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ISSUES OF THE FORMATION AND FOREIGN POLICY OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE IN BORIS SOKOLOV'S WORK "THE GERMAN EMPIRE: FROM BISMARCK TO HITLER"

Lecturer: **Boltaev Okhun**
Asia International University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology
Department of Foreign Languages and Social Sciences
Email: 9690798@gmail.com

Abstract: :This article analyzes the process of the formation of the German Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century, the diplomatic activities of Otto von Bismarck, and the development of political relations between the German and Russian Empires. Particular attention is paid to the role of the Franco-Prussian War in German unification, the establishment of the Three Emperors' League, and its influence on the system of international relations in Europe.

Keywords: German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, Franco-Prussian War, Three Emperors' League, Russian Empire, European diplomacy, geopolitics, international relations, German unification, nineteenth century.

On January 18, 1871, exactly 170 years after the Brandenburg Elector Frederick III proclaimed himself King Frederick I of Prussia, the establishment of the German Empire was officially proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors of the Palace of Versailles following the victory over France. This date carried profound symbolic significance. It was Frederick III who, among the Prussian monarchs, was the first to create a truly strong professional army and to develop industry and trade to a level that enabled the maintenance of the armed forces without reliance on foreign loans. As a result, the Kingdom of Prussia became independent of its powerful neighbors both militarily and financially. Having defeated the French army, which was considered one of the strongest military forces on the European continent, Prussia assumed leadership over a union consisting of four kingdoms, six grand duchies, twelve duchies, and three free cities. All of these states retained their internal autonomy. Moreover, the kingdoms of Bavaria and Württemberg, which had previously belonged to the South German Confederation, were granted the right to maintain their own ministries of foreign affairs, postal and telegraph services, as well as independent armies and ministries of war. During their accession to the North German Confederation and subsequently to the German Empire, various German states negotiated special conditions for their membership. These arrangements allowed them to preserve certain political and administrative privileges while becoming part of the newly established imperial structureIn particular, the Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg retained its economic independence both in 1867 and in 1871 and did not join the German Customs Union (Zollverein). It was only in 1888, under pressure from the imperial and Prussian authorities, that Hamburg finally became a member of the customs union.

Formally, the German Empire was a federal state, consisting of a union of states that had voluntarily united while preserving their internal autonomy and broad governmental rights. The highest legislative body of the Empire was the Reichstag, whose members were elected through universal, direct, equal, and secret suffrage. However, laws passed by the Reichstag could enter into force only after approval by the Bundesrat, the Federal Council, whose members were delegated by the parliaments of the constituent states in proportion to their populations. Since the

population of Prussia constituted nearly two-thirds of the total population of the German Empire, Prussian representatives held a dominant position in both the Reichstag and the Bundesrat. Furthermore, according to the Constitution adopted on April 21 and enacted on May 4, 1871, the King of Prussia was declared the permanent President of Germany and was granted the title of German Emperor. The Emperor possessed the exclusive right to appoint the Imperial Chancellor, to whom all civil officials of Germany were subordinate. He also served as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, with all military personnel owing allegiance to him. The Chancellor, in turn, was accountable solely to the Emperor rather than to the Reichstag.

Thus, in many respects, the German Empire was closer to a centralized state than to a genuine federation. Owing to its dominance within the administrative and military apparatus, Prussia could readily impose its will upon the other states of the Empire. The Emperor, regarded as a ruler who derived his authority from God, was considered responsible only before God Himself.

As a result of the Franco-Prussian War, the German Empire acquired Alsace and Eastern Lorraine. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck strongly supported the annexation of Alsace. In his view, France would never become a true ally of the German Empire; therefore, it should be weakened through the loss of Alsace, a region endowed with developed iron and steel industries, engineering enterprises, and significant coal deposits. Bismarck also took into account the fact that although the inhabitants of Alsace considered themselves French citizens, they had preserved the German language and could therefore be relatively easily Germanized. Although the majority of the population was Catholic, there was also a considerable number of Calvinists who could potentially serve as a social base for Prussian influence. The situation in Lorraine, however, was different. The inhabitants of Lorraine had long been French-speaking and were almost entirely Catholic. Bismarck foresaw serious difficulties in integrating this population into the Empire and therefore opposed the annexation of Eastern Lorraine. Nevertheless, his position did not prevail. The arguments of the Prussian General Staff concerning the strategic importance of the fortress city of Metz, the capital of Lorraine, together with the region's rich deposits of iron ore and coal, proved more persuasive. Emperor Wilhelm I accepted these considerations and, on this occasion, chose not to support the views of the "Iron Chancellor."

In 1871, the German Empire covered an area of approximately 540,000 square kilometers and had a population of 41 million people. However, its territory expanded further after the signing of the final peace treaty between Germany and France in Frankfurt am Main on May 10, 1871. Under the terms of the treaty, France was required to cede the whole of Alsace and part of Lorraine to Germany and to pay an indemnity of five billion francs. Until this indemnity was fully paid, German occupation forces were to remain stationed on French territory It was stipulated that German occupation troops would remain on French territory until the indemnity had been paid in full. Alsace and Lorraine, which were transformed into an imperial province, effectively came under Prussian control. Initially, they were administered by an Oberpräsident appointed by the Emperor and subordinate to the Imperial Chancellor. Beginning in 1879, however, the region was governed by an Imperial Governor (Statthalter) directly appointed by the Emperor. The revanchist sentiments that emerged in France as a result of the forcible annexation of Alsace and Lorraine gradually began to diminish over time. This was largely due to the increasingly unfavorable prospects of France in any potential future conflict with Germany. While the French population remained almost stagnant, the population of Germany grew rapidly, thereby steadily increasing Germany's relative strength. In 1866, approximately 40 million people lived within the territories that would later form the German Empire, compared to 38 million in France. Had France faced only Prussia in 1870, as it had anticipated, its opponent would have possessed a population of

merely 24 million. By 1910, however, France's population had reached only 39 million, whereas Germany's population exceeded 65 million. As a consequence of the mutual hostility between Germany and France, Russia began, after 1871, to view itself as an arbiter between the two powers and consequently emerged as a dominant force in continental Europe. Relying on this position, Russia decided to wage war against the Ottoman Empire in 1877. Even after achieving victory, however, its ambitions were constrained primarily by Great Britain and Austria. At the Berlin Congress of 1878, Bismarck was compelled to choose between Russia on the one hand and Britain and Austria on the other. For example, the Baltic German writer Victor Hehn, in his diary published in 1892, portrayed Russia as a threat to European civilization and expressed alarmist views regarding a potential Russian advance toward the West. His opinions reflected the Russophobic sentiments that were widespread among German nationalist circles of the period.

The territories of the former Livonian Order that had become part of the Russian Empire were regarded by many Germans as lands that ought to be incorporated into Germany. They were considered a natural extension of the German cultural and political sphere. In particular, the Prussian general Friedrich von Bernhardi, who was born in St. Petersburg, argued in a work published in 1892 that Germany needed to establish complete control over the Baltic Sea and that this objective could be achieved only through confrontation with Russia. In his view, the future course of history would be determined by the struggle between the German world and Pan-Slavism. However, as long as the German Empire was led by the experienced and cautious statesman Otto von Bismarck, anti-Russian sentiments remained largely confined to certain political groups originating from the Baltic regions. These circles supported the idea of uniting Estonia, Livonia, and Courland with the German Empire. Bismarck, by contrast, clearly understood that an open confrontation with Russia would not serve Germany's national interests. Anti-Russian attitudes were also relatively strong among German Social Democrats. During the Revolution of 1848, German revolutionaries viewed Tsarist Russia as a power capable of obstructing German unification and intervening militarily to suppress revolutionary movements. As a result, numerous anti-Russian propaganda leaflets were circulated throughout the German states.

German Social Democrats inherited the traditional perception of Russia and the Russian people as embodiments of an Asiatic despotism that threatened German freedom. One of the most influential leaders of the Social Democratic movement, August Bebel, declared during the era of the German Empire: "If war with Russia breaks out, I myself will take up a rifle." This statement was particularly striking because he had previously championed the slogan: "Not a man, not a penny for this system!" According to the West German publicist Sebastian Haffner, by 1914 the German Social Democratic Party had effectively ceased to be a revolutionary organization and had become a parliamentary party. Rather than seeking to overthrow the existing political order, it aimed to integrate itself into the political system alongside the Liberals and the Centre Party. Mass demonstrations and red flags increasingly functioned as traditional political rituals rather than genuine instruments of revolutionary struggle. As a result, the notion of a "Russian threat" became a convenient instrument for supporting the German government and portraying war as a defense of "democratic values" against the autocratic regime of the Russian Empire. In this context, democratic France and Great Britain were not suitable candidates for the construction of an effective "enemy image."

In an effort to mitigate the tensions between the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary, Bismarck established the League of the Three Emperors (Dreikaiserbund). This arrangement enabled Germany, for a certain period, to maintain cordial relations simultaneously with both Russia and Austria-Hungary. However, profound disagreements concerning the Balkans and the

Polish question, as well as the growing influence of Pan-Slavic sentiments within the Russian political elite, inevitably meant that Berlin would sooner or later be forced to make a strategic choice between the two powers.

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