

## HOW EUROPE WENT TO WAR IN 1914

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The study is devoted to the question of the outbreak of war in August 1914. The author analyses the imperial aims of the individual great powers and their war aims. He takes a critical view of the attempts of some authors to transfer the blame for the war to all the participants. According to the author, having imperial aims and starting a war are two different things. The Central Powers played the key role in starting the war in the summer of 1914. Germany used various channels to put pressure on its ally Austria-Hungary to start the war quickly.

Key words: First World War. Outbreak of war. War aims.

### Problems of Interpretation

The centenary of the outbreak of World War I, has sparked discussions – and not just professional ones – concerning the causes of the war. Once again, people ask whether the War was necessary, whether it was impossible to avoid. Much has been written and said about the failure of diplomacy. When talking about the “failure of diplomacy”, a popular misconception, which should not be found in literature written by experts, often appears: it says, that the role of soldiers is to fight wars, whereas the role of diplomats is to avoid wars. Obviously, this has never been true, and still is not true. The discussion about who to blame for the War taking ten million lives and the health, possessions, etc. of an unprecedented number of people, had started as early as during the peace negotiations in the suburbs of Paris. Articles 227-230 dealt with the war crimes that Article 231 defined in a way to identify Germany as the only entity to be blamed for starting the War. Even during the peace negotiations the German delegation protested against the definition of the German guilt, saying this was irreconcilable with the honour of the German nation.<sup>1</sup> The peace conference did not take German objections into account. In post-war Germany, the articles of the Treaty of Versailles were perceived very sensitively, and became the subject of more debates than the tragic reparation measures. German society influenced by pre-war nationalistic propaganda obviously was not capable of much self-reflection. It is nearly incredible how German official propaganda, the Emperor and government were able to influence German society. Wilhelm II and the politicians around Bethmann Hollweg were and are partly to our days identified with the German nation and its honour. This situation changed partially only after World War

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1 MICHAELIS, Herbert – SCHRAEPLER, Ernst – SCHEEL, Günter (eds.). *Ursachen und Folgen. Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart*, vol. III., Berlin 1958, pp. 373-384, 386-388.