitz that “the *Declaration* itself is quite right.” Prussia subsequently proposed a meeting with the signatory states of the Paris Treaty in order to discuss the issues raised by Gorchakov in the circular. Great Britain and Austria-Hungary agreed with the proposal “provided that the results of the

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<sup>13</sup> Bismarck advised Russia to build war ships in the Black Sea and wait “for others to complain.” This was an irrelevant piece of advice for Russians; they wanted other countries to recognize their rights to have a war fleet in the Black Sea.

<sup>14</sup> During the war of 1864 Poet Fyodor Tyutchev very clearly formulated the task of Russia’s foreign policy: “Unique, natural politics of Russia in comparison with western states – this is not an alliance with this or that state, but separate, a division between them. Thus divided, they stop being our enemies – they become powerless. This is a cruel truth, possibly it will affect sensitive souls, but eventually this is the law of our existence.” Tatischev 1902: 478–479.

conference are not decided beforehand” and that it involved all states that signed the Paris Treaty. Russia accepted the conference, but on the condition that it only sanction the decision of the Russian government. The government and the Emperor, in addition, counted on Bismarck’s support and favourable international circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

The London Conference of European states, organized at Bismarck’s initiative, which Gorchakov considered to be “short and purely practical,” was held from 17 January to 13 March 1871. At the conference Great Britain was represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Grenville, while “other countries were represented by diplomatic representatives accredited in London.”<sup>16</sup> The task of the Russian ambassador Brunov was to make Gorchakov’s decision from the circular “international.” In addition, Gorchakov instructed Brunov to be “moderate and cautious, to direct the attention of the conference participants to the horrible consequences of the Paris Treaty for Russia’s internal development, its agriculture, industry, security.” The most important discussions were held on the conditions of regulating sailing through straits. Great Britain and Austria-Hungary finally accepted an agreement to amend the provisions of the Paris Treaty on the Black Sea neutralization.<sup>17</sup> The navigation regime through the straits because of this suffered “for Russia not entirely acceptable changes.” The Sultan was given the right to regulate the navigation regime of the straits “in peace in favour of military ships of friendly and allied states,” if Turkey “finds it necessary to ensure the fulfilment of the provisions of the Paris Treaty.” “This article worsened Russia’s position in its defence plans in comparison to the 1841 convention,” which stipulated that in times of peace, the straits would be closed to military vessels of all states, except for light ones. What followed was signing the convention between Russia and Turkey, which annulled the convention of 1856. The change in the provision on the neutralization of the Black Sea was a personal success of Gorchakov’s,<sup>18</sup> who was able to use the international circumstances for “saving Russia from the most difficult provisions of the Paris Treaty.” Russia re-established its sovereign rights on the Black Sea thereby regaining the prestige of a great power. The London conference thus agreed with the change of all the restrictions that it had so far, which meant that Russia could “keep the fleet in the Black Sea and build fortifications.” It was a “diplomatic victory without a war,” important for its position in Europe. During the fifteen years that it took Russia to annul the provisions of the Paris Treaty the situation in Europe changed – “Germany became an empire.” Emperor Wilhelm did not hide the role of Russia in this, as

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<sup>15</sup> Ignatev 1997: 78.

<sup>16</sup> Prussia was represented by Bernstorff, Austria-Hungary by Apponyi, Italy by Cardona, Turkey by Musurus-pasha. The representative of France Broley, who replaced Favre, arrived “only at the last session.” The relation of powers at the conference was as follows: the representative of England, who chaired the conference, was in agreement with the representatives of Turkey and Austria; Prussia supported Russia, which greatly weakened England’s anti-Russian position; Italy and France did not have a significant impact on the work of the conference. A representative of Turkey Musurus-pasha, an experienced diplomat, was known for his anti-Russian tendency.

<sup>17</sup> Representatives of Great Britain and Austria-Hungary in return asked for a change in the “limiting article,” a change in navigation regime through the straits “to their advantage,” as well as the possibility to form their military naval bases on the territory of Turkey. It is natural that these proposals jeopardized the security of the Ottoman Empire, so not only Russian but also Turkish representatives opposed them.

<sup>18</sup> Gorchakov’s programme was realized on the day of ratification of the London Treaty and, after the emperor’s orders, he got the title of His Holiness.

he admitted in a letter to Emperor Alexander. “Prussia will never forget that it is obliged to you that the war did not spread. May the Lord bless you for that!”<sup>19</sup>

The union of Germany was proclaimed in Versailles on 18 January 1871,<sup>20</sup> when the “South, which held the neutral position for a long time, united with the North,” which led to a “new distribution of forces on the continent.”<sup>21</sup> Russia now had a powerful neighbour on its borders, so the further weakening of France did not suit it. In the Russian public voices were heard in favour of another rapprochement with France. Gorchakov also had this opinion as he understood the importance of France as a counterweight to the restored Germany. “We need a strong France,” Gorchakov admitted although the French government was aware of the closeness of the “courts in St. Petersburg and Berlin.” Foreign Minister Jules Favre felt that France could not expect anything from Russia at that moment but it would sooner or later show that “the new German Empire could no longer expand without compromising Russia’s security.” In the meantime, Russia began with active politics in Central Asia, which aggravated its relationship with Great Britain. Because of that, it now needed a solid support in Europe, which she could only find in Germany. The Russian government counted that with the help of Germany it would disable the expansion of Austria-Hungary into the Balkans, where it “directed its activity” after the defeat of the war in 1866. The Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Andr ssy also sought Germany’s support against Russia, which he saw as the main opponent. Bismarck also encouraged Austro-Hungarian activity in the Balkans, thus wanting to draw its attention from Central Europe. However, he did not want Austria-Hungary to completely distance itself from Germany as in the future he assigned it the role of an ally. At the same time, he was ready to enter into an agreement with Russia to prevent it from approaching France. According to the Russian diplomat Count Pyotr Shuvalov, Bismarck was haunted by the “nightmare of a coalition.” This “nightmare” did not disrupt the peace of the German Chancellor by accident; international relations in the early 1880s provided a basis for a possible convergence of Russia with Austria-Hungary and France. After 1871 Bismarck did everything to preserve what he had accomplished, showing a “mature political wisdom.” Austria-Hungary was an “ideal partner” for him because this alliance guaranteed German dominance in Central Europe.

The Russian government closely followed the relations between Berlin and Vienna and counted on Germany as “a desirable ally” and at the same time as a mediator in resolving problematic issues with Austria-Hungary. The rapprochement of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany should have been formalized in September 1872, when Emperor Franz Joseph planned to visit Berlin. In order to prevent the creation of a dual alliance, Alexander II wrote in the letter to Wilhelm I that he wanted to participate in the meeting of the two

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<sup>19</sup> Kozmenko 1952: 107–110; Geller 1997: 133.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the German empire was proclaimed in Versailles and it included 22 states and three free towns of Hamburg, Bremen and L beck under the dynasty of Hohenzollern. The King of Prussia Wilhelm I became the Emperor of Germany Wilhelm I.

<sup>21</sup> The Frankfurt Peace Treaty was signed on 10 May 1871, when France lost Alsace and eastern Lorraine, territories with the majority German population, which the French annexed in 1648 after a Thirty-year War. Besides that, the defeated had to pay a contribution of five billion golden francs and until the final payment the German occupying army stayed in the French territory and it was also supported by Paris.

monarchs. The Russian emperor feared the possibility of the Austro-German alliance, so Wilhelm I, after Bismarck's advice, agreed that the Russian emperor attend the meeting. Alexander II, therefore, travelled to Berlin in early September 1872. The negotiations in Berlin led to the rapprochement between Gorchakov and Andrassy's attitudes. When it came to the Balkans, an agreement on the status quo was reached. The agreement was also supplemented by a joint statement "that neither side will interfere with Turkey's internal affairs." Bismarck supported the agreement and during his meeting with Gorchakov he said he would accept those actions in the Balkans that were agreed by St. Petersburg and Vienna. The exchange of opinion confirmed the advantage of the position of Berlin, "which had no special interest in the region" and could have acted as an arbitrator in the Russian-Austrian conflict. Later Gorchakov wrote that there was nothing new in the conversation with Bismarck, which reduced Bismarck's intervention, as Gorchakov wrote, "only ... to a greater unity between Russia and Austria." Namely, Bismarck had planned an alliance with the recently defeated Austria and he intended to involve Russia in the new alliance.<sup>22</sup>

The meeting in Berlin laid the foundation for the final agreement of the three countries. At the beginning of May 1873 Wilhelm I, accompanied by Bismarck and Field Marshal Moltke, arrived in St. Petersburg. The result of the encounter between the German and Russian emperors was the conclusion of a military convention signed on 6 May 1873 by the chiefs of general staff Berg and Moltke. Both sides accepted the obligation that if one of the European states would attack one of the signatories of the convention, the other would "immediately hire an army of 200,000 people." The convention "did not contain anything hostile to any nation or government." Bismarck wanted Vienna to join the agreement so he claimed that the convention "would not have the strength if it was not joined by Austria." In June 1873 Alexander II, accompanied by Gorchakov, arrived in his first visit to Vienna after the Crimean War in an effort to persuade Franz Joseph to join the Russian-German military convention. During the negotiations a Russian-Austrian convention of "consultative character" was signed. The two countries agreed that, in the event of a threat to European peace from a third country, they would not conclude a new alliance until they reached a mutual agreement on "the course of joint action." In case, however, there was a necessity of resorting to force, it was planned that the representatives of the two countries meet to specify the obligations regarding mutual support. In that case only two countries would resort to the conclusion of a military convention. The agreement which meant to "consolidate peace" was signed on 6 June 1873 in the Castle of Schönbrunn. This was a political, not a military convention since the Austrian government did not want to give it a binding character.<sup>23</sup> The new Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary Andrassy told Gorchakov that his country was a "defensive state" and that Hungary was overloaded with rights and privileges "so the Hungarian ship would immediately sink if the smallest cargo was added, whether it was gold or mud." Gorchakov answered him that he opposed any kind of intervention in the Middle East. Emperor Alexander II was pleased, as he confirmed in the letter to Wilhelm I. "I got, not without much effort, the result that we

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<sup>22</sup> AVPRI: 1872, ЛЛ. 2606–27; Geller 1997: 133–134.

<sup>23</sup> Russia had a military convention without a political agreement with Germany, and a political agreement without a military convention with Austria-Hungary.

wanted ... neither the Emperor nor Andrásy wanted to consent that the agreement gets the form of a military convention equal to that signed by two of our marshals.”<sup>24</sup>

Finally, on 22 October 1873, the convention was signed by the German emperor during a visit to Vienna, creating a “consultative pact between the three countries, which Europe called the League of the Three Emperors.” This was not an agreement on the alliance, but an agreement between three conservative states in which each of its signatories followed its own foreign policy goals. In practice, a formal contract was not concluded by the emperors; instead, they limited themselves only to changing the note on three problems: preserving the existing borders in Europe, the Eastern issue, and taking joint measures against a revolution “that could endanger all three countries.” The agreement was signed, but the disagreements between the states, in particular between Russia and Austria-Hungary, remained. Each of them sought to prevent the other’s dominance in the Balkans and each of them counted on winning Germany over for the support of its politics. On the other hand, Germany wanted to use the disagreements between Russia and Austria-Hungary to get a *carte blanche* in Western Europe. Germany strove to gain domination on the continent and to finally eliminate France as a rival.<sup>25</sup>

Emperor Alexander II and Chancellor Gorchakov, who formally led Russian foreign policy, “saw the possibility of Germany transforming into a mighty empire as a danger to Russia.” But Alexander II made the final decision because he saw a true ally in the empire of his uncle Wilhelm I, not only in the struggle against the revolution, but in the solution of the Eastern issue. The strengthening of Germany and its transformation into an empire resulted in the outbreak of anti-German sentiments by the representatives of “various” social circles in Russia. Slavophiles persistently reiterated that Germany was the main enemy of the Slavs. However, this primarily referred to Austria, but the strengthening of the power of Prussia began to “seriously aggravate diplomats and soldiers.” Publicist Mikhail Katkov, who played an important role in public and political life – “until he came along Russia did not know a publicist who had such an impact on the country’s politics” – believed that an alliance with Germany was dangerous for Russia and he characterized it as an “enemy of the Slavs.” General Mikhail Skobelev, celebrated in the wars in Central Asia and Turkey, was no less emotional in expressing his views. For General Skobelev everything was clear: “Yes! The foreigner is with us everywhere. His hand is present everywhere. We are a toy of his politics, a victim of his intrigue, the slaves of his power ... and you want me to tell you who this foreigner is ... he is an intriguer, the enemy of Russia and the Slavs, I’ll tell you that it is the German. I repeat and please do not forget – our enemy is the German.”<sup>26</sup>

For Russia the treaty with Germany and Austria ensured the security of its western borders thus facilitating its politics in Central Asia. Bismarck’s intention to establish the hegemony of Germany in Europe because of Russia’s focus on the Eastern issue proved elusive. The Russian government understood well the danger of German hegemony on the continent and therefore did not want to support it. This was especially prominent in early 1872, when Bismarck, in an effort to further weaken France, began with a policy of

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<sup>24</sup> Tatischev 1902: 494–499; Kozmenko 1952: 124, 126–127; Shneerson 1984: 91–107.

<sup>25</sup> Gall 1990: 508–509.

<sup>26</sup> Geller 1997: 126, 135–136.

provoking a new conflict. The cause for such move from Bismarck was the proclamation of the Law on the General Military Obligation on 28 July 1872, through which France wanted to renew its army. The process of restoring France was fast. After the Law on the Military Obligation in the spring of 1873 ended the payment of the contribution defined by the Frankfurt Peace Treaty. In September the German occupying army left France. Bismarck did not want such a quick renewal of France and “gloomy clouds again appeared on the European sky.” It was extremely important for St. Petersburg to maintain friendly relations with Berlin. This desire corresponded to Bismarck’s plans to the extent that France was kept in international isolation. An important part of that plan was the preservation of the republic, against which the supporters of the restoration of the Bourbons and Orléans “actively worked” with the full support of the monarchist General Mac Mahon, who became president of the Third Republic in 1873. On 2 May 1874 Bismarck told the Austrian Prince Hohenlohe: “We primarily have to strive for the internal opportunities of the country not to increase and that it does not get respect abroad, which would give it the opportunity to gain allies. The Republic and the inner disorder are the best guarantee of peace.” For the French Foreign Minister Decazes “the only hope was the search for protection of the Russian emperor.” In a conversation with Leflo which subsequently followed Gorchakov sided with France: “I have told you already, and now I repeat that – we need a strong France.” Russia thus made it clear that it did not want any further weakening of France and that it did not support Germany.

Thanks to Russia’s attitude, the crisis was overcome, but the relations between Berlin and Paris were again aggravated in 1874. The French ambassador in St. Petersburg Leflo emphasized to Gorchakov the danger that threatened his country from Germany. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Decazes demanded protection from St. Petersburg and Gorchakov promised that Russia would protect France. Emperor Alexander II gave an almost identical answer to the French diplomat. Russia did not take any action as it counted on Bismarck’s moderation, just like Queen Victoria, who wrote to Wilhelm I on 10 February 1875 and urged him to “be generous.” In the spring of 1875, disconcerted by the rapid recovery of France, Germany began preparing for a new war so that, as Bismarck said, “sick France would not get better.” In February 1875 the French government adopted a law on the increase of the size of its army. The military strengthening of the Third Republic was obvious, but it did not cause concern for Emperor Wilhelm and the German general staff. Nevertheless, Bismarck decided to use it in order to defeat France again. In April 1875 Bismarck inspired the publication of an article entitled *Is the war in sight?*, which greatly resonated in the German press.<sup>27</sup> There was a new military alert, which should have diverted France from thinking about the possibility of revenge and the return of Alsace and Lorraine. Russian chancellor Gorchakov categorically opposed the consent for a preventive war against France, which Bismarck demanded from him. The war was thus avoided, but Bismarck blamed Gorchakov for his failure saying that “the only guarantor of the continuity of Russian cooperation with Germany was the personality of the emperor.”<sup>28</sup>

Bismarck thought that, because Russia was busy in Central Asia, he would have full freedom of action in his dealings with France. In February 1875 he requested from the

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<sup>27</sup> Gall 1990: 509.

<sup>28</sup> Ignatev 1997: 82–83; Bismarck 1928: 516, 528.

Russian government a friendly neutrality in the event of a new conflict with France through his diplomatic envoy Radowitz. In return, he promised cooperation in the East. Bismarck, therefore, asked Russia to abandon France in return for the support in the East, but he was told that St. Petersburg “had nothing planned but general peace and tranquility.” At the same time, the emperor and the chancellor announced to the French ambassador in St. Petersburg that they would give his country diplomatic support. Emperor Alexander told the French ambassador that Germany would “take on a great risk” if it acted without a real cause. Alexander II confirmed his position when travelling through Berlin in May 1875 on his way to Ems, when, during the meeting with Wilhelm and Bismarck, he spoke against the new German-French war, which, he said, would be Germany’s responsibility. Russia received support for its peaceful politics from other European countries, above all Great Britain and Austria, which, like St. Petersburg, “were not interested either in the final or partial disappearance of France as a state,” because it would represent the demolition of the European balance for the benefit of Germany. After that, Bismarck was forced to withdraw, convinced that he could not take advantage of the alliance with St. Petersburg and Vienna in order to achieve his goal directed against France. In a conversation with Emperor Alexander II Bismarck then said that “no aggressive action against France was planned.” The Chancellor shifted the responsibility for war preparations to the generals, whom he accused of “understanding nothing about politics.” Russia thus eliminated Bismarck’s intention of a “preventive” war against France.<sup>29</sup>

After the war danger was finally eliminated, leaving on 10 May 1875, Gorchakov sent a laconic message to Russian diplomatic representatives in European capitals: “From now on, peace is secured.” This caused an outburst of indignation with Bismarck, who saw this as an open humiliation of Germany, which had to stand down under the pressure from Russia. The “war alert” of 1875 contributed to the cooling of relations between Russia and Germany,<sup>30</sup> but it did not lead to the collapse of the League of the Three Emperors because both sides were interested in preserving the original agreement. The eruption of the Eastern Crisis of 1875 showed all the depth of the contradiction and all the “fragility” of the League of the Three Emperors. When Gorchakov was able to persuade Alexander II to the danger that potentially came from Germany, Russian politics also changed. Bismarck did not hide his disappointment and warned Gorchakov: “I am telling you openly – I am a good friend to my friends and a good enemy to my enemies.” Bismarck’s enemy was Gorchakov’s potential ally – Emperor Alexander II.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gall 1990: 509-512.

<sup>30</sup> Gorchakov’s telegram echoed considerably, but it did not necessarily imply the tension in Russian-German relations. It is natural that he was undesirable for Bismarck himself, but it was received in France with care. President Mac Mahon expressed his gratitude to Emperor Alexander “for this blessing and great influence” that the Emperor had on the direction of European events. According to Bismarck, in those days he began to have a nightmare about anti-German coalitions, whose contours began to occur unexpectedly as a result of his own actions directed against Paris. In December 1875, while reviewing the past year, Bismarck had to admit: “We can oppose... France. All the danger lies only in the coalition and this last thing will, no doubt, come for France.” More importantly, Bismarck realized that such a situation could be created, recognizing that “there was nothing incredible in the old coalition of Kaunitz (created) between France, Austria and Russia.”

<sup>31</sup> Lord Disraeli believed that it was necessary to unite “hand in hand” with the Russian government against Bismarck. “Bismarck – he is truly the new Bonaparte, he should be restrained.” Then he added: “An alliance

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between Russia and us is possible for that specific goal.” And in 1875 Germany had to give up Bismarck’s goal of a preventive war in order to limit French military power. Tatischev 1902: 505–509; Borisov 1951: 218–253; Hvostov 1974: 51; Geller 1997: 137.

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**ПОЛИТИКА РУСИЈЕ У ЕВРОПИ 1870-1875.  
(КРАЈ НЕУТРАЛИЗАЦИЈЕ ЦРНОГ МОРА. САВЕЗ ТРИ ЦАРА)**

**Резиме**

Париски уговор, закључен 30. марта 1856, био је понижавајући за Русију; посебно су тешки били чланови уговора који су се тicali Црног мора. Одредба о неутрализацији Црног мора забрањивала је Русији да у његовим водама држи флоту, гради утврђења и инфраструктуру. Уговором од 15. априла 1856. Велика Британија, Француска и Аустрија су се обавезале да ће надгледати да ли Русија поштује услове Париског мира, чиме је створена „кримска коалиција”. Поразом у кримском рату Русија није „изгубила статус велике државе”, принуђена је, додуше, да се одрекне своје раније улоге у Европи, чиме је њен међународни положај ослабио. Преузимајући Министарство иностраних дела, Александар Горчаков је дефинисао циљ руске спољне политике: „Тражим човека који ће поништити клаузуле Париског уговора које се односе на питање Црног мора .... Тражим га и наћићу га.” Тако је руска политика после Париског конгреса имала јединствен циљ, окомила се на ревизију Париског уговора, искључујући све друго. Како Француска није била спремна да подржи Русију, Петроград се окренуо Прусској која је показала вољу да се измене одредбе о Црном мору. То међусобно приближавање условило је и потоњи настанак Савеза три цара, између Русије, Немачке и Аустрије.

**Кључне речи:** Русија, Европа, XIX век, Савез три цара, Бизмарк, Горчаков.

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ISTRAŽIVANJA – JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES 29, 110-124