

## **There Was an Alternative! The Legacy of Franz Ferdinand**

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TODAY, WHEN WE KNOW EVERYTHING about the atrocities of the second "Thirty Years' War" that was shaking the world between 1914 and 1945 we regret that back in 1891 Russian Emperor Aleksandr III had ignored an invitation of the heir presumptive to the Austrian throne to revive the Austria-German-Russian agreement as the most natural one for continental Europe. He was not heard: by that time too many people had poured too much effort into the opposite project — the Franco-Russian and later the British-Franco-Russian Entente Cordiale.

Who in imperial Russia stood behind the military alliance with France and who pinned their hopes on it in the unfolding big geopolitical game? The irrational haters of Germany, the Anglomans and clients of French banks.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Russia and France lived on the opposite sides of a deep cultural and religious gap. The French radicals then in power in France went to the extremes in their anti-religious rage: army officers wishing to climb higher on the career ladder had to conceal their religious convictions.

Back in 1902, French Premier Emile Combes, and anti-clerical and Free Mason, issued a document in which he demanded to tighten ideological control over appointments in the government structures. In 1904, the Chamber of Deputies was shaken by the *affaire des fiches* caused by the intention of War Minister Louis Andre to subject the officer corps of the French Army to ideological (anti-clerical) purges. This, and the ban on teaching activity for the priests that closed 2500 Catholic schools, cost the minister and the premier their posts.

At the same time Russian Czar Nicholas II, the Supreme Commander of the Russian Army, personally attended the celebrations in the name of canonized Seraphim of Sarov. The Supreme Commander was obviously much more religious than his officer corps on the average. In France the picture was different: the anti-religious radicalism of the top crust far exceeded the average level of free-thinking among the officers raised in the traditions of the previous period.

Republican France that supplied brilliant publicist writer and founder of Zionism Max Nordau with the material for his *Degeneracy*<sup>2</sup> could serve (and served) the training camp for Russian revolutionaries (there was a party school

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of sorts in Longjumeau) could hardly be a true ally of monarchist Russia.

At least, this became unimaginable when the slim chance of restoring the Bourbons\* to the French throne created by Napoleon III defeat in the war with Prussia and his abdication was lost in the fall of 1873. Count de Chambord declined the invitation of the monarchist parliamentary majority (legitimists and Orléanists) to accept the title of the king of France and Navarre: he rejected the revolutionary tricolor as the state flag of his kingdom and declined a compromise: the historical white fleur-de-lis flag for his personal standard and the tricolor with a royal coat of arms and a crown as a national flag. France became a republic with one-vote majority.

Franz Ferdinand was fully aware of the true nature of Russia's ally, the child of the French Revolution. He had a much clearer idea of it than many of the Russian statesmen to say nothing of the intellectuals. He suspected that French diplomacy was steering for a clash between Russia and Austria in an effort to spread "republicanism" across Europe.<sup>3</sup> France and Great Britain had no intention to encourage the traditionalist monarchies of Europe that stood opposed to revolutionary separatism in Austria and Revolution in its absolute sense in Russia. The fact that Paris and London wanted peace in their former (let alone future!) members of the Alliance of the Three Emperors least of all and torpedoed all attempts of Berlin, Vienna and Moscow to draw closer together cannot be explained by merely economic, political or even ideological (liberal-revolutionary) considerations.

Britain was violently opposed to Germany's impressive economic might for a simple, and logical, reason: it was disinclined to share the glory of the "workshop of the world" and let any other country to "rule the seas," an obvious policy typical of the British Empire throughout its history. The all-pervading economic egotism of the German as well as British and French bourgeoisie turned out to be deadly dangerous for the fates of Europe. (Not quite bourgeois nature of the Austrian and Russian empires put them apart in this respect.)

As distinct from the Anglo-German, mainly trade and economic, rivalry the contradictions between France and Germany were of an irrational nature fed by the French obsession to "return Alsace and Lorraine" and the German equally strong desire to retain the territories no matter what. The real price of the ruling circles' fixation on the old cultural and historical realia was still hard to imagine.

An outsider can hardly grasp the pungency of the Alsace issue. Indeed, Louis XIV, for example, when joining this German-speaking province to his possessions never tried to make it French. As distinct from the Jacobins the Ancien Régime easily reconciled itself with the cultural and linguistic variety of the

\* It was Henri V d'Artois, Duke of Bordeaux and grandson of King Karl X, known as Count Henri de Chambord, 1820-1883. There is no agreement about the causes and effects of the heir's fateful decision.

French Kingdom. It was two centuries later that Alsace and its population became an apple of discord between two ethnic nationalisms when Christian and monarchist *Europe of the states* was transformed into a liberal and revolutionary *Europe of nations and nationalities*.

In the past, it was the Holy Alliance of monarchies that restored the continent to normalcy after the horrors of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary wars of the turn of the 19th century and gave Europe half a century of quiet political development.

An outsider will find it equally hard to grasp the pungency of Russo-Austrian rivalry in the Balkans in the early 20th century. Indeed, at that time Russia had no reason to concern itself with a German railway to Turkey leading "straight to the Armenian highland" (it was London's concern) or with the "unbridled desire of Austria-Hungary to completely subjugate the Balkan Slaves"<sup>4</sup>: Vienna obviously had no means and resources to fully control this "powder keg" (as it turned out later) of Europe.

The Bulgarian adventure of 1877-1878 that forced Russia to strain its forces to the utmost in the Russo-Turkish clash merely replaced direct Ottoman governance with indirect presence of Berlin and Vienna. This should have taught the Russian imperial bureaucracy caution when it came to patronizing all sorts of the Balkan Slavs; this was even more advisable when it came to "binding alliances" with them: now we know where they might lead us.

It should be said that the more Slavic nations the Habsburg Empire included in its limits and the greater the role they played in it the greater were Russia's financial and political gains. It would have spent less money while the natural linguistic and cultural affinity between the Balkan Slavs and the Russians would have been never clouded with their direct or indirect subjugation to the Russian state.

The *Austroslavism* ideology that by the mid-19th century had been detailed by, for example, Austrian scholar and politician of Czech origin Franz (František) Palacký offered a solution of the empire's domestic contradictions and its fairly serious foreign policy problems.

Since the time of Bismarck's "blood and iron" the so-called German Empire (which was not an empire proper but a very large German kingdom headed by the Prussian dynasty started by a deposed Teutonic knight<sup>5</sup>) it was Berlin, rather than the Hungarian and Slavic subjects, that threatened Austria's integrity. The pan-Germanists were much more dangerous than the romantic-minded pan-Slavists.

The new, Protestant and liberal, *empire of the German nation* "was based exclusively on the principle of nationality (as its cornerstone) obviously opposed by the theory of the Holy Empire."<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that back in the

early 19th century the Austrian monarch, under pressure of Napoleon's claims to Charles the Great's legacy,<sup>7</sup> had rejected the title of the Roman Emperor the dynastic and supra-ethnic nature of the Austrian The union statehood traditional in "Roman" Europe survived.

The union between the conservative and Catholic monarchy of the Habsburgs in which loyalty to the dynasty, rather than the ethnos, was the supreme political value and the Protestant and revolutionary-ethnocentric monarchy of the Hohenzollerns was not mere internally contradictory — it was unnatural. It was an ad hoc union suggested by the very specific geopolitical circumstances of the turn of the century and was, therefore, doomed.

Obviously, a stronger Slavic element could transform the Dual Austro-Hungarian Empire into a triple (Austro-Hungarian-Slavic) empire. This was what Franz Ferdinand strove to achieve either by restoring the Croatian or the Czech throne (in the latter case the emperor was to be crowned with St. Venceslav crown). This could have affected the future empire's political aims and the methods employed to attain them; this is true, in the first place, of the relations between the Danube and St. Petersburg monarchies.

A union between the Habsburgs and the Russian czars was most logical. At the turn of the 20th century the German national-revolutionaries and anti-clericals greatly impressed with the myth of pan-Germanism and the *Realpolitik* of Bismarck spared no effort to fight the dynasty and the Church. They doubted the very foundations of the Catholic monarchy and the imperial social order.<sup>8</sup>

Franz Ferdinand was cruel and up to the point: he rebuffed the anti-Catholic Kulturtregers who insisted on a separation from Rome with "Separation from Rome means a separation from Austria!"<sup>9</sup> The heir to the Austrian throne was obviously determined to stand up to the spirit of Revolution to the end. Traditional conservatism of the Viennese court could oppose, more or less successfully, the ethno-nationalist and absolutely revolutionary in its meaning temptation of Berlin only if allied with imperial Petersburg, despite their confessional distinctions.

Strange as it may seem, pre-revolutionary Russia was, on the whole, negative about *Austroslavism*. Nikolay Danilevsky, a perspicacious historian, admitted that having read Palacký's *Idea státu Rakouského* (1865) he never "detected this idea in it."<sup>10</sup> Konstantin Leontiev, on the other hand, found that "it was excellent that we have carefully dealt, so to speak, with *fragile* Austria-Hungary."<sup>11</sup>

Had the Austrian-Slavic political trend developed successfully the Czecho-Slovakian and Serbo-Croatian subjects of the Habsburgs would have got the key roles to play against the background of German-Hungarian rivalry. The Ukrainian project, if abandoned by the Vienna Cabinet and the Austrian General Staff might have been left in the cold. Not an initiative project in many respects, it was mainly a reactionary and a defensive project born by pan-Slavism's inflated fear of the "Russian threat" in the situation when the threat of pan-Germanism

had become very real. Vienna had to invest into the "Ukrainian movement."\*

All sorts of neo-pan-Slavists of the early 20th century (Russian Count Bobrinsky, Czech Kramař or Slovenian Grabar) who preached inter-Slavic unification in the face of the "German threat" unfortunately contributed to the suicidal clash between Russia and Austria. The Russian military and bureaucrats far removed from ideological constructs were inevitably impressed by intellectual inventions of varied preachers of revolutionary ethnonationalism. This explains why in the summer of 1913 Prince Vladimir Meshchersky's calls were ignored. Meanwhile, he wrote in his newspaper *Grazhdanin*: "We should put an end, once and for all, to the routine tradition of diplomatic Slavophilic sentimentality that has already cost us hundreds of millions rubles and streams of holy Russian blood and that brought us nothing except a ignominious role of being the ready dupes of quasi-'bratushki'."<sup>12</sup> Later, in February 1914 Petr Durnovo, a well-known Russian conservative, who warned in his memo about the horrible and inevitable results of a war against Vienna and Berlin was likewise not heard.

(Today, all of us, Russians, know that infatuation with political myths costs dearly: the patriotic frenzy of the wild summer of 1914 brought in the catastrophe of February-November 1917; the democratic ruptures of another, no less wild, summer of 1991 deprived us of our country in a couple of months.)

In the past, it was the Holy Alliance of monarchies that restored the continent to normalcy after the horrors of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary wars of the turn of the 19th century and gave Europe half a century of quiet political development. Had Franz Ferdinand realized his dream, a certain copy of the Holy Alliance in the form of a conservative union of three continental empires, not only the Vienna, Berlin and St. Petersburg empires but also France and Great Britain would have escaped the cultural and civilizational destruction in the Great War. Their victory over Germany was a Pyrrhic victory; it was Washington, not London or Paris, which won the main financial and political prize.

The hopes that the Austrian archduke pinned on a restored Holy Alliance were not the day dreams of a reactionary intellectual but a reasonable diplomatic project of a confirmed Christian and a responsible politician. The fact that Franz Ferdinand was a devoted Roman Catholic and a confirmed monarchist (yet never power-thirsty) brings him *post factum* close in the most natural way in the historical perspective of European tragedy, to Russian Orthodox Emperor Nikolay Aleksandrovich.

The Austrian crown prince was aware of the dangers of a Russian-Austrian military confrontation not only for the future of both empires but for the

\* On the whole, the Ukrainian project proved to be the most successful of the 20th-century projects: it continues living and **breathing** while its original sponsors and operators left the stage of history. Their circle is not limited to Andrey Sheptitskiy, Lvov Uniate Metropolitan, or the Austrian General Staff – it included the Communist "Ukrainiasers" of the 1920s.

monarchist principle in Europe to a much greater extent than the so-called monarchists of the time (to say nothing of patriots of all hues) possessed by the demons of liberal-revolutionary ethnic nationalism, all of them the subjects of the Danube and St. Petersburg monarchies. In 1913, Franz Ferdinand wrote to one of his advisors: "I shall never fight against Russia. I am prepared to sacrifice everything to avoid this. Any war between Austria and Russia will pull down either the Romanovs or the Habsburgs or, probably, both." Several months later he told to his adjutant von Barloff: "Any war with Russia will end in our defeat. Harsh treatment of Serbia would bring Austria-Hungary into an open conflict with Russia. Should the Emperor of Austria and the Czar deprive each other of their thrones to open a door to revolution?"<sup>13</sup>

He did not live long enough to realize his plan of turning his Dual Monarchy into a triple (German-Hungarian-Slavic) empire. He died before he ascended the throne of the great empire he had hoped to protect against the war. He wanted to protect the Russian Empire as well if only to support and strengthen the common principle of monarchic conservatism. "There is no doubt that he would have done everything to bring Germany and Russia closer."<sup>14</sup>

His death at the hands of revolutionary nationalists started the Great War — the cultural-civilizational suicide of both Roman-Germanic and Slavic Europe. Historically and mythically the tragic horror of two regicides — in Sarajevo and Ekaterinburg — was no coincidence: they framed the all-Europe hecatomb of 1914-1918. (As distinct from Sarajevo, it was revolutionaries-internationalists who distinguished themselves in Ekaterinburg.)

The hecatomb ushered in another Thirty Years' War. Like its predecessor of the early 17th century the new war started by the shot in Sarajevo rapidly became a *war of all against all*, a "European civil war of 1914-1945."<sup>15</sup>

It was the beginning of the World War rather than the Russian revolution of 1917 (as prominent historian Ernst Nolte <sup>16</sup> tried to convince the world) that brought about the collapse of the old European order. The very first shots of the European massacre opened the gate for what recently had been hard to imagine: dubious victory justified everything — from deportation of unreliable ethnic groups <sup>17</sup> deeper into the country to slander <sup>18</sup> and legal lawlessness <sup>19</sup> — *con-tradictio in adjecto* - for military-political aims.

The blood and fire of the Great War buried the great self-assured and assured of its future Europe of *belle époque*, of which only memories survived.<sup>20</sup> Europe of old aristocracy in which the ideas of loyalty and honor were still alive (contemporary author described Franz Ferdinand as "loyal and reliable, his two main virtues"<sup>21</sup>) remained in the pre-Sarajevo past.

The efforts of preventing the civilizational suicide were not abandoned after the summer of 1914. Franz Ferdinand was not the only one who was completely aware of the destructive nature of the European conflict.

In 1915, Belgian officers Princes Sixtus and Xavier of Bourbon-Parma

with Papal benediction traveled from one warring European capital to another in an attempt to achieve reconciliation. In 1916, even London was prepared to accept peace without victors and defeated: the Lord Asquith coalition Cabinet of Liberals and Conservatives had become aware that continued war would bury the old European order and Great Britain itself and tried to contact the Germans. Bourgeois hawk Lloyd George who replaced Lord Asquith as the prime minister in December 1916 cut short these efforts. He preferred to negotiate Americans' joining the European war with a very vague idea about what it would cost.

In 1917, Emperor Charles I who ascended the throne after the death of Franz Joseph tried to disentangle from the war with the help of Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma<sup>22</sup> to save his country — and Europe.

All the timely attempts at achieving peace "without annexations and contributions" unfortunately failed because all those possessed by the demons of ethnonationalism or merely by greediness — the liberals of all hues and radicals (who had ignited the conflict in the first place) — imagined that then- victory was round the corner!

Self-opinionated myopic politicians, the military, industrialists and financiers of that time bring to mind the myopia of our contemporaries. The European contradictions of the time, no matter how acute, look hilariously petty against the background of common European, common civilizational interests which have become obvious in the face of real civilizational challenges.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1. There were other forces and people who did a lot to seal the military agreements that

finally plunged the continent into a catastrophe. George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*, Vol. 1, *Russia Leaves the War*, Princeton, 1956.

2. Max Nordau, *Vyrozhdnie. Sovremennye frantsuzy*, Moscow, 1995.

3. Jean-Louis Thiériot, *François Ferdinand d'Autriche. De Mayerling a Sarajevo*, Paris, 2005, p. 244.

4 N.A. Narochnitskaia, *Rossia i russkie v mirovoy istorii*, Moscow, 2004, c. 167.

5 Supported by Luther and Philipp Melanchton Albrecht Hohenzollern renounced the title of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights and secularized the Prussian territories of the Order to convert Prussia in a hereditary duchy. The Order survived by assuming the patronage of the Habsburgs. See: *Hartmut Boockmann, Nemetskiy orden. Dvenadtsat glav iz ego istorii*, Moscow, 2004 (Der Deutsche Orden. Zwölf Kapitel aus seiner Geschichte).

6 James Bryce, *Le Saint Empire Romain Germanique et L'Empire Actuel d'Allemagne*, Paris, 1890, p. 570.

7 About a fairly contradictory nature of this heritage and its incompatibility with imperial universalism see: A.V. Nazarenko, "Imperia Karla Velikogo – ideologicheskaya fiktsia ili politicheskii eksperiment?" *Karl Velikiy. Realii i mify*, Moscow, 2001, pp. 11-24.

8 All sorts of political models of German social-radicals of Austria are discussed in: Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien. Lehrjahre eines Diktators*, München-Zürich, 1997, S. 337-435.

9 *Ibid.*, S. 357.

<sup>10</sup> N.Ya. Danilevsky, *Rossia i Evropa. Vzgliad na kulturnye i politicheskie otnoshenia slavianskogo mira k germano-romanskomu*, St. Petersburg, 1995, p. 298.

<sup>11</sup> K.N. Leontiev, *Vostok i slaviansvo: Filosofskaia i politicheskaia publitsistika. Dukhovnaia proza (1872-1891)*, Moscow, 1996, p. 233.

<sup>12</sup> Prince V.P. Meshcherskiy. *Grazhdanin i konservator*, Moscow, 2004, c. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Louis Thiériot, Op cit., p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>15</sup> This was the subtitle of a book by a French historian who analyzed the non-material consequences of the destruction of old Europe: Enzo Traverso, *A feu et a sang. De la guerre civile européenne, 1914-1945*, Paris, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Nolte, *La Guerre Civile Européenne, 1917-1945. National-socialisme et bolchevisme*, Paris, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Enzo Traverso, Op. cit., pp. 130, 154.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Gaultier, *Germanophobie*, Paris, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> About the "treason cases" of Myasoedov and Sukhomlinov fabricated for political reasons see: Aleksander Tarsaidze, *Chetyre mifa o pervoy mirovoy*, Moscow, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> *Mémoires de S.A.R. L'Infante Eulalie. 1868-1931*, Paris, 1935.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Louis Thiériot, Op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> Both missions of Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma are described in: Gottfried Zarnow, *Verbündet - Verraten! Habsburgs Weg von Berlin nach Paris*, Bern, 1936.

<sup>23</sup> The future of the old ideological constructs determined by the Euro-Atlantic and common European expansion to the Slavic and Byzantine world of the former COMECON against the background of the present lack of understanding between Russia and Europe is discussed by the present author in "Geopolitika evroslavizma. Segodniashnie russkie chaiania," *Politicheskiy klass*, No. 1 (25), 2008; "Festina lente. Ob otnosheniakh nashikh s Evropeyskim soiuзом," *Politicheskiy klass*. No. 12 (24), 2006.