

Russian Expansion, Self-reflection, and its Absence from Russian Policy – from Sarajevo to the Princes’ Islands (1914–1919)

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From the middle of the 19th century onwards two fundamental, contrasting foreign policy doctrines developed in Russia; first Pan-Slavism promoting expansionism in Europe, then later Eurasian imperialism with a forceful Asian mission. The events of the 1880’s changed European Russian foreign policy to concentrating on straits to the sea on the one hand and becoming friendly towards the Serbs on the other.¹ The defeat suffered at the hands of the Japanese in 1904–1905 lead to internal crisis and revolution in Russian, which Tsar Nicholas II and his circle attempted to handle with a degree of liberalization, a particular quasi parliament and the institution of the Duma. These policies reduced the brutal Russian governmental nationalist oppression introduced during the rule of Alexander III and gave the nationalities living within the territory of the empire and Russian society itself room to breathe.

The particularity of the state with Saint Petersburg at its center was that Russians were not in the majority.² Since the division of Poland in the

¹ After the Bulgarians, the Russians began to strongly support the Serbians as well. According to the older, orthodox based Russian expansionist concept both the Bulgarian and the Serbian nation counted equally as “brothers”. For more details on this process see: G. GECSE, *A külpolitika hatása az 1870-es, 1880-as évek orosz nagyhatalmi gondolkodására*, in: *Nemzetek és birodalmak. Diószegi István 80 éves*, Budapest 2010, pp. 177–191.

² Based on the 1897 census Russians comprised 44.2% of the Russian Empire although if taken together with the Ukrainians they could be considered a majority (62%). See M. HELLER –

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18th century there was constant friction with the largest Slavic nationality not sharing a religious denomination with the Russians: the Poles. In examining the chief element of the various Russian Pan-Slavic concepts resting primarily on an ethnocentric based foundation, it may be ascertained that following the dismantling of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire the Russians did not wish to annex these territories to Russian directly but instead envisioned a federation of states over which Russia would have “only” supremacy.³ Following the 1905 Revolution from the outset of the institution of the Duma, Russians received greater representation in proportion to their percentage of the population. Consequently, from 1906 onwards, along with their greater representation in the Duma they also had greater influence there than the other nationalities.

For Saint Petersburg the greatest dilemma up until the outbreak of the First World War was caused by the Poles,⁴ who formed a separate fraction in the Russian Duma. Acknowledging the indefensibility of the old Pan-Slavic position with regard to the Poles, the Russian movement promulgating the union of all Slavs redefined itself as Neoslav. Three Neoslav congresses were held in total: in Prague in 1908, in Sofia in 1910 and in Belgrade in 1911.⁵ Whereas absent at the earlier 1867 Moscow Slavic Congress, Polish were now attendees to the 1908 Prague Congress. Their leader in the Duma, Roman Dmowski opposed German expansion and, similarly to the Czech

A. NYEKRICS, *Orosz történelem 2. kötet. A Szovjetunió története*, Budapest 1996, p. 55; G. HOSKING, *Rossia i russkie*, Vol. 1, Moscow 2003, p. 423.

³ See for example the concepts outlined by Danilevsky, Fadeyev and Leontiev. G. GECSE, *Bizáncról Bizáncig. Az orosz birodalmi gondolat*, Budapest 2007, pp. 107, 115, 164.

⁴ The Polish-Russian congress taking place in Moscow in April of 1905 took the position of autonomy, but even more significant was the Pan-Russian zemstvo congress held in September, which took a similar position. According to the Tsar's May Decree the Polish language was introduced in primary schools in Polish territory and the establishment of Polish private middle schools was also permitted. K. RÁTZ, *A pánszlávizmus története*, Budapest 2000, reissue of the 1941 Volume, pp. 227–228.

⁵ Neoslavism is considered a Czech creation and is attributed to the Czech Karel Kramář was at that time orientating towards Russia rather than towards Austria. See A. Ya. AVREH, *Tsarism i tretyejjunszkaya sistema*, Moscow 1966, p. 91.

Karel Kramář active in the Parliament in Vienna, emphasized the necessity for Austria-Hungary and Russia to unite. This state of affairs was greatly exacerbated by the formal annexation of the Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Monarchy.⁶

Shortly thereafter two wars were waged in the Balkan Peninsula. The first Russia considered to be a foreign policy success, as the Balkan block which was the foundation for outbreak of the war on October 13, 1912 had been formed with Russia's support.⁷ The division of the booty (mainly Macedonia), however, lead to a serious dispute between Serbia and Bulgaria, which in turn lead to the attack by Bulgaria on Serbia on June 27, 1913.

The Serbians, however, had by then entered an alliance against Bulgaria not only with the non-Slavic Romanians, but also with the "ancient enemy": the Turks.⁸ As a result of the Bucharest Peace Treaty of August 10, 1913 Serbia and Greece remained Entente orientated while Bulgaria did not. The relationship between the Russian leadership and the Czech parties on the other hand, further solidified in the wake of the wars in the Balkans.⁹

⁶ On September 16 of 1908 Russia gave its assent to the annexation provided that the Monarchy supported permitting the passage of the Russian military navy through the straights to the sea. Count Alexander Izvolsky was in Paris to negotiate the deal, however, when Vienna announced the annexation and thus the Russian Foreign Minister learned about the event from the newspapers. See I. MAJOROS – M. ORMOS, *Európa a nemzetközi küzdőtérén. Felemelkedés és hanyatlás 1814–1945*, Budapest 1998, p. 199. A peculiar contradiction at the time was that the Slavic representatives in the Parliament of the Habsburg Monarchy, the majority of whom sympathized with the Russians (such as the Czechs and the Southern Slavs), voted by a great majority for the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the Hungarians (and, of course for other reasons, the Serbs) were not at all enthusiastic about the action.

⁷ On March 13 of 1912 the Serbians and the Bulgarians entered into alliance, which was followed by an alliance between the Serbians and the Greeks to which Montenegro soon joined. In December of 1912 the war ending in Turkish defeat was ended with a peace concluded in May of 1913, which also established Albania's independence. E. PALOTÁS, *Kelet-Európa története a XX. század első felében*, Budapest 2003, p. 66.

⁸ The Bulgarians had succeeded in retaining only the Thracian seaside and the Struma River Valley amongst the territories gained in the previous war: essentially a tenth of Macedonia. The Turks regained Adrianople, while the Romanians Southern Dobrudja. See PALOTÁS, p. 68.

⁹ In 1913 Václav Klofáč, the head of the Czech National Socialist Party offered the Party's assistance to the Russian secret service. I. MAJOROS, *Vereségtől a győzelemig. Franciaország a nemzetközi kapcsolatok rendszerében (1871–1920)*, Budapest 2004, p. 218.

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Sergei Sazonov, appointed Russia's minister of foreign affairs in 1910,¹⁰ attempted unsuccessfully to persuade the Balkan states and the Porte to enter an alliance against Austria-Hungary.¹¹ Following the assassination in Sarajevo in June 1914 the radicals of the Russian rightwing were not enthusiastic about a clash with the Germans, while (primarily) the liberals succeeded in persuading the greater part of Russian society, including Nicholas II himself, to support the war. It was the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy which, on July 28 of 1914, triggered the First World War by declaring war on Serbia. Nevertheless amongst the Great Powers only Russia, in an anti-German position represented by Sergei Sazonov,¹² made no secret of the fact that she aimed to destroy the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy,¹³ even though in Russia's peace treaty draft Sazonov outlined a trialist Habsburg Monarchy comprised of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.¹⁴ Russia, with her allies Great Britain and France, succeeded on the March of 1915 in officially having endorsed the so-called Constantinople Agreement, according to which, in the event of an Entente victory she would have gained Constantinople, the western coast of the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles and a strip of Southern Thracia.¹⁵

Paradoxically the Russians did not take substantive steps prior to the First World War in the interest of realizing their claims with regard to Constantinople, for they were waiting for a victorious end to the war to bear

¹⁰ Sergei Dmitriyevich Sazonov held this post until June 1916.

¹¹ Sazonov belonged to the pro-war faction within the Saint Petersburg government. See F. FEJTŐ, *Rekviem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért. Ausztria-Magyarország szétrombolása*, Budapest 1997, pp. 46–47.

¹² The most certain method of hitting Germany with a blow and preventing her ambitions to world power is to destroy the toppling building of the Habsburg Monarchy. Sz. D. SZAZÓNOV, *Végzetes évek*, n.d., p. 314.

¹³ The Russians in September and November of 1914 signaled to their French allies that they wish to procure a reinforced naval base on the Bosphorus and in Thracia, as well as to destroy Austria-Hungary. FEJTŐ, p. 49.

¹⁴ Nevertheless in talks with the French ambassador in Saint Petersburg several months later Sazonov again stressed that "Austria-Hungary must be dismembered." January 1, 1915. MAJOROS, p. 216.

¹⁵ H. KOHN, *Pan-Slavism. Its History and Ideology*, New York 1960, pp. 257–258. For more details on the Constantinople Agreement see: SZAZÓNOV, pp. 358–362.

fruit.¹⁶ The course of the war was taking however, did not look as their hopes would be realized. Between 1916 and 1917 it was not Russia, but instead the Central Powers which succeeding in bringing the intermediary European territories, the co-called *Zwischeneuropa*,¹⁷ under their control. As far as the parties in the Duma were concerned, in August 1915 the Kadets, along with the Octobrists, the Centrists and the moderate right wing formed the Progressive Block in opposition to the Tsar's policies, to which the Tsar responded by breaking up the session of the Duma.

Although the major offensive lead by General Brusilov in the summer of 1916 was successful, it came with massive losses.¹⁸ The crippling of Russia by the war strengthened the circle in the Tsar's court supporting the conclusion of a separate peace with Germany. This also explains the dismissal of the Entente friendly Sazonov in the summer, but the announcement by the Central Powers of the formation of an independent Poland in the November of 1916 exacerbated the Russian government's situation. When Nicholas II convened the Duma session for the first of November it turned out that the great majority of Russia's political players, in spite of the depletion of the country's human and

¹⁶ The Russians did not develop their Black Sea navy significantly in comparison to the navy in the Baltics. In addition they had planned to expend only a fraction of the amount designated for the development of the Black Sea navy in 1914 (25 million rubles from the total allotment of 112 million rubles for the period between 1914 and 1917). This was the subject of the February 21, 1914 special session. See Yu. B. LUNIEVA, *Bosphor i Dardanelli. Tayniye provokatsii nakanune Pervoj mirovoj vojni (1907–1914)*, Moscow 2010, pp. 203–210, 243.

¹⁷ It was primarily between the two World Wars that the territory between Russian and Germany was called *Zwischeneuropa*, a term first used by German scholars in 1916. Cited by I. ROMSICS, *Nemzet, nemzetiség, állam Kelet-Közép- és Délkelet-Európában a 19. és 20. Században*, Budapest 1998, p. 18.

¹⁸ The figures on the death toll in the intense three month battle are contradictory. According to British sources the German death toll reached 1 million whereas Austria-Hungarian and Russian sources put this number close to 350,000. http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_kovel_stanislav.html. In an earlier work Nelipovich however, reports that the Russian losses were far greater at 1,650,000 See: <http://www.pereplet.ru/history/Autor/Russ/N/Nelipov/Articles/brusil.html#п3>, as well as his newer book published in 2006 in which the number of Russian losses is stated to be 1,446,334. S. G. NELIPOVICH, *Brusilovskii proriv*, Moscow 2006, p. 45. In spite of their success the Russians were unable to complete their victory. See N. I. TSIMBAYEV, *Istoria Rossii XIX – nachala XX vv.*, Moscow 2004, pp. 397–399.

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physical resources, continue to support carrying on the war for an anticipated final victory. Prime Minister Stürmer was charged with being a German stooge, who thwarted the intention by the Tsar to conclude a separate peace. In December of 1916 the assassination of Rasputin, who had maintained great influence over Empress Alexandra, succeeding in convincing those who had been up to then in doubt that the state of the court was untenable.¹⁹ Following these events the outbreak of the 1917 February Revolution contributed to the fulfillment of destiny and the Tsar, with little opposition, relinquished power. The Liberals, the Octobrists and the Social Revolutionaries forming a government in Russia in March of 1917 ensured autonomy to the Poles,²⁰ and ratified the Finnish Constitution. According to the Lvov government's position, from the Russian standpoint after the overthrow of Tsarism and the victory of the revolution the war had lost its imperial character and had now become a revolutionary fight for national defense. The attempt, therefore, to mobilize the population in the interest of a victorious end to the war continued. During the course of the revolution, however, a number of soviets, i.e. councils, had been formed alongside of the Provisional Government across the country and in the capital city as well, resulting in the emergence of a dual authority over the country. In contrast to the government the soviets, were not pro-war. The Petersburg City Council, the Petrograd Soviet gave voice most fervently to the mood of the masses, which resulted in a number of disputes with the Provisional Government. The anti-war mood became so great that on April 26, 1917 Foreign Minister Pavel Milyukov, having supported the fight to a final victory, gave in to the pressure of the mass demonstrations and resigned from his post in early May 1917, along with Minister of War Alexander Guchkov. The one single person

¹⁹ The most vocal of these was the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party which demanded that Russia be capable of maintaining her international position as a strong nation. See HELLER – NYEKRICS, p. 12, as well as TSIMBAYEV, pp. 406–407.

²⁰ Whereas the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies recognized the right of the Poles to independence, the Provisional Government in its proclamation to the people of Poland on March the 16th, 1917 mentions only a "Polish state unified with Russian in a free military alliance", i.e. it offered less to the Poles than did the Central Powers. See I. DOLMÁNYOS, *A nagy forradalom krónikája*, Budapest 1967, pp. 102–103.

who had consistently proclaimed a program of an immediate peace was Vladimir Illich Lenin, who had returned to Petersburg from exile in April of 1917. His program which he had outlined in 1914 remained the same: the goal being “to transform the imperialist war into civil war”.²¹ Lenin formulated the “all power to the Soviets” motto as well, which suggested the non-violent overthrow of the Provisional Government.

Following the Petersburg demonstrations Georgy Lvov attempted to stabilize the Provisional Government by forming a socialist coalition with the cooperation of the Social Revolutionaries. When he felt that this succeeded, he wished to support his endeavors with a foreign policy success. In this he found a fitting partner in Minister of War and the Navy Alexander Kerensky who, in June of 1917, directed General Brusilov to mount a new offensive.²² This action, however, resulted in an ignominious defeat leading to the fall of the Lvov government and then to the formation of a single party government by the Social Revolutionaries,²³ the head of which was Alexander Kerensky, who retained his post as Minister of War.²⁴

After March of 1917 not one of the Russian civil coalition governments was willing to resign from representing “Russian national interests”. The ever growing military exhaustion played a decisive role in the Bolsheviks (who had consistently agitated against the war and had declared national interest to be a fabrication) seizing power in November of 1917. Following the proclamation of the peace treaty the Russian communists expressed their anti-imperial policy also in making public secret agreements of earlier Russian

²¹ The RSDWP proclamation published in Switzerland on the first of November in 1914 was entitled “The war and Social Democracy”. From the motto “to transform the imperialist war into civil war” came directly another motto: the defeat of one’s own governments in the imperialist war. See *A Kommunista Internacionálé*, Budapest 1971, pp. 26–27.

²² According to the old Russian calendar this was waged from June 18, 1917 to July 1, 1917. The Gregorian calendar notes the beginning of the offensive to be July 1.

²³ More than half of the 300,000 soldiers remained dead on the battlefield. The outcry in the capital was so great that the Government was forced to resign. LENGYEL, pp. 18–19. Other works on this topic state the death toll to be around 60,000 on the Russian side, but certain lists state this number to be 400,000. See <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerenszkij-offenzíva>.

²⁴ I. DOLMÁNYOS, *A Szovjetunió története II. (1917–1966)*, Budapest 1982, pp. 33–34, 42.

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governments: thus the Anglo-Russian agreement concluded in the spring of 1915 on the distribution of the territory of the Ottoman Empire, according to which Russia would have received Constantinople and the straights to the sea.

In December of 1917 the Bolsheviks concluded an armistice with the Central Powers following which they initiated peace negotiations. On their part Leon Trotsky representing the position of “neither war, nor peace” ending up signing nothing.²⁵ A few weeks later, with less favorable conditions, the Bolsheviks concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany on March the 3rd, 1918, according to which the Russians surrendered not only the Baltic region, but also vast Slavic territories, consequently major parts of Poland and Ukraine as well.²⁶

Following the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty the Entente treated Soviet-Russia as an enemy. This may be explained by the fact that Romania occupied Bessarabia with no opposition, likewise the British the Caucasian territories, and in December of 1918 France took over Odessa.²⁷ On September 20, 1918 the Ottoman Empire occupied Baku, to which the Soviet of People's Commissars reacted by declaring this act to be a breach by Istanbul of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, and therefore the treaty void. As soon as the German Empire as the defeated party put down its arms on November 11, 1918, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee repealed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in one decree on November 13, 1918.²⁸

²⁵ The Bolsheviks received 24% of the vote in the elections which took place in December 1917, while the Social Revolutionaries received 40.4%. N. DAVIES, *Európa története*, Budapest 2002, p. 861; HELLER – NYEKRICHS, p. 32. Werth gives these percentages in real numbers. N. VERT, *Istoria sovietskogo gosudarstva 1900–1991*, Moscow 1994, p. 122.

²⁶ József Galántai summarizes the territorial losses of the Russian Empire under the terms of Brest-Litovsk as follows: with the recognition of the independence of the Polish, the Ukrainian, the Georgian and the Armenian territories in total 60 million people and 1.42 million square kilometers of land in addition to the loss of 75% of Russia's iron and steel industry. I. NÉMETH (Ed.), *XX. századi egyetemes történet, 1.kötet*, Budapest 2006, p. 31.

²⁷ Only 3 military divisions were available (compared to the originally planned 12), and from these one was incapacitated as the soldiers had been hit with an epidemic. The first divisions of the French troops arrived on December 18, 1918 to Odessa and its environs. J. K. MUNHOLLAND, *The French Army and Intervention in Southern Russia 1918–1919*, in: *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, 1981, pp. 45–47.

²⁸ The course of the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations is detailed in Yu. Ya. TERESCHENKO, *Istoria Rossii XX-nachala XXI vv.*, Moscow 2004, pp. 60–61.

Preceding their withdrawal the Germans had transferred power of the occupied territories to the local national councils which had formed in the interim. The battles between the civil and the left wing forces thus began in these territories, and the left wing was universally supported by Moscow. Thus in November 1918 the Council of People's Commissars recognized the independence of the Soviet Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and consequently the year of 1919 in these republics was one full of battle between the supporters of civil independence and those of the Bolsheviks. Following the capitulation by the Germans, Poland under the leadership of Józef Piłsudski, however, became a major dilemma for Moscow as on November the 14th in 1918 Piłsudski and his supporters launched an attack on the Bolsheviks.

Russia and the Versailles Peace Conference

Between November of 1917 and the autumn of 1918 battles broke out between the Bolsheviks and their rivals in the central Russian territories. Kerensky was the last Russian head of government recognized by the Entente who, however, following a few clashes at the end of 1917 with a few formations loyal to him, could consider himself lucky to be able to escape the country with his skin intact. By 1918 two Russian anti-revolutionary centers of power with significant military force had formed in the territory of the Empire: one was from the Urals to the east where Alexander Kolchak had been first the minister of war for the Russian government which had been set up there before he took power at the end of the year; the other was the Volunteer Army active in the southern territories of the Russian Empire, first under the command of Kornilov, then by the autumn of 1918 under Anton Denikin. Both considered themselves to be heirs of Imperial Russia and attacked the Bolsheviks as Great Russian nationalists. The members of the Russian Constituent Assembly, who had become representatives of the legislative assembly on January of 1918 via the only legitimate elections held in Russia, met in Archangelsk in the eastern part of Russia, although they lacked any real military support.

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Although by November 1918 the Entente had won the First World War essentially without Russia, it was undeniable that up until 1917 Russia had contributed significantly to victory on the Eastern Front. The Bolsheviks, proclaiming a position of peace without annexation and reparations as well as the sovereign rights of nations were closer to the position taken by the American President Wilson, while at the same time they were declaring an all-out war on the capitalist world order as well.²⁹

Incidentally at the end of 1919 the victorious allies were not convinced that Bolshevism would not spread further into Europe, even perhaps into their own countries. It was, therefore, a major achievement under these circumstances that the former Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire, Sergei Sazonov was able to obtain the backing of the Leader of the southern Russian white Volunteer Army, Anton Denikin and also that of Admiral Alexander Kolchak (who had proclaimed himself commander-in-chief) for him to represent “the interests of the true Russia” at the Versailles Peace Conference. Sazonov was aided in great measure by Karel Kramář, also in Paris (officially representing Czechoslovakia) and who viewed Russia to be of key significance both from the point of view of Czechoslovakia and of the world order as well and considered the Bolsheviks to be so pernicious that he would have been willing to send the Czech legions into battle against them.³⁰

In the fall of 1918 Sazonov formed the Russian Policy Advisory Council (RPS³¹) in Paris, whose tasks included outlining extensive preparatory documents for the peace process.³² The select cabinet of the RPS, the so-called

²⁹ Wilson did not encourage the Allied Powers to bring in nations into the negotiations who had made a separate peace with Germany, and the agents of which were attempting to topple their governments. H. KISSINGER, *Diplomácia*, Budapest 1996, p. 255.

³⁰ Kramář saw a quasi foreign policy guarantee to Czechoslovakia's existence in the Russians. Ye. P. SERAPIONOVA, *Karel Kramarzh i Rossiya*, Moscow 2006, p. 281, Masaryk and Benes did not support Kramář's idea to intervene in Russia's internal affairs as they thought that Bolshevism would sooner or later fall automatically. *Ibidem*, p. 283.

³¹ Rossiyskoe Politicheskoe Soveschanie.

³² Not only diplomats and politicians, but also generals who had been in command in World War I participated in the work which included drafting decisions related to border designations.

Russian Political Delegation (RPD³³) was soon set up, the task of which was to take part in the peace negotiations. The Council was composed of three members: in addition to Sazonov was Vasily Maklakov, the former ambassador to Paris of the Provisional Government and Nicolai Chaykovsky, the president of the Provisional Government set up in the eastern Russian territory. (Boris Savinkov was to join only later). Former Prime Minister and Interior Minister of the Provisional Government, Prince Georgy Lvov was chosen as the head of the Delegation. They formed their position on November 7, 1918, which deviated from the traditional Russian imperial concept on one point: they were willing to give up Poland, but they were unwilling to relinquish any other territories of the Russian state. Moreover, they counted on Galicia, Bukovina and Ruthenia³⁴ being annexed to Russia. Nor did the Russians wish to recognize the independence of the Baltic states and they wanted to ensure passage for Russia to the Black and Caspian seas.³⁵ The ambitions of the Russian anti-revolutionary forces waging war against the Bolsheviks were, therefore, (particularly considering their capabilities at that point) greatly exaggerated. Following a period of some thought on January 12, 1919 the Allied Powers, on the suggestion of French Foreign Minister Pichon ended up deciding not to provide a seat for Russia amongst the victorious powers at the Peace Conference³⁶. Nevertheless on January 16, 1919 at a meeting of the Council of Ten Lloyd George did raise the question as to what should be the relationship with Russia? He thought it mad to think that Bolshevism could be brought down with military force. The Versailles Peace Conference

³³ Rossiyskaya Politicheskaya Delegatsiya.

³⁴ Also known as Subcarpathia (Kárpátalja in Hungarian) and Sub Carpathian Rus. This territory, now better known as Ruthenia, been part of the Hungarian kingdom since its foundation in 1000 until 1919. For a detailed history on the area see works by Robert Paul Magocsi from the University of Toronto. See <http://dmorgan.web.wesleyan.edu/easteur/map1930.htm>.

³⁵ Serapionova confirms that the British were more supportive of the Baltic nations than of the Russians concerning the passages to the sea. See SERAPIONOVA, pp. 288–289.

³⁶ Although they did offer Russia the option to express her position in memoranda. Ibidem, pp. 286–287.

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was opened two days later on January 18, 1919.³⁷ The British Prime Minister thought it important to obtain information on the true balance of power and the situation with regard to the Russians. His only remark was that it was to be stipulated that Lithuania and Poland be evacuated. According to Lloyd George to harbor hopes in Denikin, Kolchak and in the Czechoslovak army was like “building a sandcastle”. The ensuing reaction was interesting and France, for instance, strongly objected to the proposal by the British Prime Minister. Therefore the debate was postponed until January 21, 1919 at which time the possibility of a more serious intervention was again brought up. This possibility had been rejected earlier by Lloyd George, nor was it supported by the American president. Lloyd George felt it worth organizing the defense of various independent nations, referring to Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Finland. In the meantime the Bolsheviks had taken control not only of the capital of the country, but also of the central territories of Russia.³⁸

Finally Woodrow Wilson proposed a congress for all powers having formed within the territory of the Russian Empire. He suggested inviting them to the islands of *Thessaloniki* or *Limnos* and, moreover, to invite not only the Russian anti-revolutionary forces but also the Bolsheviks and the various independent national governments, a proposal which Clemenceau strongly opposed.³⁹ The next day, on January 22, 1919 the American president proposed Princes' Islands at Istanbul's entrance to the Sea of Marmara as the site of the congress, and the proposal was then sent to all the various organizations.⁴⁰

³⁷ In contrast to the Vienna Conference held one hundred years previously, here right from the outset the conquered powers were not allowed to participate: notes Henry Kissinger in his tome on the history of diplomacy. KISSINGER, p. 227.

³⁸ Luckily for the Bolsheviks, there were serious conflicts also amongst the various anti-revolutionary groups, which in turn reinforced Lenin. General Alekseyev wrote to his Russian representative to England in the summer of 1918 that he would rather cooperate with Lenin and Trotsky than with Savinkov and Kerensky. See HELLER – NYEKRICS, p. 67.

³⁹ Clemenceau stated his concern with regard to the spread of Bolshevism throughout Europe. Sonino Italian Foreign Minister would have sent only volunteers as interventionists to Russia. http://www.diphis.ru/princevi_ostrova-a496.html.

⁴⁰ On January 24 of 1919 a radio announcement was made to all organizations within the

Wilson's suggestion was to invite, based on his Fourteen Points, three representatives for preliminary consultation from all the organized groups from the territory of the Russian Empire with political or military power, other than Finland and Poland. Conflict amongst the groups was to be suspended for the duration of the meetings. The congress would have been convened in the interest of forming a common position. Princes' Islands were chosen as the site because the Allied Powers had entered the area following November 1918, and it was close to all Russian territories and therefore the delegates would have been able to access it relatively easily. The costs would have been covered by the Allied Powers and the planned date was set for February 15, 1919.

The offer to convene on Princes' Islands was extended to the representatives of the Baltic and the Caucasian states, in addition to the Bolsheviks and the whites.⁴¹

On February 2, 1919 Maklakov wired to Omsk that the recognition of Finland was a *fait accompli*. Regarding Bessarabia the Romanians are "*plotting*", he wrote, while the Poles are planning to form a federation with Lithuania and are making claims for a part of Belorussia, as well as for Eastern Galicia. On the same day Kolchak and his circle sent a cable via Foreign Minister Vologodsky that "the enemies of civilization (the Bolsheviks) are going to fight *to the bitter end*". "*On Princes' Islands they will be willing only to condemn Bolshevism and to enter into no other sort of negotiations.*" Omsk sent a similar reply on February 5, 1919.

The French, counting on the success of their own expedition forces and on that of the whites, intimated to the Russians that they should reject the invitation. In spite of this Odessa sent a detailed list on February 3, 1919, in which they left out the local Bolsheviks. Maklakov sent a supplementary explanation on February 26, 1919 in which he called attention to the fact that the invitation was not to parties but to "*existing power structures*" having governmental and military power.

territory of the Russian Empire. MAJOROS, *Vereségtől a győzelemig*, p. 188.

⁴¹ Why did the West not begin to fight Russia? See <http://www.volk59.narod.ru/interpost.htm>.

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From the Eastern Territory's Provisional Government in Archangelsk the message was that they: "*consider the armistice with the enemy to be detrimental, as the Bolsheviks respect neither international treaties nor international agreements.*"

On the tenth of February Maklakov sensed that Washington's position was becoming unfavorable towards the Russian White forces: "*who are unable to liquidate Bolshevism on their own, and the reason for their dependence on foreign powers is the lack of support by the people.*"⁴² Russian anti-revolutionary forces felt Wilson's proposal to be "*a stab in the back*" and to be "*another Brest*".

On the part of the Soviet of People's Commissars G.V. Chicherin, Commissar of Foreign Policy sent a wire on February 4, 1919 in which the Soviets declared they were ready to pay installments on the debts of Tsarist Russia and of the Provisional Government. The Russian Political Advisory Council in Paris reacted to the proposal on February 16, 1919, i.e. after the planned date of the congress. They stated that no sort of armistice was conceivable between the national forces and the Bolsheviks who "*are able to remain in power only by means of terror*" and rejected the proposal because the congress would have "*decidedly detrimental results*". So whereas the Bolsheviks reacted diplomatically,⁴³ the whites rejected the idea with outrage, and thus by March of 1919 the initiative, primarily due to the position of the latter, was defeated.⁴⁴ The Supreme Council at its session on March 25, 1919 was therefore forced to decide on whether or not to reinforce its Odessa base

⁴² The "reactionary character" of the Don and Siberia on liberal politicians such as Wilson made doubtful the support of such white forces who were thinking along the lines of forming an authoritarian system and who wished to reinstate a Russia with an expansionist foreign policy. See S. LISTKOV, *Russkoe politicheskoe soveshchanie i W. Wilson na Parizhskoi mirnoi konferentsii*, in: http://www.perspektivy.info/history/ruskoje_politicheskoe_sovesshhanije_i_v_vilson_na_parizhskoj_mirnoj_konferencii_2009-01-20.htm.

⁴³ There was no mention of an armistice in the Bolsheviks' reply. Furthermore, they stressed that nothing would be able to hold back the building of socialism in the Soviet Union. See http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Совещание_на_Принцевых_островах.

⁴⁴ From amongst the Baltic nations the Estonians and the Latvians were hoping for international recognition of their nations from this event, while the Georgians for example referred to the fact that Russia was the topic at hand, with which they have nothing to do and therefore they don't even wish to hear of the matter. N. A. NAROCHNITSKAYA, *Rossiya i russkie v mirovoi istorii*, Moscow 2004, p. 232.

or to shut it down. It decided on the latter option and with this the fate of the planned great intervention was sealed. It was not to happen.⁴⁵

The Soviet government recognized the sovereign rights of the nationalities. Theoretically this included the possibility of independence, i.e. the right to secede from the Soviet State. Joseph Stalin, who was later to become the People's Commissar for Nationalities Affairs, was the first to formulate this right, with the aid of Bukharin, in 1913 in his article entitled "Marxism and the National Question". The Soviet leadership proceeded in this spirit when on November 15, 1917 it proclaimed the right to collective sovereignty in its decree on "The rights of peoples". In January of 1918 the Finns declared their sovereignty and were followed in this by the Poles and the Baltic peoples of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.⁴⁶

The Communist Party's position rejecting traditional Russian imperial policy was seemingly consistent in these years. Nonetheless with regard to the right of sovereignty of peoples one cannot overlook the fact that the Party made concessions only in matters of the nationalities on the periphery, and even then not always.

Lenin's Bolshevik general staff was not overjoyed at the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic of Councils on March 21, 1919 as it had been counting on not only revolutionizing the territories of the former Monarchy, but also Germany as well. It was in the days just before the Hungarian Republic of Councils was proclaimed that the First Communist International had been established for the purpose of organizing world revolution.⁴⁷

Summary

The Comintern, as the Third International was referred to, declaredly took as its point of departure that in the time of communist revolutions "*the liberation of the peoples must be achieved*".⁴⁸

⁴⁵ MAJOROS – ORMOS, pp. 256–257.

⁴⁶ A commonality amongst them was that they were all close to Europe, and the European influence prevailed in their territories. KOHN, p. 279.

⁴⁷ *A Kommunista Internacionálé válogatott dokumentumai*, Budapest 1975, pp. 13–20, as well as 1920 party rules *ibidem*, pp. 53–57.

⁴⁸ The founding congress (March 2–6, 1919) minutes *ibidem*, p. 14.

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In the period at issue, although their ambitions were global, in reality even though the foreign policy of the Bolsheviks was based to a significant degree on the rejection of Pan-Slavism, it also remained European centered. Their position was not free from contradiction, as although they were mainly counting on revolutionizing the wartime enemy of Germany, at the same time they practiced realpolitik. The need to consolidate the state power of the Bolsheviks simultaneously required that they forsake not only the Russian objectives of the war: i.e. those of procuring the straights to the sea and gaining Constantinople, Ruthenia, Galicia and Bukovina, but also that they relinquish such territories of the Russian Empire the dis-annexation of which was seen by the majority of the Russians to be unnatural: i.e. Ukraine, Bessarabia, and the Caucasian nations, although it is conceivable that the independence of Finland, Poland and even the Baltic states could have been digested.

The Russian national rightwing program was not free from contradiction either. It outlined an uncompromising annexation program in both the Central European region and also in the region of the Bosphorus. By mid-1917, however, it was evident that it would be unable to realize this program alone, and by July 1917 politically both the Kadets and the Octobrists were removed from the Provisional Government due to the intolerance by Russian society of these factions' own expansionist policies. For them remained the blind belief in the victory of the Allied Powers, while only socialist parties: the Social Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks were ruling at the center in the Provisional Government. The Kadets and the Octobrists began to organize in the marginal territories, but in addition to the fact that they were unable to count on the support of the nationalities making up more than half of the Empire, they could not recover the support of the majority of the Russian population either. The fall in production further exacerbated the situation. The lack of any gains from the war increased the popularity of Bolsheviks who had been promoting a foreign policy nihilistic from the outset, which led to Lenin and his circle being able to solidify their power following the revolution of October 1917. The program of relinquishing traditional expansion and

breaking with the former foreign policy objectives seemed to be the lesser destructive of two evils. Thus unfolds the tale of gradual failure of Russian Pan-Slavism pushing European expansionism in the period between the assassination at Sarajevo and the planned congress at Princes' Islands. In the course of these events the Tsar and his circle were confronted with the scope of the fiasco although, perhaps due to the particular Russian governmental structure, mainly the traditional civil parties of the Duma were not. While the Tsar and his supporters were almost immediately ejected from the power structure, the Octobrist and Kadet members of the Duma left only a half year later and due to a number of major foreign policy blunders they drifted to the periphery. The greater part of the Social Revolutionary Party was expelled by the open dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, definitively in January 1918. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was, from a Bolshevik viewpoint, not about foreign policy goals but about survival and which the Bolsheviks repealed as soon as they were able to. As the burdens of the war were born by Russia and thus she contributed to the defeat of Germany to a significant degree, it would have been morally justified for Russia to participate at the Versailles Peace Conference. (From a political power perspective, just as for all the defeated nations who were not allowed to participate either, consequently for Germany as well). These, mainly Anglo-Saxon initiatives in January and February of 1919 did attempt one thing, but a compromise, and thus participation at the Peace Conference, was made impossible by the enmity by all parties towards each other. The Bolsheviks were the ones to sense the divisiveness of the Great Powers when they reacted to the invitation to the Princes' Islands, as the "carrot" held out of payment of the debts incurred by the Tsarist governments and the Provisional government was designed for the French. The French, however, played deaf to the proposal as they were hoping for the collapse of the system. Therefore the peace treaty to be concluded with the Russians failed due to the opposition of the various Russian anti-revolutionary centers, to the civil war taking place on the territory of Russia, and in part due to the resistance by the French as well.

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It seems in any case to be certain that the various political groups endeavored consistently to realize their own objectives. The question, however, remains: to what degree that did what occurred in Russia come about due to lack of inexperience with power, simple stupidity or to the unnatural degree of reliance on foreign allies?

Abstract

Russian expansionism in Europe during World War I – despite the temporary victories - by the end of 1916 concluded to an occasional and by the spring of 1918 a decisive defeat. Tsar Nicholas II was the first who was willing to take steps towards peace that led to the fiasco of Tsarism which was the most influential cause of the Russian Revolution and foundation of the Russian Republic by the end of February in 1917. The new Russian Provisional government had been emphasizing the goal of the final victory continuously, which led to the victory of the anti-expansionist Bolshevik movement. Lenin's followers had signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria at the spring of 1918, but after the defeat of the Central Powers in the autumn of 1918 the Bolshevik government declared it null and void in all respects. The Allied Powers originally counted on the participation of Russia at the peace talks in Versailles, but by January 1918 they changed their mind. At the same time they had made steps to bring about a joint Russian position, so they invited all the Russian political movements and parties to Princes Islands nearby Constantinople. Nevertheless, the Russians were not able to form a common standpoint, partly because they were conflicting amongst themselves, on the one hand, and partly because their expansionist programs were contradictory to each other and were not based on a real strong and functioning military power.

Keywords

Sarajevo; Princes' Islands; Pan-slavism; Russian Expansionism; Octobrists; Bolsheviks; Social Revolutionaries