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**PERPETRATORS OF WORLD WAR I IN THE INTERPRETATION
OF EMPEROR WILHELM II HOHENZOLLERN: VERIFICATION
OF THE HISTORICAL VERSION**

Abstract. *The purpose of the article is to verify the historical version of the German Emperor Wilhelm II Hohenzollern regarding the perpetrators of the outbreak of the World War I. The research methodology is based on the principle of basic expansion of the interpretive field of the issue under research, verification, content analysis, comparative historical and comparative lexical methods, quantitative method when using thematic statistical research. The scientific novelty of the study consists in the return to scientific circulation of the historical version of Wilhelm II Hohenzollern regarding the culprits of World War I and the verification of this concept based on the study of the memoirs of the last German emperor; memories and works of politicians and diplomats from Germany, England, France, as well as analytical works of the Russian General headquarters, contemporary press, published diplomatic documents and statistical data.*

Conclusion. *In his memoirs, the former German Emperor Wilhelm II Hohenzollern presented “historical tables” that were supposed to prove the falsity of the accusations of Germany and Austria-Hungary in the outbreak of World War I. The key thesis is that the war for Germany, under the conditions of the united and overwhelming forces of the Entente, looked like a losing strategy. The analysis of indicators of military capabilities presented in the article confirms this thesis of Wilhelm Hohenzollern and proves the impossibility of conducting a successful long-term war against the overwhelming forces of the enemy in a situation of strategic encirclement by enemy countries from the West, East and North (the advantage of the British Navy). France and Russia appear in the memoir as the behind-the-scenes power and the executive power. Great Britain, unlike France, did not directly contribute to the growth of Russia’s military power. The personal sources we have examined, such as the memoirs of French and British politicians and diplomats, as well as the fact that Russia was the first major European country to start military mobilization and create a real threat of war against Austria-Hungary and Germany, encourage us to take a closer look at the German version of events. In the end, Germany chose the established practice of declaring war on countries that threatened it in order to legitimately start mobilizing in response to Russian mobilization efforts. It is significant that British politicians recognized the peace-loving, or at least non-aggressive, mood in Berlin on the eve of the war.*

Key words: *World War I, perpetrators, German Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russia, France, England, memoirs, historical tables, statistical data.*

ВИНУВЦІ ПЕРШОЇ СВІТОВОЇ ВІЙНИ В ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЇ ІМПЕРАТОРА ВІЛЬГЕЛЬМА II ГОГЕНЦОЛЛЕРНА: ВЕРИФІКАЦІЯ ІСТОРИЧНОЇ ВЕРСІЇ

Анотація. *Мета статті* полягає у верифікації історичної версії німецького імператора Вільгельма II Гогенцоллерна стосовно винуватців розв'язання Першої світової війни. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на принципі базового розширення інтерпретаційного поля обраної проблеми, верифікації, контент-аналізу, порівняльно-історичного та порівняльно-лексичного методів, квантитативного методу при використанні тематичних статистичних досліджень. **Наукова новизна** дослідження полягає у поверненні до наукового обігу історичної версії Вільгельма II Гогенцоллерна стосовно винуватців розв'язання Першої світової війни та верифікації цієї концепції на підставі вивчення мемуарів останнього німецького імператора, спогадів та праць політиків і дипломатів Німеччини, Англії, Франції, а також аналітичних праць російського Генерального штабу, тогочасної преси, опублікованих дипломатичних документів і статистичних даних.

Висновки. У своїх мемуарах колишній німецький імператор Вільгельм II Гогенцоллерн представив так звані “історичні таблиці”, які мали засвідчити брехливість обвинувачень на адресу Німеччини та Австро-Угорщини у розв'язанні Першої світової війни. Ключова теза – війна для Німеччини, в умовах об'єднаних та переважальних сил Антанти, була стратегічно програшною справою. Аналіз показників військових спроможностей підтверджує цю думку Вільгельма Гогенцоллерна й засвідчує неможливість ведення успішної тривалої війни проти переважальних сил противників. Німеччина була оточена ворожими країнами із Заходу, Сходу та Півночі (флот Великої Британії). Франція та Росія фігурують у спогадах як сила закулісна та сила виконавця. Велика Британія, на відміну від Франції, прямо не сприяла зростанню військової міці Росії. Розглянуті нами особові джерела – спогади французьких та англійських політиків і дипломатів, виявлення того факту, що Росія першою з великих європейських країн розпочала військову мобілізацію й створила реальну загрозу війни проти Австро-Угорщини та Німеччини, спонукають уважніше поставитись до німецької версії подій. Зрештою, Німеччина обрала усталену практику оголошення війни країнам, які їй загрожували, задля легітимного початку мобілізації у відповідь на російські мобілізаційні заходи. При цьому, як ми могли пересвідчитись, британські політики визнавали миролюбність або, принаймні, неагресивність настроїв у Берліні напередодні спалаху війни.

Ключові слова: *Перша світова війна, винуватці, Німецька імперія, Австро-Угорська імперія, Росія, Франція, Англія, мемуари, історичні таблиці, статистичні дані.*

Problem Statement. As a result of the victory of the Entente countries in World War I, a one-sided view of the perpetrators of this bloody confrontation was formed. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 – 1920 recognized the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires as aggressor countries. However, at the beginning of the Great War of 1914 – 1918, in the Ukrainian historiography another version of events was formulated. In the publications of the “Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy” (“Union for the Liberation of Ukraine”), the perpetrators of the war are the Entente countries, and Russia is called the main aggressor (Nasha platforma, 1914, pp. 1–2). The German version of the events of the beginning of World War I also differed from the Versailles concept. Based on the study of the memoirs of the last German Emperor Wilhelm II Hohenzollern, memories and writings of politicians and diplomats of Germany, England, and France, as well as analytical works by the Russian General Staff, the press of the time, published diplomatic documents and statistical data, we will try to analyze the little-known alternative arguments of the German Kaiser. The focus is on the military potential of Germany in comparison with the potential of the Entente countries. The relevant data indicate that the Great War threatened Germany with an imminent disaster. Kaiser Wilhelm’s “historical tables” reveal to us a kind of prelude to the war in the context of Russia’s military operations. The Russian Empire was the first major European country

to begin military mobilization, and this made war inevitable. The arguments presented in the memoirs of the former Emperor Wilhelm allow us to systematize the German version of “guilt in starting the war” and check its validity.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. The events of World War I have been interpreted one-sidedly since the defeat of Germany and the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles on July 28, 1919. The German and Austro-Hungarian Empires were accused of starting World War I (Mirnyj dogovor, 1925). This thesis became the dominant one in world historiography. The famous author Barbara W. Tuchman in her famous work “The Guns of August” (1962) drew attention to the role of chance and fatal mistakes that led to the tragic war. This was an unusual vector for the development of our understanding of World War I. War is a kind of *fatum*, a tragic set of circumstances (Barbara W. Tuchman, 1962). In Russian revolutionary and Soviet historiography, World War I was interpreted as an imperialist war, and all of its main participants were guilty of unleashing it. At the same time, the distinct aggressiveness of Germany and the sacrifices of Russia, which was forced to follow the instructions of France and suffered great human losses in the war, were emphasized. The novelty was in highlighting the hidden aspects of the Franco-Russian alliance (Lenin, 1924; Pavlovich, 1923; Pokrovskij, 1925; Tarle, 1924). Some contemporary Ukrainian studies also show the influence of the old concept of “Austro-German guilt” (Lytvyn, 2014; Trojan, 2014). At the same time, the German version of the events on the eve of World War I was supported by the Ukrainian intellectuals, founders of the “Union for the Liberation of Ukraine” in the midst of hostilities (Do hromadskoi dumky Yevropy, 1914; Nasha platforma, 1914; Znachinnie Ukrainy, 1916). In French historiography an example of the rethinking of the prevailing Versailles narratives is Jean-Jacques Becker’s article on the falsification of some documents from the French diplomatic collection *La Livre Jaune* (1914) (Jean-Jacques Becker, 2012). This was done in order to find evidence of Germany’s accusation of starting the war. In contemporary Ukrainian historiography, there is also an attempt to go beyond the Versailles univectorality. S. Vidniansky and A. Martynov draw attention to the role of different European countries in allowing the war to happen (Vidnianskyi, & Martynov, 2024). Another area of research is the study of the confrontation between the leading countries for influence in the Balkans, as this was the catalyst for the Great War (Mashevskiy, & Kondratenko, 2022; Mashevskiy, & Kupchyk, 2022).

Purpose of the study: to comprehensively study, systematize, and summarize the components of the German and Ukrainian versions (publications of the “Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy” and other Ukrainian formations) of the causes and initiators of the outbreak of World War I on the basis of source documents and historiographical heritage.

Results of the Research. In 1922, the memoirs of the last Emperor of the German Empire, Wilhelm II Hohenzollern (1859 – 1941) “Ereignisse und Gestalten aus den Jaren 1878 – 1918” (“Events and personalities during 1878 – 1918”) were published in Leipzig. The memoirs became the main alternative to the prevailing Versailles concept of determining the perpetrators of World War I and at the same time became an important historical document of the era of confrontation between the old dynastic monarchies. Wilhelm II dedicated his work to his late wife Auguste Viktoria von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg (1858 – 1921). At the beginning of his memoirs he noted – “in memory of the Empress, at whose suggestion these notes were created” (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922).

The pages of this book reveal the historical drama of German history during World War I. Germany was defeated in the war, but not as a result of a military disaster, but as a result of

the outbreak of the revolution. Kaiser Wilhelm refused to suppress the rebel mass in the rear with an army loyal to him, accepted defeat, abdicated, left for the Netherlands, where he lived in the Doorn estate in the Utrecht province. Based on the text, the memoirs were an attempt to reveal the most important and most painful issue for him – to show Germany's innocence in inciting war, disinterest in waging a great war, because Germany had great success due to the peaceful development of the last decades of the 19th – early 20th centuries. At the same time, the Treaty of Versailles provided for the recognition of those countries that declared war guilty of inciting war. That is, Austria-Hungary and Germany were found guilty (Do hromadskoi dumky Yevropy, 1914, p. 2). Wilhelm strongly denied this conclusion. In his work, he tried to show “what” or “who” forced Germany to declare the war. This step was forced under deliberately created circumstances.

In general, on the eve of the Great War, European countries were aware of the power of the German army. Even the British, who at the time represented the most powerful Empire in the world, were convinced of Germany's military superiority in continental Europe. The British Prime Minister Lloyd George (1863 – 1945, Minister of Finance at the beginning of the war, Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922) recalled that two or three years before the war he had met with the Sirdar (Commander-in-Chief) of the Egyptian army, Lord Herbert Kitchener (1850 – 1916). The military commander was very skeptical of the French army and emphasized that the Germans would “shoot them like woodcock” (War Memoirs, 1938, vol. 1, p. 38). However, this was a superficial opinion. The statistics presented in 1915 by the famous economist M. Tugan-Baranovsky and later by the Soviet Institute of World Economy (Institute of World Economy and World Economy) (the 1930s) on the military potential of the German Empire and its allies during World War I showed that the Central Powers were seriously lagging behind the Entente and that they could not win a long war.

On the one hand, Germany was indeed very successful in the field of economic development. On the eve of World War I (1913), the country's share in the volume of industrial output was 15.7% of world indicators (the share of England – 14%, France – 6.4%, USA – 35.8%). In terms of the volume of major products, Germany also ranked first in Europe, second only to the United States in the world economy. For example, Germany produced 19.3 million tons of pig iron, 18.3 million tons of steel (England – 10.2 and 7.6 million tons, respectively; France – 5.2 and 4.6 million tons; Russia – 4.6 and 4.4 million tons). The United States produced 30.9 million tons of pig iron and 31.3 million tons of steel per year¹. However, on the eve of World War I, Germany and Austria-Hungary were significantly inferior to the Entente countries in the number of peacetime armies. In peacetime the French army numbered 766 thousand soldiers, the Russian – 1 million 360 thousand, the British – 258 thousand soldiers. Total – 2 million 384 thousand military. The German Army in peacetime was 801 thousand soldiers, the Army of Austria-Hungary – 436 thousand soldiers. Total – 1 million 237 thousand military. On 1 January 1915, after mobilization measures and five months of intense maneuver warfare, the French army numbered 3 million 381 thousand soldiers, Russia – 6 million 600 thousand, Britain – 1 million 500 thousand, total of 11 million 481 thousand military. At that time the German Army consisted of 4 million 200 thousand soldiers, Austria-Hungary – 2 million 500 thousand, total of 6 million 700 thousand soldiers. The largest gap in the size of the army occurred in early 1917. At that time, the troops of all Allies of the Entente were 23 million 500 thousand soldiers, of whom Russia 10 million 800 thousand soldiers, France – 4 million 511

¹ On the impact of uneven economic development of countries on international relations, see the article Zemzulina, & Tsybal, 2020, pp. 54–64.

thousand souls, England about 3 million. The German Army is about 4 million. 500 thousand soldiers, the army of Austria-Hungary – about 4 million military. Together, the troops of Germany and the Allies in January of 1917 numbered 10 million soldiers and officers. Ended the war with the indicators: the armies of the Entente (consisting of France, Britain, Italy, USA and others without Russia) amounted to 14 million 500 thousand troops, the armies of the former Triple Alliance (consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria) – 10 million military (Tablica 2, 1934, p. 13).

In 1914 – 1918 the armament of the main participants of World War I on the European continent was as follows: artillery systems (light and heavy together, without anti-aircraft guns) – France (4800 at the beginning and 17 500 at the end of the war), Russia (7907 at the beginning and 9825 at the end), England (2000 and 11 000 respectively), Germany (7500 at the beginning and 25 000 at the end of the war); machine guns – Germany significantly prevailed in light machine guns – 12 000 at the beginning of the war, 104 000 at the end (France had 70 000 at the end of the war, England 10 000, Russia had none by the end of the war), but Germany had no heavy machine guns by the end of the war (respectively, France had 5000 at the beginning of the war, 30 000 at the end of the war, Russia had 4152 at the beginning, at the end – unknown, England – 2000 at the beginning, 50 000 at the end); tanks – at the beginning of the war, no country had them in service, at the end – France 4000, England 3000, Germany 70, Russia had none; fighter aircraft – France 560 at the beginning, 7000 at the end of the war, Russia 150 at the beginning, 1000 at the end of the war, England 272 and 4000 respectively. Italy, which had been fighting on the side of the Entente since May of 1915, had a large Air Force: 14 airplanes at the beginning of the war and 2600 at the end of the war. Germany had 300 aircraft at the beginning and 14 000 at the end of the war (Table 18, 1934, p. 31).

In terms of the parameters of the German Navy, although it was actively building it during the reign of Wilhelm II, at the beginning of World War I it was far inferior to the navies of the Entente countries, especially Britain, and could not counteract their military power at sea. In 1914 Great Britain had 460 warships (battleships, cruisers of various types and destroyers) and 105 submarines, France – 116 ships and 69 submarines, a strong Navy owned by Italy (since May of 1915 on the side of the Entente) – 164 warships and 49 submarine, Russia was not part of the “major maritime powers”, Germany had 267 warships (dominated by destroyers) and 26 submarines (Calculated by: Tablica 49, 1934, p. 50).

Germany’s lagging behind in terms of military potential, including naval capabilities, had large-scale consequences a year after the outbreak of the war. M. Tugan-Baranovsky noted that German maritime trade came to a standstill. The international exchange of the German Empire declined under the influence of the war to 1/10 of its previous size. Germany turned into an “isolated trading state” (Tugan-Baranovsky, 1915, pp. 274–275).

These statistics show the validity of Emperor Wilhelm’s statement about the obvious disadvantage for Germany to start a war in 1914, given the combined forces and the numerical superiority of the potential enemy (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, p. 255).

The testimonies of British diplomats on the eve of the war confirmed Germany’s peaceful intentions, and in this regard, the British Foreign Office even maintained reasons for optimism. Of all the Entente countries, Britain pursued the most cautious policy and apparently did not “work” to incite war. The British Ambassador to France, Lord Francis Leveson Bertie (1844 – 1919), wrote in his Diary (1924, the Russian translation published in 1927 entitled “Behind the Scenes of the Entente”) on 27 July 1914 he wrote that despite the

strong intentions of the so-called “military party” in Germany, he did not consider “that the German Emperor and his Government desire war”. “But if the Russian Emperor adheres to the absurd and outdated claim that Russia is the protector of all Slavic States, no matter how badly they behave, war is likely” (The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1924, p. 2).

Lord Bertie was inclined to the opinion of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Herbert Henry Asquith (1852 – 1928, Prime Minister 1908 – 1916), who believed that the situation depended on Russia’s position. The entry in the 29 July Diary is very eloquent: “Things look more hopeful as regards peace between the Powers. The Russians and Austrians are to converse. If, however, the Russians begin to mobilize the Germans will do the same – and then?” (The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1924, p. 4). In the end, this is what happened, military mobilization in Russia led to a declaration of war and the beginning of a world fire.

The key aspect of preparing for war, of course, was the military action of certain countries. The event that made the beginning of the war inevitable was the mobilization of Russian troops and the corresponding direct threat to the bloc of Central Powers, especially to the weaker military power of Austria-Hungary. Before the war, the Russian army outnumbered the Austro-Hungarian army three times; numbering 1 360 000 against 436 000 (see statistics above). After the assassination on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo of the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este (1863 – 1914), and his wife, Sophia, Duchess von Hohenberg (1868 – 1914), events unfolded without an alternative to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Representatives of Austria-Hungary were prohibited from investigating the case in Serbia, where the participants in the murder, armed with Brauning revolvers (most likely, it was a compact Belgian revolver le Nacional for 7.65x17 cartridges) and six hand grenades, arrived (Prilozhenie 8, 1915, pp. 72, 74–75).

In response, the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on the Kingdom of Serbia on 15 July 1914 and mobilized eight corps (about 400 000 troops). Of these, four corps (two armies – about 200 000 soldiers) took part in the military operation against Serbia – led an offensive from the north and northeast on the territory of Serbia. The other four corps reinforced the eastern direction in the face of a possible war with Russia (Shol’p, 1914, p. 1; Vojna, 1914, p. 1). Despite the fact that this local mobilization did not pose a threat to Russia in terms of possible offensive operations by Austria-Hungary, and the Russian Army still far outnumbered the Austro-Hungarian Army (1 360 000 against more than 830 000 Austrian troops after local mobilization, of which 200 000 were used against Serbia – Author), Russia began the so-called “limited mobilization” on July 16, 1914. As a result, mobilization was carried out in the Odesa, Kyiv, Moscow, St. Petersburg (primarily reserve military ranks of the Navy), Kazan military districts. The Cossacks of the Don, Kuban, Terek, Astrakhan, Orenburg, and Ural armies were mobilized. Finally, reserve officers of the army, navy, Cossack units, doctors, veterinarians and pharmacists were mobilized in all twelve military districts of the Russian Empire. In those districts where the mobilization of lower military ranks took place, there was also a supply of horses, carts, and harnesses from the population to the Army (Vysochajshyj ukaz., 1914, p. 1).

The scale of this “limited mobilization”, along with the huge army of 1 360 000 peacetime troops, revealed a direct military threat to Germany and a mortal threat to Austria-Hungary – all of Ukraine east of the Zbruch as part of the Russian Empire was to be mobilized! On 18 July Russia announced a general mobilization. The result of this decision by Russia, which was militarily commensurate with the declaration of war, was the open declaration of war by the German Empire and the corresponding launch of the army’s own mobilization

mechanism on July 19 (August 1 according to the new style) – only on the third day after Russia’s large-scale mobilization measures! In addition, as noted in 1916 by General of the Cavalry, Baron Konstantin Wilhelm von Gebsattel (1854 – 1932) – before the war continued covert measures of the Russian Army to concentrate troops against the Central Powers. “Russia has skilfully prepared everything to destroy Germany”, wrote the German general. “Under cover of manoeuvres, in April 1914, it threw its masses of troops to the western borders” (Znachinnie Ukrainy, 1916, p. 291).

In the memoirs and correspondence of the German Emperor, we find this interpretation – the reception of Russian mobilization as the engine of the Great War (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, p. 216). On 17 and 18 July, Kaiser Wilhelm II sent warning telegrams to Russian Emperor Nicholas II, emphasizing the inevitability of war because of Russia’s mobilization measures. The same warnings were passed on through the German Ambassador to St. Petersburg (Germanskaya Belaya kniga, 1915, pp. 60–61). In response, the Russian Tsar allegedly gave a verbal order to the Chief of the General Staff, Nikolai Yanushkevich (1868 – 1918), to stop the mobilization. However, this was not done, and Russian supporters of the war no longer held back – the military mechanism was launched. Personally, with regard to the main perpetrators of the war, William II named French President Raymond Poincaré (1860 – 1934), Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov and Russian Ambassador to France Alexander Izvolsky (1856 – 1919, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1906 – 1910, Ambassador to France 1910 – 1917) (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, pp. 218–219).

Information about Russia’s military preparations for a major war, namely the concentration of troops in the western military districts of the Empire, also applied to the earlier period. Wilhelm II noted that prisoners of war of the Siberian Corps at the beginning of the war testified that in the summer of 1913 they were sent by rail to the suburbs of Moscow for military manoeuvres. The manoeuvres did not take place, but the troops were kept at a new place and quartered for the winter. In the summer of 1914, they were transferred from Moscow to the Vilno district (Vilnius – Author) also under the guise of conducting military exercises. Soon, they were given ammunition and informed of the start of the war. The Siberian Corps took part in the Russian offensive in East Prussia (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, p. 215).

According to a story published in the press in the winter of 1914/1915 by a traveling American who was in the Caucasus in May 1914, there was a large movement of Russian troops in the Caucasus. Authorities in Tiflis (Tbilisi – Author) explained this as conducting ordinary military manoeuvres. At the same time, there were great difficulties with the departure of the American and his wife. The steamships leaving the sea from the ports of the Caucasus were overcrowded with soldiers, and Russian officers explained that the troops were being sent to Odesa for large-scale manoeuvres in Ukraine (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, pp. 215–216).

Thus, according to information established after the war, in addition to the mobilization of military districts of the European part of Russia in July of 1914, at least during the period of 1913 – 1914 there was a strengthening of the Russian troops near the borders with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. At the same time, with regard to the Siberian Corps, subsequent events clearly showed that its gradual redeployment to the border with Germany was caused by the preparation of offensive actions.

For its part, a clear manifestation of Russia’s aggressive intentions against Germany and Austria-Hungary on the eve of the war was the extraordinary intensification of espionage activities in Austria-Hungary (against this country planned the largest offensive of the Russian

Army at the beginning of the war). Thus, at the beginning of 1913, there were about forty cases in the courts of the Danube Empire against people accused of espionage in favour of the Russian Empire. These were people of various social classes, citizens of Russia and Austria-Hungary, people of various civilian professions, and priests. Also in early 1913, a pre-trial investigation was conducted in Austria-Hungary against twelve people with the same charges (O shpionstve, 1913, p. 27).

In the same list of manifestations of the Russian Empire's offensive preparations in Galicia and East Prussia was the organization by the Russian General Staff of special studies on military statistics, military geography, and the comprehensive characterization of the German and Austro-Hungarian armed forces. This training had been carried out at least since the beginning of the 20th century in combination with special intelligence activities. Its results were military works with special limited access for use: "Military Geographical Description of Galicia" (1904, published by the Headquarters of the Kiev Military District), "The Armed Forces of Austria-Hungary: Organization, Mobilization and Composition of the Armed Forces (as of January 1, 1912)" (1912, published by the Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff (Quartermaster Generals Department)), "Germany. Military Statistical Description. East Prussian District" (1912, published by the Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff (Quartermaster General's Department)), "German Armed Forces" (1914, published by the General Directorate of the Russian General Staff (Quartermaster General's Department) (Voenno-Geograficheskoe opisanie, 1904; Vooruzhenny'e sily' Avstro-Vengrii, 1912; Germaniya, 1912; Vooruzhenny'e sily' Germanii, 1914).

The clear coherence between France and Russia can be seen in President Poincaré's visit to Russia a week before World War I, on 20–23 July 1914. Poincaré arrived in Russia by sea on the cruiser "France", and talks with Nicholas II took place on the Emperor's yacht at the Kronstadt raid, as well as in Peterhof, St. Petersburg and on the French cruiser before the French delegation left for home. According to President Raymond Poincaré, the tensions between Sweden and Russia over espionage efforts in the Scandinavian country under the auspices of the Russian naval attaché were discussed. They also noted the uncertainty in the issue of Austrian-Serbian relations, Nicholas II and Poincaré stressed the need for concerted action between the countries, as well as in relations with Britain (Puankare, 1925, pp. 188–196). Apparently, the real purpose of the visit to Russia was hidden, as the usual confirmation of the need for concerted action did not require a "sea voyage" of the President of France. After all, this was the period after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the beginning of Russia's so-called "limited mobilization" and the bringing to full combat readiness of the Russian troops in Kiev military district on the border with Austria-Hungary. At the same time, Poincaré was to testify publicly to the peaceful sentiments of both countries. At the same time, Poincaré was to testify publicly to the peaceful sentiments of both countries. In his memoirs, he quoted from his own toast during a joint dinner at the Peterhof Palace on 21 July: "France will defend, in close and daily cooperation with its ally, the interests of peace and civilization, for which both governments and both nations continue to work" (Puankare, 1925, p. 192). This diplomatic rhetoric of the President of France was once aptly interpreted by the soviet researcher M. Pavlovich in the preface to the publication of the memoirs of the French Ambassador to Russia during World War I Maurice Palaeologus (Fr. Georges Maurice Paléologue, 1859 – 1944). Assessing Poincaré's visit, he noted: "The mobilization of the thirteen corps of the Russian army and the rest of the military measures that provoked the war were developed and approved in advance by Poincaré" (Pavlovich,

1923, p. 8). In this sense, the French leader's visit to Russia really seemed justified and necessary to coordinate specific actions of the two allies.

Given Russia's "pre-emptive" military mobilization on a scale sufficient to conduct offensive operations against neighboring Austria-Hungary or Germany, we can speak of Russia's major role in the immediate outbreak of World War I. What new can be said about Russia's interest in waging a war of conquest, especially against the weaker Austro-Hungarian Empire? In this regard, the arguments of Russia's opponents in Bulgaria, which opposed pro-Russian Serbia and Russia itself in South Slavic Europe, were very interesting. Let us dwell on this briefly.

Bulgaria, which joined the Central Powers during World War I, was already one of the centres of the struggle against Russian propaganda at the beginning of the war. According to the definition of the Russians themselves, in particular in the publication "Predatel'stvo Bolgarii. Dokumental'naya istoriya Bolgaro-Serbskoj vojny' 1913 g. i vstuplenie Bolgarii v lono germanizma (1914 – 1915) (Petrograd, 1916)," Bulgarian government newspapers became a haven for "Russophobes". These newspapers were of the opinion that Russia's policy was directed against the interests and even the existence of Slavdom. Bulgarian publications emphasized that Russia had entered the war with Austria because Austria was a semi-Slavic country in which the Slavic population was more cultured than the Russian population and lived in better conditions. Austria plans to solve the Slavic problem through "trialism", granting the southern Slavs the appropriate rights and the formation of Austrian Slavism! Such a policy undermined Russian Pan Slavism and the Serbian policy of uniting the South Slavs under its leadership (there was a propaganda thesis – Serbia is Piedmont or the centre of the South Slavic revival). Thus, we can conclude that "the whole struggle (on the part of Russia and Serbia – Author) is now directed not against German pan-Germanism, but against Austrian Slavism!!!" (Veritas, & Semenova, 1916, pp. 177–178).

Based on the above, we can identify three main motives for Russia's desire to destroy Austria-Hungary as a significant European state by military means. Firstly, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was an obstacle to Russia's strengthening in the Balkans, preventing it from entering the Mediterranean region through the Aegean and Adriatic Seas with the help of Serbia (the prospect of opening up opportunities for military presence in the region and access to major sea trade routes). Secondly, the Austrian monarchy, represented by the heir to the throne, Archduke Ferdinand, was preparing plans to solve the Slavic problem in the empire by expanding the rights of the Slavic peoples, introducing the principle of "trialism" and neutralizing the Russian myth of the main defender of the Slavic peoples. The Austrian monarchy itself could claim the role of defender of the Slavic peoples and the formation of the main centre of Slavism. Thirdly, Russia intended to "finally" resolve the Ukrainian issue by occupying the western lands of Rus-Ukraine. In this way, it would end the centuries-long struggle against the true bearers of the historical heritage of Kievan Rus, by destroying the rightful heir to an ancient tradition.

Accordingly, did the behind-the-scenes organizer of World War I, namely the French Republic, have offensive plans against Germany? Raymond Poincaré gave the answer to this question in his memoirs. The President of France wrote that the mobilization, which began on 2 August 1914 (20 July in the old style), made it possible to form an Army of 3 million 780 thousand soldiers, including 77 thousand native colonial troops. This was the total number of the Army before the losses of the first months of active warfare, and it was an Army that had to wage a large-scale war on only one front. Four armies of eighteen corps and eight

reserve divisions were concentrated at the forefront between Mezier (Charleville-Mézières) and Belfort. The Fifth Army, consisting of three corps, was stationed on the second line from Sainte-Menehould to Commercy, with the prospect of being deployed at the forefront if necessary. In this case, the offensive targets defined the French Army before the war. Poincaré recalled, “The offensive had to be as fast as possible. We had to operate on both flanks, the right – in Lorraine between the forests and mountains of the Vosges and the Moselle in the direction of Toul, the left – north of the railway between Verdun and Metz. The troops connecting the two flanks, stationed in the upper Meuse and in the Vainre, were to provide communication between the armies designated for the two combined attacks; Due to this military plan, our troops had to move east and northeast” (Puankare, 1936, p. 6).

Subsequent events showed that the German army simply acted ahead of the French and forced it to defend itself. The French President put it this way in his memoirs, “While our army was going to methodically carry out its concentration (it is clear from the above that the concentration was to precede the deployment and offensive – Author), Germany, which deliberately hurried with its declarations of war (actually responded to military mobilization in Russia and acted according to the forced plan of war on two fronts – Author), is ready to begin hostilities and on 5 August at six o’clock in the evening begins the attack on Liege, which was conducted by six brigades under the command of General Otto von Emmich (1848 – 1915) and three cavalry divisions led by General Georg von der Marwitz (1856 – 1929). The total number of troops that invaded Belgium, King Albert I of Belgium (1875 – 1934) estimated at 120–150 thousand soldiers” (Puankare, 1936, p. 8).

Conclusions. In his memoirs, the former German Emperor Wilhelm II Hohenzollern presented “historical tables” that were supposed to prove the falsity of the accusations of Germany and Austria-Hungary in the outbreak of World War I. The author has shown the groundlessness of these accusations at various levels of information. The main component of reasoning is the search for logic in the desire of certain countries to start a war. In this regard, the war was the least profitable for Germany among the large countries of Europe, because this country was undergoing a phase of rapid economic growth precisely in the conditions of a long peace, and was the first economic power of Europe. Instead, the war for Germany, under the conditions of the united and overwhelming forces of the Entente, looked like a losing strategy. The analysis of the indicators of military capabilities presented in the article confirms this thesis of Wilhelm Hohenzollern and proves the impossibility of conducting a successful long-term war against the overwhelming forces of the enemy in a situation of strategic encirclement by enemy countries from the West, East and North (the overwhelming fleet of Great Britain). At the same time, not only Germany waged a war on two fronts, but also Austria-Hungary (Russia in the East and Serbia and Montenegro in the South). Wilhelm II laid the general blame for the outbreak of the war, stopping the successful peaceful development of Germany, on his opponents in the international arena. France and Russia appear as a behind-the-scenes force and an executive force. The United Kingdom, unlike France, did not directly contribute to the growth of Russia’s military power. The narrative sources examined – the memoirs of French and British politicians and diplomats, the discovery that Russia was the first major European country to begin military mobilization and create a real threat of war against Austria-Hungary and Germany – prompt us to focus more attention on the German version of events. Due to the favourable strategic position of the Entente countries, France and Russia became the main organizers of the war. At the same time, Germany and Austria-Hungary were forced to respond to terrorist and military

threats from Serbia (the assassination of the heir to the throne and commander-in-chief of the Austro-Hungarian army, Franz Ferdinand von Habsburg, and his wife, Duchess Sophia von Hohenberg), Russia, and France. Germany chose the established practice of declaring war on threatening countries in order to mobilize in response. It is significant that British politicians recognized a peaceful or at least non-aggressive mood in Berlin on the eve of the war.

The second level of argumentation is the identification of trends through a set of individual facts. In this regard, we note the importance of information on the redeployment of Russian troops in Russia's western military districts on the eve of the war, the anti-German sentiments of Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich (Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in 1914 – 1915) and Russian officers in general. Also indicative is the leak of information about the war, which will begin “not earlier than the end of the month” (July of 1914 – Author) and will lead to the inevitable defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Relevant information came from Grand Duchess Anastasia (1868 – 1935) and Militia (1866 – 1951) of Montenegro during the dinner in honour of French President Raymond Poincaré in the Red Village on 9 (22) July 1914. They referred to an encrypted telegramme from their father King of Montenegro Nikola I Petrovic-Negos (1841 – 1921) (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, pp. 213–214; Paleologue, 1923, pp. 39–40).

These facts look quite convincing because the former Emperor Wilhelm offered evidence and information that came from Germany's enemies or was made public after the end of World War I (Wilhelm Hohenzollern took the above information from the memoirs of the French Ambassador to Russia Maurice Paleologue, first published in the *Revue de deux Mondes* in 1921) (Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1922, p. 213). In his “historical tables”, Kaiser Wilhelm sought to show the reader that the Great War was a planned action for Russia and France, while for Germany it was unprofitable and unexpected. That is why, he preferred to call the section of his memoirs devoted to the preparations for and the outbreak of the war “Kriegsausbruch” – “outbreak of war”.

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