

M. MACMILLAN, *THE WAR THAT ENDED PEACE — THE ROAD TO 1914*.
NEW YORK: RANDOM HOUSE, 2013.

Reviewed by Miloš Vojinović*

In 1914 the famous writer Herbert George Wells wrote several articles in which he blamed the Central Powers for the outbreak of the Great War. The articles subsequently appeared in the book titled *The War That Will End War*. H. G. Wells's idea became a slogan which, during the war and the Paris Peace Conference, symbolized the belief that after so much bloodshed in 1914–1918 there will be no more wars. After David Fromkin's book *A Peace to End All Peace*, *The War That Ended Peace* is a new piece of historical writing that draws attention to this utopian belief, which culminated during the Paris Peace Conference.

MacMillan, professor at the University of Oxford, claims that historians should not ask only “why the Great War broke out”. She instead raises the question “why did the long peace not continue”? This is how MacMillan seeks to find a place for her book in the vast literature on the origins of the First World War. *The War That Ended Peace* does not

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bring many new ideas. The focus on the collapse of peace instead on the outbreak of the war, was used by William Mulligan in his book *The Origins of the First World War* published in 2010. Numerous books about the First World War published over the past twenty years, such as John Röhl's books about Kaiser Wilhelm II and his politics, David Stevenson's *Armaments and Coming of War*, or Günter Kronenbitter's *Krieg im Frieden*, all have offered new ideas for debate about the origins of the war. The same can hardly be said for MacMillan's book.

The book is filled with many enjoyable anecdotes, and it is an easy read. The first chapter *Europe in 1900* is arguably the most original in the entire book. MacMillan has used the Universal Exposition held in Paris in 1900 to demonstrate many characteristics of pre-war Europe, from nationalism and imperialism to economic progress and development to international relations. She argues against the idealized picture of Belle Époque and claims that the exhibition reflected tensions inside Europe. Influence of Social Darwinism is illustrated by the example of the official catalogue of the Paris Exhibition, where it was said that "war is natural to humanity" (pp. 7, 25).

MacMillan's ideas are not constant throughout the book. For example, on p. 171 she quotes conversation between David Lloyd George and the liberal statesman Lord Rosebery. They spoke about the *Entente cordiale* of 1904 and Rosebery claimed: "It means war with Germany in the end." Later on in the book, MacMillan claims that alliances before 1914 were defensive in character and that they acted as deterrent to aggression (pp. 529–530). This is not the only place where MacMillan's ideas are not entirely clear, and the book seems to have been written within a short span of time.

A large part of the book (pp. 28–245) is devoted to the creation of two opposing blocs, Great Britain, France and Russia

on one side, and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other. This part of *The War That Ended Peace* is not simply a diplomatic history; it is more of a history of international relations, if we bear in mind the difference between the two as it was defined by Pierre Renouvin. The author does not only sum up the content of numerous diplomatic despatches but also seeks to depict the character of a "surprisingly small number of men" whose decisions took Europe to war. Even though MacMillan does not quote Renouvin, she searches for his *forces profondes* that shaped the politics of the Great Powers. In the chapter on Great Britain and the end of so-called "splendid isolation", she shows how Britain's declining prestige and the rise of other world powers forced Great Britain to abandon its own diplomatic traditions.

The chapters devoted to Germany are expectedly focused on the personality of the Kaiser. Wilhelm is portrayed as unstable, as a ruler who was proudly saying that he had never read the German constitution, and who was especially proud of his army. We can see the German Kaiser as a person who did not appreciate civil authorities and who had always had more faith in his army than in the diplomatic service. The Kaiser once said: "You diplomats are full of shit and the whole Wilhelmstrasse stinks" (pp. 77–78). Considerable attention is devoted to the naval arms race between Germany and Great Britain. MacMillan minutely follows the development of German naval laws, of Alfred von Tirpitz's politics and his relationship with the Kaiser. She claims that "the naval race between Germany and Britain helped to lead Europe towards the Great War" and that "the naval race is the key factor in understanding the growing hostility between Britain and Germany" (pp. 80–142).

Chapters *Unlikely friends* and *The Bear and the Whale* covers the first years of the twentieth century which were marked by revolutionary changes in European for-

eign policy, with the Entente Cordiale in 1904 and the Anglo-Russian agreement in 1907. MacMillan places these agreements in the broader context of international relations between all of the Great Powers. Chapter *The Loyalty of the Nibelungs* is about complex relations of Austria-Hungary and Germany. The author maintains that Austrian foreign policy was especially complex because of the close link between domestic and foreign policies in the multinational empire. The Austrian chief of staff Conrad von Hötzendorf is given due attention. It is an example of how MacMillan can easily introduce biographical elements into a story of international relations. Hötzendorf believed that “it must always be kept in mind that the destinies of nations and dynasties are settled on the battlefield rather than at the conference table” (pp. 233–234). The Austrian chief of staff from 1906 to 1917 (with interlude in 1912) is portrayed as a person powerfully influenced by Social Darwinism. He believed that existence is about struggle. MacMillan shows Hötzendorf’s attitude towards the South Slavs, whom he judged as “bloodlust and cruel”. He is portrayed as a warmonger and MacMillan quotes one of the letters in which Archduke Franz Ferdinand wrote to the Austrian foreign minister about him: “For naturally, Conrad will again be for all kinds of wars and a great Hurrah-Policy, to conquer the Serbs and God knows what” (p. 237). MacMillan also addresses a topic which is not always discussed in the books about the origins of the Great War: the peace movement and antimilitarism. She here follows the line of François Furet who maintains that when the First World War started members of the Second international in Berlin, Paris, London and St. Petersburg did not believe that socialist universalism was more important than patriotism.¹

In the chapters *Thinking About War* and *Making the Plans* MacMillan shows how militarism shaped the history of the early twentieth century. She claims: “What the military plans did do to bring about the Great War put additional pressure on the decision-makers by shortening the time in which decisions had to be taken. Whereas in the eighteenth century and even in the first part of the nineteenth, governments usually had months to think about whether or not they wanted or needed to go to war, they now had days. Thanks to the industrial revolution, once mobilization started armies could be at their frontiers and be ready to fight within a week, in the case of Germany, or in the case of Russia with its greater distances, just over two weeks” (p. 323). It was assumed that the war would be short and that only increased the pressure on decision makers.

The First Moroccan crisis in 1905 is emphasized by the author as the start of a crisis period which would eventually end in a European war. MacMillan shows how Kaiser Wilhelm had not wanted to visit Morocco, but was persuaded by his chancellor Bülow. Although Bülow advised Wilhelm against saying anything at all to the French representative, German Kaiser could not restrain himself from making comments. MacMillan interprets the Bosnian crisis in the context of the Austro-Russian rivalry for influence in the Balkans. The reader is led to understand the Balkans as a sphere where Russian influence confronted Austrian. MacMillan argues that Russia and Austria had earlier agreements as regards the Balkans, such as the treaty of 1897. While some historians maintain that Russia or Serbia started to change the game in the Balkans, MacMillan claims that it was Austria: “In 1906, however, under pressure from his nephew and heir, Franz Ferdinand, Franz Joseph

¹ F. Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion – The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 35.

made two important appointments which inaugurated new, more active policies for Austria-Hungary. Conrad took over as chief of the general staff and Aehrenthal became Foreign Minister. Many, especially in the younger generation of officers and officials, hoped that now the Dual Monarchy would stop its slow suicide and show that it was still vital and powerful" (pp. 409–410). Interestingly, MacMillan sees Austrian ambitions as regards the Ottoman Empire as colonial. That is similar to the position of Clemens Ruthner and Stijn Vervaeke, who studied Austrian rule in Bosnia in a colonial context. It seems that MacMillan is right when she claims that the Balkans was dangerous because "highly volatile situation on the ground mingled with great power interests and ambitions" (p. 477).

Even though MacMillan writes about the feudal system of land tenure in Bosnia "that had alienated the tenants who were mostly Serb", and about the trial held in Vienna where the Austrian prosecutor used forged documents, when it comes to Serb or South Slav nationalism, it is mostly presented as a consequence of agitation that came from Serbia (pp. 418, 426). As Robin Okey has noted, Serbian nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not simply the result of propaganda. It had much to do with the fact that the Austrian regime in Bosnia reserved the majority of jobs in civil administration for Austrians and Hungarians, and only a handful for the loyal Catholics.² Democracy and civil rights were important factors that drew the attention of the South Slavs of Austria to Kingdom of Serbia.³

² R. Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism: The Habsburg 'Civilizing Mission' in Bosnia 1878–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 173.

³ J. Pleterski, "The Southern Slav Question", in *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary*:

In the chapters on Germany, MacMillan makes a statement that requires further analysis. She claims that Wilhelm "did not want a general European war and in the crisis of 1914 as well as previous ones his inclination was to preserve peace" (p. 63). This statement is completely out of line with the historiography of Wilhelm's role in the July crisis.⁴ John Röhl used ample source material during his life-long study of Wilhelm II and his role in the July crisis and his conclusions strongly contradict MacMillan's claims. MacMillan has not connected the War Council held on 8 December 1912 in Berlin with the crisis in Austro-Serbian relations. If we compare the role Wilhelm had in December 1912 and his role in July 1914, it is easy to understand the importance of Kaiser's decisions.

When Serbian troops entered Albania and reached the Adriatic coast in the autumn of 1912, it was seen in Vienna as a good cause for war. But Austria needed support from Germany for war and the Austrian chief of staff Basius Schemua left for Berlin, disguised as a civilian. He was asking for German support for war against Serbia and he was assured of Germany's support, regardless of circumstances and even if a general war were to result.⁵ German Kaiser revised his deci-

A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century Europe, ed. M. Cornwall (Liverpool: Exeter University Press, 2002), 128.

⁴ J. C. G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II – Into the Abyss of War and Exile 1900–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 874–953.

⁵ "22. November 1912: Schemua's report about meeting Moltke and Wilhelm II", *The Origins of the First World War: Diplomatic and Military Documents*, ed. A. Mombauer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 79.

sion after he had found out that Great Britain would not be neutral in the case of a European war. In July 1914, the scenario was absolutely the same. After the Sarajevo assassination, a high-ranking Austrian official went to Berlin again; this time it was Count Hoyos. Wilhelm's decision was crucial since Austria could not wage war without Germany's support. Before Count Hoyos cabled the news that Germany would support Austria, Conrad spoke with the Emperor and asked him, "If the answer is that Germany is on our side, will we then wage war against Serbia," and the Emperor answered, "In that case, yes."⁶ Count Hoyos claimed in his memoirs that Germany had been aware of the likely risk of a European war, but still encouraged Austria-Hungary to proceed with action against Serbia.⁷

MacMillan compares Young Bosnia with Al Qaeda (p. 546). Since she used Vladimir Dedijer's book *The Road to Sarajevo*, it is really difficult to understand her criteria for this comparison, and for her claim that it is "hard not to compare them to the extreme groups among Islam fundamentalists such as Al Qaeda". What requires additional attention is the claim that "Pašić got wind of what was up" (p. 549) and that the Austrian government "unfortunately [sic!] was unable to find evidence that the Serbian government was behind it" (p. 566). The reader gets the impression that the evidence existed but there was no time to collect it.

Official Austrian investigation concluded that there was no evidence that the Serbian government had known about the

assassination plans.⁸ Senior Austrian diplomat Friedrich von Wiesner was sent to Sarajevo to collect evidence about possible connections between the conspirators and the Serbian government. In his report to the Austrian foreign minister Leopold Berchtold, Wiesner claimed: "There is nothing that can prove or raise suspicion that Serbian government encouraged the crime or preparation of it. On the contrary, there are reasons to believe that this is completely out of question."⁹ This episode is also confirmed by Leo Pfeffer, Austrian investigator who was in charge of the official inquiry.¹⁰

It is not that the evidence existed but Austrians did not find it, as MacMillan suggests. When Wiesner sent his report, Austrians had already known about Vojislav Tankosić and Milan Ciganović, and had almost all details, and Wiesner wrote about them in his report to Vienna. But he knew that they were not Serbian government, and that is why he wrote that there was no connection between the conspirators and Serbian officials. The Austrian government tried to obtain evidence about such a connection wherever it could, and the Hungarian prime minister Tisza even wrote to the Croatian ban Ivan Skerlec, "I am informing you that we are collecting those concrete data which shed light on the machinations directed against us by Serbia."¹¹ Count Hoyos himself wrote in 1922: "I never believed that murder

⁶ "5. July 1914: Conrad audience with the Emperor Franz Joseph", *The Origins of the First World War: Diplomatic and Military Documents*, 189.

⁷ "5. July 1914: Hoyos account", *The Origins of the First World War: Diplomatic and Military Documents*, 190.

⁸ *Diplomatische Aktenstücke Zur Vorgeschichte Des Krieg 1914* (Vienna 1919), 52.

⁹ *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik: von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914*, VIII 10252/53.

¹⁰ L. Pfeffer, *Istraga o Sarajevskom atentatu* (Nova Evropa: Zagreb, 1938), 98–99.

¹¹ *Count Stephen Tisza Prime Minister of Hungary – Letters 1914–1916* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 7.

of the Archduke was prepared or even wished in Belgrade of St. Petersburg".¹²

¹² A. Hoyos, *Der deutsch-englische Gegensatz und sein Einfluß auf die Balkanpolitik Österreich-Ungarns* (Berlin 1922), 77.

Margaret MacMillan is well known historian of international relations, and in this book she offers her summary of the events the led Europe to the First World War. Although her book is rich in content, apart from new stereotypes on Serbia, it does not offer new ideas and explanations about the origins of the First World War.