

Book Presentation

July 1914, The Prussian Trap

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This essay aims to describe a pivotal period in European history by drawing on telegrams primarily from Greek and other European Embassies. Their juxtaposition, along with diplomatic comments, highlights the drama that unfolded



in Europe during the last week of July 1914.

The summer of 1914 begins with Greece in mobilization, as Hellenism in Anatolia and Constantinople faces mortal threats from the Young Turk government. Meanwhile, Greeks in Northern Epirus struggle to defend themselves against Albanian expansionism instigated by Italy. Bulgaria aims to revert Greece to its pre-Balkan Wars borders. Austria, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire support these efforts to overturn the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest.

Europe is divided into two camps, but it has lived for a century without a widespread war, and nothing hints at what will happen next. The assassination of the Archduke of Austria in Sarajevo doesn't initially seem to threaten it. President of the Council of Ministers Venizelos traveled to Europe to meet with the Grand Vizier to resolve the issue of the Aegean islands and the status of the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire. The start of the extremely critical last week of July finds him in Munich, where he tries to keep Greece neutral.

The assassination of the Archduke took place within the territory of the Dual Monarchy; thus, responsibility should be assigned accordingly. However, this is not mentioned in the telegrams.

According to Christopher Clark's well-known quote in *The Sleepwalkers*: "These rulers, who believed they were innovators and rationalists, moving like sleepwalkers, led their states from mistake to mistake, until there was no other solution left than war". But is this really the case? Reading the original telegrams offers a different view of this brief but extremely crucial period in history: Austria-Hungary fell into its ally Germany's trap, which sought an excuse to advance its pan-German agenda.

The war between Serbia and Austria was considered inevitable early on, and all diplomatic efforts focused on preventing its escalation. They were unable to succeed, as the decision to expand the conflict had been made from the beginning by Germany, which may also have helped draft the Austrian strict ultimatum. The first written acknowledgment of Germany's responsibility came from the Ambassador in London, Gennadius, the day after Austria-Hungary issued its ultimatum to Serbia, followed by the Greek Ambassador in Berlin, Theotokis.

The Triple Understanding does not seem to have made any mistakes; it tried hard but simply could not prevent the prescribed development. The Balkan countries also appear to have taken a cautious stance, not threatening anyone. However, Greece's alliance commitments to Serbia required it to warn Bulgaria if this country became involved in the war.

Germany initiated the situation, declaring war on Russia but instead attacking Belgium and, subsequently, France, in accordance with the Schlieffen Plan. However, the plan failed when the German advance into France halted at the Marne River in early September 1914. Germany was defeated in the Great War. Despite the harsh conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles (which were later heavily criticized by the victorious Westerners), Germany was not discouraged. As soon as it regained the necessary strength, it attacked Europe again to carry out its pan-German plans, this time without unnecessary pretexts.

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