



Volume 4. Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890
Three Emperors' Treaty with Austria and Russia (June 18, 1881)

In 1873 Bismarck had negotiated the Three Emperors' League, which included Franz Joseph I of Austria, Alexander II of Russia, and Wilhelm I of Germany. These monarchs guaranteed their countries' neutrality in case of a conflict with another nation. The events of 1878 and Russia's resentment of Bismarck's role as an "honest broker" at the Congress of Berlin threatened this agreement, but the old relationship among the three conservative empires was reconstructed by the Treaty of the Three Emperors of June 1881, which fell short of a formal alliance. The treaty ruled out the possibility that Russia would support France in case of another Franco-German conflict. But it also made it very unlikely that Britain would join the Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary, on account of Britain's long-standing disagreements with Russia.

Three Emperors' Treaty between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia from June 18, 1881

The courts of Austria-Hungary, of Germany, and of Russia, animated by an equal desire to consolidate the general peace by an understanding intended to assume the defensive position of their respective states, have come into agreement on certain questions which more especially concern their reciprocal interests.

With this purpose the three courts have appointed: [. . .]*

Article I. In case one of the high contracting parties should find itself at war with a fourth Great Power, the two others shall maintain towards it a benevolent neutrality and shall devote their efforts to the localization of the conflict.

This stipulation shall apply likewise to a war between one of the three powers and Turkey, but only in the case where a previous agreement shall have been reached between the three courts as to the results of this war.

* Plenipotentiaries were: for the Reich, Reich Chancellor Prince Bismarck; for Austria, Count Imre Széchenyi (1825–98, Ambassador in Berlin 1878–92); for Russia, Peter v. Saburow (Envoy in Athens 1870–80, Ambassador in Berlin 1880–84.) [All footnotes adapted from Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Dokumente zur Deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte (Documents on German Constitutional History)*, 3rd rev. ed., vol. 2, 1851-1900. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986, p. 495-96.]

In the special case where one of them should obtain a more positive support from one of its two allies, the obligatory value of the present article shall remain in all its force for the third.

Article II. Russia, in agreement with Germany, declares her firm resolution to respect the interests arising from the new position assured to Austria-Hungary by the Treaty of Berlin.

The three courts, desirous of avoiding all discord between them, engage to take account of their respective interests in the Balkan Peninsula. They further promise one another that any new modifications in the territorial *status quo* of Turkey in Europe can be accomplished only in virtue of a common agreement between them.

[. . .]

Article III. The three courts recognize the European and mutually obligatory character of the principle of the closing of the Straits of the Bosphorus and of the Dardanelles, founded on international law, confirmed by treaties, and summed up in the declaration of the second Plenipotentiary of Russia at the session of July 12 of the congress of Berlin (Protocol 19).*

They will take care in common that Turkey shall make no exception to this rule in favor of the interests of any government whatsoever, by lending to warlike operations of a belligerent power the portion of its empire constituted by the Straits.

In case of infringement, or to prevent it if such infringement should be in prospect, the three courts will inform Turkey that they would regard her, in that event, as putting herself in a state of war towards the injured party, and as having deprived herself thenceforth of the benefits of the security assured to her territorial *status quo* by the Treaty of Berlin.

Article IV. The present treaty shall be in force during a period of three years, dating from the day of the exchange of ratifications.

Article V. The high contracting parties mutually promise secrecy as to the contents and the existence of the present treaty, as well as of the protocol annexed thereto.

Article VI. The secret conventions concluded between Austria-Hungary and Russia and between Germany and Russia in 1873 are replaced by the present treaty.

* The so-called "Protocol 19" of the Congress of Berlin referred to here is in *Staatsarchiv*, vol. 34 (1878) No. 6771.

Article VII. The ratifications of the present treaty and of the protocol annexed thereto shall be exchanged at Berlin within a fortnight, or sooner if may be.**

[. . .]

Széchényi
v. Bismarck
Sabouroff

Source of English translation: *The Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary, 1879-1914*, vol. I, Alfred Franzis Pribam, ed. Eng. Ed. by Archibald Cary Coolidge, Tr. by Denys P. Myers and J. G. D'Arcy Paul. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920, pp. 37, 39, 41, reprinted in Theodore S. Hamerow, ed., *The Age of Bismarck: Documents and Interpretations*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973, pp. 279-81.

Original German text reprinted in B. Schwertfeger, *Die Diplomatische Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes 1871-1914* [*The Diplomatic Files of the Foreign Office 1871-1914*], vol. 1, pp. 260ff, and in Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Dokumente zur Deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* [*Documents on German Constitutional History*], 3rd rev. ed., vol. 2, 1851-1900. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986, pp. 495-97.

** The ratification took place on June 27, 1881.